

History, Philosophy and Theory of the Life Sciences

Raphael Falk

# Zionism and the Biology of Jews

 Springer

# History, Philosophy and Theory of the Life Sciences

## Volume 19

### Editors

Charles T. Wolfe, Ghent University, Belgium

Philippe Huneman, IHPST (CNRS/Université Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne), France

Thomas A.C. Reydon, Leibniz Universität Hannover, Germany

### Editorial Board

Marshall Abrams (University of Alabama at Birmingham)

Andre Ariew (Missouri)

Minus van Baalen (UPMC, Paris)

Domenico Bertoloni Meli (Indiana)

Richard Burian (Virginia Tech)

Pietro Corsi (EHESS, Paris)

François Duchesneau (Université de Montréal)

John Dupré (Exeter)

Paul Farber (Oregon State)

Lisa Gannett (Saint Mary's University, Halifax)

Andy Gardner (Oxford)

Paul Griffiths (Sydney)

Jean Gayon (IHPST, Paris)

Guido Giglioli (Warburg Institute, London)

Thomas Heams (INRA, AgroParisTech, Paris)

James Lennox (Pittsburgh)

Annick Lesne (CNRS, UPMC, Paris)

Tim Lewens (Cambridge)

Edouard Machery (Pittsburgh)

Alexandre Métraux (Archives Poincaré, Nancy)

Hans Metz (Leiden)

Roberta Millstein (Davis)

Staffan Müller-Wille (Exeter)

Dominic Murphy (Sydney)

François Munoz (Université Montpellier 2)

Stuart Newman (New York Medical College)

Frederik Nijhout (Duke)

Samir Okasha (Bristol)

Susan Oyama (CUNY)

Kevin Padian (Berkeley)

David Queller (Washington University, St Louis)

Stéphane Schmitt (SPHERE, CNRS, Paris)

Phillip Sloan (Notre Dame)

Jacqueline Sullivan (Western University, London, ON)

Giuseppe Testa (IFOM-IEA, Milano)

J. Scott Turner (Syracuse)

Denis Walsh (Toronto)

Marcel Weber (Geneva)

More information about this series at <http://www.springer.com/series/8916>

Raphael Falk

# Zionism and the Biology of Jews

 Springer



*In memoriam:*  
*Lisa and Walter Falk,*  
*Rivka and Benjamin Auren (Aharonovich),*  
*Zionists.*

# Contents

<b>Preface</b> .....	xi
<b>Acknowledgments</b> .....	xv
<b>1 Introduction</b> .....	1
1.1 Humans Vary; Are Jews Distinct?.....	7
1.2 Who Is a Jew?.....	9
1.3 From Anthropology and Eugenics to Population Genetics.....	12
<b>2 From Emancipation to “Scientific Racism”</b> .....	17
2.1 Jews as a Distinct Entity .....	22
2.2 The Biologization of Race .....	24
2.3 Anti-Semitism.....	31
2.4 Judaism as a Historic Entity .....	34
<b>3 Heredity or Environment?</b> .....	37
3.1 Heredity or Society? .....	43
3.2 Racism .....	44
3.3 Eugenics.....	45
<b>4 The Response: Zionism</b> .....	49
4.1 Theodor Herzl.....	55
4.2 Max Nordau .....	57
4.3 Zeev Jabotinsky .....	61
4.4 Martin Buber.....	63
4.5 Arthur Ruppin.....	65
<b>5 A Jewish Race Notwithstanding?</b> .....	71
5.1 The Zionist Claim .....	75
5.2 People of the Middle-East?.....	79
5.3 A Political-Social Perspective.....	86

<b>6</b>	<b><i>Eidoth</i></b> .....	93
6.1	The Middle Eastern Jew: The Jewish Prototype? .....	97
6.2	On Khazars and Ashkenazim .....	100
6.3	The Merger of <i>Eidoth</i> : Assimilation or Amalgamation? .....	104
6.4	Jewish Diseases.....	108
6.5	Immigrants and Natives .....	113
<b>7</b>	<b>Pioneers as Eugenic Agents</b> .....	119
7.1	Hebrew Work – An Insurmountable Challenge .....	124
7.2	Education and Racial Hygiene.....	126
7.3	Jewish Intelligence (and Disease).....	133
7.4	The “Demographic Issue”.....	137
<b>8</b>	<b>The Inagathering of Exiles</b> .....	143
8.1	Medical Anthropology and Population Genetics .....	145
8.2	Common Relatives <i>versus</i> Common Genes.....	151
8.3	The Genetics of the Israeli Melting Pot.....	162
8.4	From Single-Genes to Systems Polymorphisms.....	171
<b>9</b>	<b>From DNA to Politics</b> .....	175
9.1	Similar but Different .....	177
9.2	The Trail of Y-Chromosome Haplotypes.....	182
9.3	Towards Genome-Wide Association Studies .....	188
9.4	DNA Sequence Analyses .....	193
9.5	Politics <i>versus</i> Science.....	195
9.6	Common Origins or Common Network? .....	197
<b>10</b>	<b>Coda: Zionism and the Biology of the Jews Tomorrow</b> .....	203
10.1	A Jewish State or a State for the Jews?.....	207
	<b>Bibliography</b> .....	211
	<b>Index</b> .....	227

