

# Chapter 9

## Risky Jews: Understanding Antisemitic Communication Through a Social Intuition Framework

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### ABSTRACT

*Focusing on many previously untranslated articles in popular national magazines and newspapers, as well as works by prominent racial theorists, this chapter traces how outrage was systematically fomented against Jews in Nazi-era Germany, creating perceived imperatives for drastic discriminatory measures. Rather than locate the core of Nazi antisemitism in historical or psychological factors, this study approaches antisemitism using the theoretical framework of risk communication. The heuristics of risk perception reveal an array of rhetorical tactics that fomented visceral aversion impervious to logical refutation. Portraying Jews as embodying maximal and uncontrollable risk, political, academic, and mass media discourse converged on the theme of Jews as posing unacceptable dangers that required progressively more drastic measures to control. The principles of risk communication, especially the means of inflaming outrage, could furnish useful interpretive frames for analyzing current antisemitism and other types of repressive discourse.*

### INTRODUCTION

The virulent antisemitism propagated by the Nazi regime and its sympathizers seems to defy logical explanation. More generally, the negative characteristics that antisemitism attributes to Jews present a cacophony of contradictions. The extensive annals of antisemitic discourse simultaneously accuse Jews of being: socialists but also hoarding money for themselves, capable enough to engineer world domination but also innately inferior, ubiquitous yet secretive and invisible, and a host of other inconsistent claims. The rapidly growing field of behavioral economics suggests that some of the most fruitful explanations of human attitudes and actions begin where conventional rationality ends (Ariely, 2010). Whether in

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economics or in politics (Koenigsberg, 2009), the theory of the rational actor scarcely applies to the boundlessly cruel antisemitism that culminated in the Holocaust and has stubbornly persisted for millennia.

This chapter examines the intuitive rationales and emotional appeal of antisemitism to understand its recalcitrance. The analysis is rooted in detailed examination of public discourse of “racial science” in Nazi Germany as the limit case of the extreme consequences antisemitism can entail. Although the Nazi version of antisemitism ignited the Holocaust, its appropriation of scientific language and the aura of scientific authority should not obscure the ways that all forms of antisemitism rely on fueling perceptions of Jews as inherently dangerous and undesirable. Antisemitism may take different forms as theologically (Kiewe, 2021), culturally, or politically grounded. All species of antisemitism, however, share a common *modus operandi* in their reliance on intuitive heuristics that enable prejudice. Not every variety of antisemitism relies on the same heuristic techniques, but all antisemitism—and indeed bigotry itself—exhibits the patterns that lie at the heart of how social intuitionism shapes perception, beliefs, and actions.

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK, SCOPE, AND PURPOSE

Although Nazi antisemitism was not *rational*, it did offer *rationales* that propelled otherwise logically and morally responsible people to endorse, enact, or tolerate overt cruelty and brutality. According to social intuitionism, moral decisions may rest on a basis of minimally reflective, affectively charged reactions arising through mental shortcuts that then get rationalized (Haidt, 2001, 2012). Communication plays a central role in generating and perpetuating these heuristic operations. From a communication standpoint, Nazi antisemitic fervor operates as a linguistically engineered manipulation of threat perception. The metaphoric framing of Jewish influence as a public health emergency provided a context for specific rationales that maximized the perceived peril posed by the Judaic pathogen. Close analysis of references to Jews and Judaism focusing on previously untranslated primary sources from Nazi-era political leaders, racial “scientists,” and the popular press (especially the daily *Völkischer Beobachter* and the weekly *Das Schwarze Korps*) reveals a convergence in metaphors and imagery across political discourse, purportedly scientific publications, and public journalism that systematically maximized perceptions of Judaism as a collective threat.

The discussion that follows represents the first attempt to apply empirically based research in risk communication—specifically, analyses of how people actually assess risks—to the ways Jews were rhetorically constructed as a risk in antisemitic discourse by researchers, political figures, and in popular tracts directed toward the general public. The study focuses on pre-World War II communication because the exigence of physical warfare introduces another set of risks alongside what was known as the “Jewish question” [*Judenfrage*]. The application of risk communication literature to antisemitism that Nazi Germany embraced could add depth and precision to discussions of how risk can be construed rhetorically. Instead of merely identifying root metaphors and other literary devices in antisemitic rhetoric, this study explores how specific discursive tactics amplified perceptions of Jews as hazardous.

Grounded in the heuristics operant in social intuitionism, the framework of a public health emergency was energized to ground extreme antisemitism. A central question arises that probes the roots of social intuitionism: if people do not behave as rational actors (calculating costs vs. benefits, weighing pros and cons, and assessing long-term consequences), then what influences their decisions? Observable answers appear in the actual discourse employed to promote the idea that the mere presence of Jews posed a

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public health risk. This equivalent of a medical emergency demanded the most extreme measures to protect the body politic. In 1928, Hitler drew the conclusion in accordance with the medical analogy: “Now, healing a national body [*Volkskörpers*] from a deep and difficult illness is not a question of finding a prescription that itself is completely free of poison; often it involves destroying a poison through an antidote” (1961, p. 74).

