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VOLTAIRE AND THE JEWS

BY

ALICE MAE ROPER

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Thesis Director's signature:

Houston, Texas

April, 1976
TO J.P.R.

"Ton souvenir en moi luit comme un ostensoir."

Baudelaire
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express appreciation to Professor Virgil W. Topazio, my thesis director, who first introduced me to the wit and wisdom of Voltaire and whose guidance has proved invaluable in the preparation of this study.
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CHAPTER I

THE SITUATION OF THE JEWS
IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY FRANCE

Peter Gay has pointed out that the "Enlightenment...converted the
Jew from a victim to a problem."¹ Indeed, the end of the eighteenth
century witnessed the Emancipation of the Jews of France from centuries
of enforced isolation and discrimination and, theoretically at least,
welcomed them into the mainstream of society. To attempt to trace the
complex factors which led to the Emancipation is well beyond the scope
of this study. Nevertheless, it is important to seize at least the
drift of the evolution of the Jewish question in France as it provides
a background essential to the understanding of our subject: the relation-
ship between Voltaire and the Jews.

On the eve of the French revolution there were approximately
40,000 Jews residing on French soil. Yet, to describe the situation of
the Jews as if these thousands constituted by virtue of their religion
a homogeneous entity is pure folly. There was no single "Jewish commu-
nity" in France, but a series of settlements each with its own cultural
make-up, each with its own problems and aspirations.²

Fundamentally, however, one may delineate the Jews into two main
groups: the Sephardim, emigrants from the Iberian peninsula who had
settled in Bordeaux and the Ashkenazim, or eastern European Jews who
inhabited the Alsace-Lorraine region. Culturally, the two groups had
little in common. The Sephardim were the elite of European Jewry, the
most acculturated group, and therefore the group most acceptable to the
Gentile majority.³ The Ashkenazim, on the other hand, were religiously
conservative and remained firmly attached to the cultural traditions most Christians found distasteful. 4

In the march toward full civil rights the two groups took separate routes. In general terms it may be said that the fate of the Sephardic community proved to be directly inverse to that of the Ashkenazim. Due to the interaction of a number of factors such as the conditions of their settlement in Bordeaux, favorable economic developments, the political situation of the region, as well as the more liberal cultural stance adopted by the Jewish community itself, the Sephardim gradually prospered. With their increasing affluence and demonstrated utility to the French government, notably in the development of the maritime industry, they managed to acquire political influence. By 1776 they enjoyed virtually all the rights of French citizens. 5

By contrast over the course of the 17th and 18th centuries the fortunes of the Alsatian Jews went from bad to worse. In the final analysis it was their situation which sparked the nationwide debate on the Jewish question.

In Bordeaux the Jews had initially been accepted as "new Christians" or "Portuguese merchants" and were thus relatively free to integrate themselves into the economic mainstream. The Ashkenazim, on the other hand, had been inherited from Germany when Alsace passed into French control and were thus already locked into a rigid socio-economic position. Although the legally established Jewish communities of Alsace were officially protected by the king from undue persecution, their actual social status was determined almost entirely by local powers. 6

Given the attitudes the Alsatian parlements, the power of the guilds, and the hostility of the population steeped in age-old super-
sitions and prejudice, the Jews' lot was a sorry one. Though reli-
giously tolerated they were maintained in the strictest physical and
social isolation. Systematically excluded by law from entrance into
the professions, the trades and most legitimate businesses the Jews
were driven to eking out a living through peddling, petty trade and of
course, moneylending. The precarious nature of this arrangement is
evoked by the fact that few Jews could afford to confine their efforts
to only one commercial area, but were forced to engage in several en-
terprises simultaneously. Add to this already bleak portrait the ever
increasing burden of taxation levied upon the individual and the Jewish
community as a whole by hostile local governments and one is not sur-
prised to learn that by the time of the Revolution most Jewish settle-
ments were teetering on the brink of bankruptcy. Moreover, though the
debates on Jewish civil rights centered on usury and Jewish greed even
anti-Semitic pamphleteers conceded that half the Jews of Alsace were
paupers and that the other half had fortunes amounting to one hundred
livres. (Hertzberg, p. 117)

A great deal has been written about the Jews and their role as
moneylenders under the Old Régime. Although the whole of Jewish capital
expended in loans never exceeded twelve million livres (a paltry sum if
one considers that the Jewish family Grasis of Bordeaux alone was worth
more than that) the question of loans constituted one of the prime eco-

The general monetary situation in Alsace was indeed bleak, but it
was particularly critical for those least able to cope with it, the
peasants. They were inevitably forced to borrow money to purchase animals and to pay the crushing taxes to which they were subjected. Significantly, the peasants' creditors were inevitably Jews. The reasons for this situation are several. First, the Jews were more accessible than Christian bankers, since they traveled more, frequently hawking their wares through the countryside. Secondly, as one would surmise, the peasants were poor credit risks and Jews, due to their own needs, were more willing to accept such risks than Christians. Because of the hazards involved the Jews were obliged to charge the peasants higher interest rates. The peasants frequently defaulted on payment, either honestly or through fraud, and the Jews consequently lived in a constant state of uncertainty regarding their expended capital. This situation which worsened throughout the century did little to produce an amicable rapport between the peasants and the Jews. (Szajkowski, pp. 15, 75, 101)

Did the Jews truly exploit the peasants with usurious interest rates and unfair business practices? There is no easy answer to this question. However, several things must be remembered. The issue of usury was so sensitive that the Jewish community took it upon itself to punish wrongdoers. (Hertzberg, p. 127) Self-regulation aside, there existed severe penalties for conviction of usury in civil courts. Consulting the legal records of Metz, for example, one finds that few Jews were brought to trial for usury and that of those tried none were convicted.8 The evidence suggests then that while there may have been abuses, the image of the Jews gleefully preying upon the peasants out of greed is an exaggeration born of superstition.

Whether or not the Jews actually exploited the peasants is rela-
tively unimportant. Much more significant is the fact that the French public believed that they did. Surrounding the Jew was a whole mythology rooted in centuries of superstition. The Jew was hated and feared not only for religious reasons but because he was assumed to be inherently evil, bent on the destruction of Gentile society. In the eyes of most Christians the Jew was not a competitor, but a threat to the well-being of the nation. Rumors periodically circulated to the effect that the Jews were plotting to take over the country. To the Gentiles the Jew could have no honorable motive in his financial dealings: "Cette nation juive ne semble ramper que pour mieux s'élever et s'enrichir."

Nowhere does this basic mythology more clearly reveal itself than in the area of moneylending. The very word "Jew" was synonymous with usury as a series of Strasbourg documents points out. In 1738, for example, the city issued a decree proscribing the signing of contracts with Jews and "Judengenossen" or Christian usurers. Later in 1774 a law was published against Christians who practiced "Judaism" that is to say, usury. In the minds of the citizens of Strasbourg then the Jews and usury seem to have had the same connotation. Furthermore, it was almost universally believed that the Talmud permitted and even ordered Jews to charge usurious interest rates to Christians. (Szajkowski, pp. 119-120)

The charge of usury leveled against the Jews was indeed an old one, but as the 18th century progressed it became one of the most serious impediments to the Emancipation: "Usury was the main argument of anti-Jewish propaganda, especially on the eve of 1789 when the liberal circles could not be reached by other means." (Szajkowski,
pp. 119-120) Belief in Jewish usury persisted even after other prejudices had been conquered, for even the most active defenders of the Jews gave credence to this accusation, sincerely believing that the Jews were ruining the people by their usurious practices. Moreover, along with the most prejudiced even some liberals were under the impression that it was a willful act on the part of the Jews designed to avenge persecution. (Szajkowski, p. 121)

During the Enlightenment organized religious persecution of Jews was on the wane. Nevertheless, public opinion regarding Jews had not advanced appreciably beyond medieval concepts. If the slaughter of thousands was no longer in vogue and religious persecution actually ran counter to official government policy, superstitions traceable to a more primitive era still provided the rationale for sporadic outbursts of violence. Thus as late as 1765 Jews were being beaten in the streets at Easter for the crime of deicide. (Szajkowski, p. 30) In 1761 several Jews were hanged in Nancy as accessories to sorcery involving sacrilege. In Paris in 1757 three Jews were accused of murdering a Christian child for ritual purposes. These cases are isolated, but they point to the fundamental problem the Jews faced: the persistence of patterns of thought which held that the Jew with his foreign ways and "devilish" rites was capable of anything.

The dehumanized portrait of the Jew as the rich and miserly usurer cheerfully preying upon unsuspecting Gentiles or that of the Jewish ghoul subjecting Christian women and children to the most gruesome rituals was deeply engrained in the psyche of the average Christian. Yet even among those who were managing to divest themselves of these crude superstitions there persisted the belief that Jewish culture,
though perhaps not inimical, was nevertheless inferior. As Poliakov remarks: "Aux yeux des contemporains de Voltaire...la sagesse juive n'était que fables et chimères talmudiques." (Poliakov, pp. 62-63)

As the Jewish question rose to prominence late in the century it was apparent that even to their most ardent champions the Jews appeared an uncivilized mass. It gradually became clear that the Jewish problem was not only a religious and economic issue, but a cultural one as well. In order to be accepted the Jews would necessarily have to assimilate themselves to the predominating culture. (Baron, p. 71; Szajkowski, p. 121)

The Jew was therefore at a distinct disadvantage in the mind of the French public. Yet by the end of the century the Jews had been emancipated and made citizens of France. Obviously, some changes in public attitudes had to take place before such revolutionary acts could take place. The Jewish question was slow to gain national attention. Virtually nothing was said about Jewish rights during the first half of the century and even until the 1780's amelioration of their plight remained the cause of a few isolated advocates. (McCloy, p. 51)

The evolution toward a movement for emancipation is complex. Fundamentally, however, it involved the gradual questioning of the myths surrounding the Jew. Were the Jews responsible for the crucifixion? Were they avaricious by nature? Were they actually bent on the destruction of Gentile society? And of course, was usury an inherently "Jewish" vice? Ultimately, it came to be realized that much of what was thought to be wrong with the Jew was the effect of persecution and prejudice. The conclusion was clear, at least to some: remove the source of the problem and the Jew would be freed to "rehab-
ilitate" himself in an image more acceptable to the majority.

What forced the Jewish question onto the national scene was not only a gradual "prise de conscience" among isolated liberal thinkers, but a financial debacle in Alsace which forced the public to come to grips with the practical aspects of the Jewish dilemma.

Late in 1777 and especially in 1778 Alsace was flooded by counterfeit receipts signed in Hebrew supposedly by Jewish creditors. When the Jews requested payment of debts owed them they were presented with the receipts. It soon became apparent that this was the work of a well organized ring which had encouraged the debtors, most of whom were peasants, to defraud the Jews.

Groups had attempted to defraud the Jews in the past. What made the "affaire des fausses quittances" different was its monumental proportions. It plummeted the already unstable Alsatian economy to the brink of disaster and brought about the ruin of many Jews. At the same time, emotions were running high as anti-Jewish riots erupted and the Jews were frequently assaulted on the open road. So great was the chaos that the central government was forced to intervene. Eventually the perpetrators of the hoax were brought to justice, but the effect of the affair was cataclysmic. As Arthur Hertzberg concludes: "It raised the Jewish issue before the government and public opinion in the sharpest form in the last decade of the ancient regime. In direct stages all else that happened in the 1780's was given its immediate impulse by this battle." (Hertzberg, p. 121)

Events followed in quick succession. The 80's saw the rise of national debate on the place of the Jews in French society. The single most important vehicle for the growing controversy was an essay contest
sponsored by the Academy of Metz. (Hertzberg, p. 328) It was a milestone in the evolution of the Jewish question as, for the first time anywhere in France, the literate public was officially challenged to take a stand on the Jews. The proposed title of the essay itself was couched in terms reflecting the rise of a new spirit: "Est-il un moyen de rendre les Juifs plus heureux et plus utiles en France?" The very title is revolutionary for although the traditional quest to make the Jews "useful" remained of prime concern, the topic as it is stated attempted to deal first, and perhaps foremost, with the Jews in human terms. It is evident that the members of the Metz academy had at last advanced beyond the stereotype to the human being that was the Jew. Hence, it was recognized that far from bringing a vulture joyfully feeding upon the carcass of the Alsatian economy, the Jew was basically unhappy and deserving of consideration on that score. The title further implied that this situation was intolerable as it called for concrete proposals to ameliorate both the economic and the psychological state of the Jews. Finally, through the title we perceive that the task of regenerating the Jews was viewed as the responsibility of the Gentile majority. Thus, after centuries of mindless oppression, the fate of the Jews was at last considered to be a problem to be dealt with pragmatically, yet humanely. The battle which culminated in the Emancipation of 1791 was joined.

This brief survey of the state of the Jews in France during the Enlightenment provides a background essential to the understanding of Voltaire's attitudes toward the Jews. Though the Jewish question arose as a subject of national debate only after 1778, the year of Voltaire's death, it is clear that it was in a state of fermentation well prior to
this date. Finally, it is against this background of myth, superstition, and the growing challenge to age-old prejudice that Voltaire's remarks on the Jews can be most fairly judged.

The name of Voltaire is almost synonymous with the Enlightenment. This man who dominated the intellectual circles of Europe for most of the 18th century is customarily associated with humanitarian thinking, the rejection of prejudice and superstition, and above all, tolerance. Yet Voltaire's relationship with the Jews remains problematical. It is a subject which has haunted Voltaireans for nearly two hundred years and which has yet to be definitively resolved. In our next chapter we will explore the state of criticism on the question, elucidate some of the problems involved, and outline the method we will employ in arriving at some reasonable conclusions regarding Voltaire's relationship with the Jews.
FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER I


7 Charles Hoffman, L'Alsace, I (Colmar, 1906), 3-5.


13 Arthur Hertzberg's previously cited The French Enlightenment and the Jews offers the most detailed study of the trends leading to the Emancipation Act of 1791.
CHAPTER II

VOLTAIRE AND THE JEWS:
THE PRESENT STATE OF CRITICISM

The question of Voltaire's attitudes toward the Jews bears a peculiar resemblance to the metaphysical debates in Candide. After nearly two hundred years of sometimes heated discussion we appear to be, like Martin and Candide, "aussi avancés que le premier jour." While no one disputes the fact that Voltaire manifested a pointed antipathy toward Judaism as a religion, there is a mass of contradictory opinion relating to his sentiments toward the Jews themselves.

During his life and in the stormy years following his death Voltaire held the reputation of being the enemy of the Jews. It was generally assumed that the remarks pertaining to the Jews found in Voltaire's anti-biblical writings not only condemned the ancient Hebrews on an ideological level as precursors of Christianity, but also reflected a personal hatred for all Jews, past, present, and future. Voltaire's sometimes venomous attacks were seen in the double light of the desire to dismantle Christianity at its roots and a personal vendetta carried out against all Jewry because of two disastrous business dealings with Jewish agents. This view was most articulately expressed by abbé Guénée in his reply to Voltaire's biblical criticisms and it is this opinion which has predominated with slight variation until recently.  

Voltaireans of the 19th and early 20th centuries demonstrated a fundamental lack of curiosity to delve into the question in any depth. Instead, they treated the charge of anti-Jewish bias as a matter of fact,
but chose to emphasize the anti-Christian and historical implications of Voltaire's criticism. Thus, for Lanson, Pellissier, and Morley the main point of interest was not how Voltaire's comments related to the Jews themselves, but how they affected Christianity and the Christian concept of world history. Morley writes for example that "if some of Voltaire's details are crude and rudimentary at least he has the merit of showing to his unaccustomed readers what vast epochs of time, what uncounted multitudes of men, what varied movements of the human spirit, surround the little spark of Judaism." This opinion is echoed by both Pellissier and Lanson:

D'abord aux préjugés religieux qui faisaient de la Palestine le centre même de l'humanité, il oppose tout ce qu'avait découvert la science contemporaine sur les antiques peuples du Haut-Orient...ses nombreuses erreurs ne l'empêchent pas d'avoir, le premier, réformé la fausse conception qu'on s'était faite jusque-là de l'histoire universelle. Derrière le petit peuple juif, qui n'y joua par lui-même qu'un rôle très médiocre, il montre les Chinois, les Hindous, les Persans, un monde bien autrement vaste que celui de la Bible; et, donnant place à ces peuples dans l'histoire, il corrige ainsi le plan conventionnel qui la subordonnait à la théologie catholique.

Though no one completely exculpated Voltaire of prejudice, the choice of focus had the net effect of minimizing its importance. Among the three only Lanson offered a precise opinion about Voltaire's relationship to contemporary Jewry and this brief mention cast Voltaire in a favorable light: "Aux Juifs, qu'il méprise, il offre la sécurité, la condition d'étrangers domiciliés, et l'invitation de se décrasser, de se cultiver." (Lanson, pp. 184-185) For these critics, then, Voltaire's supposed bias was almost totally overshadowed by an intellectual battle undertaken in the name of humanity in which the ancient
Jews happened to be the pawns. By contrast, Bellesort seemed to imply that Voltaire's purposes may not have been so lofty nor his prejudices so sublimated: "Voltaire ne lâchera plus la Bible et les Juifs....
Pendant plus de vingt ans il s'est acharné sur les contradictions, les
invraisemblances, les férociés, les horreurs de l'Ancien Testament.
Du badinage à l'invective, il a épuisé contre eux toutes les ressources
de son éloquence sarcastique: Il n'y a pas de fourberie dont il
ne les croie capables, pas de crimes dont il ne les accuse....Il va
jusqu'à justifier les persécutions dont ils furent les victimes."

