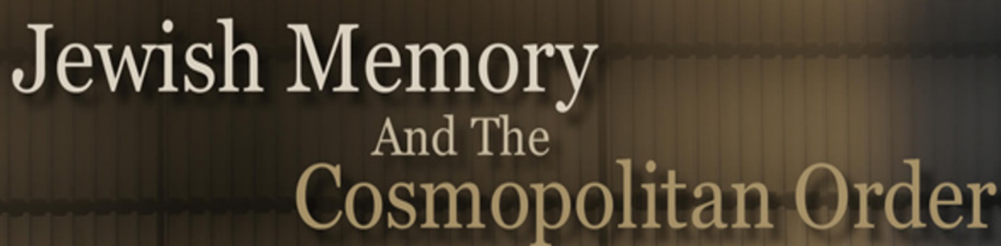

Jewish Memory And The Cosmopolitan Order

NATAN SZNAIDER

JEWISH MEMORY AND THE COSMOPOLITAN ORDER

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HANNAH ARENDT AND THE JEWISH CONDITION

Natan Sznaider

polity

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— 1 —

INTRODUCTION: KÖNIGSBERG, JERUSALEM, PARIS, AND NEW YORK

> Auch stünde es schlimm um Europa, wenn die kulturellen Energien der Juden es verließen. [It would be bad for Europe if the cultural energies of the Jews were to leave it.]
>
> Walter Benjamin (1972: 834)

That is what Walter Benjamin wrote to his Zionist friend Ludwig Strauss as a twenty-year old, and it is also the central theme of this book. Is there a Jewish perspective on Europe? And if so, is this perspective religious, ethnic, or political? Is there such a thing as a Jewish Europe, or a Europe of Jews? Can one even speak of Jewish voices or a Jewish epistemology without reducing thought to a matter of origin and birth?

This book addresses a broad set of historical and intellectual developments that attempts to shed light on these questions. It is not a "Jewish book," but it uses "Jewishness" as a metaphor for people on the margins, people who are minorities, whether against their will or by choice. At the same time, it is a book about cosmopolitanism, as theory and praxis that sees Jews not in terms of their victimhood but explores the possibilities of autonomous cosmopolitan social and political action. It also tries to illuminate Jewish voices that self-consciously examine what Europe meant to them before and after the Holocaust.

Some of these voices stress the sanctity of this world and speak of the autonomy of the individual as one of the fundamental principles of modern society. Many Jewish intellectuals were concerned with moral individualism, which is both transcendental and of this world (this was not, of course, only a Jewish agenda). In their view, this was the true expression of modernity. The particular world of devout

Jewry was no longer sufficient to cope with the challenges of modernity. Thus, they were looking for universal guidelines, both within and outside the state. This trend was exemplified by the French sociologist Emile Durkheim, who came from a religious Jewish family and described the birth of civil religion at the end of the nineteenth century. Durkheim was a firm believer in the religion of humanity, the worldly belief in salvation through the action of human beings. It is this religion of humanity that also allows Jews to be incorporated into the universality of the rational state. A similar point can be made today about the "secular" religion of cosmopolitan morality: it, too, has transcendental features and places the human being in the foreground. For cosmopolitan theory, this means the tangible human being – not the idea of a human being, the universal man of modern theory.

Hannah Arendt, the Jewish intellectual, is the main protagonist with whose help I will explore those questions. She expressed this sentiment in an early essay of 1945 on guilt and responsibility. We will see how these concepts like guilt and responsibility became central to a cosmopolitan theory of being "my brother's keeper." What does "universal" responsibility mean? Arendt was asking this question at the moment when World War II came to an end. She addressed it in one of her first essays in 1945; it occupied her for the rest of her life.[1] The essay concludes with Arendt's comments about universal responsibility and its relation to the concept of humanity, which she sees as part of the Jewish tradition: "Perhaps those Jews, to whose forefathers we owe the conception of the idea of humanity, knew something about that burden when each year they used to say: 'Our Father and King, we have sinned before you,' taking not only the sins of their own community but all human offenses upon themselves" (Arendt 1994: 131–2). Thus both Durkheim and Arendt tried to push the boundaries of their collective existence from particular premises to universal ones, combining the monotheistic message of the Jews with the universal claims of the Enlightenment. Arendt and many of her Jewish contemporaries serve in this book as personifications of a cosmopolitan ideal, with all its inherent contradictions.