Heuristics, often marginalized or dismissed as logical fallacies, can lend sense to everyday decision-making (Ariely, 2010). Heuristics simplify decisions. As Daniel Kahneman (2011), a Nobel Prize-winning trailblazer in this line of research, explains: “This is the essence of intuitive heuristics: when faced with a difficult question, we often answer an easier one instead, usually without noticing the substitution” (p. 12). For example, when encountering a news report that a Jewish person overcame antisemitism and became wealthy, one could ask: “How did this person develop the strength to withstand prejudice? What financial strategies enabled this individual to succeed when so many others fail?” Answering these questions would require biographical research, comparing different investment strategies, and analyzing how prejudice operates in professional contexts. A much simpler question invites a ready answer: “Why are Jews so obsessed with money?” The circular answer: Because Jews are greedy. Paradoxically, this question transforms a triumph over antisemitism into reinforcement of an antisemitic motif.

While they may violate logical rationality, heuristics do offer simple and workable justifications for judgments. Such heuristics enabled the political leadership, the scientific community, and the popular press to maintain a sense that the Jewish menace was too dangerous to tolerate. Building upon the literature examining how heuristics influence risk perceptions (Kahneman, Slovic, & Tversky, 1982), several heuristic tactics emerge as central to the propagation of antisemitism. Collectively, the heuristics generate, perpetuate, and accentuate outrage (Sandman, 1993). Perhaps the most disturbing finding from probing these heuristics is their resistance to rational refutation. Responding to antisemitism through superior arguments will not reduce its persuasive capacity (affective appeal) or its potential explanatory functionality (as a simple sense-making device).

## **RACIAL SCIENCE AND INTUITIVE ANTISEMITISM**

The Nazi species of Jew-hatred occupies a special place in the annals of antisemitism. Aside from earning designation as the most extreme case of following hatred of Jews to its ultimate endpoint—systematic destruction—the version of antisemitism that flourished under Nazism was distinguished by its scientific aura (Laqueur, 2006). Capitalizing on the popularization of eugenics and racial anthropology, Nazi antisemitism shifted away from earlier Christian varieties that targeted Jews based on theological grounds (i.e., Jews as murderers of Christ). Instead, Nazism marked the first large-scale movement to scientize antisemitism, presenting inferiority and perversity of Judaism as an incontestable fact established by scientific research. While ample textual documentation illustrates this impersonation of science, simply dismissing it as pseudoscience fails to account for its rhetorical power. Treating Nazi antisemitism primarily as a pseudoscience presumes that its persuasive appeal lay in borrowing the authority of science, transposing its apparent incontestability to support public policy. This explanation, however, seems to oversimplify the *modus operandi* of antisemitism in the Nazi era.

The Nazi brand of antisemitism used science as a rhetorical resource, presenting Jews as a public health risk. The Nazi regime, its sympathizers, and its progenitors devoted extensive effort to conduct research that would prove the damage Jews could inflict. Whatever arguments emerged from these

(pseudo)scientific endeavors, however, were constructed on the heuristic foundation of cultivating visceral aversion to Jews as a threat. The explanations of what became known as racial science acquired rhetorical force from exploiting the temptation to quickly render judgments about a group as dangerous when placed within an interpretive framework of vivid images, intense metaphors, and explanatory storylines.

Racial science became a means of arousing and directing emotion-driven judgments against Jews. Empirical evidence provided justification for the antipathies activated through interpretive frameworks that essentialized Jews as threatening. The classification of Jews as a race in itself essentialized identity as inherent and invariant. This marshaling of science to serve intuitive attributions appears throughout the work of racial scientists who sought the essence of races. Visual reinforcement of racial identity was consistent with the work of racial anthropologists whose books teemed with photos of racial archetypes. In several books on identifying and classifying types of racial character, Ludwig Ferdinand Clauss attempted to demonstrate how physical appearance was governed by racial laws. In any environment, physical features eventually would exhibit their innate tendencies to express themselves in ways characteristic of their racial composition. Clauss (1938) called this principle the “law of the gestalt,” and went so far as to define race as “heritable gestalt” (p. 28). Such efforts, most painstakingly carried out in Clauss’s *Race and Soul* [*Rasse und Seele*], would eventually reveal “racial style,” the physiological manifestation of the essential racial identity contained in the “racial soul” [*Rassenseele*] (Clauss, 1926/1943, pp. 9-10). Observable behavior always outwardly expressed the inner racial soul. Researchers such as R. F. Viergutz therefore could exploit an axiom to guide the study of race: “As a man is, so he will behave” (1932, p. 34). The fundamental hereditary factors were determined by means of research “which extracts from the spiritual to arrive at what is biologically important for race” (Viergutz, 1932, p. 34).

The racial flash cards—bearing photos and drawings of people who exhibited exemplary racial characteristics—included with some of Clauss’s books illustrate an important perceptual manipulation in antisemitism. As students of racial anthropology advanced in their study of racial essences, they presumably became more capable of definitively identifying a race based on fewer and fewer concrete visual indicators. Just as a more sophisticated gourmand can recognize an ingredient’s presence based on only a hint of its flavor, the thoroughly trained racial scientist presumably could pinpoint racial identity from only minimal salient racial characteristics. The “beginner” level of flash cards showed photographs of a subject’s head. The flashcards for more advanced study showed progressively fewer details until only an outline of key racial features (e.g., the shape of the nose or the slope of the forehead) remained. The fewer characteristics necessary to establish racial identity, the more readily any individual could be classified as a member of a given race. Ready racial classification served practical purposes as well. The fewer the salient indicators were needed as sufficient for membership in a race, the lower the burden of proof required to label someone as recognizably Jewish.