# List of Figures

Fig. 2.1	Lavater’s characterization of nationals by physiognomy (Lavater 1984).....	19
Fig. 2.2	Characterization of Jewish facial patterns using Galton’s technique of superimposing film negatives (Efron 1994).....	28
Fig. 3.1	The title page of Theodor Herzl’s <i>Altneuland</i> (1902).....	47
Fig. 6.1	Classification of human types by three criteria (Sheldon 1954).....	96
Fig. 6.2	From Ruppin’s (1930a) gallery of Jewish types: Albert Einstein (“Mediterranean impact”); Lord Reading and Sir Herbert Samuel (England); and a Jewess, the daughter of a Sephardic father and an Ashkenazi mother, born in Jerusalem .....	97
Fig. 7.1	Jewish National Fund poster, 1947 .....	120
Fig. 8.1	“Jewish facial form” in a Bakaïri – Papuan native (Stratz 1903) .....	151
Fig. 8.2	Haeckel’s tree life in <i>The Evolution of Man</i> (1879).....	161
Fig. 8.3	Graphic representation of frequencies of blood type in Jewish (full circles) and non-Jewish (open circles) communities. Full lines connect Jews and non-Jews of similar sites, broken lines connect Jews of different background (modified from Fig. 4 of Mourant et al. 1978) .....	164
Fig. 8.4	Muhsam’s (1964) attempt to identify the frequencies of the ABO blood type of the Jewish forefathers: vectors from “Gentile environments” to the corresponding “genuine” Jewish <i>eidoth</i> . <i>Lower right</i> : expected; <i>upper left</i> : observed .....	166

Fig. 9.1 Multivariate analysis of genetic variants of various populations based on Y-chromosome hapolotype data (after Hammer et al. 2000). *Solid triangles* represent Jewish populations; *solid squares* represent Middle Eastern populations..... 190

Fig. 9.2 Model of the reconstruction of the Ashkenazi Jewish (AJ) and European (FL) demographic history. The *wide arrow* represents an admixture event (Carmi et al. 2014) ..... 194

# Preface

Biased scientists are inevitable, biased results are not (M. Weisberg and D. B. Paul, 2016, quoting J. E. Lewis et al., 2011, confronting S. J. Gould, 1978, discussing S. G. Morton's, 1839-1844 studies of human cranial capacity).

Zionism, a national sociocultural doctrine, and biology, an empirical natural science, appear to be two alien conceptual domains. Yet, toward the end of the nineteenth century, biology became increasingly a science that provided empirical foundations even to the philosophy of human social relations. Thus, it is natural to examine Zionism, the late-nineteenth-century political movement dedicated to the return of the Jewish people to their homeland, not only from the perspective of historians but also from that of biologists. Looking at the claims that Jews constitute a people with common biological roots may provide further justification to their political aspirations.

The nineteenth century witnessed the dawn of European nationalism. In the spirit of *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*, various political-cultural associations of peoples demanded the political right to their own homeland, from Greece and Italy in the 1820s up to Czechoslovakia and Poland in the 1920s. The longing of the Jews for the return to their homeland in the Land of Israel has been a predominant theme of their prayers for generations. Thus, the Zionist dream of a Jewish state, which was realized in 1948, should be considered a late event of the European nationalist sentiments.

Although Jews have suffered persecutions for almost two millennia, Jewish identity became “biological” only in the last decades of the nineteenth century. *Anti-Semitism*, a term coined in the 1870s, also engendered the assertion that the physical features of Jews and their sociocultural traits are functions of their biological distinctiveness. With the biological rationalization of sociocultural discrimination, the perennial hatred of Jews became *racism*. Although this hatred achieved its climax manifestation in modern times in Nazi Germany, even today anti-Semitic racism is persistent in various Western as well as in numerous Middle Eastern societies.

The period from 1945 to 1950 witnessed massive waves of migrations within formerly Nazi-occupied Europe by refugees who repeatedly brought up notions of nationalism. The Jewish survivors of the Holocaust, many of whom did not have a

home to return to, formed a very particular group among these refugees. Equally, discrimination and at times persecutions of the Jewish communities in North Africa and in the Middle East made life there as hard and unbearable as ever. The Zionist State of Israel offered citizenship in the historic homeland of the Jews, regardless of one's country of origin. But subsequent developments made many to consider Zionism as leftover of European colonialism rather than a liberating movement of people returning to its homeland. Such claims were further stressed by Israel's Law of Return of 1950 that gives the right to live in Israel and gain Israeli citizenship to any Jew.

But who is a Jew? Are the Jews of Morocco, Lithuania, Yemen, Ethiopia, Greece, or Iran of common descent? Are not indigenous Palestinians, who vehemently resisted the Zionist project and for many of whom the founding of Israel turned out to be the traumatic event of losing their homes and lands, the legal residents of the land? Is it possible that these Palestinians are the descendants of the ancient Jews?

Israel of the first decades of the twenty-first century in many respects played a central role in the development of genomics and the applications of biological technological innovations, including DNA sequencing and analyses. The history related in this book may help to make sense why Israel has wholeheartedly embraced a wide range of reproductive genetic techniques. Indeed, the uptake of such technologies, which is encouraged and supported by the government, is probably higher than in any other country. Indeed, Germany stands at the opposite extreme, and its caution regarding practices that involve the selection of fetuses and embryos is usually explained as a residual reaction to its coercive Nazi past. The shadow of the Third Reich certainly hovers over every discussion of the appropriate use of these practices. One might expect Israelis' reservations regarding what amounts to eugenic policies to be at least as strong as those expressed by Germans, and one might expect the discourse around the use of genetic services in Israel to be strongly influenced by revulsion at assumptions about which lives were – and which were not – worth living. That this is in fact very far from being the case is made intelligible by the history detailed in the present text, which shows that Zionism was actually closely intertwined with eugenics for a long time.

This volume is a revised and edited English version of my book *Tzionut Vehabiologia shel Hayehudim (Zionism and the Biology of Jews)* that was published in 2006. As noted, I am not a professional historian but rather a geneticist by training. I spent half of my career experimenting with *Drosophila* flies before I eventually became involved in the study of the history and philosophy of evolutionary biology, genetics, and eugenics.