The choice of Arendt is not arbitrary. Perhaps more than that of any other thinker of the twentieth century, the urgency of her writing on totalitarianism, democracy, critical judgment, and evil remains relevant today. Her being born Jewish, her engagement with the fate of the Jews (which caught up with her life in Germany in 1933), her work with Jewish and Zionist organizations, her criticism of Zionism

from within, her engagement with Jewish history and politics on a theoretical and on a practical level – all of these things make her a good fit with the subject of this book. But this is not a book about Arendt's political theory.[2] Her political theoretical work of the 1950s and 1960s is well known and established her reputation as one of the most important political thinkers of the twentieth century. Less well known are her writings on Jewish issues and her professional work with Jewish agencies and institutions, which in my view laid the groundwork for her later theoretical work.[3]

But even within this framework, Arendt is usually considered a secular thinker whose relationship to Jewish thought was one of critical distance. She was supposed to be engaged with Jewish politics but not with Jewish thought and philosophy.[4] There are, of course, connections between her earlier work on practical matters of Jewish politics and her theories about politics, democracy, pluralism, and federalism. Her experiences during World War II, and what would later be called the Holocaust, kindled practical concerns about the future of the Jewish people and the future of Europe, and at the same time fed her theoretical interest in the relationship between universalism and particularism. Her life experiences – growing up in Germany as a Jew, escaping from Germany to Paris in 1933, leaving France in 1941 for the United States, working with Jewish organizations, her political observations, her philosophical writings – make her the embodiment of Jewish cosmopolitan existence, and through this analytical prism her life and work can shed light on the possibilities and impossibilities of such an existence.

Arendt studied philosophy in Germany with Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers. She studied ancient Greek and Protestant theology and enjoyed the typical classical education of assimilated German Jews.[5] Arendt can be our companion and guide in the search for a Jewish existence on the margins. My purpose in this book is not to essentialize her Jewishness, but just the opposite. I consider Jewishness in this study as a political identity, circumscribed by political events and historical contingencies. I will show how Arendt's Jewish identity changed over the decades, how she tried to combine universal philosophy and cultural Zionism, how she became a politicized Jew through the rise of the Nazis and her exile in Paris, how she turned away from Zionism and closed the circle through philosophy again.[6]

It is my intention to bring Arendt's particular Jewish experience back into the equation of her universal horizons, and in doing so to show how she constantly navigated between universalism and particularism through her understanding of political judgment, the

revolutionary tradition, federal republicanism, and other issues she examined through the prism of the Jewish fate. By looking at her theoretical and practical works, I attempt to develop a more historically informed notion of cosmopolitanism. Throughout her work, Arendt was concerned with language and its ability (or inability) to express extreme experiences. What language do we need to speak, and can we speak, when we talk about the destruction of the Jews?[7] On the one hand, the destruction of the Jews challenged concepts of the Enlightenment, became part of the so-called dialectic of the Enlightenment and the debates surrounding the project of modernity. On the other hand, destruction was not only foundational for postwar criticism of the Enlightenment but also for attempts to reconstruct the Enlightenment through institutions that promoted human rights legislation and sought to prevent genocide. The aftermath of the war, that is, witnessed an attempt to rebuild the basic principles of modernity through institutions that went beyond the confines of the nation-state. Thus, for Arendt, one of the crucial questions was whether there can be a universalist minimum that does not involve giving up particular demands at the same time. Language is indeed crucial here, and different texts tried to come to terms with the catastrophic history of the Jews during World War II. One of them, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, tried to frame the catastrophe in universal terms: "Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind . . . "[8] It was clear to the framers of the Declaration, in December 1948, which barbarous acts were referred to. This language was clear for the framers three years after the war, but at the same time it has since then turned into foundational language, without the clear-cut historical context. The memory of the Holocaust becomes decontextualized and detached from the historical event. It becomes a symbol. Human rights are therefore based not on clear-cut philosophical or religious worldviews but rather on historical experiences and concomitant memories of catastrophe.[9] We will see in the following chapters how this language has been constructed and reconstructed.