Researchers also avoided mathematical treatments of race because they recognized that racial theories could not be proven empirically with any degree of reliability. Anthropometrics did not necessarily yield firm conclusions, as the film *Europa Europa* (Holland, 1990) shows. In one scene, a Nazi instructor of racial science declares, after extensive anthropometric manipulations, that a student who is actually Jewish sports a model Nordic visage. In fact, long before the Nazi regime and throughout the Third Reich, racial theorists cautioned researchers not to claim that the nature of “Jewishness” could be found by measurements alone (Clauss, 1929, p. 83). The same warning was issued to readers of the official newspaper of the Nazi SS, *Das Schwarze Korps*, which presented photographs of Jews with a variety of facial features. The accompanying article observed: “The Jew is by far not always hook-nosed or flat-footed. Science proved long ago that he is encountered in different physical forms without thus ceasing to be a

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Jew in his soul” (Kleine Beitrag, 1935, p. 8). In an early explanation of the method employed in his own tracts on racial anthropology, Ludwig Ferdinand Clauss outlined the objections to quantitative studies that underlay racial research throughout the Nazi regime. His method and views have been identified as typical of racial science in the Nazi era, and his works were not only popular but established him as one of the two “most important racial theoreticians of the Nazi movement” (Mosse, 1966, pp. 57-58). Clauss (1929) claimed that “all counting and inference is foreign to our work” because observation—presumably of how the soul expressed its nature—would constitute “direct evidence” of racial regularities that carried the force of necessity: “We see that it must be like this” (pp. 58, 60). These remarks aptly describe the formation of intuitive judgments.

Nazi-era antisemitic discourse displays pervasive biological terminology. By weaving biocentric metaphors into common heuristics for determining risk, discourse constructed a *Weltanschauung* driven by the ever-escalating, imminent threat of utter racial destruction wrought by Jews. Biocentric metaphors that portrayed life as a mortal struggle against pathogens collectively personified by “the Jew” framed antisemitic discourse, providing a context for heuristics that maximized the perceived risks posed by the mere presence of Jews. Biocentric metaphors provided the strategic basis for the tactical use of heuristics that magnified the risks posed by the Jewish pathogens.

Since racial identity and influence transcended mere physical appearance or presence, matters of health and illness moved to a more metaphysical realm. If alien races posed a spiritual threat to Germany, sickness could arise from a conflict between different racial characteristics. Unless alien blood were purged, unless behavior harmonized with the propensities of the racial soul, “spiritual deformity” [*seelische Verbildung*] would result (Clauss, 1929, p. 93). These threats to racial quality called for racial scientists to assume the capacity of diagnosticians who would identify the signs of the nation’s illness, then determine its causes. The “internal causes of decay” would “lead to a hollowing out of the race and the death of the nation” if left untreated (Staemmler, 1933, p. 11). The researcher had become the healer of the state who could prescribe cures for social as well as physical ailments.

## **ANTISEMITISM AS RISK MAGNIFICATION**

Although Nazi antisemitism was not rational, it did offer rationalizations that propelled otherwise logically and morally responsible people to support and enact overt cruelty and brutality toward Jews. Analyses conducted by researchers such as James Waller (2007) thoroughly discount the claims that perpetrators of genocide necessarily suffer from psychopathology. What rationales could render antipathy toward Jews as something not simply desirable, but as a compulsory duty to such an extent that extermination would seem the only responsible course of action? The answer to this question does not lie in an “eliminationist” essence at the core of German culture (à la Goldhagen, 1996). This revamped *Deutscher Sonderweg* thesis casts genocidal fervor as the exclusive province of a particular national heritage, thereby failing to account for the dismally widespread recurrence of genocides in cultural milieus as diverse as Rwanda, Cambodia, Bosnia, and Myanmar. Nor does the answer lie exclusively in psychological explanations that rely on assumptions about psychic pathologies that fail to account for wide complicity across demographics.

A more communication-focused explanation would account for the persuasive appeal of Nazi antisemitism while recognizing its resilience in the face of potential refutation. Instead of sheer racism disguised as science, Nazi antisemitic propaganda offered a constellation of concepts whose strategic construction

insulated them from refutation and rendered opposition difficult to sustain. The technique that enabled antisemitism to exert such a powerful hold was the manipulation of risk perception. By linking Judaism per se—not merely individual Jews—with the highest conceivable risks, antisemitic attitudes, actions, and policies acquired status as not simply acceptable but inevitable, obligatory, and urgent.

Conventional, probabilistic models of risk perception define threat construction with the following equation:

$$\text{perceived risk} = \text{likelihood of occurrence} \times \text{magnitude of harm}$$

wherein both likelihood and magnitude are manipulable judgments subject to rhetorical influence. Contrary to treatments of risk as quantifiable probabilities assessed by rational decision makers, a rhetorically imbued perspective on risk recognizes that judgments of risk do not necessarily align with probabilistic logic. Instead of corresponding with observable, measurable hazards, judgments of relative risk seem to be influenced by factors such as contextualization, verbal framing, and presentational techniques (Schwartzman, Ross, & Berube, 2011). This mismatch between risk perception and actual occurrence of hazards may explain why perceived knowledge of risks often poorly comports with the statistical likelihood that a harm would occur (Wrench, 2007). Assessments of risk, therefore, emerge as products of the communication that defines the risk and renders it as a threat (Bartesaghi, Grey, & Gibson, 2012).