In our world of scientific-technocratic reasoning, biological research – more specifically, molecular genomic research – has become a major tool that enables us to examine and perhaps validate the link between communities of present-day Jews and between them and the ancient residents of the Land of Israel. Establishing this linkage would help rationalize the ardent hopes of Jews throughout the centuries of returning to Zion. Detailed analyses of the genomes of individuals have identified specific DNA sequences that may indicate the common lineage of many Jewish communities and of other overlapping Mediterranean populations. A *vertical* depic-

tion of the phylogenies often appears to sustain the traditional Jewish historical lore of the lineal descent of contemporary Jews from the historic residents of the Land of Israel. The same genetic relationships, however, also hint at secondary *horizontal* associations through intermarriages between Jewish and non-Jewish communities that by virtue of domicile came in close contact.

In this book, I attempt to present developments by taking the reader on an abbreviated tour of my own extended study of the hereditary relations of political Zionism. I narrate the story how it began with the promise to provide a haven for persecuted Jews, how the hard-gained realization of this promise allowed a national homeland to be established, how the original version became transformed with the establishment of the state, and how the extreme elements of the original vision became policies of implementing cleric-nationalistic claims of *inherent* rights of the Jewish people. However, I am also aware and acknowledge the plight of the Palestinian inhabitants in this land. It partly reflects my own history as a son of committed Zionist parents who emigrated from Germany to Palestine in 1933.

Experimental scientists pride themselves of being followers of Francis Bacon's (1561–1626) inductive method of investigating nature, presumably without prejudice. But clearly, this is impossible; we view the world through a lens that is polarized by our dispositions, inclinations, and preconceived notions. As a student of the evolution of scientific concepts, I based much of my narration on secondary readings of the sources. I have been continually surprised to discover how difficult it is to admit the extent to which many of us – in the natural sciences and in the sciences of man – are influenced by our preconceived ideas.

Jerusalem, Israel

Raphael Falk

# Acknowledgments

My interest in the genetics of Jewish communities in Israel stems from the days when I was engaged in the dynamics of population genetics. My Ph.D. instructor, Elisabeth Goldschmidt, gave me the opportunity to study the dynamics of change in migrant populations by following the genetics and observing the sociocultural integration of the different, well-delineated immigrant isolates who settled in Israel. In particular, I was fortunate to be able to assist Goldschmidt in 1961, when I was secretary of the conference that she headed on *The Genetics of Migrant and Isolate Populations*.

My colleague of many years, Jacob Wahrman, helped me to develop a critical perspective on ideas and observations and to appreciate the advances in biological science, in general, and genetics, in particular. Of special value was the help of my wife Ruma, whose analytic and unrelenting attention to details helped me to recognize and overcome many of the misconceptions that I had adopted. My son Oren gave me critical and constructive comments. My family, our daughter Raya and her late husband Avisar, their daughter Lili and her husband Elisha, Raya's son Yoav, as well as our twin great-grandchildren Neta and Gefen, and Oren's family, Yael, Naomi, and Daniella, all have been constant sources of support. Many colleagues, students, and especially my assistants – Shula Baker, Miriam Broit, and Ana Rahat – helped me do the research, gave me advice and information, read sections of my drafts, and corrected some of my mistakes and errors. Judith Atidia, Eitan Bloom, Michael Brandeis, Snait Gissis, Oren Harman, Daphna Hirsch, Shaul Katz, Bat-Sheva Kerem, Alexandre Métraux, Ariella Oppenheim, Diane B. Paul, Sam S. Schweber, Dudy Tzfati, and Issachar Unnah are only some of those who were involved in the Hebrew version, advising, reading, and commenting on selected sections of the present text. Amit Baskin patiently helped me with the proof reading. Finally, Miriam Greenfield and Dania Valdez meticulously edited my English text.

I am also grateful to the readers who thoroughly reviewed the text, not only correcting mistakes but also suggesting important improvements and updates.

All remaining errors and mistakes are of course my own responsibility.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

The longing for Zion has been a manifest attribute of Jews for generations. As a part of daily prayers, this longing of the heart has been expressed primarily as a wish for relief from persecutions and the other hardships of Jewish life in the Diaspora.<sup>1</sup> Yet, there were always individuals and groups who took this longing literally: some immigrated to Zion to spend their last days there and to be buried in the Holy Land; others were content with a bag of soil from Zion under their heads in their final resting place in the Diaspora. Still others, who could not tolerate the hardships of daily existence and persecution in the Diaspora, stimulated by religious sentiments, made the pilgrimage and actually settled in the Holy Land. Yehudah Halevy (1075–1141), the scholar and poet, travelled from Spain to the Holy Land in 1140, but died shortly after his arrival. A few individual Jews from Yemen came as pilgrims as early as the fifteenth century, and a larger contingency immigrated in the winter of 1881–1882. Jews from North Africa, under the leadership of Rabbi David Ben-Shimon, established the “Maghreb Community” in Jerusalem in 1860. Pious Jews from Eastern Europe settled individually in the holy cities of Tiberias, Safad, Jerusalem and Hebron. These are only a few instances of the realization of the eternal sentiment of “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither” (Psalms, 137:5). There was, however, a fundamental change in conception, though not in motivation, when in July 1882 a group of previous students from Russia, settled on a barren hill south of Jaffa and founded the colony of Rishon-LeZion, literally, the First to Zion.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, economic and social pressures and repeated pogroms against Russian and Rumanian Jewish communities led more groups of Jewish students to conclude that the problem of the Jews could not be resolved by maintaining isolated communities of pious persons in the Holy Land, completely dependent on the Jewry of the Diaspora. Israel Belkind (1861–1929), the leader of the immigrant students, referred to this as “Holy Cities Zionism.” Reflecting the nationalist mood and conceptions popular at the time, these young-