At about the same time that the Universal Declaration was being written, the state of Israel was founded. Its declaration of independence frames the Jewish catastrophe differently:

> The catastrophe which recently befell the Jewish people – the massacre of millions of Jews in Europe – was another clear demonstration of the urgency of solving the problem of its homelessness by reestablish-

> ing in Eretz-Israel the Jewish State, which would open the gates of the homeland wide to every Jew and confer upon the Jewish people the status of a fully privileged member of the comity of nations.[10]

The same catastrophe was given two completely different meanings: barbarous acts versus the massacre of millions of Jews in Europe; or "crimes against humanity" versus "crimes against the Jewish people." These poles became crucial for Jewish intellectuals who thought they needed to navigate these apparent contradictions and tensions. As we will see in chapter 5, they also became crucial for Arendt's thinking about the cosmopolitan role that Jews could fulfill in a global world, while at the same time a sovereign Jewish state was coming into existence. This book demonstrates how Arendt, in her controversies with Jews and non-Jews, tried to defend the principles of universalism and particularism at the same time.

I also argue that Arendt's political theory and praxis can be understood as exemplary of Jewish thinking and conduct before and after the catastrophe. It is the intention of this book to locate Arendt's thinking within the context of Jewish history and experience without neglecting the universal claims she consistently worked to develop. Thus, Jewish history and universal history are seen not as two different lenses through which to view the past but as part of one common project.[11] If one excludes the particular memories of Jews, one risks falling back on a Kantian conception of either cosmopolitanism or multiculturalism, which are both rooted in a universalism that has no conceptual or actual place for the persistence of particular attachments. It is my argument that the universalist narrative obliterates the cosmopolitan potential of the Jewish experience, which straddles the interstices of universal identifications and particular attachments.

Cosmopolitanism combines appreciation of difference and diversity with efforts to conceive of new democratic forms of political rule beyond the nation-state. As we will see, this corresponded with Arendt's theory of political federalism. In this view, cosmopolitanism differs fundamentally from all forms of vertical differentiation that seek to place social difference in a hierarchical relation of superiority and subordination, whereas universalism is the dissolution of all difference and represents the countervailing principle to hierarchical subordination. Universalism obliges us to respect others as equals in principle, yet for that very reason it neglects what makes others different. On the contrary, the particularity of others is sacrificed to an assumed universal equality that denies its own origins and interests.

Universalism thereby becomes two-faced, involving both respect and hegemony. Cosmopolitanism differs in its recognition of difference as a maxim of thought, social life, and practice, both internally and externally. It neither orders differences hierarchically nor dissolves them, but accepts them as such – indeed, invests them with positive value. It is sensitive to historic cultural particularities, respecting the specific dignity and burden of a group, a people, a culture, a religion. Cosmopolitanism affirms what is excluded both by hierarchical difference and by universal equality – namely, perceiving others as different and at the same time equal.[12]

What I propose in this book is to reinscribe the Jewish voice in a more general narrative. In other words, universal aspirations and particularistic ethnic identification are not merely part of Jewish history but are relevant for, even constitutive of, contemporary debates about minorities and their rights.[13]

My goal is to bring into the open the possibility of a cosmopolitan Jewish Europe, which involves reviving the memory of the systematic breakup of the process that led to the domination of a national perspective on politics and society. The Jews were transnational and had to face a national world. They encountered a clear division between inside and outside, domestic and foreign. In addition, however, in the surrounding of the Jewish world, the nation-state was the principle of order, even though it was not theirs. A cosmopolitan Jewish Europe, or so-called rooted cosmopolitanism, on the other hand, is defined as a composite of the two extremes of being at home everywhere and being at home nowhere. Clearly, the notion of "rooted cosmopolitanism" does not refer only to Jewish concerns. The concept was developed by scholars working from postcolonial perspectives who argued for cosmopolitanism without homogenization.[14] These tendencies demarcate a shift from one universal culture to cultures in the plural.[15] I aim to show in this book that rooted cosmopolitanism produces new forms of localism that are open to the world. By "rooted cosmopolitanism," I refer to universal values that descend from the level of pure abstract philosophy and engage people emotionally in their everyday lives. It is by becoming symbols of people's personal identities that normative cosmopolitan philosophy turns into a social and political force. As Durkheim taught us a century ago, by embodying philosophy in rituals, such identities are created, reinforced, and integrated into communities.[16] A commitment to global or cosmopolitan values does not imply that cosmopolitans are rootless individuals who prefer some abstract "humanity" over concrete human beings. This became historical reality for many Jews