Once the concept of likelihood broadens beyond statistical probability, it involves intuitive judgments susceptible to influence from many sources. Some of these additional influences begin to enter consideration with Sandman's (1993) representation of risk construction as:

$$\text{perceived risk} = \text{hazard} + \text{outrage}$$

which can combine with the previous equation to yield:

$$\text{perceived risk} = (\text{likelihood of occurrence} \times \text{magnitude of harm}) + \text{outrage}.$$

Inclusion of outrage introduces the entire emotional domain that can influence judgments of acceptable levels of risk, whether the level of risk warrants action, and relative prioritization among risks. Although outrage arguably delimits the affective domain too narrowly by reducing it to one category of emotion, it does acknowledge inclusion of feelings as an important component of risk assessment (Schwartzman, Ross, & Berube, 2011; Slovic, 2000; Slovic, 2010).

Zygmunt Bauman (2000) proposed that the key factor enabling antisemitism to gain momentum and culminate in the Holocaust was the same moral insensitivity that allows genocides to grind on with minimal intervention: maximizing the perceived social distance from the victims. Simply put, the more tenuous the perceived human connection with Jews, the less likely that anti-Jewish behaviors would arouse indignation or opposition. Antisemitic discourse may not have provided the sole or primary causal influence in eroding moral obligations toward the Jewish community. Rather, it provides an observable index of how insensitivity toward the Jewish plight became naturalized as normal and justifiable. Focus now shifts toward how antisemitism arouses the sense of risk and directs it toward Jews.

## Aggregation and the Representativeness Heuristic

Nina Morais, a Sephardic Jew living in Philadelphia, commented in 1881 that the aggregation of Jews into a single, undifferentiated mass facilitated anti-Jewish attitudes and actions. “In the popular mind the Jew is never judged as an individual, but as a specimen of a whole race whose members are identically of the same kind” (Hoobler & Hoobler, 1995, p. 70). This comment that predates social intuitionism research by almost a century encapsulates the essence of the representativeness heuristic. Kahneman and Tversky (1972) found that people judge probabilities subjectively rather than on the basis of how frequently something has occurred or been observed. In more concrete terms applied to judgments about people, what counts as a “typical” Jew or “normal” for a Jew arises from perceptions about what to expect from ordinary Jews. The vital point here is that these perceptions arise independently of evidence or experience related to Jews. Thus, whatever characterizations are considered most salient represent the collective identity of Jews—even if those attributes lack empirical support. This heuristic helps explain why negative attributions can attach to Jews (or any other group) collectively by selectively highlighting negative exemplars. If the negative attributes and examples appear sufficiently severe, vivid, or immediate, then they override the actual frequency of incidents or people that embody them. Logically grounded judgments of representativeness should emerge inductively, extrapolating from knowledge about or experience with a sufficient number and variety of members from a group. Contrary to this Bayesian expectation, perceived representativeness proceeds from expectations about the group that guide expectations regarding particular group members. Biocentrically oriented antisemitic discourse systematically channeled perceptions of Jews as a whole, effectively minimizing the persuasive force of particular counterexamples.

In the discourse of Nazi political leaders and some racial scientists, Jews were treated linguistically as a composite manifestation of undesirable racial traits. Jews, whether a category or a conglomeration of individuals, were consistently referred to in the singular: *der Jude*. This fact has been overlooked consistently by communication researchers. The context of National Socialist racial theories renders the choice of the singular significant. The singular term diverts attention from individual Jews who might not fit the stereotypical image of Jews as a whole. All Jews become members of the general classification “Jew” and thus lose their identity as individuals. This rhetorical deindividuation enabled the antisemites to make sweeping statements about Jews as a whole by fostering perceptions that each Jew should be understood not as a particular person, but as a component of the aggregate. The result was that “the Jew” could be labeled, for example, as a criminal element and the characterization could persist despite the law-abiding behavior of individual Jews (*Der Jude als Verbrecher*, 1935). The biological metaphors so frequently describing Jews as bacteria fit neatly with the singular *der Jude*. Jews, like bacteria, were understood as a single, undifferentiated mass whose reproductive capacity and potential for infection made concern for individuals secondary to the pernicious effects of the pathogen as a whole (Bytwerk, 1983).

This distinction between *der Jude* (singular) and *die Juden* (plural) brings to the fore a central conceptual point. The singular indicates a state of being a single whole, just as the Platonic form of the Good is unitary: “And again there is a true beauty, a true good; and all other things to which the term many has been applied, are now brought under a single idea...” (Plato, 1953, VI.507b). Once the unitary ideal of the Jew was established through the identification of inherent racial traits, each individual Jew became an instance, if not a perfect manifestation, of a racial stereotype. In Platonic and Jungian terms, each Jew participated in the essence of the archetypal Jew, so that attributes of Jewry [*Judentum*] and the Jew per se [*der Jude*] could be invoked concerning any particular Jew.

The connection between the aggregate singular and the biologicistic treatment of Jewry should not escape attention. Since any individual Jew was subsumed under the totality of the Jew per se, Jews could elude classification as individuals. If Jews were discussed in terms of bacteria, fungi, or pestilence, three of the most common metaphoric choices, then the characteristics of the entire body of Jews mattered more than their individual components. The salient features of bacteria and other organisms of infestation or infection were their ability to penetrate and destroy a host rapidly (Bytwerk, 1983). Attention now turns to the biologicistic metaphors that captured Jewish racial features most relevant to the aim of combating Nordic or Germanic racial decline [*Rassendämmerung*].