---

<sup>1</sup> The very term Diaspora, spelled with a capital D, indicates this feeling of longing for the homeland, Zion.

sters strove to form a center of gravity for Jews as an autonomous nation, a place where they immanently belonged and where they would not be considered strangers. They founded the Bilu movement – the Hebrew acronym for ‘House of Jacob, Let’s Go’ (Isaiah 2:5) – and took an oath to live by three principles: national resurrection, settlement in Eretz-Israel,<sup>2</sup> and cultivation of the land. This idea of becoming a nation in the homeland was an outgrowth of the Age of Romanticism and Nationalism that flourished throughout Europe in the second half of the nineteenth century. In 1882 Leo Pinsker (1821–1891) wrote *Autoemancipation*, and in 1896 Theodor Herzl (1860–1904) wrote *Der Judenstaat*; these books reflected and radiated the romantic spirit of Jewish national resurrection.

In August 1897, the return-to-Zion notion of a Jewish settlement in the ancient homeland was formally inaugurated at the First Zionist Congress in Basel. At that Congress, the aspirations of the emancipated, semi-assimilated Jews, who considered themselves part of the Western European socio-political web, conjoined with tribulations of East European Jews, who were as a rule more integrated in traditional Jewish culture than were their Western brethren. This encounter at Basel provided the leverage to stimulate Jews to settle in Eretz-Israel during the first decades of the twentieth century. As events unfolded in Europe, Eretz-Israel turned out to be one of the few places that provided a haven for some of the Jews in Nazi Europe. On May 15, 1948, the State of Israel was founded in accordance with the United Nations’ decision of November 29, 1947, and on July 5, 1950, the Law of Return, was legislated, thereby securing the right of every Jew to become a citizen of the State. Thus, the Jewish populations of Israel provided a unique opportunity to conduct a study: *The Genetics of Migrant and Isolate Populations* (see e.g., Goldschmidt 1963).<sup>3</sup> However, Israel, as a national home of the Jewish People that was founded on the

---

<sup>2</sup>David Vital in a prefatory note on nomenclature to his book (1987, p. *xiii*) writes: “There remains the question of the name of the Land. [...] ‘Erez-Israel’ (literally: ‘Land of Israel’) to denote the country that a great many people do indeed think of as ‘Palestine’. The difficulty is that for centuries, until the British took it over at the end of the Great War, it was an exceedingly loose geographical expression at best; and no political or administrative unit of that name, or covering that territory even approximately, existed.” The formal name of the country, which from the time of the capitulation by the Romans was Palestine, became later, a district in the Ottoman Empire, called Phalastin in the Arabic version. I shall follow Vital who thought “it right to use the term ‘Palestine’ when the context or the documents required it and [rather] ‘Eretz-Israel’ when it seemed the more appropriate.”

<sup>3</sup>In September, 1961, a group of geneticists from fifteen countries met in Jerusalem “to discuss the genetic differentiation among the Jewish groups in Israel.” The conference was organized by Prof. Elizabeth Goldschmidt of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and Prof. Chaim Sheba of the Tel-Hashomer Hospital, and the present author as its secretary. The conference, *The Genetics of Migrant and Isolate Populations*, may be considered the founding event of human (and medical) genetics in Israel, because it was centered on an exhibition that invited not only academia, but also medical doctors all over the country, to examine their empirical data and present data of their own that might have genetic relevance (see Goldschmidt 1963, pp. 251–355).

In June 2011 a conference celebrating fifty years of the late Sheba’s contribution to human and medical genetics in Israel was convened under a similar title. It concentrated on efforts to utilize the genetic relationships between Jews of different origins to trace their history since leaving their fatherland two thousand years ago.

humanistic ideas of *fin de siècle* Europe, was never acknowledged as such by the native population of Palestine, who viewed it essentially as a rudiment act of European Imperialism, while its neighbor states considered its citizens heathen foreign intruders. The constant threat to its existence and the continuous, ever increasing need to maintain a balance of power with its neighbors caused many Jews in Israel to turn away from the humanistic, often utopian ideologies of political Zionism and to become hard-core nationalists, increasingly driven by religious zeal.

Correspondingly, as the conflict of the Zionist State with the Arab world intensified, so did the wish to prove “scientifically,” by biological-genetic means, the immanent physical, historical connection of the Jewish people to Zion. Genetics, it was hoped, would uphold not only the historical evidence, but would also provide biological evidence that the dispersed Jewish ethnic groups (*eidoth*)<sup>4</sup> of today are indeed one people whose roots trace back to Eretz-Israel.

Over the ages Jews, in various contexts and at different times were recognized as a people of a distinct religion, or as a highly knit people with unique socio-cultural bonds. Yet, what ultimately maintained the Jews’ identity were the claims of their genealogical relationships: Jews were perceived as the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – the three Patriarchs – not only spiritually but primarily biologically. According to the official law in the State of Israel, Judaism is basically a blood-relationship: a Jew is one born to a Jewish mother (in acknowledgment of the difficulty of proving fatherhood). Nonetheless, over history there have always been individuals and communities who converted to Judaism. Consequently, even the formal religious law recognizes as Jews those who ‘properly’ converted to Judaism according to Rabbinic guidelines.

With the Age of Enlightenment in the second half of the eighteenth century, the claim for universal values seemed to open the way for the emancipation of the Jews. It was argued that what distinguished Jews from gentiles was their cultural history and their social conditions as communities, rather than their biological essence. Nevertheless, discrimination of Jews did not diminish: During the nineteenth century, at least in Western Europe, while the social and religious distinctive markers of the Jews gradually relaxed, while Jews formally enjoyed emancipation, much of the emphasis of discrimination shifted to biological markers, claiming that Jews were inherently different.