when emancipation demanded that they give up their traditional religious ties. Arendt very early considered the central shortcoming, politically and analytically, of a universalism that operates with an ahistorical notion of history, one that seeks to mold and freeze particular memories of the past into universal standards for the future. This kind of universalism fails to recognize the persistence of particularism and exclusion as central features of human life. This kind of universalism sees nationalism as the opposite of cosmopolitanism and as something to be overcome.[17] Rather than treat cosmopolitanism as the antidote to nationalism, I seek to relate it to particular national attachments as potential mediators between the individual and the global horizons against which identifications unfold. The historical analysis in the chapters that follow attempts to contribute not only to a much-needed historical–empirical operationalization of cosmopolitanism; I hope that it will also serve as an important reminder that theories of cosmopolitanism must attend more closely to political culture and the underlying beliefs and ideals that foster shared understandings, identity, and belonging, in national, ethnic, and religious groups. The case study under consideration here is Jewish politics and thought.

How do particular values come to define personal identity and thereby also acquire political significance? Cosmopolitanism diverges from universalism in assuming that there is not one language of cosmopolitanism but many languages, tongues, and grammars. This belief corresponds to the languages in which Jews wrote and spoke. There was no one Jewish language but many. Thus Jewish culture is by definition multilingual, and this has implications for multiple cultural identities as well. Moreover, nationality also means memory. Is there a shared European memory? A glance at textbooks and encyclopedias reveals attempts to construct a shared past and identity, starting with the Greco-Roman heritage and moving through the humanism of the Renaissance, the era of Enlightenment, the dawn of democracy, and the Christian heritage. Even the term "Europe" is part of Western Christianity and Greek mythology.[18] The boundaries of Orthodox Christianity and Islam define Europe as Europe.[19] What role did and do the Jews play in this conception of Europe? Did a Jewish nation exist in Europe, though dispersed and lacking territory and sovereignty? Weren't the Jews of Europe assimilated, emancipated, acculturated, orthodox, socialist, nationalist and even non-Jewish at the same time? Was it not this lack of belonging that stirred the ontological evil of anti-Semitic fantasies and the anti-Semitic state, which tried to destroy the transnational cultures of the Jews in

the heart of Europe? After the war, Europe needed to pick up the pieces and to try and forget what had happened to the Jews throughout Europe under the Nazis.[20] Thus, if Europe is indeed "laboring under a national-misunderstanding" (Beck and Grande 2007: 4), perhaps one reason can be found in amnesia about the transnational Jewish presence in what was once Europe. There was a time when Jews tried to become a European people unrestricted by borders or nations. Jews were cosmopolitans before Europe became cosmopolitan. If cosmopolitanism indeed combines an appreciation of difference and alterity, and also attempts to experiment with democratic forms beyond the nation-state, then it must reach back to its own Jewish sources which existed in Europe and were destroyed by the most ruthless project of destruction Europe has ever known. And this was one of the political demands Arendt made when she looked at the Jewish tradition as a source for the future of Europe.

After 1945, it initially seemed for many Jews that only Zionism could make whole for Jews what the German Nazis had shattered. Zionism held out the promise of a Jewish state for a stateless people, the promise of safety and security. Between the wars, Zionism was one of various political alternatives for Jews, but after 1945 it became one of the major viable alternatives, as the language of the Israeli declaration of independence so clearly states. The new state of Israel thus began to employ an ethnic definition of its nationhood, trying to make homogeneous which was by definition heterogeneous. At the same time, many Jews saw the United States as the other viable alternative. Thus American and Israeli definitions of nationhood are closely entwined with the well-known tension between two fundamental definitions of nationhood. The first is territorial and political and has roots in Western Europe; the second is ethnic and is typical of the historical experience of Eastern and Central Europe.[21] Both are conceptualized through the boundaries of the state. One variety is associated with "rational" principles of citizenship and democratic virtues. The other, the dominant one in the Israeli context, is organic and is associated with beliefs that supersede the voluntaristic nature of the first type. "Enlightened" political nationalism has gradually been replaced by organic forms of nationalism that were embraced in Central and Eastern Europe and went on to become the origins of the Jewish nation of Israel. But are these the only alternatives? For Arendt, more was at stake here. She looked at the concrete political makeup of the Middle East and proposed a federal political structure that corresponded to her understanding of politics and judgment which differed from ethnically oriented forms of Zionism.