The critics of the late 19th and early 20th centuries experienced
no compulsion to explore the question more fully than the above cita-
tions indicate. Seen in retrospect, however, Bellesort's final remark
seem to have heralded a new phase in the history of the problem. More
and more scholars have tended to investigate the question from the
point of view of Voltaire's personal feelings and their impact, direct
or indirect, on his Jewish contemporaries and their modern descendan	s.

Among the most inflammatory works to be written during the last
thirty years and one which represented a complete departure from tra-
dition was that of Henri LaBroue. Writing near the height of Hitler's
anti-Semitic campaign, LaBroue compiled over two hundred pages of quo-
tations from Voltaire's writings on the Jews. LaBroue's intention was
to show that Voltaire, like himself, was both a Christian and a con-
firmed anti-Semite who exposed the Jews for what they are, an infer-
or, conniving race bent on the destruction of the non-Jewish world.
In so doing, LaBroue hoped to show that Voltaire was an invaluable and
authoritative source which modern Christians could use with a clear
conscience against the Jews. 6
LaBroue's aim to "rehabilitate" Voltaire as a Christian anti-Semite is manifest in his brief introduction to the body of the work. Here he attacks the classic position on Voltaire's attitudes as a "Jewish plot":

Les judaïsants répugnent à admettre que Voltaire ait combattu les Juifs tout simplement parce qu'ils sont Juifs. Selon eux, sa guerre au judaïsme n'est qu'une manœuvre oblique destinée soit à atteindre le Nouveau Testament à travers l'Ancien, soit à venger Voltaire d'usuriers juifs qui lui avaient rogné des spécies. Telle est bien entendu, la thèse de Th. Reinach, frère de Salomon: 'Voltaire méprise les Juifs et fait porter à l'Ancien Testament le poids de ses rancunes contre l'Evangile....Peut-être aussi de quelques rancunes privées contre des banquiers israélites.'

Rancunes privées contre des banquiers israélites? Th. Reinach, étant Juif, a pu croire de bonne foi que Voltaire se battait pour de l'argent. (LaBroue, p. 16)

The blind hatred behind these remarks is evident in the vicious slur against Reinach who, after all, was merely repeating a position first uttered by one of Voltaire's Christian contemporaries. LaBroue goes even further, however, and offers another reason for this "Jewish" interpretation - the Jews' grasping pride:

Ici il importe de dissiper une équivoque complaisamment entrelacée par les Juifs. Ceux-ci, en effet, se sont vaniteusement attachés à faire du christianisme une simple province de leur royaume.... Les Juifs, qui veulent toujours qu'on leur doive quelque chose, réclament donc des droits sur celui qu'ils ont rejeté et mis à mort et qui ne se survit que par les non-Juifs....Un Chrétien ferait inconsidérément le jeu de ces pires ennemis du christianisme s'il accordait à L'Ancien Testament les respects que revendiquent les Juifs. (LaBroue, pp. 17-18)

For LaBroue Christianity is completely divorced from the Old Testament and Judaism. St. Paul was the initiator of this divorce
and according to LaBroue, Voltaire, a sort of St. Paul reincarnate, finished the task through his writings on the Old Testament. Thus, if Voltaire attacked the Old Testament it was to pulverize Judaism and the Jews, not to deflate Christianity. LaBroue maintains that Voltaire consistently extolled Jesus, the law of charity, and by extension Christianity at the expense of Judaism. Despite his quarrels with the Church, when it came to the question of the Jews and the Old Testament, Voltaire was both a Christian and an anti-Semitic. (LaBroue, p. 25) LaBroue gives scant evidence to prove this revolutionary interpretation of Voltaire. Evidently he believes that the quotations contained in the two hundred pages following the introduction speak for themselves. Hence he offers them virtually without commentary grouped under such headings as "leurs stigmates intellectuels". Though LaBroue's book contains little in the way of real scholarship, it nonetheless demonstrates that Voltaire's writings on the Jews are subject to the most bizarre manipulation. Here they are used to give an aura of respectability to the racist convictions of LaBroue and his ilk.

If for LaBroue Voltaire seems to be the patron saint of anti-Semites, for Pierre Aubery the question takes on an entirely different light. Aubery's article attempts to show that Voltaire was neither an anti-Semite nor a philo-Semite, but that in some very important ways Voltaire's writings were favorable to the Jews. 7

This interpretation seems to rest on a fundamental distinction between an emotional Voltaire and a rational Voltaire. Prejudice and particularly anti-Semitism are not intellectual or voluntary phenomena; rather they are unconsciously imbibed into an emotional
level of our consciousness at a tender age. Though Voltaire was no exception to this rule, Aubery argues that intellectually he was keenly aware of tendencies toward prejudice existing in himself. Moreover, being acutely sensitive to the horrific consequences of prejudice of all kinds, Voltaire consistently sought to combat prejudice in general and to promote reconciliation with the Jews. These efforts manifest themselves in a number of interesting ways in his writings.

First of all, Aubery selects quotations to show that Voltaire always clearly distinguished between the biblical and the modern Jews. Moreover, if he was harsh in his treatment of biblical Jewry it was to combat superstition rather than the Jews themselves. Indeed, his sarcastic comments on the Old Testament and the ancient Israelites served a fundamentally positive end: that of demystifying the Jewish question. In poking fun at the Jews, their history, and their superstitions Voltaire desired to "dépassionner la question juive, à faire rentrer les juifs dans l'humanité, montrer que les Juifs sont des hommes comme des autres, soumis aux mêmes servitudes naturelles que tous leurs semblables." (Aubery, p. 78) In this same vein Aubery further points out that Voltaire helped to dismantle the cornerstone of traditional Christian anti-Semitism by consistently refuting the myth that the ancient Jews were directly responsible for the death of Christ. (Aubery, p. 71)

Voltaire's fairmindedness is further manifested in his dealings with contemporary Jewry. As proof of Voltaire's genuine desire for reconciliation between Gentiles and Jews Aubery delves into the correspondence citing two letters which pointedly call for understanding, a dismissal of past quarrels and which deny any intention of doing
injury to the Jews of his time. (Aubery, pp. 73, 75)

In addition to presenting his own point of view, Aubery takes the offensive against the traditional position that Voltaire bore an undying animosity toward all Jews because of his bankruptcy in London. As evidence he calls upon Pomeau who has shown that despite the disaster Voltaire maintained friendly relations with the Jewish businessmen involved over an extended period of time after the affair. (Aubery, pp. 74-75)

Finally, Aubery takes Peter Gay to task for his assertion that Voltaire was totally insensitive to the economic plight of the Jews in the 18th century. According to Gay, Voltaire never conceded that if the Jews were involved in usury, it was the result of Christian attitudes and practices, rather than a particular Jewish propensity toward chicanery. Citing a passage from the Dictionnaire philosophique where Voltaire does indeed take the position that historically the Jews have been forced into usury, Aubery exclaims: "On ne savait mieux esquisser, plus clairement et plus succinctement les grandes lignes de toute explication sociologique future de la condition juive."

(Aubery, p. 77) Thus, judging from Aubery's interpretation, far from fanning the fires of anti-Semitism, Voltaire was truly a member of the vanguard to dispel superstition and prejudice as they related to theological questions as well as to the Jews themselves.

As comforting as this article may be to the beleaguered Voltairean, it must be admitted that although Aubery's contentions are carefully documented, his quotations are nonetheless selective. Aubery simply ignores some extremely thorny passages in order to give emphasis to more liberal quotations. If his purpose is to refute what he
terms "des interprétations tendancieuses" he has failed in that he skirts many serious issues on which these interpretations have been based. This fact becomes clear as we examine other points of view which offer distinctly different conclusions drawn from Voltaire's writings.

Midway between Aubery's apology for Voltaire and more radical interpretations prejudicial to the author of Candide, lies the testimony of Peter Gay. In a brief chapter in The Party of Humanity Gay somewhat sadly admits that Voltaire was indeed an anti-Semite, but that his prejudice was not without certain qualifications. Unlike Aubery who insists upon the modernity of Voltaire's writings on the Jews, Gay finds that Voltaire was a straggler in the march toward toleration and the emancipation of the Jews. He quite correctly points out that the 18th century was a turning point in Jewish history as people began to question age-old prejudice: "With its cosmopolitan spirit, its cultural relativism, and its doctrine of toleration, the Enlightenment converted the Jew from a victim to a problem." Historically speaking, then, Voltaire had the option of joining the growing ranks of philosemitism: He had merely to follow in the steps of his contemporaries such as Locke and Toland, who advocated both religious toleration and civil rights for Jews. Yet, throughout his life Voltaire remained a prisoner of prejudice. (Gay, pp. 101-103)

In order to prove this point Gay makes use of some of the same evidence that Aubery uses to show Voltaire's desire for reconciliation with the Jews! Aubery cites a letter in which Voltaire replied to the Jewish "philosophe" Isaac de Pinto as proof of Voltaire's sincere desire for understanding and reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles.
Here Voltaire admits that perhaps in the past he had been a bit harsh toward the Jews, but that he meant no harm and that in the future he would correct the passages Pinto had found offensive. (Aubery, p. 75) Gay considers this letter unconvincing: "He never rewrote the passages that had offended Pinto, and never recanted his crude prejudices."

(Gay, p. 103) Gay goes further, however, and asserts that Voltaire's prejudice prevented him from being an effective spokesman against persecution. Though he condemned the Inquisition, it was a mere regurgitation of Montesquieu rather than a valid personal statement. On the contrary, in Gay's opinion, Voltaire's solution to the Jewish question was for the Jews to cease to be Jews. (Gay, p. 101)

As we have pointed out in connection with Aubery's article, Gay feels that Voltaire never attempted to understand the Jews' economic or social predicament. Rather than ascribing their position as usurers or old clothes dealers to a lack of alternatives enforced by Christian prejudices and legislation, Voltaire viewed it as the result of their character: "In general, he described Jews as materialists, eminently qualified to be usurers, as greedy, iniquitous, clever and rootless." (Gay, p. 102) It was this attitude which led Voltaire to exclaim "damned Jew" on the occasion of his bankruptcy with the Jewish banker Medina and in later misfortunes with Hirschel. (Gay, p. 102)

Nevertheless, Voltaire's prejudice was qualified in two ways. First, more than anti-Jewish bias was at work in his biblical criticism. If Voltaire at times distorted the Bible in order to render certain episodes more shocking than they actually were, Gay sees it as anti-Christian rather than anti-Semitic propaganda. (Gay, p. 105)

Indeed, in his fight against Christianity the Jews were sometimes
subtly depicted as superior to Christians, since for all their bar-
barism and superstition, they never admitted the dogma of immortality
of the soul, eternal rewards and punishments, or the divinity of the
messiah. (Gay, p. 107)

A second way in which Voltaire's prejudice was qualified lay in
the future. Gay maintains that Voltaire foresaw the possibility of
"Jewish Rehabilitation" since he firmly believed that they could purge
themselves of their past through participation in the philosophical
movement. (Gay, p. 107) Finally, echoing Lanson, he writes: "The
Jews, for all their failings, would be a part of Voltaire's good
state. At times he did not seem certain whether he would extend the
same privilege to pious Christians." (Gay, p. 108)

It would seem then, judging from Gay's conclusion, that the root
of Voltaire's prejudice was Judaism rather than the Jew himself. It
appears that Voltaire felt that Judaism gave rise to a peculiar and
repugnant Jewish character to which Voltaire objected strenuously.
Voltaire evidently felt no sympathy for the Jews as Jews, but con-
ceded that as human beings they too could improve if they rid them-
selves of the cause of their iniquities.

In the light of the hitlerian holocaust, some scholars have been
led to pursue a quest for clues to the origin of what is termed
"modern" anti-Semitism. Modern anti-Semitism differs from the older
Christian variety in that it is a fundamentally secular, racial pre-
judice. This search has led at least one scholar to Voltaire's door
step: "An analysis of everything that Voltaire wrote about Jews
throughout his life establishes the proposition that he is the major
link in Western intellectual history between the anti-Semitism of
classic paganism and the modern age. In his favorite pose of Cicero reborn, he ruled the Jew to be outside society and to be hopelessly alien even to the future age of enlightened men. 9

Sweeping though this statement is, Hertzberg acknowledges complexities and contradictions existing in Voltaire's writings on the Jews. Thus, dealing with Gay and Aubery he declares: "All of these explanations of Voltaire's attitude toward the Jews can be denied, with adequate citations from Voltaire himself." (Hertzberg, p. 284) Given the contradictions that abound in Voltaire, Hertzberg concludes that it is impossible to discern Voltaire's inmost feelings and that it is of no importance to do so. What is important and what can be demonstrated are how Voltaire's contemporaries interpreted his remarks and the legacy Voltaire left for the future. Hertzberg contends that 18th-century readers considered Voltaire a confirmed anti-Semite and that Voltaire's place in history was that of the "crucial architect of the ambivalences that surrounded the Emancipation. His work made a fundamental contribution to its debacle." (Hertzberg, p. 286)

Despite the caveat mentioned above, Hertzberg does indeed offer an opinion on Voltaire's thoughts. For Hertzberg, Voltaire was a racist who inexorably detested all Jews and refused them any place in the society he sought to establish. He gives little credence to Voltaire's pleas for tolerance and his condemnations of the Inquisition. Instead, he asserts that Voltaire, like Cicero, Juvenal and other ancient anti-Semites, despised the Jews as an oriental blight upon classical western civilization. This blight had overtaken and subverted Greco-Roman civilization in the form of Christianity. To restore Europe to its true heritage it had to be removed. Such was
Voltaire's task. It was no simple cultural conflict, however. Europe could rid itself of the pernicious judeo-christian tradition since it was, after all, an imposition from without. The Jew, on the other hand, could never rid himself of what he was, for it was innate. Thus he would forever remain a potentially subversive force in western society. We can see, then, that in Hertzberg's opinion, Voltaire's antipathy toward the Jews was both cultural and racial. As such it represented an important departure from Christian anti-Semitism which had been rooted in religious animosity. As Hertzberg puts it:

The essence of Voltaire's view on the Jews, the key to the understanding of all the rest, is in one of his last serious writings on the subject. In 1771 he again adopted one of his favorite poses, that of a classic Roman, and wrote Lettres de Memmius à Cicer... The climax of this outburst read: 'They are, all of them, born with raging fanaticism in their hearts, just as the Bretons and the Germans are born with blond hair. I would not be in the least surprised if these people would not someday become deadly to the human race.' Voltaire had thus, being an ex-Christian, abandoned entirely the religious attack on the Jews as Christ killers or Christ rejectors. He proposed a new principle on which to base his hatred of them, their innate character. (Hertzberg, p. 300)

As a confirmed racist and proponent of classical civilization, Voltaire's main objective was to show the innate inferiority of the Jews and their culture. To attain this end Voltaire consistently relied on arguments culled from the repertoire of ancient anti-Semitic. Thus, in Hertzberg's view, the link between Voltaire's anti-Semitism and that of the ancient world is manifest not only in his intellectual adherence to that civilization, but in the very arguments he constantly employed against the Jews. (Hertzberg, p. 303)
His insistence that the Jews were cultural plagiarizers rather than inventors, that they were inferior to the Greeks in morality, that they were ignorant of the arts and sciences, that they learned from rather than taught the Greeks, all stemmed from the classical arsenal of anti-Semitism. His assertions that the Jews hated all other men, that they were clannish and fundamentally anti-social likewise had their source in the writings of the ancients. Finally, his attempts to discredit Judaism as superstition or as an aberration of pre-existing pagan myths are also found in classical writers such as Cicero and Tacitus. (Hertzberg, p. 306)

In combatting the Jews, Voltaire said nothing essentially original; nevertheless, his place in the history of anti-Semitism was crucial, for in harking back to classical sources he gave impetus to a new more nefarious form of anti-Semitism which directed itself at the Jew as a racial rather than religious entity. Voltaire sought to restore Europe to its true cultural nature, that of greco-roman civilization. To do that, Christianity, a Jewish imposition upon the west, had to be destroyed. With Christianity eliminated, however, the Jew remained: "The case of the Jews is radically different. Being born a Jew and the obnoxiousness of the Jewish outlook are indissoluble; it is most unlikely that 'enlightened' Jews can escape their innate character. The Jews are subversive of the European tradition by their very presence, for they are the radically other, the hopelessly alien. Cure them of their religion and their inborn character remains."

(Hertzberg, p. 307)

Hertzberg's thesis is certainly the most original to be found in recent scholarship. Yet, like the others, it suffers from a funda-
mental flaw: it does not sufficiently prove itself. Part of the problem is that of space. Though Voltaire occupies an important position in Hertzberg's thesis, the book is devoted to the entire French enlightenment and the Jews. Thus, while Voltaire's name is mentioned repeatedly, the logical development of the author's case against him is accorded only a few pages. Consequently, in dealing with Voltaire, Hertzberg is given to making sweeping generalizations for which he offers little hard evidence. Many questions are raised in the reader's mind which go unanswered.