The nineteenth century saw major social shifts due to industrialization and commercialization that caused notable population movements both horizontally in terms of urbanization and vertically in terms of social categorization. After the publication of Charles Darwin’s (1809–1882) *Origin of Species* in 1859 – and the discussions of its role in social relations in human societies by thinkers like Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) in Britain and Ernst Haeckel (1834–1919) in Germany – socio-political movements were increasingly interpreted biologically, in terms of hereditary inequalities among human beings. Thus, to the extent that religious and cultural arguments for segregation and persecution of Jews lost force, biological claims for persecution held sway: Jews were considered to be of a different “race” – a socio-cultural invention of a presumed “biological entity” – and their specific traits were

---

<sup>4</sup>Ethnic-group is the term I shall use interchangeably with the Hebrew term *eidah*, in plural: *eidoth*.

part of their biological essence. Hatred of the Jews became hatred of the Semitic race, namely anti-Semitism. The term anti-Semitism was coined in the 1870s by the German publicist Wilhelm Marr (1819–1904). Marr’s Darwinian philosophy was explicit: “Anyone who cannot hold his own has to go” (Zimmermann 1986, p. 67). The notion that the biological differences of people are responsible for their social differences gained credit and spread exponentially.

“Scientific racism,” however, is older than Marr’s concepts. The idea that human beings may be classified into five races that differ in origin had been raised towards the end of the eighteenth century; albeit that many thinkers of the Enlightenment and later maintained that differences between populations and societies were primarily differences in culture rather than in *material essence*. The prominent German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) created the notion of a nation, or *Volk*, as a meaningful entity. A *Volk* was conceived as a being, an entity distinguished by landscape, climate, language, tradition, foreign intercourse, and consequently, also by heredity. Thus, in the first half of the nineteenth century the idea of the *Volk* became increasingly emotionally charged with essentialist patriotic notions largely colored with biological nuances. Even if the *identifying* properties of the races were in the realm of culture, language or religion, it was still argued that their *essences* were biological. The Nazis were those who eventually brought such racial theories to their full horrific application.

Herder argued that Jews living in Germany should enjoy the full rights and obligations of Germans, and that the non-Jews of the world owed a debt to the Jews for centuries of abuse that could only be discharged by actively assisting those Jews who wished to do so to regain political sovereignty in their ancient homeland of Israel. He refused to adhere to a rigid racial theory, writing that “notwithstanding the varieties of the human form, there is but one and the same species of man throughout the whole earth.” In other words, Herder conceived Jewry as an example of a community of individuals of national character, maintained by a religious and traditional culture, rather than by race. He even conceived of the establishment of a political entity in Palestine, the site where their culture originated, as a guarantee for the persistence of Jewry (see, for example, Hess 2002, p. 55). Half a century later, Moses Hess (1812–1875), a close associate of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, became one of the first Jews who, disappointed by their emancipation, explicitly called for their national revival in Palestine. In his book *Rom und Jerusalem, die Letzte Nationalitätsfrage* [Rome and Jerusalem: The Last National Issue] (1862), he noted that “Jews are first of all a race,” more in terms of Herder’s *Volk*, than those of social-Darwinism, which was not yet conceived, and called for the Jews to reestablish their Jerusalem just as the Italians, under the leadership of Mazzini, established their Rome (Avineri 1986).

However, by the 1870s and 1880s, the claims that Jews belonged to a race that could be discerned in terms of the natural sciences, were repeatedly brought up, and hatred against them became more ethnic in character. Against this background, the plight of the Jews became increasingly a political issue by the end of the century. Contrary to many of the assimilated or integrated Jews of the Age of Enlightenment and the Age of Romanticism who focused on the cultural aspect of being Jewish, the

Zionists-to-be stressed that Jews were not merely members of a cultural or a religious entity, but an integral biological entity, even though they had been dispersed and had no country of their own. In other words, the Zionists adopted the concept of *Volk* in terms of a nation-race as molded by the notion of Blood and Soil (*Blut und Boden*) – current in central Europe of the time. Accordingly they demanded the materialization of their nationality rights in a country of their own. *Blut und Boden* became one of the popular inciting slogans of the Nazi Party. Undoubtedly many of those who expressed themselves at the turn of the century in terms of *Blut und Boden* were referring to the abstract, Hegelian term, rather than to the anthropological or biological notion, and surely not to the later National Socialist interpretation of the term. Yet, considering the positivist attempts to impose social and humanitarian principles upon the principles of the natural sciences, it is difficult to accept that persons who adopted this term did not see the real life consequences of such an expression.

Nevertheless, one should not forget that Zionism, contrary to the traditional ideological longing for Zion, was from its beginning a pragmatic political movement. The desire of Zionism to bring about the “normalization” of the Jews as an organic part of society through a change in lifestyle, was a very enlightened notion. Although the concept of race had not been well defined (as is also the case today<sup>5</sup>), racial identity – contrary to racial ideology – was a common, widely accepted biological truth among socialists, liberals, and humanists, and was considered a corollary of the inherent variability of natural species. Accordingly, in 1930, thinkers like Albert Einstein related to the Jews as a race that must also become a nation:

Before we can effectively combat anti-Semitism, we must first of all educate ourselves out of it and out of the slave-mentality which it betokens. [...] Only when we have the courage to regard ourselves as a nation, only when we respect ourselves, can we win the respect of others; or rather, the respect of others will then come of itself. Anti-Semitism as a psychological phenomenon will always be with us so long as Jews and non-Jews are thrown together. But where is the harm? It may be thanks to anti-Semitism that we are able to preserve our existence as a race; that at any rate is my belief. (Einstein 1930, p. 23)

A blunt, unfortunate example of the adherence of the Zionists to the nineteenth-century notion of Blood and Soil as ground for their territorial rights is the statement by the poet Chaim Nachman Bialik at a press conference at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem in the beginning of 1934: “I too, like Hitler, believe in the power of blood.” In Bialik’s opinion, the Jewish race’s will-power and Jewish blood are what could successfully undermine “the remnants of paganism in the Christian world” (Bialik 1934).