Jews lived in constant tension between universalism and particularism as part of their history. The respective milieus of seminal Jewish cosmopolitans shaped their perceptions. But there came a historical moment when this tension took center stage for Jewish actors, especially in Central Europe. The circumstances of their lives transformed especially the Jewish elite into cosmopolitan actors. Central Europe had already been the venue for a struggle between cosmopolitanism and nationalism in which Jews played a major role. It was the site of ethno-national tensions, the Holocaust, and the expulsions after World War II. Cosmopolitanism was one of the refuges of a small circle of intellectuals who thought they had nothing to gain from the emerging ethno-politics. A typical example was Karl Popper's *Open Society and Its Enemies*, a seminal Cold War text that defended the openly cosmopolitan imperialism of the West. As Malachi Hacohen's analysis of Popper shows, because of anti-Semitism, this type of universalism was not able to mediate between nationalism and cosmopolitanism. Its antidote to nationalism was an "enlightened imperialism," whether the Habsburg Empire or, for Popper and others, the British. This universalism was also the milieu that gave birth to Zionism's seminal text, Theodor Herzl's *The Jewish State* (1896), which declared the failure of emancipation and demanded a sovereign state for the Jews. On the other hand, Popper's hostility to Zionism (as to any other form of ethno-nationalism) was typical of a dichotomous worldview that conflated cosmopolitanism with universalism and could not see how cosmopolitanism could be squared with nationalism. Popper's imagined "open society" became the "assimilated Jewish philosopher's cosmopolitan homeland" (Hacohen 1999: 136). It was an imperial homeland, a kind of westernized modernity in its global vision that attempted to imitate late Hellenic culture. It was dominant, progressive, the wave of the future, assimilationist, admirable, seductive, and beautiful, as it always was and is for Jewish particularism. Its vision of a democratic cosmopolitan empire attracted many Jews, like Popper, to Great Britain, whereas Zionists recognized the need for Jews to secure a common past that was inextricably tied to cultural artifacts and national history. If we take the long historical view, the fundamental meaning of Jewish cosmopolitanism for both its proponents and its antagonists was a sign of Jewish civilization.[22] Diaspora for the Jews meant that they were an ethnic-religious-national community that juggled all of these components. For Jews (and others) who wanted to regard themselves as different, this is a crucial point. Paul Gilroy (1993) made this point clear in *The Black Atlantic,* which opens with this statement:

"Striving to be European and Black requires some special form of consciousness."[23] Gilroy pointedly notes that the same can be said of Jews (pp. 208ff.).

This diasporic view of an existence at the margins was extremely attractive to Jewish men and women of letters who celebrated it as a sign of an advanced modernity. *The Jewess of Toledo,* a novel by the German–Jewish writer Lion Feuchtwanger published in 1955, embodies this outlook perfectly.[24] Like many of Feuchtwanger's earlier works, this novel deals with the Jewish predicament of being caught between universal claims and particular attachments, in this case framed by a love story involving a Christian king and a Jewess. The story is set in twelfth-century Spain, a country bordering both Christianity and Islam, and thus on the front line of the original Crusades and Jihads, in an age when those words were more than just metaphors. The hero of Feuchtwanger's book, Jehuda Ibn Esra, lives at the epicenter of these realms. He accepts the post of finance minister under King Alfonso – essentially the post of an economic czar, who takes a cut of the overall profit in return for personally putting up capital and bearing huge risks – because he sees this Christian country as having productive potential that he can bring to fruition, if, and only if, he can keep the country out of war. The king, a knight of the old camp, wants to go to war as soon as possible, since that is the only sure road to glory. He grudgingly accepts that he must build up the economic strength of his exhausted country first, and with the same unwillingness finally recognizes that Ibn Esra has a genius for peacetime management that he himself lacks. Thus the two struggle with each other for many years, in a partnership and a rivalry for very high stakes. Jehuda Ibn Esra has a beautiful daughter named Raquel who is every inch his child. She is as cultured as anyone in the realm, and she is just as ambitious as her father – ambitious not merely to get ahead in this dangerous world but to make it better: to soften it, beautify it, redeem it. She is even more deeply entangled in it, because King Alfonso falls in love with her, and she with him. This relationship keeps the entire kingdom in suspense for seven years. Enemies and allies and historical forces gather on every side, until the next crusade – and with it, the destruction of everything Jehuda Ibn Esra has built – seems to be hanging on the subtleties of love. The secularized Jewish elite (Feuchtwanger's projection, no doubt) sees Raquel as a civilizing influence on a man who is a force of nature. Jews and women, and in particular a Jewish woman, champion those civilizing influences over knightly ideals.