One such question is that of Hertzberg's interpretation of the rare passages he uses to support his viewpoint. We have already pointed out that it is Hertzberg's contention that Voltaire was a cultural absolutist who constantly pitted greco-roman civilization against the Hebrew, to the detriment of the latter. As an illustration of this point Hertzberg cites two examples. The first is a book review appearing in the **Gazette littéraire** of 1764 in which Voltaire uncharacteristically demonstrated approbation of certain biblical passages as literature: "He approved of some of the poetic images of the prophets and he liked the pastoral quality of the Pentateuch, as literature. He even explained Hebrew imagery, in the manner of Montesquieu, as being rooted in the climate and manner of life of the ancient Hebrews. Nonetheless, he added that 'one must state that this people had no idea of that which we call taste, delicacy, or proportion.'" (Hertzberg, p. 301) In Hertzberg's interpretation it is only this final sentence which is of any significance. He sees little or no importance in the fact that prior to the last sentence Voltaire was attempting to evaluate ancient Hebrew culture on its own terms and from a positive point
of view. Secondly, Hertzberg fails to mention that this book review does not form part of Voltaire's polemical output and might then more accurately reflect what he felt in his more objective moments. When one considers that this article appeared in the same year as the *Dictionnaire philosophique* which in general was quite harsh toward Jewish culture, one is astounded by the discrepancy between Voltaire the literary critic and Voltaire the polemicist. Nonetheless, Hertzberg uses the final sentence as a stepping stone to what he terms a clearer illustration of "Voltaire's basic view".

This illustration is found in "one of Voltaire's very last utterances", *La Bible enfin expliquée*, a decidedly polemical work as the ironic title well indicates. Here Hertzberg isolates one passage which he interprets as a good indication of Voltaire's cultural absolutism. By the time of the writing of the books of the Machabees, due to the influence of greco-roman civilization, Voltaire wrote:

>'The Jews themselves had shied away from a bombastic, incomprehensible, and incoherent style...and one which resembles drunken dreams when it does not reflect the enthusiasm of divine inspiration....The books of the Machabees prove the point. We do not know who the authors were. It is enough to know that in general they were written in a style somewhat more human than that of all the earlier histories in the Bible and sometimes, if one may dare say it, close to the eloquence of the Greeks and Romans.' (Hertzberg, p. 301)

Apparently Hertzberg sees no contradiction between the generally favorable literary review and the isolated remark in the lengthy polemical treatise. Moreover, he evidently views as extraneous Voltaire's enthusiastic commentaries on passages from the story of Joseph and the book of Ruth which appear in *La Bible enfin expliquée.*

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10 Be that as
it may, though Voltaire does demonstrate a sort of cultural superiority complex in the passage cited above, it is evident from this self-same passage that he does not view defects in Jewish culture as innate and beyond repair. The very thrust of the quote is the clear, if grudging, admission of a westernization of Jewish literature as exemplified in the books of the Machabees. Having quoted this passage himself, can Hertzberg legitimately go on to maintain that Voltaire considered the Jews irretrievably alien from the "superior" classical civilization? This is but one of the many questions Hertzberg's book poses to the serious reader.

Hertzberg divorces Voltaire from traditional Christian anti-Semitism to make him the major proponent of a renewed neo-classicist racism. Yet, to the embattled Voltairian's astonishment, still another scholar presents Voltaire as an anti-Christian anti-Semite who nonetheless gave new impetus to age-old Christian arguments against the Jews.11

At the outset of his article Bensimon makes the important distinction between anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism. The former can be a rational choice, the latter, on the contrary, is always couched in the affective layers of the personality. It is thus basically an irrational phenomenon. In the light of this distinction, Bensimon considers Voltaire's rapport with the Jews and Judaism. Like Hertzberg, Bensimon considers anti-Semitism from an historical perspective and finds a link between the 20th-century variety and the writings of Voltaire. Contrary to Hertzberg, however, Bensimon considers the modern phenomenon an extension of traditional Christian anti-Semitism, rather than a harking back to ancient Rome and Athens. Instead of "classic-
izing" anti-Semitism, as Hertzberg would have it, Voltaire revitalized existing Christian anti-Semitic mythology by shrouding it in the deceptive cloak of rationalism:

Ces mythes...Voltaire ne les a pas inventés, mais il leur a donné une impulsion nouvelle en les accréditant sous l'étendard de la raison, du progrès. L'anti-sémitisme 'scientifique' n'est pas absolument une invention du 20e siècle. Voltaire avait des fondements rationnels à sa haine du juif. Ce démystificateur aura été le plus grand diffuseur de mythes anti-sémites du XVIIIe siècle. (Bensimon, p. 28)

Bensimon does not deny that Voltaire intended to destroy Christianity by his attacks on the Bible, nor that he used the Jews and Judaism to further this end. He maintains, however, that Voltaire could have accomplished his purpose without giving way to anti-Semitic propaganda. According to Bensimon, what usually began as a rational attack on biblical Judaism and its progeny, Christianity, ended as an attack against the Jews themselves. Voltaire "rationalized" his hatred of the Jew by finding arguments which proved pre-existing anti-Semitic notions. The Bible "proved" the Jewish stereotype in all its forms: the dirty Jew, the depraved Jew, the usurer by nature and by Law, the intellectually vacuous Jew. (Bensimon, pp. 20-23) Thus prejudice assumed the cloak of reason.

That Voltaire was irrational when dealing with Jews is further proved by the exception to the rule. On occasion Voltaire disputed the age-old myth that the Jews killed Jesus Christ. He convincingly demonstrated how historically untenable this accusation is since at the time of the crucifixion the Jews had neither the right to perform executions nor the custom of crucifying wrongdoers. Indeed, crucifixion was a punishment peculiar to Roman law. Yet, Bensimon adds, "Un Voltaire
plus conséquent avec lui-même, plus rationaliste eût extirpé de lui les mythes qui ne sont pas que la petite monnaie de celui-ci."

(Bensimon, p. 26) Voltaire's irrationality is evident not only in the contradiction mentioned above, but in the very language he employed when speaking of the Jews. His favorite epithets were such emotion-charged words as abominable, disgusting, and atrocious. (Bensimon, p. 27)

In Bensimon's view, then, Voltaire upheld the traditional anti-Semitic image of the Jew in his writings. To this image Voltaire added one element: the mask of reason. By acting as the secular reasoner in search of a rational approach to the Bible, he modernized ancient Christian prejudices. He gave people "proof" that what had always been believed of the Jews was true: the Jew was an alien, animistic, demoniacal creature. In this way Voltaire contributed to the development of "scientific" anti-Semitism so prevalent in our own century.

Judging from the preceding pages it is clear that after two centuries of criticism the question of Voltaire's relationship with the Jews remains unsolved in any definitive way. If anything, it appears to be more problematical than ever before as more and more scholars offer an ever increasing spectrum of opinion. Which, if any, of these articles offers the complete truth of the matter? Each proves itself by means of quotations from Voltaire. Some indeed use the same quotations to prove opposing views.

Upon examination of these and other pieces written on the subject several important conclusions are reached. First, most of these authors seek to discover and expose a structure in Voltaire's writings
which in turn illuminates his basic view. Presumably, the authors arrive at this structure through a careful evaluation of all of Voltaire's remarks. After weighing the evidence and arriving at conclusions they then compile what they deem to be the most characteristic quotations and include them as proof in the ten to fifteen pages they allot to the subject. What is embarrassing here is the myriad of basic views the authors have found, for the differences in opinions are not merely of detail.

It seems to us that given the contradictions, the question is not only worthy of further study but warrants a more extended exposé than most of the scholars previously cited have been willing to give. It may well be that there is no basic view, but rather a succession of opinions each written for a specific purpose and within a specific context. Nevertheless, if one is to succeed in discovering a viable structure in Voltaire's remarks on the Jews it now seems apparent that it does not suffice to compile a series of complementary quotations to be included in a ten page article which will in turn be refuted by other quotations in another article of the same length and breadth of purpose. A structure, if it exists, can only be proved after showing, through a conscientious study of the context and circumstances, why certain other passages must be discounted. What we are undertaking, then, is not necessarily a total refutation of all existing opinion in favor of a revolutionary theory on Voltaire's attitudes toward the Jews. We are undertaking a more comprehensive study of the question in hopes that a more complete, though not necessarily less complex picture will emerge.

Because we believe that in order to determine Voltaire's true
attitudes toward the Jews one must compare the remarks made within
the biblical context to those made in others, we are dividing our study
into two main parts: first, a close scrutiny of the biblical comment-
ary (Chapters III through VI; second, the examination of the extra-
biblical remarks together with a comparison between Voltaire's com-
ments and those of his philosophical contemporaries (Chapters VII and
VIII). Employing this method, we believe that we will arrive at some
reasonable conclusions regarding Voltaire's relationship with the Jews.
FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER II


2A. Guénée, Lettres de quelques juifs portugais et allemands à M. de Voltaire (Paris: Laurant Praulet, 1769).


6Henri LaBroue, Voltaire, anti-juif (Paris, 1941), p. 27.


10Voltaire, "La Bible enfin expliquée," Oeuvres complètes, ed. Louis Moland, XXX (Paris, 1888), 63, 65, 155. All subsequent references to Voltaire's works are taken from the Moland edition and will henceforth be noted in the text with the volume and page numbers.

CHAPTER III

THE BIBLIOCENTRIC VIEWPOINT
AND THE CONTROVERSY SURROUNDING IT

It is evident from the preceding pages that most recent critics regard Voltaire as an anti-Semite to one degree or another. In proving their respective cases against him all have relied heavily upon writings customarily grouped under the general heading "polemical works" which are primarily concerned with the Bible and the biblical era. With the notable exception of Aubery the critics interpret Voltaire's critical remarks on the Jews found in this context as reflective of his personal feelings toward all the Jews. Thus, LaBréoue, for example, has culled two hundred pages of quotations drawn from the biblical writings to show that Voltaire was a racist. Hertzberg has stated categorically that what Voltaire wrote on the Jews in the biblical context was meant to apply to all the Jews.

Certainly if all one read of Voltaire was the biblical criticism one would emerge with the impression that the author was literally obsessed with the Jews. The fact remains, however, that outside the biblical context Voltaire had very little to say about them and that what he did write was by no means totally inimical. This discrepancy would be of minimal interest were it not for the traditionally accepted notion that Voltaire was an anti-Semite obsessed with an uncontrollable hatred for all Jews. Our task, then, is to evaluate Voltaire's thoughts by presenting a fuller view of his comments than has been customary. Furthermore, we will attempt by means of comparison between the polemical comments and Voltaire's other random remarks to arrive at
an evaluation of the place occupied by the Jews in Voltaire's thought. If possible, we hope also to arrive at some reasonable conclusions as to his personal attitudes toward Jewry.

Before tackling the thorny question of the Jews in Voltaire's biblical writings it is imperative to interject a few words concerning the historical context of these works. Such eminent scholars as Ira Wade, Peter Gay and Norman Torrey have pointed out that Voltaire was finely attuned to the intellectual cross-currents of his day. Peter Gay has shown that Voltaire's anti-biblical writings were at least in part a response to prevailing attitudes within society.¹ Ira Wade and Norman Torrey have demonstrated in some detail how much Voltaire's arguments against the Bible were influenced both generally and specifically by his anti-Christian predecessors.² Without belaboring already soundly established principles it nonetheless behooves us to crystallize some of the main currents of thought which surrounded Voltaire as he took up his pen.

In order to understand the vehemence of Voltaire's attacks against the Bible it is essential to comprehend the all-pervasive authority of the Bible in the psyche of Christian Europe at the time he wrote. It was the focal point around which the average man organized, not only his religious beliefs, but his entire vision of the world. The Bible was not only the word of God in the purely theological sense, but dictated the Christian's political, historical, cultural and moral outlook.³ Ira Wade has captured the crucial importance of the Bible in the following passage:

For instance, the whole institutional organization in Christian countries had for centuries depended for its authenticity upon the
divine character of the Scriptures. There is no exaggeration in insisting that the Bible embraced all aspects of Christian life with as much thoroughness as the Koran now embraces all aspects of Mohammedanism. The foundations of morality were derived naturally from the Ten Commandments. The nature of all economic activity, the divine right of kingship, the whole institution of religion in its organizational hierarchy, the cult, the ritual, the dogma, and the continuity of history and knowledge, as well as belief, were all derived from the Bible. Thus the questioning of the accuracy, the validity, the reliability of the whole Bible could easily upset the order of things.... In many respects this is just what happened. (Wade, p. 513)

In undermining the authority of the Bible, therefore, much more was at stake than Christianity. A whole civilization hung in the balance.

Within the French intellectual community the "bibliocentric" viewpoint was most eloquently expounded by Bossuet. In his capacity as royal tutor, for example, he composed a masterly work of political indoctrination for the dauphin, Politique tirée de l' Ecriture sainte. Specifically, the treatise demonstrated that the divine right of the monarch was derived from and therefore sanctified by the Holy Book. Along more general lines, Bossuet tried to engender in his royal pupil a reliance on scripture as a source of guidance in the affairs of state. In the Old Testament, declared Bossuet, one will find the duties of the monarch outlined. Moreover, biblical study is the sole path to wisdom and solution to all human problems:

'Whatever was wisest in Sparta, in Athens, in Rome, to go back to the very beginning, in Egypt and the best governed of all states, is as nothing compared to the wisdom that is contained in the law of God, whence the other constitutions have drawn all their better aspects. Therefore no state has ever enjoyed a finer constitution than that under
which you will see the people of God.'
(Cited by Hampson, p. 18)

This passage is crucial to the understanding of the biblio-
centric mentality. Bossuet assumes that the highest good in human aff-
airs is the implementation of God's will. He further assumes that God's
will was revealed directly to one people, aptly called the chosen people
or the people of God. Finally, these revelations were recorded in the
Bible. The Hebrew constitution by virtue of divine guidance constitutes
the absolute and most perfect source of wisdom for the Christian monarch.
Thus, what we would consider today a secular matter was considered at
that time to be within the province of religion.

There is a second point of interest here, however, because
Bossuet goes further than merely advocating the Christian's adherence
to God's will in the political sphere. Bossuet actively dissuades his
reader from seeking political wisdom elsewhere in the past, that is to
say, among "secular" peoples. God chose only one people. In so far
as they enacted his will they can be said to have functioned at a di-
vine level. Other societies, operating at a purely human level, nec-
essarily fell far short of the absolute good and therefore could not
be perfect models.

Finally, Bossuet implies that the political worth of the secular
societies depends on the degree to which they imitated the Hebrew
model. Nevertheless, Bossuet makes clear that these imitations were
greatly inferior to the original. Thus, the ancient Jews, directly
guided by God, were the teachers of the world. As such, they are the
best model for the modern Christian. We can see, then, that this
passage has enormous implications for the world view of the Christian
reader to whom it was directed. It places the Jews in the position of a superior and original society of which other ancient peoples were but faulty imitators.

The "worship" of the chosen people, as Peter Gay puts it, (p. 37) was not peculiar to Bossuet nor confined to the political sphere. Christian writers such as Huet showed that pagan deities and myths were taken from Hebrew originals. Greek learning was borrowed. Plato was thought to have been the pupil of Jeremiah in Egypt. Ancient societies had been formed originally by the grandsons of Noah. (Hampson, p. 18) Judging from these examples it soon becomes apparent to what degree the Scriptures and the chosen people dominated Christian Europe's concept of the development of civilization.

This attitude is also evident in purely historical works, such as Bossuet's famed *Histoire universelle*. Everyone recognizes today that this work is not a universal history. Bossuet completely ignored the Chinese, the Indians and other ancient civilizations of which the West was beginning to be aware. (Hampson, p. 19) So great was his faith in the Bible and his belief in the Chosen People as the executors of God's will on earth that he considered other Mediterranean peoples important only in so far as they affected the fate of the Hebrews. Thus the Persians who were instrumental in freeing the Jews from their captivity were accorded a much higher place and more attention in Bossuet's historical hierarchy than the Greeks. (Gay, pp. 76-77) To judge from Bossuet's account, the history of the entire ancient world revolved around the Scriptures' account of Hebrew history. 4

Finally, the Scriptures and the Jews were crucial to Christians as a purely religious source. Bossuet and other devout Catholics
prided themselves on the continuity of the Church. Indeed, variation was considered a sign of error. For them, one of the proofs of the truth of Catholicism was that it could be shown to have evolved in an unbroken line from the time of the Old Testament to the present.\textsuperscript{5}

Thus in the areas of religion, history, politics, and culture the Old Testament was crucial. For the Christian the Bible was the most important book ever composed, the ancient Jews, the most important people ever to live. The prime point, however, is that in the minds of Christians the Bible and the Jews were unattackable, the hand of God being upon them. The aura of sanctity surrounding both the Bible and the Chosen People was a sort of spell which colored everything with which it came into contact. The average Christian lived under this spell, but long before Voltaire arrived on the scene several independent thinkers had already begun the work of exorcising it.