Whereas the end of the eighteenth century was characterized by a pervasive belief that humanity was involved in a process of progress and enlightenment, the nineteenth century ended with the feeling that society was immersed in degenerative processes. The conception of the Zionists was that the often blemished “Jewish characteristics” were indeed signs of degeneration – the consequences of centuries of life in exile. Their task was, therefore, to lead the Jews back to the path of progress.

---

<sup>5</sup> See Roberts 2011. But see also Wade 2014.

As late as the establishment of the State of Israel, the declared aim of the Zionist movement was to change the image of the “Diaspora Jew” to that of a “New Jew,” to that of a “Normal” citizen of a modern Western country. Immigration and settlement in Eretz-Israel, the Land of Israel, were presumed to bring about the expected conversion of both body and soul. However, after the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel, the emphasis was eventually diverted to the ingathering of the Jews from the Diaspora and their absorption into the Israeli melting pot. Thus, the issue of the biological essence of Jewish existence that accompanied Zionist activity from its beginnings shifted emphasis: In the early decades of the twentieth century the emphasis was on the nature of the traits, regardless of whether these so-called Jewish characteristics were hereditary or merely acquired responses to living conditions in the Diaspora; in the second half of the century the emphasis shifted to the variegated composition of the hereditary pool of the various Jewish parishes and *eidoth*.<sup>6</sup> Scientists discovered early on that it was possible to trace the hereditary nature of traits, especially such diseases that appeared to be practically restricted to well-defined Jewish communities. The massive migration during the 1950s and onward provided the scientific community with a unique opportunity to study the dynamics of whole populations in nearly laboratory conditions (see Goldschmidt 1963, and juxtapose it with Reuter 2006). However, socio-political interests, as well as the dramatic developments in molecular genetics, increasingly directed research to use hereditary traits, like diseases, when discussing phylogenetic relationships between Jewish communities and their origins.

In this book, I wish primarily to discuss two issues: the claims that there exists a *biology of Jews* on the one hand, and the attempts to integrate it into a consistent *history of national-political Zionism*, on the other hand. Both issues unfolded on the background of a romantic national culture of Western Europe in the nineteenth century: Jews, primarily from Eastern Europe, were sucked into the world of these notions and soon they took the lead in the re-formulation of Jewish and Zionist existence.

We can delineate three overlapping questions that have emerged during the two centuries of Jewish emancipation and the one century of national-political Zionism in the West: What is special or unique to the Jews? Who were the genuine Jews? And how can one nowadays identify Jews? Whereas the first question was the focus of attention mainly at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, interest in the second question grew during the period between the two world wars. Much of the interest in this issue was diverted to the question of whether the Ashkenazi or the Sephardi ethnic-groups better represented the genuine “Jewish type.” After the establishment of the State of Israel, discussions centered on the third

---

<sup>6</sup>In conflicts like those in the Balkans, in Africa, in India, in South-East Asia or in Northern Ireland, and to some extent even in the Israeli-Arab conflict, a starting point is the *existence* of distinct ethnic or religious entities that struggle for the same piece of land. On the other hand, except for Nazi efforts to *diagnose* the biological belonging of individuals to national-ethnic entities, there is no other example known to me like the Zionists’ of an intensive effort to prove the immanent biological belonging or non-belonging of communities to what is considered to be the Jewish entity.

question of how one can identify the common genetic denominator of Jewish communities.

## 1.1 Humans Vary; Are Jews Distinct?

In Spain before the fourteenth century, the position of the Catholic Church was that anyone converting to Catholicism would be accepted as an equal, having the same rights as anyone born into a Catholic family (Yerushalmi 1982). Yet, converted Jews were discriminated against, because it was asserted that by virtue of “blood” they remained Jews. This fifteenth century viewpoint was apparently the first instance of racism based on biology.

The primacy of rational thinking in the Age of Enlightenment motivated the demand for equality for all human beings, irrespective of their religion or tradition, and the upsurge of interest in the Sciences of Man, both in the social-sciences and in the life-sciences. Centuries of explorations had revealed to the Europeans that their countries and cultures were just a few among many. This compelled them to reexamine nature and the place of humans in it. The philosopher of science, Stephen Toulmin, has suggested that the 13th of April, 1769 marked the beginning of a new era. On this day, HMS *Discovery* anchored in Tahiti: Captain Cook’s crew was commissioned by the Royal Society to carry out some measurements needed to confirm Newton’s theory. But, as Toulmin relates, what left a deep impression on the crew was their anthropological observations of the natives: they lived free, comfortable, and happy lives in spite of being heathens who were following life patterns completely alien to those of the Europeans (Toulmin 1972, pp. 41–42). Thus, instead of establishing the unshakable, God-given lawfulness of the eternal image of the Newtonian universe, the expedition discovered the existence of consciousness of multiplicity of habits, traditions, ideas, even principles of human morality!