It is no accident that Feuchtwanger wrote this book just after the Nazis and their war destroyed his German–Jewish world of educated and wealthy burghers. For Feuchtwanger, the knightly ideals that would destroy everything that other people had built up were all too close to home. He contrasts them with the striving for wealth and commerce pursued by the citizens of the town, by Jews, and by women, who counteract the destructive force of knights and barons with the quiet pleasures of enjoying material things. In his Josephus trilogy, published between 1931 and 1941, Feuchtwanger, assuming the role of the Jewish historian Josephus Flavius, depicts the dilemma of a man torn between Jewish patriotism and Hellenist/Roman imperial cosmopolitanism. Feuchtwanger was trying desperately to protect a European cosmopolitanism composed of Jewish, Greek, Christian, and Muslim identities against the rise of National Socialism.[25] In Weimar Germany and Central and Eastern Europe, there were more such heroes trying to work out economic and political arrangements that would bind Germany to England and avoid war. European Jewish intellectuals lived between cultures and were regarded with suspicion. They saw themselves playing the same dangerous game for the same high stakes – namely, the preservation of civilization and all that they had built. These men's position between cultures is what gave them their sophistication, their breadth of vision, and their tolerance – in a word, their virtue. Their composite culture was ingrained in their character. The various cultural traditions they embodied all felt familiar, as though they belonged together. They personified the ideal of integration; this was inextricably part of their ideal of individual cultivation. In men and women like this, rootedness – being fixed in one place and submerged in one culture – was regarded as a limitation. They recognized that limited people could only extend their (mental and physical) boundaries by war. This is why their cosmopolitanism was always threatened by the warriors they tried to civilize. It also expresses a vision of multiethnic European civilizations. It is coextensive with Gerard Delanty's (2003) vision, discussed above, of a Europe based on multiple modernities and composed of three civilizational constellations: the Occidental Christian, the Byzantine-Slavic Eurasian, and the Ottoman/Islamic.

It is my intention to add the Jewish dimension to this civilizational equation. One way of doing this involves exploring memories of the Holocaust, which changes the relationship between universalism and particularism. These memories were organized around a dichotomy between universalism (the idea that the Holocaust was an assault on

humanity) and particularism (the recognition that it was primarily an attempt to exterminate European Jewry). As we will see in the following chapters, Hannah Arendt constantly tried to navigate between these two poles in her work. The Holocaust has not become one totalizing signifier conveying the same meaning for everyone. Arendt tried to demonstrate that memories of the Holocaust (even if she did not use the term) involve the formation of both nation-specific and nation-transcending commonalities. Thus, for her as for many other Jewish intellectuals, it is no longer the dichotomy but the mutual constitution of particular and universal conceptions that determines the ways in which the Holocaust can be remembered. One theme nevertheless is constant: the tension between the universal and the particular has become an inevitable feature of the cosmopolitan condition, and this is, of course, not merely an accident of intellectual history. As I show in the following chapters, the agonizing that Arendt and others went through – their inability to give up either their universalist dreams or their ethnic national identity – was not merely an indecisiveness born of trauma and exile. Questions of Jewish particularism and universalism within and beyond Judaism, and questions of individual independence and collective responsibility, are not only questions of particular concern but are theoretically relevant to cosmopolitan theory and praxis. The reason why this generation of Jewish intellectuals, who underwent their formative political growth in the interwar years, were pioneers in developing the concept of modern cosmopolitanism was that they were situated between worlds. Together with all the non-Jewish cosmopolitans, they left their imprint on a vision of postwar Europe.

Hannah Arendt used to call the era that challenged democracy and was at the same time deadly for European Jews "dark times," a term she borrowed from Bertolt Brecht's poem "An die Nachgeborenen" (To Those Born After Us), which Brecht wrote in 1939 in exile and which begins, "Truly, I live in dark times." In 1959, Arendt elaborated: "History knows many periods of dark times in which the public realm has been obscured and the world become so dubious that people have ceased to ask any more of politics than that it show due consideration for their vital interests and political liberty."[26] Arendt was looking for a new kind of language that could give expression to the predicament of Jewish and human existence in a post-Holocaust world. Existentially, the question for Jews was whether to assimilate or not. This was an intellectual puzzle. Can a Jew assimilate? Or is the idea of Jewish assimilation oxymoronic by definition? Because the more you assimilate, the less you are a Jew.