Even as Bossuet composed his grandiose history the very basis for his contentions was being challenged both within and outside the church. Among these early critics the most influential in terms of later developments in the French Enlightenment of the next century was undoubtedly Spinoza. (Wade, pp. 514, 694, 706) In general, one can say that his great tract on the Bible did much to dismantle the aura of sanctity surrounding it and the ancient Hebrews. Spinoza approached the Old Testament from a purely rational point of view. He treated it as a human document and demonstrated how it was no more accurate than any other document. (Hampson, p. 29) He showed, for example, that Moses could not have been the author of the Pentateuch. He did much to explode the notion of the prophet as "exalted seer" by relying on his theory of prophetical disposition, namely, if the pro-
phet was content, his prophecies were optimistic and vice versa. (Ages, p. 187) In an equally iconoclastic spirit Spinoza did violence to the concept of the Jews as God's elect before whom all other peoples paled in importance and achievement stating that: "there is absolutely nothing which the Jews can arrogate to themselves beyond other peoples."6 They certainly did not surpass others in wisdom, intellect or piety: "For in respect to intellect...they held very ordinary ideas about God and nature, so that they cannot have been God's chosen in this respect; nor were they so chosen in respect of virtue, the true life, for here again they, with the exception of a very few elect, were on an equality with other nations." (Spinoza, pp. 46-47)

Indeed Spinoza attacked those passages in Deuteronomy which claimed an exclusive election by God to the detriment of other peoples. According to him, these passages had only a limited application. They were a political ploy utilized by Moses to insure the obedience of the people. Moses was constrained to speak in language the Jews would comprehend and respond to; consequently, he spoke according to their "childish understanding" telling them they were unique. (Spinoza, pp. 43-44)

Spinoza further maintained that the laws and customs developed by the Hebrews resulted from their particular disposition. Far from being universal, they applied only to the Jews themselves. (Wade, pp. 638-639) These are but a few examples of Spinoza's attempt to wrest the Old Testament from its pedestal and place it within the grasp of the rational mind.

Within the Church itself, the foremost spokesman against the prevailing view of the Bible was Richard Simon. Far from being a rene-
gade, Simon's concern for the Church's welfare led him, ironically, to criticize the Bible. He perceived a danger in relying too heavily on Scripture alone as a source book for Christianity. He demonstrated this danger by showing the lapses, incongruities, and contradictions which indicate that the Bible had been altered over the course of the centuries. As a consequence he advocated the utilization of sacred tradition to supplement Scripture. (see Ages, pp. 99-100) Though Simon's intention was actually to strengthen the Church, it was clear to Bossuet that Simon's methods were potentially subversive. He savagely rebutted Simon and did his utmost to see that his book was burned. (Ages, pp. 99-100) Nevertheless, the controversy had been kindled and certainly could not be quashed by the censor's torch. Indeed, the criticism of Spinoza and Simon was mild compared with that which sprang up in England and later on the continent.

England was a particularly rich source for Voltaire. Norman Torrey has shown in his comprehensive work, Voltaire and the English Deists, that the author of Candide, by pillaging the works of the most extreme English critics and by utilizing virtually every technique coined by his predecessors, refuted every claim made on behalf of the Bible and the Jews. (Torrey, p. 198) As a historical document the Bible was shown to be defective. From the religious point of view, the time honored clichés of the chosen people, the prophecies and the miracles were undermined as irrefutable proofs of the validity of Christianity. From the standpoint of morality the Bible emerged as an abomination. Culturally, the Jews, far from being in the vanguard, were backward and inept. These themes were present in varying degrees among the English deists who most influenced Voltaire. Middleton, for
example, stressed, as did Voltaire, the lack of originality in Jewish
customs and disputed the authority of the miracles and Scripture.
(Torrey, p. 156; Wade, p. 518) Tindal, too, was harsh in his views of
the chosen people and emphasized the cruelties and immoralities of the
Old Testament. (Torrey, pp. 108-109; Wade, p. 518) Tindal, moreover,
ever failed to point out the more ridiculous aspects of Scripture, asking, for example: "'How many commands did God give his proph-
ets, which, if taken according to the letter, seem unworthy of God,
as making them act as mad-men or idiots?" (Cited by Torrey, p. 120)
Like Tindal, Anthony Collin belittled the Jews, disputed Moses' author-
ship of the Pentateuch (as had Spinoza), and attacked the miracles and
the contradictions of the early Church. (Wade, p. 517) Thomas Wool-
ston was another important source for Voltaire; Wade affirms that
"borrowings from the Discourses on the Miracles can be found in nearly
every work that Voltaire wrote against Christianity." (Wade, p. 517)
Finally, Peter Annet, author of David, the Man after God's own Heart
(1761) had a direct influence on Voltaire's Saul, as well as on numer-
ous other works. (Wade, pp. 518-519)

On the continent, although Spinoza was, according to Wade, the
most important single source for the biblical criticism of the Cirey
period, both Jean Meslier and Bayle had a decided effect on Voltaire's
biblical attacks.

Wade shows that Voltaire was particularly impressed by the work
of Meslier since he was a priest who on his deathbed called upon God
to forgive him for having supported Christianity all his life. (Wade,
p. 531) Meslier, like Voltaire, was violent in his attack on the
Bible and the Church; although Voltaire utilized many of his arguments,
he never went as far as Meslier had gone:

Meslier transcended the simple advice of his fellow critics, that natural religion was the answer to the falsity of Christianity. It is true that he approved the Golden Rule in one of his violent passages, but he had scant faith in its efficacy. There was, he believed, no hope of ever organizing among mankind the social beneficence of man. Nor did Nature itself offer any final hope to man: the universe is composed of matter, there is no spiritual force, no final cause, there is no virtue nor vice, no good nor evil. (Wade, p. 530)

Though Voltaire was never willing to descend this far into materialism and pessimism, he nonetheless put to good use many of Meslier's most extreme accusations against the ancient Jews. A case in point was Voltaire's oft repeated charge of human sacrifice. (Ages, pp. 103-104)

Voltaire's relationship with the English deists, with Spinoza, Bayle and Meslier have been studies in detail by a number of eminent scholars. It is not our purpose here to reiterate their findings. Nevertheless, it is important to note, at least in passing that Voltaire was quite responsive to the criticism growing up at the time and that many of his arguments were not original. What is of more interest to us is the use to which he put these and his own arguments. It will be seen later that Voltaire's attack was not solely against the Church itself, but against the entire world view, which revolved around the ancient Hebrews and their books.

The world view laid down by Bossuet and his intellectual allies was essentially based on a series of "givens" which were assumed to be true since they were cloaked in an aura of sanctity. Because these "givens" were of a supernatural nature they were never open to question or examination by the human mind. The fundamental concept was that of
divine intervention in human affairs which took the form of a special relationship between God and one people, the Jews. From this initial notion flowed an entire network of ideas effectively covering the panorama of human activity, from the beginning of time to the modern era.

Voltaire was adamantly opposed not only to the individual concepts involved, but in fact to the entire mentality which fostered them. His writings on the Jews and the Bible were a direct response to the Christian viewpoint; the manner and scope of which were determined, in our view, by the Christians themselves.

Since the concept of the Jews as the chosen people was central to the Christian outlook, it is not surprising to find that much of Voltaire's criticism was geared toward the destruction of this notion. Voltaire found the very idea that God would select one people over all others ridiculous in itself, unjust in its implications, and detestable in its consequences. He declared his position in the Profession de foi des théistes where he said: "Si Dieu a fait les hommes, tous lui sont également chers, comme tous sont égaux devant lui; il est donc absurde et impie de dire que le père commun a choisi un petit nombre de ses enfants pour exterminer les autres en son nom." (XXVII, pp. 56-57)

The idea of a chosen people is a man-made delusion unworthy of the divinity. In a later work he strengthens his condemnation by adding that he who denies God is mad, but he who maintains that God loves only him and hates or ignores the rest is a "barbare détestable et l'ennemi du genre humain. Tels étaient les Juifs et il a bien paru." (XXVIII, p. 26)

Although some critics have utilized parts of this passage or others similar to it to prove Voltaire's anti-Semitism, there is some
justification in viewing it as a typical Voltairean outburst against fanaticism, here as it relates to the "myth" of the chosen people. It is apparent from both passages indicated above that Voltaire was repelled by the concept because it implies exclusivity and indeed superiority. These twin notions breed contempt for others which, in matters of religion, has invariably led to violence and persecution. It is in this sense that the Jews through their belief in divine election are deemed the enemies of the human race. This interpretation seems all the more valid if one considers Voltaire's treatment of the Jews' entry in to the so-called Promised Land. Their status as chosen people evidently gave them a license to usurp the homeland of the Canaanites and to decimate the population. (XXVI, p. 344) Thus Voltaire showed that the concept, ridiculous in itself, became nefarious as it was applied by the Jews. In its practical consequences, then, Voltaire judged the idea of the chosen people to be a seedbed of bloodshed providing a justification for violence perpetrated by the favored against the unfavored. Voltaire constantly related this judgment to the activities of the Jews in the Old Testament, but he also perceived the relationship between these activities and those undertaken by Christians in the name of the "true religion". The Old Testament provided a sanctified example of persecution ultimately traceable to the concept of the chosen people. (XXX, p. 571; XXVII, p. 64)

Voltaire was equally concerned, however, with the intellectual consequences of the chosen people myth: that is the inordinate place accorded the Jews and their writings in the historical, political, cultural and moral outlook of Christians. Again the crux of the matter is the distinction between the divine and the profane. He sarcastic-
ally remarked in the *Dictionnaire philosophique*:

On peut encore faire une réflexion: c'est que Dieu ayant été leur seul roi très-longtemps, et ensuite ayant été leur historien, nous devons avoir pour tous les Juifs le respect le plus profond. Il n'y a point de frivole juif qui ne soit infiniment au-dessus de César et d'Alexandre. Comment ne pas se prosterner devant un frivole qui vous prouve que son histoire a été écrite par la Divinité même tandis que les histoires grecques et romaines ne nous ont été transmises que par des profanes? (XIX, p. 368)

This passage, although obviously carried to an extreme, illustrates Voltaire's perception of the fundamental dichotomy in the average Christian's mind: divine, ergo superior Jewish history versus profane, therefore inferior history.

This distinction dictated the Christian view of history and consequently the way it was written. Responding to a Chinaman's astonishment at the lack of mention of his country in Bossuet's *Histoire universelle*, Voltaire condescendingly declared: "On ne parle seulement pas de vous dans ce livre; vous êtes trop peu de chose; presque tout roule sur la première nation du monde, l'unique nation, le grand peuple juif". (XIX, p. 268) If everything revolves around the Jews, other peoples are mentioned only according to their relationship with the Jews. Hence the silence on the Arabs, for example:

On ne parle pas d'eux dans nos histoires universelles fabriquées dans notre Occident; je le crois bien: ils n'ont aucun rapport avec la petite nation juive, qui est devenue l'objet et le fondement de nos histoires prétendues universelles, dans lesquelles un certain genre d'auteurs se copient les uns les autres, oubli les trois quarts de la terre. (XI, p. 46)

Here again is a clear allusion to Bossuet's practice of measuring the historical worth of all peoples in direct proportion to the closeness
of their relationship with the Jews and their history.

Furthermore, those peoples mentioned or studied by western historians are never considered for themselves, but as mere appendages of the Jewish experience. Their sole "raison d'être" in the unfolding of human history was to play a role in the fortunes of the chosen people: "Ce que j'admire le plus dans nos compilateurs modernes, c'est la sagesse et la bonne foi avec laquelle ils nous prouvent que tout ce qui arriva autrefois dans les plus grands empires du monde n'arriva que pour instruire les habitants de la Palestine." (XIX, p. 355)

Voltaire's objections embraced other aspects of the judeo-centric viewpoint as well. He protested against the Christian notion of the Jews as the "teachers of antiquity", that is, that everything worthwhile in realm of culture, politics, religion etc. originated with the Jews. We have seen that Bossuet believed that the Jews developed laws which were imitated by all the great empires. Likewise Huet proclaimed that pagan deities and mythological heroes were imperfect imitations of ancient Hebrews. In the Essai sur les moeurs, Voltaire demonstrated his hostility to these claims in one bold stroke: "Notre ignorante crédulité se figure toujours que nous avons tout inventé, que tout est venu des Juifs et de nous qui avons succédé aux Juifs; on est bien détrômpé quand on fouille un peu dans l'antiquité." (XI, p. 199; see also XXVI, pp. 175-76; XXVII, p. 314; XIX, p. 617; XXX, pp. 390-91)

Voltaire showed himself to be equally preoccupied with the Jews' standing as the arbiters of morality. He was aware that Christians found justification for their moral conduct not only in the New but also in the Old Testament:

Puisqu'on s'efforce encore de nos jours à
chercher des exemples de conduite chez ce peuple, autrefois gouverné par Dieu même, et si souvent infidèle à Dieu; chez ce peuple qui prépara notre salut, et qui est l'objet de notre horreur; puisqu'on a confondu si souvent ses crimes avec la loi naturelle et divine qui les condamne, je vais choisir encore un exemple de ce peuple parmi cent autres exemples...(XXX, p. 571)

Or again: "Nos chrétiens, il le faut avouer, n'ont que trop imité ces anathèmes barbares tant recommandés chez les Juifs; c'est de ce fanatisme que sortirent les croisades qui dépeuplèrent l'Europe."
(XXVII, p. 64; see also XXV, pp. 571-72)

One could select ad infinitum passages similar to those presented above, but they suffice to show a certain pattern which we believe provides the focal point of Voltaire's remarks on the Jews and the Old Testament. Voltaire was extremely interested in the way Christians considered the Jews and in the intellectual and practical consequences of this consideration. The place of the Jews as chosen people provided historical, cultural, moral and, of course, religious judgments which Voltaire felt were fallacious. These were the primary areas which Voltaire exploited in his criticism. Furthermore, the passages presented above are more than just random selections demonstrating a casual awareness and rejection of various Christian concepts. They manifest a preoccupation with the origins of these ideas, that is a religious or supernaturally oriented mentality which accepts certain unproven "givens" as true and proceeds from there. We have been, he repeated again and again, credulous automatons in the ongoing march of tradition. For Voltaire then, the question was not only the truth of the concepts themselves but the merit of their base: the sacrosanct place of the Jews and the divinity of the Bible.
In these passages Voltaire also announced his plan of attack: to confront what he considered to be prejudice with what he considered to be fact. "Fouillons un peu dans l'antiquité", he wrote. With this as his motto, Voltaire constantly played upon traditional expectations and prejudices, confronting them with fact, common sense, historical evidence etc. in order to dislodge them from the Christian mind. It is obvious that Voltaire was not bent on an impartial search for truth; he already had his parti pris. Hence he boldly stated in one passage: we have been deceived; let us divest ourselves of our illusions. Finally, it must be said that Voltaire consistently presented Christian ideas in their most hyperbolic form. There was no middle ground. It is in these ways that Voltaire can be said to have been the antithesis of Bossuet and a foe of Christianity at large.
FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER III


7 For a complete study of Meslier's influence, see J. Morehouse, Voltaire and Jean Meslier (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1936).

CHAPTER IV

THE CHOSEN PEOPLE,
THE OLD TESTAMENT
AND WORLD HISTORY

Since the Christian outlook ultimately rested on the chosen people and a divinely inspired history, Voltaire's primary task was to create a breach between the divine on the one hand and the Jews and their books on the other. With the Jews themselves and with the Bible Voltaire underscored the imperfections of both which were obviously incompatible with divine inspiration.

As an historical document Voltaire attacked the Old Testament in a number of ways. In all he showed that the credence accorded the Bible as historical fact confounds human reason and it can therefore only be accepted on faith. (XXIII, p. 548) Yet, the question remains, could God have dictated a history so blatantly incompatible with reason? The Bible cannot be divine if it is erroneous, and it cannot be erroneous if divine. Voltaire showed that the Bible is in error in any number of ways and thus created a dilemma for the Christian mind.

Excluding for the moment episodes which are presented as examples of miracles, Voltaire proved that the account of world history recorded in the Old Testament is patently impossible. Voltaire made much of the idea that Jews were forbidden to read certain parts of Genesis before the age of 25:

C'est encore une chose surprenante, que les Juifs ne pussent lire ce chapitre qu'à vingt-cinq ans. Il semble qu'il devait être proposé d'abord à l'enfance, qui reçoit tout sans examen, plutôt qu'à la jeunesse, qui se pique déjà de juger et de rire. (XIX, p. 230)
Voltaire never tires of enumerating the impossibilities, implausibilities, contradictions, exaggerations and anachronisms which he found everywhere in the Scriptures. However, in his quest to destroy the Old Testament's credibility as a document per se, his special attention was drawn to the Pentateuch, which he viewed as the corner-stone of the Judeo-Christian religious and historical tradition: "Les fanatiques croient que le Pentateuque est le livre le plus ancien du monde mais les livres indiens et chinois le sont" (XIX, pp. 506-507) Or again: "Le Pentateuque gouverne les Juifs, et, par une singulière providence, il est aujourd'hui notre règle. Notre devoir est de lire ensemble cet ouvrage divin, qui est le fondement de notre foi."

(XXVI, p. 338) Leaving aside the purely religious aspects of the books, that is to say, matters such as original sin or other dogma derived from them, we find that Voltaire was extremely interested in the historical aspects. Among the books of the Pentateuch Voltaire was particularly fascinated with Genesis, so much so that he devoted an entire article to the exposition of its factual weaknesses in the *Dictionnaire philosophique*. Considering Voltaire's animosity toward Bossuet and the Christian view of universal history it is not surprising, for Genesis represents universal history in the strictest sense of the word, tracing the origins and development of the world and its earliest inhabitants.