Acquaintance with the huge and unexpected variability of human and also non-human nature, which was initiated of course long before Captain Cook’s voyage, generated a search for new methods of classification of the accumulated knowledge that expressed the Divine Order (see also Gissis 2011). The most important among these attempts was that of Carlos Linnaeus (1707–1778), who in 1735 attempted to organize all animal and plant life into one hierarchical taxonomic system: species converge to genera, which converge to families, orders, and phyla. Man was included in this system in the species *Homo sapiens*, which in turn converged to the genus *Homo*. Furthermore, for the first time, Linnaeus formally divided the human species into four races: the red, the yellow, the white, and the black. Race, according to this conception was a material biological entity, a distinct and consistent entity in the hierarchy of Nature, just like species and genera. Thus, Linnaeus restored the Divine Order of Nature: variability could be harnessed as distinct, essential biological entities. Not all human beings were identical, but they were all humans, and their unique socio-cultural habits reflected their inherent differences as humans, without violating the divine order of things. Linnaeus’s system was accepted throughout most of

the scientific community towards the end of the eighteenth century. Although it was acknowledged that much of the variability in nature is a direct consequence of the specific living conditions of organisms, it became obvious that at least part of this variability among living creatures is immanent and hereditary. The variability that characterized the human races was accordingly accepted as fundamental.

Thus, although the discrimination of human beings on the basis of what we nowadays call “racism” was not new, from the end of the eighteenth century scientists began to adopt notions that would be regarded as “scientific racism.” Put differently, with the increasing prestige of scientific analyses efforts were made to adopt and justify in public notions, which had been initially anchored in society and culture, as empirical-scientific terms. As the call for *liberté, égalité, fraternité* among humans became louder, more interest was directed at the non-identity of humans who presumably belong to the same entity. The further had scientific observation and experimentation had been advanced in the nineteenth century, the more social and political differences among humans were expressed in terms of biological notions of race. Rejection and discrimination of people on ethical and social grounds – such as class-differences in England, slavery of Blacks in America, European lateralization of “Natives” in Asian and African colonies, as well as hatred of Jews wherever they were – were now justified on the basis of biological arguments.

The publication in 1859 of Darwin’s *Origin of Species*, and even earlier, in 1809, of the *Philosophie zoologique* by Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (1744–1829) provided not only important support for claims that differences among humans, individuals as well as populations, were biologically based, but also new dynamic dimensions to the differences within species. Furthermore, the notion of evolution by natural selection was soon translated into terms of competition for social and cultural advancement, as if the “survival of the fittest” was nothing but the survival of the most socially, culturally, or economically successful competitors among humans. Members of the upper socio-economic classes in Europe comprised – in their own opinion – the evidence by being survivors of such a “struggle.” The traditional claims concerning the inferiority of certain communities and the superiority of other races were justified by claims concerning the inborn properties and the operation of the Laws of Nature.

Barely a few years after the publication of the *Origin of Species*, Darwin’s cousin, Francis Galton (1822–1911), came up with the assertion that the liberal social and economic processes in Western societies, while promoting equality, contradicted the powers of natural selection that had been shaping human society for eons. Thus, according to Galton, specific conscious efforts were needed to prevent the ongoing biological deterioration of the human species of Western Societies. The achievements of human culture and science led to the containment of the effectiveness of natural selection (or at least diminished it), that was in the long run essential for preserving evolution’s success. In 1865 Galton coined the term *eugenics*, namely, “good breeding,” to refer to the socio-scientific effort intended to prevent the biological deterioration of the human species caused by the relaxation of the selective forces that had shaped it. The eugenics movement, which arose from Galton’s teachings, was popular in the first half of the twentieth century: The very idea that

human culture had a crucial role in shaping human evolution, both at the level of individuals and that of communities, led to an increasing desire to control and even navigate human biological future. Thus, men of power exerted increasingly brutal means to direct the evolution of their fellow-men. Although such distortions were probably first legally applied in the United-States, they reached their abhorrent climax in the context of the *Rassenhygiene* of the Nazi regime. It must be admitted, however, that from the end of the nineteenth century to the 1940s, arguments based on Darwinian Theory for means to antagonise the so-called flood of the deleterious effects of Western Culture on the social and scientific achievements, had been at the forefront of the humanitarian consciousness (Paul 1995). As heterogeneous as the German scientists community was, they were all concerned with questions of human diversity and human evolution. In all of those traditions and schools, researchers with Jewish background tried to pursue academic careers but with little success. Although many researches with Jewish background in the German-speaking countries contributed actively to the scientific debate about the so-called “Jewish race” even before 1933, they had little success (Lipphardt 2012). Thus, no wonder that many Zionists considered their movement to be a eugenic outpost for the rescue of the Jewish biological pool from the degeneration it suffered living in the Diaspora.

## 1.2 Who Is a Jew?

In an interview in 1998, journalist Michael Sheshar asked two retired Israeli Supreme Court judges “Who is a Jew?”<sup>7</sup> The secular Judge Haim Cohen responded: “the definition must be given by every single Jew for himself. If a person says of himself that he is a Jew, for me he is a Jew. This is his autonomy and nobody can decide for him or instead of him whether he is a Jew or not. There is no need in definitions.”<sup>8</sup> The orthodox retired judge Menachem Elon emphatically contested this argument. He relied on the decision of the Knesset concerning the Law of Return: “The definition of the concept Jew, in this context, is: ‘He who was born to a Jewish mother, or converted, and does not belong to another religion’. This is the lawful definition in the State of Israel. And in my view this law is most essential. Otherwise we have no Jewish nation!”

In 2005, Alain F. Corcos published *The Myth of the Jewish Race: A Biologist’s Point of View*. The author and his family managed to escape from the jaws of the pro-Nazi anti-Semitic Vichy regime in southern France in 1944. Following a detailed analysis of the history of the Jews and Jew hatred, the author summarizes: “Many Jewish and non-Jewish writers find it difficult to accept the idea that Judaism is

---

<sup>7</sup> *Yedion Irgun Olei Merkas Europa*, 139 (August–September, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> In a later radio interview, Justice Cohen said: “Judaism is a matter of religion for one and culture for another. I completely ignore the genes and biology. I respect the spirit that I received from my parents, and from my parents’ parents.”

simply a religion and that Jews who abandon the faith, [...] are no longer Jews” (Corcos 2005, p. 18).