And if you still feel very much like a Jew, despite adopting the clothes and manners and way of life of the mainstream culture, then this proves that you haven't yet fully assimilated.[27] Arendt's basic answer is: if it is not possible to be both, it is not possible for the Jews to exist. The Holocaust made it impossible for her ever to consider her Jewishness something secondary. It was, indeed, a matter of life and death. Giving up her Jewish identity would be a betrayal of self and of millions.

As we will see, throughout her work Arendt explored the philosophical concept that the universal and the particular are mutually constitutive, the relationship between them one of inherent connection rather than opposition. For Arendt, the universal means what it does because the particulars are its background, and the particulars mean what they do because the universal is their background. When one changes, the other changes – but neither disappears. So when Jews become assimilated into Christian or secular culture, that culture becomes more Jewish, and Jewishness becomes more a matter of culture. They both change, and their relationship changes, but neither disappears. Again, the modern manifestation of this dynamic is cosmopolitanism. And Arendt was one of the first to attempt to transform cosmopolitanism and give it a modern sociological meaning. This need arose at precisely the moment when the Holocaust called the whole Enlightenment project into question. Arendt also argued that "dark times" demand a new epistemological responsibility to break through social scientific certainty and bring us back to experience.

This is not to say that this kind of thinking need be caught in a web of closed-off essentialism. Jonathan Sacks, the chief rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, observes that "universalism is an inadequate response to tribalism."[28] According to Sacks, five universalist cultures marked the history of the West – the Alexandrian Empire, ancient Rome, medieval Christianity, Islam, and the Enlightenment (61) – and Jews suffered under all of them. Thus universalism, although many consider it morally superior while others criticize its intolerance, was also historically a reaction to Jewish tribalism. For religion, one feature is absolute; all other social differences and oppositions are unimportant when compared to faith. The New Testament says, "All men are equal before God." This equality, this annulment of the boundaries between people, groups, classes, nations, societies, and cultures, is the social foundation of Christianity. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in

Christ" (Galatians 3: 28). But this belief has led to a further consequence. A fundamental new distinction has been established in the world, and it is just as absolute as the social and political distinctions that preceded it: the distinction between believers and nonbelievers. The Pauline dictum of "oneness" was the first universal reaction against Jewish tribalism.[29] These were the key debates between Jewish and non-Jewish intellectuals[30] As we will see in chapter 5, through trials like the one in Nuremberg where the Allied forces tried Nazi criminals after the war, the destruction of the Jews was depicted as a "crime against humanity," Jews symbolizing the universal concept of "humanity." This is nothing new and is part of a long European tradition that culminated in the Enlightenment. It was the Enlightenment that (after Christianity) emphasized the concept of humanity (and crimes against it) and oneness. But it neglected those who did not want to be a part of this kind of "humanity."

For Jews in Germany, the message came through loud and clear in one of the key texts of the Enlightenment, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's "Nathan the Wise" (1779), which would become crucial not only for German-Jews in general but also for Arendt's understanding of Jewish history. This late eighteenth-century story transports us back to twelfth-century Jerusalem during the Crusades. Nathan, like Feuchtwanger's Ibn Esra, is a wealthy businessman who negotiates between Christians and Muslims. In the iconic central scene, the sultan asks Nathan which is the true religion, Judaism, Christianity, or Islam. Nathan replies with the famous parable of the ring. A ring has passed from father to favorite son for many generations. At one point a father has three favorite sons, and he promises the ring to all three by having two replicas made. When the sons argue about which one of them has the true ring, a wise judge tells them that the true ring has to be deserved by the way we live. The message, of course, is that there is no one true religion; all religions can be equally true:

> How can I less believe in my forefathers
> Than thou in thine. How can I ask of thee
> To own that thy forefathers falsified
> In order to yield mine the praise of truth.
> The like of Christians.[31]

Anybody could join universal humanity when he was ready to leave his particularity behind. Ulrich Beck (2009) shows that this can be read in a different way and sees Lessing as the instigator of a new