In his attack on Genesis Voltaire proceeded first and foremost from a factual viewpoint. Its contents, like that of the entire Pentateuch, and indeed the Old Testament at large, defy human reason. Paradoxically through the demonstration of this fact Voltaire hoped to destroy its credibility as a divinely inspired document. (XXIII, p. 548)
tion is physically impossible and abounding in error. We are left with two options: 1) to accept it as a never-ending series of "prodiges" unworthy of the divinity; 2) to accept it as an error-ridden human document. Voltaire leads us in the direction of the latter by demonstrating that the notions found in the early books concerning physics, the world etc., were in keeping with the notions of the time. The article "Genèse", for example, dwells on the similarities between the ideas of creation recorded in the Old Testament by Moses and those of the ancient Indians, Chaldeans, and Greeks. Cultural relativism shows the Old Testament to be, not an exclusive revelation by God to his people, but a resumé of erroneous popular beliefs. (XIX, pp. 226-242; XVII, pp. 58-59) A case in point is the division of creation into six periods. Voltaire pointed out that this notion was common to the Phoenicians, the Chaldeans, and the Indians all of whom were, according to Voltaire, more ancient than the Jews. (XIX, p. 230) Another important example concerns Adam: Voltaire never tired of telling us that the ancient Indians had a fable of the first man too, and that there are amazing resemblances between the Indian and the Hebrew accounts: "Le premier homme, chez les anciens brachmanes, prodigieusement antérieur aux Juifs, s'appelait Adimo, l'enfant de la terre, et sa femme, Procriti, la vie....Adam et Eve signifiaient ces mêmes choses dans la langue phénicienne: nouvelle preuve que l'Esprit saint se conformait aux idées reçues." (XIX, p. 232)

In its general lines the story of creation as recounted in Genesis conforms to ancient notions. Consequently, there is nothing particularly divine in the Jewish account. Viewed from a natural perspective, it is merely an example of one people borrowing certain myths from others.
As Frère Zapata laments, in order to accept Genesis as historical fact, one must admit that the divinity lapsed momentarily from perfection in order to become, among other things, a bad physicist, and an even worse geographer. The contradictions and impossibilities that there abound are incompatible with fact, scientific or geographical, and are therefore incompatible with divine perfection. How could God have created light before creating the sun? How could he have divided light from darkness since darkness is nothing but the absence of light? How could he have made the day before making the sun? (XXIV, p. 444; XXVI, pp. 174-175) These purportedly divine acts defy the very laws of nature which are reputed to be God-given! If the Garden of Eden was man's birthplace and actually existed, how are we to find it when the indications given in Genesis create a geographical muddle:

Que dirai-je du jardin d'Eden, dont il sortait un fleuve qui se divisait en quatre fleuves: le Tigre, l'Euphrate, le Phison, qu'on croit le Phase, le Gehon, qui coule dans le pays d'Ethiopie, et qui par conséquent ne peut être que le Nil, et dont la source est distante de mille lieues de la source de l'Euphrates? On me dira encore que Dieu est un mauvais géographe. (XXVI, p. 175; see also XIX, p. 230; XXVII, p. 301; XXX, p. 7)

How could Adam have fathered all mankind with all its races? (XVII, p. 59) How could God have contradicted himself in that he warned Adam that the punishment for eating of the tree of good and evil would be death; yet Adam lived on to more than 900 years? How indeed can a tree dispense knowledge? Finally, how can it be written that the serpent eats dirt while we know that no being subsists on a diet of dirt?

The notion of divinity does not admit imperfection or error. Yet, according to human faculties the divinely inspired account of crea-
in order to explain the world, the existence of good and evil, etc.
(XVII, pp. 58-59) As damaging as this may be to the Old Testament as
an historical yet divinely inspired document, Christians may never-
theless take comfort in the idea advanced by some rabbis that the
story of Adam and Eve may be considered allegorical. (XVII, p. 58)
This is not the case, however, with another important episode: the
universal flood. Here Voltaire combined the techniques outlined above
with yet another even more destructive method: the argument from ob-
scurity.

Like the creation and the story of Adam and Eve, the tale of Noah
and the deluge defies the laws of nature. Yet, here, the possibility
of evasion through allegory is precluded, for everyone accepted the
flood as historical fact. In his article "Déluge universel" Voltaire
asserted that there being no physical explanation possible, one can
only believe it on faith: "Nous commençons par déclarer que nous
croyons le déluge universel, parce qu'il est rapporté dans les Saintes
Ecritures hébraïques transmises aux Chrétiens." (XVII, p. 327) Or
again: "Contentons-nous de lire et de respecter tout ce qui est dans
la Bible sans en comprendre un mot." (p. 330) These declarations not-
withstanding, Voltaire proceeded to outline in great detail the physi-
cal impossibilities of the flood, not the least of which is the source
of enough water to cover the earth:

En ne donnant aux montagnes que vingt mille pieds
de hauteur, ce serait donc quarante océans de
cinq cents pieds de hauteur chacun qu'il serait
nécessaire d'établir les uns sur les autres, pour
égalier seulement la cime des hautes montagnes....
Pour former cette masse d'eau, il aurait fallu
la créer du néant, Pour la retirer, il aurait
fallu l'anéantir.

Donc l'événement du déluge est un double
miracle, et le plus grand qui ait jamais manifesté
Elsewhere Voltaire explained the rise in waters through "natural" means, as given in the text itself:

> Vous me demanderez où l'on avait pris l'eau pour l'élever sur toute la terre, quinze coudées au dessus des plus hautes montagnes? Le texte répond que cela fut pris dans les cataractes.... Ceux qui écrivaient cela n'étaient pas, comme vous voyez, grands physiciens. (XXIV, p. 445; XXX, p. 17)

However, the source of the flood itself is not the only problem related to the episode. There remains the question of Noah and his ark, equally accepted as historical fact. Though the notion of containing a pair of each type of animal life found on earth within the confines of a small boat and nourishing them for one year defies human understanding, a Rouen merchant had published an article proposing the means to re-enact such a feat. Noting this, Voltaire responded: "On voit bien que ce marchand n'avait jamais gouverné de basse-cour." (XVII, p. 328; see also XXIV, p. 445; XXX, p. 16)

If this were not enough to cast doubts on the Old Testament as a reliable document, Voltaire added fuel to the controversy, through the question of the date of the flood. Three contradictory dates are given: 1656 according to the Hebrew version, 2262 according to the Septante, and 2309 according to the Samaritan. (XXV, p. 436; XXVIII, p. 144, XXVII, p. 391, XI, p. 28) The simplest means of resolving the controversy would be to consult other versions of the story; yet, though the flood is purported to be universal, no people save the Jews recorded such an event. Indeed the name of Noah which should have been revered by all peoples as the saviour of the human race was unknown to antiquity. (XXX, p. 16; XVII, pp. 510-11)
As Voltaire chipped away at specific events recorded in the Pentateuch, he also attempted to undermine the historical integrity of the whole through an attack on Moses and his authorship of the five books. Voltaire was not the first to question the validity of the Pentateuch from the standpoint of its author. Newton, for one, maintained that Samuel and not Moses was the real author, while others advanced that Edras composed the books. Voltaire took advantage of this discrepancy to lend credence to his own attack:

Les fautes innombrables de géographie, de chronologie, et les contradictions qui se trouvent dans le Pentateuque, ont forcé plusieurs Juifs et plusieurs Chrétiens à soutenir que le Pentateuque ne pouvait être de Moïse. Le savant Leclerc, une foule de théologiens, et même notre grand Newton, ont embrassé cette opinion; elle est donc au moins très-vraisemblable. (XXVI, p. 200; see also XXVI, p. 347)

As indicated above, part of Voltaire's attack dealt with the contradictions and errors of the account; yet, he added still another important element— anachronisms. In the Sermon des cinquante he alluded to the problem in a general way:

Parcourons d'une manière sommaire des livres si faussement imputés à Moïse; je dis faussement, car il n'est pas possible que Moïse ait parlé de choses arrivées longtemps après lui, et nul de nous ne croirait que les Mémoires de Guillaume, prince d'Orange, fussent de sa main, si dans ces Mémoires il était parlé de faits arrivés après sa mort. (XXIV, p. 444; see also XXIII, p. 549)

Elsewhere Voltaire specified what some of these anachronisms might be: Moses mentions cities which were not in existence during his lifetime. Moreover, he prescribes rules of government for Jewish kings, though none existed at the time and the Jews held the notion of monarchy in
horror. (XX. p. 100) Moses alluded to the temple, speaking of the value of the "sicle du temple" though it was constructed five centuries after his death. (XXX, p. 87) According to Voltaire these anachronisms prove that the Pentateuch was written much later, perhaps at the time of the Babylonian captivity.

Other facts point to this conclusion. If we are to believe Voltaire, the Jews themselves had never heard of the Pentateuch until thirty six years before the captivity. Secondly, the Laws set down by Moses were apparently unknown to them. Solomon, for example, blatantly contradicted the Law by having sculpted figures erected in the temple. Furthermore, the Jewish prophets made no mention of the Pentateuch. Finally, linguistic studies point out that some books, attributed to Moses no doubt were written at the time of the captivity or still later by Esdras since the language used is Chaldean or Persian. Had the books actually been written by Moses at the time of the Exodus they would have been in Egyptian. (XX, pp. 96, 99)

There is yet another, purely practical reason why the books cannot have been written at the time ascribed to their composition. Since papyrus had not been invented yet, they necessarily would have had to be engraved on stone or wood. It is unlikely, contended Voltaire, that the Jews who had nothing and were sustained by God through a perpetual miracle, could have found clever enough men to engrave five full books on stone. (XX, p. 99; XXVI, p. 200) Supposing the possibility of the feat itself, there nonetheless remained the problem of conservation and transportation of such a mass. (XXVI, p. 200; XXVI, p. 174; XXVIII, pp. 175-176)

Moreover, the contradictions existing within and between the books
indicate that Moses could not have written all of them himself. Among these Voltaire's favorite is the following: "A-t-il pu dire qu'il écrivait au-delà du Jourdain quand il n'a jamais passé le Jourdain?" (XXVI, p. 174; XXVI, p. 200; see also XX, pp. 99-100)

As if these objections did not suffice to cast doubt on the authenticity and the authorship of the Pentateuch, Voltaire went still further by suggesting that Moses never existed. As in the case of the flood he deftly employed a combination of arguments of impossibility and obscurity to reduce Moses and his exploits to the level of dubious legend. Moses' entire existence was one enormous prodigy, declared Voltaire. From the time he was rescued in the bulrushes by Pharaoh's daughter (an unlikely event given the ubiquitous presence of crocodiles in the Nile) to the ten plagues and the division of the Red Sea, Moses was the beneficiary or the protagonist in a ceaseless series of miraculous events. (XX, p. 95; XXVIII, p. 178) Voltaire disputed these as he had disputed the creation and deluge, with the relentless eye of logic and reason. Nevertheless, if we accept for the sake of argument that Moses did exist and that his life was as extraordinary as the Bible leads us to believe, why did other peoples make no mention of him? Certainly the Egyptians who had suffered great hardships at his hands would have accorded him some place in their history?

Even Flavius Joseph, the great Jewish historian, was forced to admit that there was no evidence from the time of Moses which corroborated his existence and purported miracles. Only centuries later did historians make confused and contradictory mention of him, but as Voltaire concluded "Ce ne sont pas là des témoignages." (XXVIII, p. 179; XX, p. 95; XXV, p. 373) Indeed there are those who believe that Moses was
merely an imitation of a pre-existing mythological hero, Bacchus.

The attack on the Bible itself as an historical document was only a small part of the overall campaign against the Christian historical viewpoint. The Old Testament is, after all, the history of the Jewish people themselves, the source book for the claims to grandeur made on their behalf. As he derided the divinity and the historical worth of the book itself, Voltaire also attacked its main characters, the Jews.

As we have previously seen Voltaire was irked by the fact that the Jews and their history, as recorded in the Old Testament, never came under the scrutiny of reason: "Le champ du pyrrhonisme est ouvert pour tous les autres peuples mais il est fermé pour les Juifs....Ainsi, n'admettons nul doute sur l'histoire du peuple de Dieu; tout y est mystère et prophétie, parce que ce peuple est le précurseur des Chrétiens." (XXVII, p. 243; see also XIX, p. 355, 239.) In his examination of the Jews in history Voltaire ironically protested that he had no intention of disrupting the status quo, that he merely intended to consider the Jews as any other people on matters totally unrelated to the faith. He created a dichotomy between what is sacred and what may be studied:

Nous toucherons le moins que nous pourrons à ce qui est divin dans l'histoire des Juifs; ou si nous sommes forcés d'en parler, ce n'est qu'autant que leurs miracles ont un rapport essentiel à la suite des événements. Nous avons pour les prodiges continuels qui signalèrent tous les pas de cette nation le respect qu'on leur doit; nous les croyons avec la foi raisonnable qu'exige l'église substituée à la synagogue; nous ne les examinons pas; nous nous en tenons toujours à l'historique. Nous parlerons des Juifs comme nous parlerions des Scythes et des Grecs, en pesant les probabilités et en discutant les faits. (XI, p. 110)

There seems to be a conflict here. On the one hand Voltaire seemingly
admits that there is no examination possible; on the other he admits the possibility of scrutinizing parts of Jewish history through the eyes of reason. The conflict is more apparent than real, however, for Voltaire fundamentally did not believe that any part of Jewish history is exempt from scrutiny. The quotation cited above is a mere ploy to distract the censor. The fact is that Voltaire never considered the Jews as just another people. If he examined their history it was always in the light of our expectations of them.

The foremost claim on behalf of the Jews was obviously that of divine election. This predilection was supposedly characterized by the continued guidance of God over the centuries punctuated by direct intervention on their behalf in the form of miracles and revelations. One way that Voltaire attempted to deflate this claim was through the demonstration that from a purely pragmatic point of view God's favor was a poor bargain indeed for the Jews. God's selection is examined in terms of its practical results and shown to be at best useless, at worst nefarious. The manifest futility of divine election reduces the concept itself to the level of meaningless jargon.

God's relationship to the Jews in history, according to Voltaire, was a series of broken promises. They were to be the most populous, the most happy, the most triumphant of all peoples. They were promised a vast homeland that would remain theirs forever. None of this came to pass. Instead, Voltaire consistently characterized them as the most unfortunate people ever to inhabit the earth. Except for a very brief period they were continuously dominated, if not enslaved by foreign powers. If this constitutes divine favor, then indeed God works in mysterious ways.
A case in point is the entire question of the Promised Land. God had promised Abraham all the territory between the Nile and the Euphrates: "Hélas! mes amis, vous n'avez jamais eu ces rivages fertiles de l'Euphrate et du Nil. On s'est moqué de vous. Les maîtres du Nil et de l'Euphrate ont été tour à tour vos maîtres. Vous avez été presque toujours esclaves. Promettre et tenir sont deux choses, mes pauvres Juifs." (XIX, p. 511) The highly touted "promised land" eventually turned out to be a squalid 60 by 46 mile strip in the middle of nowhere. (XXIX, p. 502) Voltaire wondered why God decided on that particular homeland instead of giving Egypt to the Hebrews? (XIX, pp. 510-511) In effect, Egypt would have been the logical choice. The Hebrews were already there. Furthermore, according to the scriptures Egypt had been laid low by God's hand through the ten plagues. It was then ripe for the taking. Instead, the Jews were led on a tortuous forty year journey through the desert to the threshold of the land of milk and honey described above. Commenting on the trek through the Sinai Voltaire stated: "On peut bien persuader à un peuple heureux et victorieux que Dieu a combattu pour lui; mais il n'est pas dans la nature humaine qu'un peuple croie avoir vu cent miracles en sa faveur, quand tous ces prodiges n'aboutissent qu'à le faire périr dans un désert!" (XX, pp. 104-105; see also XXVI, p. 543; XI, p. 112; XX, p. 509)

Once having arrived, by a series of miraculous victories over the inhabitants, the Jews settled in Palestine. Voltaire showed that the miracles operated by God to assist the Hebrews in the conquest of their homeland were unnecessary, futile or both. Joshua's famous victory at Jericho is a good example.

Je ne recherche point pourquoi Josuah ou Josué,
capitaine des Juifs, faisant passer sa horde
de l'orient du Jourdain à l'occident, vers
Jéricho, a besoin que Dieu suspende le cours
de ce fleuve, qui n'a pas en cet endroit
quarante pieds de largeur, sur lequel il était
aisé de jeter un pont de planches, et encore
de passer à gué....Mais pour gratifier Josuah,
pour empêcher qu'il ne se mouille et pour en-
courager son peuple chéri qui sera bientôt
esclave, le Seigneur change les lois mathéma-
tiques du mouvement et la nature des fluides;
l'eau du Jourdain remonte vers sa source et la
sainte horde judaïque a le plaisir de passer le
ruisseau à pied sec. (XI, p. 116; XXV, p. 399)

In the long run all the miracles performed on behalf of the Jews during
their wars of conquest were rendered useless by the fact that, as Vol-
taire states above, God's people were soon to be enslaved or dominated
by a seemingly endless series of conquerors.

God favored the Jews in other strange ways as well. Though he re-
vealed a Law to them which was reputed to be the model for the world,
they were the sole people on earth to have the doctrine of immortality
of the soul and eternal rewards and punishments as its basis. This was
one of Voltaire's cardinal arguments against the Jews as the Chosen
people, for as he explained: "Si Dieu a laissé le peuple de l'Ancien
Testament dans l'ignorance de l'immortalité de l'âme, et des peines et
des récompenses après la mort, il a trompé son peuple chéri." Con-
versely, if all nations knew of the doctrine and the Jews did not, they
were "un peuple de brutes et d'insensés que Dieu ne conduisait pas."
(XXVI, pp. 396-97, 401)

God apparently reserved special consideration for the Jews in
matters of punishment as well, as the following example, one of Vol-
taire's favorites, amply demonstrates: The Philistines, guilty of
stealing the sacred ark were struck with an epidemic of hemorrhoids.
Repenting, they returned the ark to the Hebrews. En route, however, the inhabitants of a certain Jewish town desired to look upon the ark and were struck dead forthwith for this impertinence. (XVII, p. 568) Certainly, the two punishments were not in keeping with the seriousness of the offenses.