## **Manipulating the Affect Heuristic**

Connections between social intuitionism and rhetorical theory become apparent when considering the affect heuristic as a driver of decisions and actions. The affective domain encompasses valenced feelings that stimulate arousal. Approach (associated with liking) and avoidance (associated with disliking) exemplify affects deeply ingrained through evolutionary biology. When associated with a cause or directed toward an object, affect coalesces into particular emotions such as fear, disgust, pity, anger, etc. Affect operates heuristically within the intuitive system of cognition that “encodes reality in images, metaphors, and narratives to which affective feelings have become attached” (Slovic, Finucane, Peters, & MacGregor, 2007, p. 1344). Since “affect comes prior to, and directs, judgments of risk and benefit” (Slovic, Finucane, Peters, & Macgregor, 2002, p. 333), it operates pre-deliberatively. From a rhetorical standpoint, affect also operates proto-deliberatively by providing the raw material for activating emotions that influence and justify judgments. Articulation of affect through communication that intensively and consistently arouses emotions toward a particular object can entrench attitudes quickly and deeply, rendering them difficult to undermine through subsequent critical deliberation. The discourse of Nazi-era antisemitism refined negative affect toward Jews by portraying them metaphorically as a terrifying and repulsive biological menace.

References to Jews as parasites or infections filled the discourse of researchers and government officials. Hitler employed this type of terminology most strikingly, although he did not belabor the biologicistic metaphors by using them repeatedly, especially within the same speech. In one of his frequent conjunctions of Jews with Bolshevism, Hitler explained how one part of Jewry propagates Bolshevik doctrines while the other part “infects [democracy] with their poison by linking up with revolutionary manifestations...” (in Domarus, 1990, 1: 729). Hitler continued to reinforce the image of Jews as uncreative, which fed the association of Jews with parasites and other forms of life that can exist only by living off food procured by the host. Drawing a lesson from Russia’s experience, Hitler warned Germany:

*In terms of creativity, it is an untalented race through and through. For this reason, if it seeks to rule anywhere for any length of time, it is soon forced to undertake the extermination [Ausrottung...schreiten] of the former intellectual upper classes of the other peoples. (Hitler in Domarus, 1962, 1: 729; Domarus, 1990, 2: 939-940)*

If a disease threatened eradication of the host, then extermination of the disease-carrier represented only a reflex action, a self-defensive measure proportional to the threat posed by infestation.

How could Germany meet the danger without lapsing into terminology that portrayed racist practices as purely negative measures? The medical terminology of cleansing fit the bill neatly. Given the associa-



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tion of Jews with rottenness (literally “rotting out,” *Ausrottung*) itself or with organisms that breed filth, the aseptic connotations of hygiene enabled racial science to curb disease and restore sanitary conditions. The metaphors and images associated with decay and contamination directly activate the value cluster of purity, marshalling reactions of disgust at whatever spoils it (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009). Research on social intuitionism finds a correlation between intense commitments to purity and conservatism, although disgust can activate moral judgments regardless of political ideology (van Leeuwen, Dukes, Tybur, & Park, 2017).

The productive task lay in the promise to “cleanse Germany of all those parasites who drank at the well of the despair of Fatherland and *Volk*” (Hitler in Domarus, 1962, 1: 890; Domarus, 1990, 2: 1142). Failure to act against the parasitical menace would itself count as cowardice or perhaps the symptom of a diseased mind. Since the battle against the Jewish enemy “began nearly 120 years ago, at the moment when the Jew was granted citizen rights in the European States,” German tolerance had reached an end; “the burden has become overbearing and the nation is no longer willing to have its life blood sucked out by these parasites...” (Hitler in Domarus, 1962, 1: 899; Domarus, 1990, 2: 1153). Outrage had reached the point of action.

Hitler by no means laid exclusive claim to infestation metaphors. If the threat these undesirable elements posed to health was eternal [*ewig*], then a populace could escape such danger only by eradicating the menacing elements. If alien blood is equated with disease, then the distinction between the physically disabled, mentally handicapped, and racially different blurs. Difference easily becomes associated with inferiority, especially when being different or “alien” carries connotations of carrying and inflicting disease. Furthermore, a carrier of alien blood was linked in this terminology to the carrier [*Träger*] of a disease. The interplay between terminology referring to physical and mental disease or disability and terminology connected with racial difference makes racial difference an illness. It also renders racial infiltration susceptible to analogous preventive measures and “cures.”

The family of terms to describe Jews showed surprising uniformity. The popular press and the speeches of political leaders overflowed with synonymous references to the Jew as a parasite: *Schmarotzer* [biological term for a parasitic organism], *Parasit* [parasite], *parasitisch* [parasitical]. No host would invite parasites; no nation should welcome Jews. From a purely deliberative perspective, the logic crumbles into contradictions. The parasitical race played both the role of the aggressor who invades the host’s body and the dependent that cannot generate its own food but must live off what the host creates.