Other scholars disagree. Solomon Zeitlin, Professor of Post Biblical Literature at Dropsie College, noted: “The question – who is a Jew – first arose after the French Revolution when the Jews were politically emancipated” (Zeitlin 1959, p. 241). According to him,

[A]nyone who is born of a Jewish mother or one who embraced Judaism, regardless of whether he observes or does not observe the precepts is a Jew. Judaism is a universal religion and no one can exclude himself. The Jews are also united by their history and to a great degree by Hebrew culture. Since Judaism represents the genius of one people there is also the ethnic element which unites them. [...] The land of Israel is not only the cradle of Judaism but Judaism as we know it today was moulded there. Throughout the ages the Jews of the Diaspora longed for establishment of a messianic kingdom in the land of Israel. [...] If Israel should become an ordinary, democratic industrial state it would be a great tragedy for Jewry and humanity as a whole. (Zeitlin 1959, pp. 269–270)

Rejecting such strict a definition in their book *Jews and Words*, the Israeli author Amos Oz and his daughter Fania Oz-Salzberger, insisted that it has been the Hebrew language that had formed the thread that has kept Jews together across the generations: “Jewish continuity has always hinged on uttered and written words, [...] Ours is not a bloodline but a textline” (Oz and Oz-Salzberger 2014, p. 1).

These polarized positions virtually confined the attempts of contemporary Jews to define Jewishness. David Vital opens his book *Zionism: The Formative Years* by noting that the Diaspora has been the most significant characteristic of the Jews for many generations (Vital 1982, e.g., pp. 5ff. & 349ff.). According to him, what characterizes and defines Jews is that in the past they had one country from which they were expelled. For Vital, this Exile has two aspects. One is the historic aspect – the physical reality of the Diaspora of the Jews, which had various and diverse consequences with respect to both their life styles and their surroundings. The other is the theological aspect – the spiritual reality of a People with no homeland, which has induced extreme changes in their religious conception of Judaism. Vital believes that although the ancient Israelites in the Near East were gradually dispersed to countries throughout Europe, they maintained the basic unity and the mutual relationships of the Jewish social and spiritual structures patterned in the first century C.E. up to the era of modern science and the industrial revolution. Although he does not insist on a biological criterion for the Jewishness of individuals or communities, it is apparent that he believes that during most of the years of exile Jews maintained not only spiritual and social unity, but also their unity of blood.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century an historic consciousness became acknowledged and with it the concern for “historic truths” rather than “eternal truths.” In order to understand the social realities of being Jewish it was necessary to consider the relevant historic processes that produced these social realities. The ahistorical “laws of nature” were gradually replaced by historic definitions, which were conceived on the foundation of a “bourgeois society” and its expectation for emancipation as an ongoing process. The future was conceived and shaped by the actions of persons. For the philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder, who heralded early Romanticism, history was the scene where the phenomenon of nation formation was

taking place and where a special spirit was being shaped. For the philosopher Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), who was a bridge between the Age of Enlightenment and that of Romanticism, history had intention: the “spirit of the world” was revealed in the process of the realization of freedom. Accordingly, “Europe as we see it today is not the result of chance, but rather the necessary result of the efforts of the ‘spirit of reason’ revealed in the history of the world” (see Livneh-Freudenthal 2001). Hegel and his school conceived of phenomena of the real world, of nations, states and persons, as being the processes that determine its character. In this spirit, Hegel claimed, the modern state is a step in the process of the realization of freedom, because the regime is the guarantee for the realization of the freedom of its citizens.

According to Vital’s analysis, the nature of Judaism started to change in the mid-eighteenth century in Western Europe, during the Age of Enlightenment, when a process of juridical emancipation of the Jews was initiated. As a consequence, by the nineteenth century, old patterns of Jewish life started to crumble. The old definition of Jews changed when their lifestyle, their religion, and their professions, or the kinds of trade they were allowed to engage in, all collapsed. However, the rate of this change and its impact differed from place to place. Least affected were the Jews in the lands of Islam, and most affected were those in Western Europe. In the latter, the more “enlightened” yet absolute rulers sought to eliminate the “Jewish problem” completely by undermining the uniqueness of the Jews and integrating them in a system in which privileges (in contrast to rights) were dispensed by the authority. On the other hand, many communities, especially in Eastern Europe, maintained their traditional ways of life, which were only slightly – if at all – affected by the spirit of the times.

It must be kept in mind that an important component of emancipation – the slow and intricate process by which Jews won redress from generations of discrimination – was that it was not restricted to Jews; rather it was a breakthrough from prohibitions and barriers for society at large. The intellectual enlightenment that brought with it the emancipation of the Jews, however, did not recognize social plurality, namely the privilege of equal rights for diverse communities, parishes, or nations. The French Revolution secured complete freedom for individuals, but rejected rights for any organized groups other than that of all citizens. Already in, 1790 Count Clermont-Tonnerre claimed:

[I]t will be argued, the Jews have their own judges and particular laws. But, I answer, this is your fault and you should not permit it. Jews, as individuals, deserve everything: Jews as a nation nothing. [...] Within the state there can be neither a separate political body nor an order. There can be only the individual citizen. [...] it is inconceivable that there should be in the state a society of non-citizens, a nation within the nation. (Katz 1980, p. 109)

At the time, the Jewish community requested that the city of Colmar postpone the disbanding of the community in order to allow the Jews of Alsace (the district where the city is located) to get used to the new patterns and lifestyle of their neighbors. This request was emphatically rejected by the revolutionary assembly. Most of its members held to the notion that there existed a human capacity to mold one’s own nature and they believed in the redeeming effect of the revolution, thus they did not see a need to defer the cancellation of the old life patterns.