Voltaire's demonstration of God's failings toward the Jews had the net effect of reducing the concept of the chosen people to the level of a meaningless epithet. Moreover, the broken or half-fulfilled promises, the futile miracles, the ever-imminent threat of servitude directly affected the status that the Jews could legitimately expect to occupy on the world historical scene. Their squalid homeland and their ephemeral victories point not to a great society of central importance to the development of the universe, but to a miserable, misfortune-ridden people of minimal historical significance. Voltaire further cemented this impression by examining Jewish history from the standpoint of the men who made it, the Jews themselves.

Voltaire's plan of attack was devastatingly effective, but poses some serious problems to the reader. He simplistically reduced the entire Jewish historical experience to three related themes: chaos, subjugation, and obscurity. Though the names and dates changed, the overall situation remained unaltered. It is this static quality which becomes problematical, as we shall see.

Voltaire's first assault on the history of the Jews arose from a consideration of their origins. Voltaire insisted that the Jews originally consisted of a pack of brigands who were expelled from Egypt for thievery and who went on to pillage neighboring territories. This account was not exclusively Voltaire's, but represented a secular his-
torical tradition extending back to Tacitus, Diodorus and other ancient writers. Voltaire used this version of Jewish origins to separate the Jews from the sanctity surrounding them and to set the stage for a whole line of attack ultimately based on their seedy beginnings.

Voltaire's aim was most clearly portrayed in the Défense de mon oncle where he compared Diodorus' version to that found in the Bible. He demonstrated that the sole difference between the two accounts is precisely the aura of sanctity arbitrarily placed upon the Jews' actions in the Bible. Having established this fact, he argued for the rejection of the biblical version on the grounds of common sense and verisimilitude.

Comparing the two accounts, Voltaire established that they both occur within the same time frame. Secondly, he tried to show that the Bible does not deny that the Jews' cultural and religious state was not very advanced; consequently, Diodorus' claim that they were a barbaric horde is entirely in keeping with sacred tradition. Thirdly, by their own admission the Jews stole utensils and clothing from the Egyptians and did indeed invade and pillage Canaan upon leaving Egypt. Voltaire concluded that the only difference between the two accounts lies in the secular versus the divine interpretation of a common body of fact. The Jews (and their Christian successors) justify these apparent crimes by the fact that they were ordered and personally directed by God himself. According to Voltaire, this justification is without merit, however, since any thief could say as much. Moreover, a good intention does not justify the commission of a crime. Finally, if the biblical version is true and stamped with the seal of divine approval, why was it unknown to anyone else until the advent of the Christian era? As
with so many other momentous events, God permitted ignorance and falsehood to prevail over truth. (XXVI, pp. 424-428)

In divesting the description of Jewish origins of any seal of divine approval Voltaire did more than merely cast aspersions on the early Jews. He provided the basis for one of his primary contentions regarding the whole of Jewish history. The image of the early Hebrews as a roving band of brigands was crucial to the development of the theme of chaos as the primary fact of Jewish social life which effectively prevented them from ever establishing a society stable enough to amount to anything.

The impression of disarray as the Jewish lot is further heightened by Voltaire's treatment of Moses' leadership and the founding of the law. Seen from a purely practical point of view Moses was at best an ineffectual leader. The law which he provided to the Jews was both a reflection of their utter barbarism and a guarantee of future social upheaval.

Moses' first acts characterized him as inept. Having decimated the Egyptian forces by the plagues he failed to utilize this opportunity for an easy conquest and instead led his people through the desert for forty years thereby inflicting upon them great suffering and hardship. (XI, p. 112; XXVI, p. 203) Even if one admits for the sake of argument that the trek through the Sinai was not ill-advised, we find that it was totally devoid of organization and consisted in wandering in circles. Voltaire concluded from this that "Il serait difficile de le regarder comme un grand capitaine." (XI, p. 112)

Moses was deficient as a legislator as well, again demonstrating a surprising lack of common sense. In constructing the law which was
both religious and political in nature he apparently ignored the one most essential concept for preventing social havoc: the belief in the immortality of the soul and eternal punishments and rewards. Voltaire characterized this doctrine as the most necessary to man's social and political well-being. Furthermore, he pointed out that this concept so useful to a stable society was the legal foundation for all ancient civilizations, except the Jewish state:

On a objecté que si les Perses, les Arabes, les Syriens, les Indiens, les Égyptiens, les Grecs croyaient l'immortalité de l'âme, une vie à venir, des peines et des récompenses éternelles, les Hébreux pouvaient bien aussi les croire; que si tous les législateurs de l'antiquité ont établi de sages lois sur ce fondement, Moïse pouvait bien en user de même; que s'il ignorait des dogmes utiles, il n'était pas digne de conduire une nation; que s'il les savait et les cachait il en était encore plus indigné. (XI, p. 75; see also: XVIII, p. 545; XX, pp. 95-108; XX, p. 348; XXVIII, p. 16; XIX, p. 617, 522; XXVI, p. 205)

On another occasion he stated: "Mon seul but est de faire voir que tous les grands peuples civilisés, et même les petits ont reconnu un Dieu suprême de temps immémorial; que tous les grands peuples ont admis expressément la permanence de ce qu'on appelle âme, après la mort, excepté les Chinois." (XXVIII, p. 151) The conclusion is clear: the Jews neither qualified as a great nor truly civilized people. The fault lay with their legislator, Moses.

This fundamental flaw in the Jewish system was important not only as it affected the possibility of social stability with the Jewish state, but also affected their position in world civilization. It does much to dispel the Christians' contention of the Jews as the teachers of the world, the forerunners of civilization, the source of all the better principles found in other legal systems, as Bossuet had asserted.
It also perforates Pascal's affirmation that the Mosaic law was the most perfect in that it provided for everything. (XXII, pp. 34–35) Indeed the impression gained is that the law was deficient in itself and that the Jews were on the periphery of the civilized world.

Moses' defective leadership is evident in another important way: the whimsical and inequitable administration of justice. Voltaire's favorite example in this area was the massacre of the 23,000 worshippers of the golden calf. As with God's punishment of the Hebrews for gazing upon the sacred ark, there was an inappropriateness in the punishment. More importantly, however, there was something quite unsavory about it, since Aaron, Moses' brother, the actual instigator of the affair, not only went unpunished, but actually rose to glory over the bodies of those he led astray. Moses elevated Aaron to the rank of pontif. This one act seems prophetic, for in all subsequent Jewish history Voltaire showed the leaders to be ready to slaughter thousands on the slightest provocation. Later, the greatest Jewish kings owed their positions of authority, however short-lived they proved to be, to those they had murdered. Moses' tyranny set a dangerous precedent. Lest this seem an isolated incident in an otherwise glorious career Voltaire pointed to the slaughter of the Madianites as supporting evidence. Because one Jew indulged himself with a Madianite woman, all were killed. Yet Voltaire pointed out that Moses' own wife was a Madianite! (XI, p. 113) If the qualities of a good legislator are to make oneself loved and feared without undue severity Moses does not qualify.

Thus Voltaire succeeded in planting doubts in the reader's mind as to the historical importance of the Jews. The fact that they were originally thieves, prone to violence, that their basic law was defi-
cient and totally out of keeping with the rest of humanity, and that their first great leader and legislator was a bloodthirsty tyrant augured ill for the future. Thereafter, Voltaire had only to exploit and expand upon this rather sorry portrait.

If the example of Moses as a leader and the deficiencies of his law seem prophetic of internal upheaval, the situation is no more optimistic in the domain of foreign policy. The concept of the promised land insured that the Jews would not enjoy peaceful relations with the peoples they came in contact with. In purely human terms Voltaire denied the justification of the promised land comparing it to the invasion of the new world by the Europeans. (XXVI, p. 344) The doctrine insured that henceforth the Jews were to be in a constant state of war and that they necessarily had to emerge as masters or slaves. The essential fact of life of Hebrew foreign policy was war. Other nations were warlike and conducted campaigns of conquest. The Romans and the Greeks were not the most peaceloving of peoples. However, what separated the Hebrews from other nations was the net result of this policy of conquest. Whereas the Greeks and Romans succeeded in eventually establishing empires of some duration and historical significance, Voltaire consistently insisted that the Jews gained virtually nothing from their warlike ways. Their conquests were by and large ephemeral and were counterbalanced by long periods of subjugation. If they finally succeeded in establishing a homeland in Palestine, this homeland was, as we have seen, not very much in itself and the Jews never managed to construct a state stable enough to make something of it.

The fate of the Jews did not improve with the entry of Joshua into Canaan. As we have seen before, Voltaire insisted upon the barrenness
and the smallness of the country itself to deride the importance of
the people who eventually came to occupy it. A country 46 miles wide
by 60 miles long was a paltry prize indeed and certainly nothing to
pride oneself on: "Voilà donc ô Juifs! l'étendu du pays que vous
vous vantez de posséder, et dont vous faites vanité parmi les nations
qui ne vous connaissent pas. Allez étaler cet orgueil chimérique aux
ignorants..." (XXIX, p. 502) Again Voltaire pitted the worthlessness
of the country against the place the Jews supposedly occupied in his-
tory: "On me montre ensuite le code d'un petit peuple qui arrive, deux
mille ans après, d'un désert affreux sur les bords du Jourdain dans un
pays serré et hérissé de montagnes. Ses lois sont parvenues jusqu'à
nous: on nous les donne tous les jours comme le modèle de la sa-
gesse." (XIX, p. 617; see also: XIX, p. 510) If the entire country
was not worth very much, its subsequent conquest by Joshua and his
successors is denigrated as well. The most famous victory at Jericho
is reduced to the pillaging of a small village. (XXX, p. 124) Never-
theless, the paltriness of the prize notwithstanding the Jews are cast
in an unfavorable light in other ways as well. Voltaire constantly
sought to establish firmly in the reader's mind that the Jews were a
small people, that their history was one of neverending chaos, and
that they never rose above a rather primitive state. Voltaire was bent
on characterizing the Jews as barbarians. The terms "barbaric" or
"barbarian" evoke among other things the notion of the spread of wanton
destruction and the lack of a stable social order. This is precisely
the portrait Voltaire created of Jewish history from the time of the
Exodus to that of David.

As barbarians go, the Jews were not very successful. They lived
as vagabonds attacking all their neighbors, pillaging, ravaging, killing women and children, sometimes victors, sometimes vanquished, often slaves. (XXVIII, pp. 160-161) They are deemed barbaric, first, because their invasion of Canaan was unprovoked and totally without justification. As Voltaire said, a person claiming to invade and occupy Ireland on the pretext that he is a descendant of St. Patrick would hardly be welcomed. Thus the Jews' claim to the so-called promised land is shown to be fallacious, a mere pretext. (XXVI, p. 344) However, it was not solely the invasion itself which characterized the Jews as uncivilized thieves, it was their manner in dealing with the vanquished people and villages. There would be, after all, some redeeming grace if Joshua and his successors had endeavored to construct a new state. Instead, they spread destruction seemingly for its own sake. In one revealing passage, Voltaire ignores the biblical justification of the invasion of Canaan as the promised land in order to portray it as an example of wanton violence. Under Voltaire's pen, Joshua's sole purpose in crossing the Jordan was to burn and pillage. (XXV, p. 399) Juxtaposed as this assertion is in the text with the Jews' self-avowed thievery in Egypt, the conclusion is clear: there was yet to be any progress toward civilization among the Jews. Recalling the destruction of Jericho in which the walls collapsed at the sound of the trumpet, Voltaire added, "Les fables des Grecs étaient plus humains. Amphion bâtissait des villes au son de la flûte; Josué les détruit." (XXVI, p. 211) The utter gratuitousness of the destruction is further heightened by the fact that Josuah slaughtered animals which could have been of use to the Jews. (XI, p. 116)

Josuah was no improvement over Moses in the area of justice. He
continued Moses' pattern of inequity and inconsistency as he systematically killed off the Canaanite "patriots" who innocently attempted to defend their homeland while rewarding the traitor. The sole survivor of the holocaust at Jericho for example, was the prostitute Rahab who betrayed the city to the Hebrews. (XI, p. 216) Ironically, as Voltaire never ceased to point out, she was a direct ancestor of Jesus.

If the Jews were no more than a roving band of brigands at the time of Joshua, when they finally did settle down under the kings some centuries later their lot did not substantially improve. They acquired a capital, but the chaos that had characterized their early existence persisted. Voltaire characterized Jewish political history as anarchy. (XX, pp. 509-510) This anarchy actually increased as the Jews moved into a period of monarchy. After all, Moses and Joshua were not assassinated by their own people. On the contrary, Voltaire remarked time and again that of the Jewish kings few were neither "assassins ou assassinés". (XXVI, p. 216; XXVIII, pp. 190-191) It is this circle of assassination which Voltaire exploited to lead his reader to the conclusion that the Jews, for all their attempts at monarchy, remained the barbarians they were at the outset of their history.

Their greatest kings, David and Solomon, rose to their thrones over the bodies of their rivals. (XIX, p. 535) David, for example, began his career by gathering together several hundred thieves who terrorized the countryside in much the same mindless fashion as Joshua had centuries before. (XVIII, p. 317) To judge from Voltaire's account the single most important thing David did was taking up with Bathsheba and assassinating her husband. These three facets of David's career,
his brigandry, his adultery, and his murder are virtually the reader's sole guide to forming an opinion of him. Whatever greatness he may have ultimately attained is thus tainted, if not eliminated outright, by his seedy beginnings. (XXVI, p. 215)

Our impression of Solomon, whom Voltaire admitted to have been the greatest Jewish king, is poisoned in a similar fashion as Voltaire described his accession to the throne through the assassination of his brother. Voltaire commented: "Si Dieu accorda à Salomon le don de la sagesse, il paraît qu'il lui refusa ceux de l'humanité, de la justice, de la continence et de la foi." (XX, p. 383) Elsewhere, he used Solomon's succession to discredit Bossuet's Politique tirée de l'Écriture sainte: "Après cela, avouons qu'il est plus difficile qu'on ne pense de prendre des leçons du droit des gens et du gouvernement dans l'Écriture sainte, donné aux Juifs, et ensuite à nous, pour des intérêts plus sublimes." (XIX, pp. 284-285)

The anarchy which seems to have characterized the Jewish state contributes to a growing impression of the "petitesse" of the Jews in relation to more stable peoples. Voltaire supplemented this fundamental theme of instability with that of subjugation to complete his devastating portrait. Jewish history is seen to have been one of unmitigated woe, for when the Jews were not assassinating their leaders, or terrorizing their neighbors, they were enslaved or occupied, presumably by peoples far more powerful than they. The list of their captors or rulers is seemingly endless, a fact which Voltaire doted upon constantly. (XI, p. 110; XXIX, pp. 184-185; XXVIII, pp. 37, 40; XXVII, p. 350; XIX, pp. 516-517) That at least part of Voltaire's aim in insisting upon the utter chaos and subjugation of the Jews was to dispel any no-
tions planted by Bossuet is clear from the following passage:

Plaisante politique que celle d'un malheureux peuple qui fut sanguinaire sans être guerrier, usurier sans être commerçant, brigand sans pouvoir conserver ses rapines, presque toujours esclave et presque toujours révolté, vendu au marché par Titus et par Adrien comme on vend l'animal que les Juifs appelaient immonde, et qui était plus utile qu'eux. J'abandonne au déclamateur Bossuet la politique des roitelets de Juda et de Samarie, qui ne connurent que l'assassinat....Je suis las de cet absurde pédantisme qui consacre l'histoire d'un tel peuple à l'instruction de la jeunesse. (XXVII, p. 350)

Throughout his consideration of ancient Jewish history Voltaire exploited the notion that the Jews were incapable of establishing an effective and stable form of government. During periods of freedom they conducted themselves like bandits. More often than not they were hauled off into slavery by such peoples as the Persians, or occupied by those such as the Greeks and Romans. One gradually gains the impression that they were incapable of self-government. The implanting of this notion was precisely Voltaire's aim, as the final episodes of Jewish history prior to the dispersal in 70 A.D. indicate.