These metaphors motivated actions consistent with emotions of disgust, disdain, and fear. Affects generate effects. Publications approved by the Nazi party emphasized that any action implying negotiation or reconciliation with lower forms of life could not succeed. “*Trichina* and bacilli are not negotiated with” (Paul de Lagarde, 1935). Gottfried Feder, co-founder of the Nazi Party, concurred that “there can never be friendship and co-operation between eagles and snakes, wolves and lambs, mankind and the cholera bacillus” (Feder, 1934/1971, p. 47; 1938, p. 20). A permanent threat to the health of the creative host race required continuing measures to reduce the threat without harming the host. The political result was to justify, both proactively and retroactively, an ongoing series of measures designed to remove or eliminate the parasitical infestation.

## **Maximizing Impact to Minimize Risk Tolerance**

Depictions and descriptions of Jews in Nazi antisemitic discourse capitalized on the perceptual variability of risk. Fostering, amplifying, and maintaining antipathy toward Jews relied on activating a mini-max

bias: the magnitude of potential harm was deemed so great that even the most remote, far-fetched chance of its realization would justify neutralization of the threat (Berube, 2000). The mini-max approach emphasizes high consequences, raising the stakes so high that any likelihood they may occur suffices to justify decisions about policy and behavior. Rather than get bogged down in weighing the probability of Jewish destructiveness, a mini-max stance avoided probability assessment altogether. Instead, the only proportionate reaction to prevent the huge impact of Jewish-engineered annihilation was to render such a process inconceivable. One might conclude that the only plausible policy to achieve such preventive certainty would be annihilation of Jews. Such a conclusion, however, would be both hasty and inaccurate. The mini-max scenario relied on more subtle techniques that could draw broad endorsement—or at least passive acceptance—even from people who otherwise would not act virulently antisemitic.

Applying the mini-max risk avoidance scenario inflates the impact of Jewish influence so that *any* chance of its occurrence would represent an unacceptable risk. This mentality by no means uniquely applies to the so-called Jewish question. Whenever the consequences become maximal, equivalent to global destruction or a similar cataclysmic outcome, the tolerance for such a risk attenuates to zero (or very close to nil). Such a reaction rings familiar in policymaking and public attitudes. Movements to ban, not merely regulate, the production of genetically modified organisms gain momentum with revelations about mutant strains of plants that could devastate commercial crops, destroying the world's food supply and poisoning unsuspecting consumers (Schwartzman, 2014). Similar reactions have followed analogous scenarios involving nuclear reactors that could irradiate the planet. Faced with such dire consequences, only certainty—preventing any possibility of threat realization—suffices as reassurance.

In the case of antisemitism, preventing the materialization of the perceived Jewish threat did not require sudden public endorsement of mass extermination. Instead, incremental measures arose as attempts to mitigate the purported danger. One result of mini-max scenarios is that they give carte blanche to virtually any policies that might offer some mitigation of the perceived threat, even though the policies could prove costly, wasteful, misguided efforts to address events that have the most miniscule probability of occurrence. Anti-terrorism policies in the United States provide a convenient illustration. Massive outlays of resources pour into screening for the next underwear bomber or shoe bomber while far more vulnerable public works facilities and gathering points (e.g., sports venues) languish with gaping security shortcomings. Because probabilities do not enter consideration, essentially any policy bearing the incontestable justification as a counter-terrorism measure encounters minimal objections.

Concentrating only on the magnitude of potential harm enabled a long series of anti-Jewish policies and ad hoc actions (e.g., the *Kristallnacht* pogrom) to arouse minimal outcry. This passive acceptance was not simply a consequence of intimidation or autocratic government. Intuitively, the greater a potential harm, the more thoroughly and aggressively it must be prevented from occurring. The larger the consequences, the lower the threshold of tolerance for its realization. If the harm is large enough, such as a threat to civilization itself, then nothing short of certainty—a guarantee of prevention—qualifies as adequate protection. Conveniently, the mini-max pressure toward certainty capitalizes on the mental heuristic of embracing absolutes as a substitute for grappling with the complexities of probabilities (Beck, 2007).

Ample evidence has accumulated to demonstrate that humans do not competently conceptualize or cope with probability and uncertainty (Kahneman, 2011). While probabilistic thinking generally proves difficult, probability becomes incalculable when applied to risks posed by Jews. How could one begin to calculate the likelihood of Jewish-engineered global destruction? Given the impossibility of such probabilistic risk assessment, the alternative was to present *any* likelihood of harm as unacceptable. The

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risk tolerance threshold simply shrank to zero. Statistically speaking, even the infinitesimal probability of Jewish domination still posed a massive risk due to the enormity of its harm. This configuration of risk, in effect neutralizing the relevance of probability, garnered immense rhetorical advantages.

A mini-max scenario immediately rendered moot any exceptions to allegedly harmful Jewish influence. No matter how many “good Jews” might be produced to refute Jewish nefariousness, any counterexamples had been pre-empted by setting a minimal tolerance for any risk. Nothing short of zero risk could be acceptable. Given this method of risk construction, it becomes understandable why one could be philosemitic in interactions with specific Jews but still support antisemitic policies and behaviors. Perhaps the familiar Jews among one’s acquaintances could pass muster as “safe,” but as long as any possibility remained for another, pernicious Jew to wield influence, the threat of Jewish-induced destruction persisted.

An important question remains. How was the threat posed by Jews constructed as a maximalist claim of impact that outweighed other risks? Rhetorical tactics that incite intense emotions can alter risk tolerance levels, raising or lowering the threshold at which a risk becomes unacceptable. Nazi-era antisemitic rhetoric presented the Jewish threat as an impending cataclysm. National Socialism had to “make war relentlessly... against the greatest enemy which threatens to destroy our *Volk*: the international Jewish world enemy” (Hitler in Domarus, 1962, 1: 890; Domarus, 1990, 2: 1142). Racial contamination assumed the character of a physiological process. The persistent threat of infection sufficed to justify elimination of those who carried the disease. Walther Gross, a central figure in designing the 1933 Law for the Prevention of Hereditary Diseases, explicitly eliminated the possibility of any proposed cure that fell short of permanently eradicating the source of infestation.

*For one can well root out decomposing [zersetzenden] spirit; one can surmount dangerous teachings and burn destructive books. But the carrier of this alien, the blood of the alien race, has infiltrated [eingedrungen] into the body of the populace [Volk] and into the womb of the family. It then constantly revolves therein forever, gives birth to ever new generations of torn and discordant men, who with unsteady character stand between the people [Völkern] and their values. (1933)*

To root out [*ausrotten*] also means to eliminate or exterminate, a concept transferred from the realm of disease to the arena of race.

The extreme harms that would ensue from realization of the Jewish threat carried clear policy implications. Alfred Rosenberg, who directed the Nazi Office of Foreign Affairs, explained the rationale. If policymakers could “know that there is a heredity of creative and parasitic tendencies,” then “from this knowledge we must draw all consequences relating to national policy as well as to the protection of nation, body, and character” (Rosenberg, 1939, p. 13). Treatment of a disease might prove fruitless after the disease-carrying organism already has invaded the body. Corrective measures to halt biological decay should proceed before the disease reaches a crisis point. By metaphoric extension, public officials must intervene to prevent contamination of the body politic: “Therefore the statesman has the duty to save his people [*Volk*] before the infiltration of alien blood and the destruction of his enduring [*tragenden*] race” (Gross, 1933). The term *Träger*, whose derivative is translated “enduring,” not only means to bear, carry, or endure, but also is the medical term for the carrier of a disease. The body of the *Volk* had contracted dangerous impurities that had to be expunged.

Mini-max scenarios acquire legitimacy as explanatory stories. The likelihood that the narratives will develop, however, does not rely on statistical probabilities or truth-value. As Walter Fisher’s (1987) work

on narrative has shown, a compelling narrative requires internal coherence and fidelity to an audience's values to nourish its propagation. Instructively, Fisher avoids labeling narratives as simply true or false (i.e., corresponding to factual conditions external to the narrative itself), preferring instead to discuss how narratives resonate with audiences *as if* they were true. The bibliographic bifurcation between fiction and non-fiction blurs, with plausibility as constructed by interpreters becoming the determinant of its adoption. To exert persuasive force, the risks associated with Jews required more than sheer magnitude. They had to be embedded in believable narratives. A likely story renders plausible what statistical probability might dismiss as a rare, inconsequential event (Kahneman, 2011).

Sheer magnitude of impact, in itself, does not provide sufficient conditions to instigate antisemitism. This lesson follows from studies of fear appeals. Although severe fear appeals tend to yield the greatest effects, severity of threat alone can induce a boomerang effect. If the danger appears too terrifying, audiences will simply ignore the message altogether, judging doom as unavoidable. Impending threats need to be accompanied by clear ways to ameliorate those threats if the fear appeal has any chance to succeed (Pratkanis & Aronson, 2001). Maximal impact, therefore, provides a propaedeutic for antisemitism, with the emergency medical treatment of extinguishing the Jewish pathogen providing the only assurance of protection. As the language of medical emergency portrayed ever more acute threats to the body politic, increasingly drastic measures became more attractive. Ironically, murder would become the means to assure health.

## **IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Configuration of antisemitism as the activation of intuitive risk perception directed toward Jews can open fruitful new directions for understanding how prejudice operates. The application of social intuitionism to Nazi-era antisemitism reveals three heuristics shaping the perceptions of Jews as an inherent, severe, and immediate threat: representativeness, affect, and mini-max. Aggregation of Jews into a singular whole fueled a representativeness heuristic that selectively makes the most pernicious characteristics of Jews seem the most expected and common. Negative attributions thus apply to all Jews because they presumably share the same essential nature. The affect heuristic positions Jews within a biological framework of medical emergency that renders Jews as invasive pathogens. This characterization arouses intense feelings of aversion that reduce the likelihood of seeking interactions with Jews that might contravene antisemitic stereotypes. Finally, maximizing the impact of hypothetical harms Jews could inflict intensifies the motivation to eliminate the threat regardless of its likelihood.

The three heuristics examined herein offer only a preliminary attempt to connect antisemitism generally or Nazi antisemitism specifically to heuristics and social intuitionism. Future research could expand the heuristic repertoire of antisemitism to include other cognitive shortcuts already extensively examined in the scholarly literature, such as availability, anchoring and adjustment, and confirmation bias. Another promising line of investigation could explore whether different varieties of antisemitism during various time periods (e.g., medieval Christianity and current Q-Anon conspiracy theorists) rely more heavily on particular types of heuristics.

A fundamental challenge remains after clarifying the heuristic underpinnings of antisemitism: how to counteract them and their detrimental effects. The rationalistic approach proceeds by delegitimizing heuristics, treating them as biases that undermine deliberatively generated judgments. While deliberation can rectify some judgmental errors, discounting the cognitive roles that heuristics play fails to remove

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biases. Instead, such a move replaces heuristic biases with a different bias: deferring to deliberative processes such as the scientific method and statistical probabilities as the sole avenues to good judgment. But what counts as “good” judgment depends on values and moral commitments that lie beyond deliberative calculi. Identifying the quality of judgment involves valenced feelings, degrees of goodness or undesirability that fall squarely within the domain of affect. Furthermore, as research on the affect heuristic demonstrates, judgments triggered by intense emotions occur rapidly and the emotional investment in those decisions makes them difficult to dislodge (Slovic et al., 2007).