Under Roman domination, the Jews nevertheless managed to gain back a bit of freedom while Rome was preoccupied with wars in Asia Minor. The result was disastrous: "... mais à peine Jérusalem jouit-elle de quelque ombre de liberté, qu'elle fut déchirée par des guerres civiles qui la rendirent sous ses fantômes de rois, beaucoup plus à plaindre qu'elle ne l'avait jamais été dans une si longue suite de différents esclavages." (XIX, p. 517) The Romans, exasperated by the conduct of the Jews, then appointed Herod as king. Voltaire slyly emphasizes that the choice of Herod was made precisely because he was a foreigner: "pour mieux tenir ce peuple en bride." (XIX, p. 517) The implication
is clear: the Jews could not govern themselves without anarchy; only through foreign domination could one hope for stability. Moreover, Voltaire depicts Herod's reign favorably; he is presented as a man of reason, a builder who attempts to impose the order of law upon the unruly Jews. The Jews, on the other hand, as always, are depicted as foolish, stubborn anarchists who fanatically resist any progress:

Le peuple juif était si étrange, il vivait dans une telle anarchie, il était si adonné au brigandage avant le règne d'Hérode, qu'ils traitèrent ce prince de tyran lorsqu'il or-donna, par une loi très-modérée, qu'on ven-drait désormais hors du royaume ceux qui vole-raient dans les maisons après en avoir percé les murs; ils se plaignèrent qu'on leur était la plus chère de leurs libertés. (XXVIII, p. 192)

This anarchical outlook ultimately brought about destruction as their final revolt provoked the great dispersal in 70 A.D. (XIX, p. 518)

The passage cited above brings home the primary quality of Voltaire's attack on Jewish history: nothing seems to have changed from the time when the Jews roved the land as itinerant brigands. Throughout their history, whether ruled by various "pontifes", kings, or under foreign domination, they retained their "brigand outlook". Their lawless ways precluded the possibility of a stable government, engendered an almost constant state of war with neighbors or revolt against murderous monarchs, and finally caused the destruction of their feeble state and their dispersal to the four corners of the world. Given this carefully orchestrated panorama, it is hard to view them as worthy of occupying the center stage of world history, much less as models of political wisdom. Voltaire succeeded through his merciless attack in dethroning the Jews, but his methods give rise to serious problems for the modern reader.
The most apparently dangerous problem with Voltaire's approach is twofold: first, we have seen that the concept of history is static. The Jews never advanced beyond their initial, decidedly barbaric state. Their lawlessness, propensity to crime and violence, the deficiency of the leaders, etc. plagued them from the outset to the dispersal. Secondly, as we shall see in a later chapter, it was only their periods of domination or captivity which were fruitful from a cultural point of view. Within the political domain, it was only with the reign of a foreigner that some attempt was made at establishing a just and effective government. Reading page after page of this commentary the reader begins to gain a troubling impression of a sort of Jewish "character" which is deficient in itself and never changing. The everlasting sameness of Jewish history as it is depicted in Voltaire's remarks generates an impression of a national inferiority. It is a small step from creating a sort of "national" characteristic to racism. The question which must be answered eventually, then, is whether Voltaire intended to create this impression, whether this indeed was his opinion of all Jews. Are we dealing with a purely polemical technique utilized for purposes of deflating the notions of Bossuet? Before answering, let us turn to a consideration of another aspect of Voltaire's attack: the question of the Jews in world religion.
CHAPTER V

VOLTAIRE AND JUDAISM

Voltaire's assault on the Jews' religious experience is as bitter and troublesome as his scathing rendition of their political history. As was the case with history, his attack contains a number of overlapping facets which render his criticism complex and difficult to deal with.

On the one hand, Voltaire treated the Jewish religious experience as a corollary of what we have seen in the politico-historical domain: that is, as a cultural phenomenon reflective of Jewish society as a whole. As such it is yet another facet of the barbaric and primitive mentality we have met elsewhere. Far from being a divinely bestowed and intrinsically superior gift to an arbitrarily selected group, Judaism is seen as a development by a culturally deprived and superstitious people totally unworthy of reverence and imitation. In this view, Judaism is a human development and thus reflects the shortcomings of those who created it, that is the Jews themselves.

These vitriolic attacks on the Jews by Voltaire, however, did not have as their sole aim the denigration of the Jews for its own sake. As was his wont, Voltaire again was operating within the Christian context, systematically dashing to the ground claims of Jewish religious superiority and exclusivity. In so doing, he prepared the way for the ultimate denial of the legitimacy of the claim of Christian succession to the Jews as God's elect. His point was this: upon examination ancient Judaism does not fulfill the expectations placed upon it by Christians. Consequently, the perfection of Christianity based upon
claims to the superiority of Judaism is tainted. Secondly, fundamental dogmas said to be derived from the Old Testament do not exist there, but are mere fabrications after the fact to lend credence to the Christian cause. In this vein, Voltaire seemingly accepted Judaism as a viable religion in order to show how Christians distorted it to suit their own ends. Thus, there was both a negative and a "positive" use of the Jews depending upon Voltaire's polemical purposes of the moment.

Does this summary mean that we accept the time-honored notion prevalent among Voltairean partisans that Voltaire attacked the Jews solely to undermine Christianity. Again we reiterate our original position that a judgment cannot be rendered until all the evidence is in. Nevertheless, it would be absurd to say even at this point that the battle against Christianity was not of prime importance in Voltaire's mind as he attacked the Jews.

Christians have long been accustomed to viewing ancient Judaism as a theological light in the darkness of the pagan world. Against a sea of polytheistic cults, Judaism stood out as a divinely instituted monotheistic religion. What saved the Jews from the pitfalls surrounding them was divine revelation and selection which implanted in this people a notion of the divinity which far surpassed those of other societies. Left to their own devices these civilizations had invented a myriad of so-called deities which were mere incarnations of human aspirations and drives and were, as such, subject to foibles attributable to human imperfection. For the Jews, however, God had intervened revealing himself and his designs for human living. The Mosaic Law, embodying these revelations, was thus, until the advent of the Redeemer, the most perfect law on earth. As for the Jews themselves, their mission was to
follow and preserve this law until such time as Jesus would come to fulfill God's plan for redemption from original sin. In the Christian view, then, Judaism was unique, original, and divine. It was part of a plan which eventually culminated in Christianity. It is important to keep this summary in mind, for the major part of Voltaire's attack was a systematic deflation of this view.

The cornerstone of the Christian view of Jewish religious superiority lay in the concept of monotheism. The Jews alone revered a single deity, the true, eternal God, creator and master of the universe, in short, the same God that Christians professed to serve. This concept of the divinity was not divined by the Jews themselves, but was presented to them by God himself. Thus, at various points in Jewish history the Lord descended from on high to reveal himself and his will to his preselected people: "I am who am", he declared to Moses. Or again: "I am the Lord thy God; thou shalt not have false gods before me." Voltaire did not deny the existence of these notions, but pointed out that the books in which they are recorded were written centuries after the events supposedly took place. (XXVIII, pp. 165-166) Prior to the time of the Babylonian captivity and despite the supposed existence of Moses, the Lawgiver, the Jews were in a state of acute religious confusion.

Voltaire asserted that the ancient Jews, even after the time of Moses, were not devoid of polytheistic tendencies. He found evidence that in the desert, even after the incident of the golden calf, they worshipped Moloch and Remphan. (XXVII, p. 241) Indeed, this apparent defiance of Mosaic Law was sanctioned by Joshua, Moses' successor, and possibly by Moses himself! (XXV, p. 67) Voltaire quoted Joshua as say-
ing to the Hebrews: "Voyez qui vous devez servir, ou les dieux que vos pères ont adoré dans la Mésopotamie, ou bien les dieux des Amorrhéens, chez qui vous habitez." (XXV, p. 70; see also XXVII, p. 57)

Therefore, far from following a unique and superior religion once it had been revealed to them, the people of God seem to have taken up the beliefs of surrounding peoples with a remarkable degree of flexibility attesting to the lack of any clear ideas of their own. Voltaire was bent on removing the Jews from the pedestal upon which they had been placed by tradition and reinstating them to their "true" place in relation to other groups: "Il est démontré...que la religion des Juifs ne fut, du temps de leur vie errante et du temps de leurs rois, qu'un ramas confus et contradictoire des rites de leurs voisins....Tout est contradictoire; tout est inconscéquent chez eux, ainsi que dans presque toutes les nations. C'est la nature de l'homme; mais le peuple de Dieu l'emporte en cela sur tous les hommes (XVIII, pp. 165-166)

After Joshua's exhortation to the Hebrews, they chose to worship Adonai. Nevertheless, Adonai was conceived in terms totally in keeping with the notions of other primitive peoples. Voltaire theorized that originally the concept of a deity was that of a local protector, a god of distinctly limited powers and domain. Each people had its own protector, but recognized his limits and accepted the existence of other deities not their own. (XX, p. 350) The Jews were no different on this score, as two passages from Judges prove. Adonai's powers were clearly recognized as limited: "Adonai marcha avec Juda, et se rendit maître des montagnes; mais il ne put exterminer les habitants des vallées, parce qu'ils abondaient en chariots armés de faux" (XXVII, pp. 57-58) Furthermore, the Jews recognized as legitimate the exist-
ence of other local deities. Jephté speaking to the Ammonites declared: "'Ce que possède Chamos votre dieu ne vous appartient-il pas de droit? Laissez-nous donc posséder ce qu'Adnonaï notre dieu a obtenu par ses victoires.'" (XXVII, p. 58) As slender as this evidence may seem, Voltaire returned to these passages time and again. His purpose was not subtle. He intended to demolish the concept of the Jews as the chosen people of the one, true divinity. Speaking of Jephté's speech cited above he commented:

Voilà nettement deux dieux reconnus, deux dieux ennemis l'un de l'autre: c'est bien en vain que le trop simple Calmet veut...échapper une vérité si claire. Il en résulte qu'alors le petit peuple juif ainsi que toutes les grandes nations avaient leurs dieux particuliers; c'est ainsi que Mars combattait pour les Troyens, et Minerve pour les Grecs; c'est ainsi que, parmi nous, St. Denis est le protecteur de la France et que St. Georges l'a été de l'Angleterre. C'est que partout on a dés-honoré la Divinité. (XXVII, p. 58; see also: XXV, p. 73; XX, p. 351)

The passages cited above situate the Jews in the mainstream of ancient religious thought while denying them their traditional place as a uniquely monotheistic group. They further demonstrate how Voltaire's interest in the Jews' religious notions was motivated by a desire to disconcert the Christian mind. Yet, the last passage reveals a certain disgust for the Jews, the ancients and indeed with Christians for having demeaned the nature of God to suit their petty ambitions. According to Voltaire, then, neither the Jews nor anyone else had a concept of God in keeping with the true notion of divinity. That is to say, everyone created religious notions out of their own aspiration, fears, or ideals. While we normally accept this notion as being true of pagan deities, we expect the Hebrew divinity to be superior. After
all, it is he who revealed himself to man, not man who created him. Nevertheless, this was precisely Voltaire's point: like other peoples the Jews devised a God in their own image. Voltaire elaborated this point most effectively in La Bible enfin expliquée, his last and most systematic analysis on the Bible.

His aim, in part, was to show, as Spinoza had suggested, that the Jews had very ordinary ideas concerning the nature of God. We have already seen how Adonai, like other primitive deities, was considered to be a local God of limited powers. In La Bible enfin expliquée Voltaire repeated this notion and added to it the important element of anthropomorphism. God walked in the garden with Adam, descended to inspect the city of Babel, partook with his angels of a meal at Abraham's house. In all these things, Voltaire remarked that the Jewish God acted entirely like pagan deities. Again, echoing Spinoza, Voltaire declared that the "sacred author" conformed to common ideas of the time, speaking according to the primitive understanding of his audience. Thus, the Bible, in this aspect as in others, was made in the image of the Jews rather than in the true image of God. Voltaire further declared that it was Plato who first divorced the concept of God from man. It was he who first conceived of a purely spiritual deity. (XXX, p. 10)

It is evident that Christian apologists were extremely uncomfortable with the Jews' notion of a corporal deity which had nothing to do with contemporary Christian thought. Hence, they attempted to squirm out of these passages by dubbing them "allegory". Voltaire insisted, however, that they must be taken literally. He perceived the use of allegory as a convenient tool overused by Christian exegetes as an escape from difficult situations. Commenting on the so-called alle-
The logical interpretation of God's visit to Abraham, he stated:

Ceux qui ont dit que toute cette histoire n'était qu'allégorique ont été bien hardis. Ils ont prétendu que Dieu et les anges qui vinrent chez Abraham ne mangèrent point, mais firent semblant de manger. Or si cela était, on pourrait en dire autant de toute la Sainte Ecriture: rien ne serait arrivé de ce qu'on raconte; tout n'aurait été qu'en apparence; l'Ecriture serait un rêve perpétuel: ce qu'il n'est pas permis d'avancer. (XXX, p. 27)

What rendered the anthropomorphic nature of the God of the Old Testament critical was the particular aspects of human nature he was made to take on. These aspects, contended Voltaire, were an affront to the very notion of the almighty and further proof that the Jews had extremely barbaric notions of what could legitimately be deemed "god-like". In every way he performed as a petty despot, jealous, inconsistent, unjust, immoral, so constantly in need of asserting his power that his very assertions imply a sense of limitation, if not weakness:

Les incrédules ne peuvent souffrir que Dieu s'annonce comme puissant et jaloux. Ils disent que rien ne rabaisse l'Étre tout puissant comme de lui faire dire qu'il est puissant; et que c'est bien plus de lui faire dire qu'il est jaloux, que ce livre (Exode) ne parle jamais de Dieu que comme d'une divinité locale qui veut l'emporter sur les autres divinités, et qu'on nous le représente comme les dieux des Grecs, jaloux les uns des autres. (XXX, pp. 85-86)

What is particularly odious in the way God is presented, according to Voltaire, is his manner of dealing with humans. Ever the sadistic tyrant, he acted more like an evil genie than the lord of the universe. A case in point is the creation of Adam and Eve as thinking, reasoning beings and the subsequent injunction against eating of the tree of knowledge. When Adam and Eve followed their nature, they were punished for it. Voltaire bitterly declared that this passage is
blasphemous as it reduced God to an unheardof level of "mesquinerie".

(XXX, pp. 8, 18) Unfortunately, this was only the beginning. Capricious and unjust He rejected Cain's sacrifice in favor of Abel's without giving the slightest justification for the act, thereby placing Himself at the root of the first murder. Moreover, if Cain did indeed sin grievously in killing his brother, why did God then protect him?

Voltaire offered this response:

Il prend le coupable sous sa protection. Il déclare que quiconque vengerait le meurtre d'Abel sera puni sept fois plus que Cain ne l'aurait été. Il lui met un signe qui lui sert de sauvegarde. C'est, disent les impies, une fable aussi exécrable qu'absurde. C'est le délire de quelque malheureux Juif, qui écrivit ces infâmes inepties à l'imitation des contes que les peuples voisins prodiguaient dans la Syrie...La fatalité, qui dispose de tout, a fait parvenir ce malheureux livre jusqu'à nous: des fripons l'ont exalté, et des imbéciles l'ont cru. Ainsi parle une foule de théistes qui, en adorant Dieu, osent condamner le Dieu d'Israël, et qui jugent de la conduite de l'Eternel par les règles de notre morale imparfaite et de notre justice erronée. (XIX, p. 236)

The God of the Hebrews consistently tinkered with men's sentiments, wrought havoc and destruction seemingly for its own sake, and condoned mass murders. A prime example is that of the confrontation between Pharaoh and the Hebrews. The Lord willfully hardened Pharaoh's heart against the Hebrew cause and then punished him by taking Egypt's first-born sons. The killing of the infants was an unconscionable example of gratuitous cruelty since absolutely no good came of it. The Hebrews did not profit one wit from it, unless one considers forty years of wandering in the desert a reward. (XXX, pp. 77-78) One could multiply, as indeed Voltaire did, examples of inconsistency, sadism, protection of wrongdoers, etc. ad infinitum. Voltaire con-
cluded that "l'histoire des Juifs est d'un bout à l'autre un blasphème continué contre l'Étre suprême....On ose avancer que Dieu, dans tout le Pentateuque ne commande pas une seule action juste et raisonnable. Oui, je défie qu'on m'en montre une seule...et on ose le supposer écrit par Dieu même! O comble de la démence et de l'horreur!" (XXVIII, p. 19)

Voltaire's point is clear. The horrors described as divine conduct were the products of a human mind. It is evident that Voltaire was attacking the divinity of the Scriptures, that he was undermining the fundamental bases of Christianity. Nevertheless, his attack was at least indirectly a condemnation of the Jews themselves since it was they who composed the books. Indeed, God's conduct was entirely in keeping with that of the Hebrews as described in previous chapters. If all ancient peoples created gods in their own image, it is logical that the Jews created theirs in like fashion. Since the Hebrews were little more than a band of roving barbarians it is not surprising that the divinity they devised exemplified the horrors to which they were prone. Such was Voltaire's conclusion.

God purportedly created laws for his people. As we have seen previously, these laws were reputed among Christians to be good and wise in themselves, the model for the rest of the ancient world, and of course ultimately the source of Christianity itself. Once again operating from the standpoint of reason and human morality, Voltaire proved that these laws and the rites derived from them were deficient in themselves, in some ways unjust, in many instances derived from those of other peoples, and in any case reflective of the barbarity, ignorance and superstition of the Jews themselves.
The fundamental deficiency in Jewish law was the absence of the doctrine of immortality of the soul and eternal rewards and punishments. Voltaire's references to this lacuna in the Mosaic law were legion and indeed it formed the criterion against which all the rest was examined. We have already seen how Voltaire determined that the lack of this law was a fundamental flaw in the foundation of Jewish society. Here, let us consider it in its religious aspects. As it relates to the concept of God it reveals again a basic injustice, for in lieu of the threat of eternal punishments as a consequence of wrongdoing, Jehovah instituted the threat of terrestrial punishments to the third and fourth generations. Voltaire found the punishment of innocent generations for the crimes of distant ancestors odious. (XXX, p. 86) On the other hand, lest it seem that God ignored wrongdoers in favor of punishing their children Voltaire pointed out that a person gathering wood on the Sabbath was to be promptly stoned. Nevertheless, rather than revealing justice on God's part, this dictum demonstrates a lack of proportion between the crime and the punishment, a further proof of the inconsistency of the Hebrew God:

S'il était permis de juger des lois du Seigneur par les lois de nos peuples policiés, on trouverait peut-être un peu de dureté à faire périr un homme pour avoir ramassé un peu de bois dont il avait probablement besoin pour faire bouillir le lait de ses enfants, ou pour préparer le dîner de sa famille; il n'est pas dit que cet homme ramassa un fagot en dérision de la loi. Ce n'est pas à nous à interroger Dieu, et à lui demander pourquoi il fait Aaron grand pontife immédiatement après qu'il a jeté le veau d'or en fonte, et qu'il l'a fait adorer; et pourquoi il condamne à mort un homme qui n'a commis d'autre crime que de ramasser un petit fagot pour son usage. Dieu fait miséricorde à qui il lui plaît. (XXX, p. 86)

The Jewish law therefore ignored the fundamental law admitted by all
peoples in favor of precepts which defy reasonable notions of justice. It is a sorry reflection on the divinity.