If deliberation cannot readily override or replace heuristically based judgments, what options remain for countering antisemitism? Several possibilities can provide springboards for further research. A general strategy would invoke the power of the same heuristics by using them to reroute judgment. Using representativeness, frequent and prominent examples of Jews behaving contrary to stereotypes could make headway in redefining impressions of “normal” Jewish behavior. For example, featuring Jews involved in law enforcement or criminal justice could undermine preconceptions of Jews as criminals. More generally, this reorientation of representativeness underscores the importance of emphasizing diverse populations in prominent professional and social roles.

Rerouting affect poses challenges, since alternative images, metaphors, and narratives must be more vivid than the negative ones that already circulate. Some key points can inform efforts to alter affect heuristics. The clusters of emotions aroused should remain consistent, directed toward the same kinds of objects (e.g., negatively valenced toward discriminatory behaviors), providing clear cues on how to react. The objects of emotions must simply, unambiguously stimulate positive or negative reactions. Narratives furnish useful examples. Nuanced characters or vacillation between good and evil stall immediate gut reactions and activate deliberative processes to decode complex plot lines. Intensity of language and imagery matters as well, since high emotional arousal will activate a reaction before deliberative processing can question it. One way to alter affect would be to appropriate existing antisemitic narratives, using the same devices (images, metaphors, plot line) but reversing the characters and change the outcome. Taking up the medical narrative thread employed by Nazi racial theorists, antisemites could be cast as contaminants with their destructive bigotry and Jews could be cast as the healers. Similarly, antisemitic mini-max heuristics could be supplanted by even more dire doomsday scenarios (e.g., civil war) stemming from institutionalized hatred. If also portrayed as a more plausible danger with a shorter timeline for its realization, an alternative scenario would outweigh the impact of Jewish-instigated disasters and merit greater attention because of its urgency.

Other types of heuristic rerouting could assist in preventing or remediating intuitive antisemitism. Employing the availability heuristic, prioritizing and expanding positive reports of Jews and Judaism in media could make favorable associations with Jews more readily accessible to memory. Frequency in itself will not activate availability; vividness and salience embed messages in consciousness (Schwartz, 2016). Using gain framing (Thaler 2015), one could emphasize the advantages of more openness and interactions with Jews, such as how learning about Jewish theological traditions would enrich understanding of Christianity. Conversely, loss framing would stress the opportunities missed by failing to appreciate Jewish culture, such as foregoing delicious foods associated with religious observances.

The formation of risk perceptions does not proceed as a value-neutral calculation of statistical probabilities. In his examination of how risk intertwines with power, Ulrich Beck (2007) highlights the need to consider risk as a socially constructed means of enacting privilege or persecution. He cautions that “people or groups who are (or are made into) ‘risk persons’ or ‘risk groups’ count as nonpersons whose basic rights are threatened. Risk divides, excludes and stigmatizes” (p. 16). The ways that risk percep-

tion gets constructed will reflect who wields the power to define risks. Theoretically, risk may measure “the product of the probability of an event multiplied by the intensity and scope of possible losses,” but in practice manipulation of risk perceptions can become a tool of oppression (Beck, 2007, p. 142).

A vital extension of this research concerns the role heuristics may play in other forms of prejudice and social justice issues. The prominent role that construction of risk plays in everyday discourse as well as in crisis situations suggests several potential applications. For example, what sense of risk perception informs the commonplace labeling of non-white, low-income, or non-English speaking neighborhoods as “high risk”? When referring to “high-risk students,” how does one distinguish between risk referring to performance and the student shouldering the stigmatic label as “risky”? How could probabilistic calculations of risk (e.g., demographically based risk assessment to determine insurance premiums) and problematic racial profiling (e.g., by law enforcement) incorporate a wider array of techniques to produce more thorough and equitable estimates of risk? Such questions only begin to illustrate the prospective contributions that closer attention to heuristically driven risk perception can offer.

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## KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

**Affect Heuristic:** Basing interpretations of something on the degree and intensity of positive or negative feelings it generates. A sense of meaning arises from emotional arousal.

**Antisemitism:** Prejudice directed against people who are Jewish or are of Jewish descent.

**Deliberative Processing:** Interpreting information and rendering decisions through reasoning and critical thinking.

**Intuitive Processing:** Interpreting information and rendering decisions based on instinctive feelings and minimal reflection. It involves mental shortcuts (heuristics) that provide simple but often biased or distorted impressions.

**Mini-Max Scenario:** Determining level of risk associated with an object or event primarily on the magnitude of harm it could inflict while discounting its likelihood of occurrence.

**Racial Science:** The discredited attempt to prove natural hierarchies among different racial groups. It was used by the Nazi regime to justify negative attitudes and actions against Jews and other groups deemed inferior.

**Representativeness Heuristic:** Judging what is normal, expected, or average within a group based on whatever one most frequently encounters instead of what actually constitutes the group. Judgment may proceed from few or atypical examples that presumably characterize the entire group.