Still considering the notion of crime and punishment, Jehovah's directives concerning the treatment of heretics and "false prophets" bear examination here. Aaron's case notwithstanding the God of Israel condemned to death all those who would lead his people astray. Voltaire perceived that this dictum is most dangerous, for it encourages intolerance and persecution, not only among the ancient Hebrews but among their zealous Christian descendants. Quoting the condemnation of false prophets Voltaire remarked:

Le premier président de Harlai, sachant qu'on avait abusé de ce passage de l'écriture, et de quelques autres passages pareils, pour faire assassiner Henri III...écrivit: 'Il serait expédient de ne laisser lire aux jeunes prêtres aucun des livres de l'Ancien Testament, dans lesquels pourraient se rencontrer semblables instigations qui ont induit maints esprits faibles et méchants au parricide et au régicide.' (XXX, p. 117)

This "instigation" to fanaticism is bad enough, but the Hebrew god demanded still more: "Si vous apprenez que dans une de vos villes des gens méchants ont dit: Allons, servons des dieux à vous inconnus, vous passerez aussitôt au fil de l'épée tous les habitants de cette ville, et vous la détruirez avec tout de qu'elle possède, jusqu'aux bêtes." (XXX, p. 117) Voltaire placed his reply in Lord Bolingbroke's mouth: "C'est le comble...de la barbarie et démence....Ce serait un peuple coupable de cette exécrable cruauté qu'il faudrait détruire, comme nous avons détruit les loups en Angleterre." (XXX, pp. 117-118)

While it is true that Voltaire's exposé of the Mosaic Law was a
often cited by Voltaire are the 32 Madianite women "reserved for God" and king Agag cut to pieces by Samuel. (XXIX, pp. 530, 534) Though Voltaire consistently stood by these episodes as clear indications of the existence of human sacrifice among the ancient Hebrews, there are other points upon which he vacillated as suited his purpose of the moment.

At times Voltaire interpreted all the massacres perpetrated by the Jews in the winning of the Promised Land as clear instances of human sacrifice since they were executed at God's direction. (XI, pp. 104-106) While he condemned the Israelites as a "peuple abominable", it is clear that it was the chosen people who were the object of his wrath. Moreover, he sought to link ancient bloodbaths with those of modern times. First there was the matter of the crusades: "Nos chrétiens, il le faut avouer, n'ont que trop imité ces anathèmes barbares tant recommandés chez les Juifs: C'est de ce fanatisme que sortirent les croisades qui dépeuplèrent l'Europe." Other proofs of imitation are the Inquisition, the St. Barthelemy day massacre, and in his own time, the recent holocaust in Ireland. (XXVII, pp. 63, 64; see also XI, p. 105)

Elsewhere, however, Voltaire did an about-face. In one significant passage he purposely downplayed the element of human sacrifice among the Jews in order to highlight Christian cruelty which then appeared as an odious aberration of western cultural and religious tradition:

Les sacrifices humains ont été établis chez presque tous les peuples, mais très-rarement mis en usage. Nous n'avons que la fille de Jephté et le roi Agag d'immolés chez les Juifs, car Isaac et Jonathas ne le furent pas. L'histoire d'Iphigénie n'est pas bien avérée chez les Grecs. Les sacrifices humains sont très-rares chez les anciens Romains; en un mot, la religion païenne a fait répandre très-peu de sang, et la nôtre en a couvert la terre. La nôtre est sans
stunning indictment of the Hebrew god, it is equally true that it was a vicious attack on Hebrew society itself. Voltaire was indeed conscious of the cultural implications of what he wrote. As he stated at one point: the laws of a people are an accurate reflection of the "moeurs" of this people. (XIX, p. 618) He sought to prove the truth of this statement with a vengeance. Under his pen the Jews became the epitome of everything cruel, immoral, and ridiculous. Yet, his condemnation of the Jews' failings fairly dripped with anti-Christian irony: 
"...tant qu'il y eut des Juifs, leur histoire fut l'histoire des cannibales....D'ailleurs la loi juive ne nous importe point; nous sommes chrétiens et non pas juifs." (XXX, p. 118)

If there was one element of Jewish law which Voltaire delighted in criticizing it was what he perceived as a clear directive found in Leviticus for human sacrifice: "'Ce qui sera voué au Seigneur ne sera point racheté, mais mourra de mort'". (XXIX, p. 532) Though it is apparent that part of Voltaire's glee in pointing out examples of this abomination stemmed from a desire to denigrate Jewish civilization, more often than not it is clear that he was directing his remarks to Christians. Time and again he alluded to Christian attempts to deny the existence of human sacrifice among the Jews, always declaring that the evidence is clear and undeniable. His favorite example was that of Jephtah's daughter. Christians maintained that she was not killed as a fulfillment of her father's vow to sacrifice whatever he saw first, but merely was "devoted" to the Lord as a sort of "vestal virgin". This interpretation, declared Voltaire, is simply not in accordance with the facts. The text states clearly that Jephtah did as he had vowed. What had he vowed? Death, replied Voltaire. (XXIX, p. 533) Other examples
Closely related to human sacrifice in Voltaire's repertoire of allegations against Judaism was the existence of anthropophagy among the ancient Israelites. The shock value of this charge is unequaled by anything else Voltaire could have invented, for the horror produced by the contemplation of countless massacres perpetrated by the Jews at God's behest pales in comparison with a tableau of Hebrews relishing human flesh. Nothing could be more repugnant to the civilized mind.

Yet to add insult to injury, Voltaire linked the existence of cannibalism to the moral character of the Hebrew people itself. Far from being a detestable perversion, Voltaire portrayed it, at least at times, as the incarnation of Jewish values: "...si cette habitude répugne un peu à nos moeurs efféminés, elle était très conforme à la vertu mâle et héroïque de l'illustre peuple juif." (XXIV, p. 236) As in the case of human sacrifice Voltaire vacillated on the extent of this practice among the Hebrews. Nevertheless, frequently he insisted that it was the rule and not the exception and that the Hebrews had an actual liking for human flesh. Despite his oft repeated blusterings to the contrary, Voltaire was on shaky scriptural ground here and knew it. When pressed by Guénéé who was perhaps Voltaire's most talented and articulate antagonist, he was forced to give way, and for once, rather clumsily:

Vous raisonnez, je crois, un peu légèrement quand vous dites que la menace faite par Moïse aux Juifs qu'ils mangeraient leurs enfants n'est pas une preuve que cela arriverait, et qu'on ne pouvait les menacer que d'une chose qu'ils détestaient. Dites-moi, je vous prie; de ce que César menaça nos pères, les magistrats de la ville de Vannes, de les faire pendre, en conclurez-vous qu'ils ne...
furent pas pendus, sous prétexte qu'ils
n'aimaient pas à l'Être? On ne vous a point
dit que les mères juives mangeaient souvent
leurs enfants de gaité de cœur; on vous a
dit qu'elles en ont mangé quelquefois: la
chose est avérée. (XXIX, p. 531)

Voltaire's logic here is blatantly fallacious. Moreover, he had at
various points stated or implied that cannibalism was both habitual and
accepted among the ancient Israelites.

Nor was this the end of it. Guénaëe and the Jewish community he
presumably represented took particular offense at this charge, perceiv-
ing perhaps in it a direct affront to modern Jewry, so often accused of
sacrificing and eating Christian children. When confronted, Voltaire
responded with a mixture of defiance and retreat: he pointed out that
almost all peoples have partaken of human flesh, notably the Gascons
and the Basques. He concluded by saying that if he didn't upset him-
self over what his ancestors may have done, why should the Jews? It is,
after all, ancient history. (XXIX, pp. 530-531) The argument is spe-
cious since it was not Voltaire's ancestry which was under attack, not
his people who suffered persecution daily for such horrendous calom-
nies. Be that as it may, Voltaire nonetheless seemed to be making an
attempt to assure Guénaëe and his allies that it was not the modern Jews
who were the object of his attack. How sincere he was on this score
remains to be seen, but whatever his motives, it is evident that Vol-
taire was aware of the disturbance his line of attack provoked and took
some steps to counteract it.

As nefarious as the charge of anthropophagy may have seemed to
Voltaire's contemporaries, it is not the only disturbing aspect of his
attack on Judaism. He employed, if sparingly, the time-honored canard
of usury being part and parcel of Mosaic Law. Unlike his charges of human sacrifice and cannibalism which abound throughout his work, his interest in usury seems to have been minimal. When he did mention it, it was either in passing or was couched among other ideas which were of greater consistent interest to Voltaire. Thus, for example, he juxtaposed it with the lack of the doctrine of immortality of the soul. It is clear that this deficiency was the true object of his attack:

Il [Moses] menace surtout les Juifs d'être obligés d'emprunter des étrangers à usure, et qu'ils seront assez malheureux pour ne point prêter à usure. Il leur recommande plusieurs fois d'exterminer, de massacrer toutes les nations que Dieu leur aura livrées, de n'épargner ni la vieillesse, ni l'enfance, ni le sexe; mais pour l'immortalité de l'âme, il n'en parle jamais, il ne la suppose même jamais. (XXVIII, p. 169)

Far more disturbing than Voltaire's occasional mention of usury is his persistent harping on the theme of the Jews as "the enemies of the human race" which he viewed as a direct consequence of certain aspects of the Law. His allegations in this domain revolved around a basic notion of exclusivity which Voltaire perceived as intrinsic in the concept of a chosen people and which he found odious. For Voltaire, the corollaries of this principle were the notion of a promised land and the concept of the Jews as the instruments of God's vengeance. Operating under these "delusions" the ancient Hebrews set about massacring the unfavored peoples who surrounded them:

Ils devaient regarder tous leurs voisins comme leurs ennemis, puisqu'on leur avait promis qu'ils domineraient d'une mer à l'autre, et depuis les bords du Nil jusqu'à ceux de l'Euphrate. Cette étendue de terrain leur aurait composé un empire immense. Leur loi, qui leur promettait cet empire, les rendait donc nécessairement ennemis de tous les peuples qui habitaient depuis l'Euphrate
It was within the context of what Voltaire deemed their fanatical conduct toward their neighbors stemming from their delusions of divine selection that Voltaire normally condemned the Jews. Unfortunately, this was not always the case.

In another passage it is not so clear that it was solely the early Jews which Voltaire was criticizing. In the Lettres de Memmius à Ciceron, Voltaire assumed the role of the latter and condemned Jewish fanaticism. Echoing what he had so often said of the Hebrews in the historical domain, he stated that they had always been troublemakers and though while in Rome they tended peacefully to their business, left to their own devices in their own homeland they were insufferable: "Ils sont les plus insolents de tous les hommes, détestés de leurs voisins, les détestant tous, toujours ou voleurs ou volés, ou brigands ou esclaves, assassins ou assassinés." (XXVIII, p. 439) Their fanatical superstitions led them to revolt, he continued, and he was glad Pompey destroyed the temple and Scipio hanged their king. He concluded: "Tous les peuples ont commis des crimes; les Juifs sont les seuls qui s'en soient vantées. Ils sont nés avec la rage du fanatisme dans le coeur, comme les Bretons et les Germains naissent avec les cheveux blonds. Je ne serais point étonné que cette nation ne fût un jour funeste au genre humain." (440) This passage can be interpreted as racist, especially if quoted out of context, as Arthur Hertzberg, for one, has seen fit to do. Within its context it is disturbing yet ambiguous. First, in context it is closely linked with fanaticism born
of superstition. It is furthermore related to the conduct of the ancient Jews and to the revolts of their descendants against the Romans, presumably for religious reasons. Thirdly, it is, after all, Cicero who is speaking within the specific context of his own time. Can one legitimately conclude that because Cicero in general represents Voltaire's notions he represents Voltaire's definitive opinion on all Jews, particularly those of the 18th century? Perhaps, but it would be necessary to prove that the attitude expressed here was Voltaire's consistent opinion and not an outrageous hyperbole emitted in the heat of controversy.

It is a question which must be answered and which can only be answered through an overall examination of what Voltaire himself, devoid of any role-playing, had to say about the Jews of his own time. In any case, it is interesting that in another passage in which Voltaire discussed Jewish revolts against the Romans he was more than sympathetic to their cause: "Ils combattaient contre la tyrannie avec autant de courage qu'ils en parlaient. Les plus horribles supplices ne pouvaient leur arracher un mot de déférence pour les Romains, leurs vainqueurs et leurs maîtres; leur religion était d'être libres." (XXXI, p. 53) Whatever the merits of the last passage, it is obvious that its very existence dictates that we look further into this whole question.

To return to our first point: most often it was the concept of the chosen people and the promise of a territory to be won by bloodshed that earned the ancient Jews the title of "enemies of the human race". The concept of the chosen people smacked of a sense of exclusivity and superiority which invited fanaticism. Other aspects of the
Mosaic code, while not fatal to non-Jews, nevertheless pointed to this inordinate sense of superiority which rendered the Jews alien to the rest of mankind. These were the dietary laws. Voltaire usually used these directives as a reflection of the absurd ignorance of the Jews themselves and as proof that the Mosaic code could not possibly have been the work of the creator. Voltaire found ridiculous the distinction between pure and impure meats. The injunction against eating pork was reasonable in a warm climate, he conceded, but the prohibition against eating griffons and animals which ruminate, such as the hare, were not only ludicrous but revealed a total ignorance of the biological world. (XI, 220; see also XXIV, 305-306; XIX, 522, 617) More seriously, the Jews' preoccupation with the purity of food and the endless rites prescribed for its preparation set them apart from the rest of the world. Voltaire clearly resented what he perceived as scorn for other peoples and their food: In the Défense de mon oncle, he set about proving that the Jews hated all nations. He first cited the massacres of neighboring peoples, supposedly at God's command. Then he turned to the dietary laws: "Un Juif était souillé, et le serait encore aujourd'hui, s'il avait tâché d'un mouton tué par un étranger, s'il s'était servi d'une marmite étrangère. Il est constant que leur loi les rendait nécessairement les ennemis du genre humain." (XXVI, p. 395) Voltaire was incensed because God supposedly created all men. If that is true then the Jews were guilty of deliberately setting themselves apart from their fellow-men.

Many of the criticisms Voltaire leveled against the Mosaic Law were couched in terms of the Law's greatest single deficiency: the lack of the doctrine of immortality of the soul. A prime example of
this technique is his criticism of the Jews' ritualistic obsession with bodily functions. It is an example of "God proportioning himself" to his people and as such an indictment of their state of culture. At the same time, it is a direct blow against the divinity of the law and the election of the Jews as God's messengers to mankind. On one occasion he wrote: "Tout ce que nous pouvons dire, c'est que le peuple juif était si grossier, et que de nos jours même la popu-
lace de cette nation est si malpropre et si puante que ses législateurs furent obligés de descendre dans les plus petits et les plus vils dé-
tails. (XXX, p. 119) There is no doubt that this was a low blow. He went on, however, to describe the laws regarding bodily functions and had Collins, the English deist, comment:

L'ordre que le Seigneur lui-même donne sur la manière de faire ses nécessités a paru indigné de la majesté divine au célèbre Collins; et il s'est emporté jusqu'à dire que Dieu avait plus de soin du derrière des Israélites que de leurs âmes; que ces mots immortalité de l'âme ne se trouvaient dans aucun endroit de l'Ancien Testament; et qu'il est bien bas de s'attacher à la manière dont on doit aller à la garde robe.
(XXX, p. 119)

This paradox is a constant throughout Voltaire's remarks on the Mosaic Law. It forms the thread that unifies his criticism. It is this defi-
ciency in the Law which proves that God was not the author of the Law nor the Jews truly his chosen people. If God indeed gave laws to the Jews, this slovenly band of brigands, how could he have neglected to restrain their thievery by insisting upon the belief in immortality and eternal punishments and rewards? Other less favored peoples be-
lieved in it. The customary answer to such objections is pure blas-
phemy: God proportioned himself to a gross people of thieves. (XXVI,
Since such "benighted" peoples as the Egyptians, the Greeks, and the Romans, using only their natural powers of reason, had perceived the doctrine, the Jews, using their powers, could have supposed it too. Indeed, they had only to follow the example of their neighbors. It is absurd to say that God denied to his chosen people a doctrine so obvious that other peoples had discovered it by their own reason. Instead of bestowing upon them this doctrine so essential to the spiritual well-being of mankind and social order, he heaped upon them countless laws reflecting a cruelty, an ignorance and a degree of superstition incompatible with any reasonable notion of divine perfection! This is what Christians must accept if they accept the Old Testament as God's word.

The absence of the dogma of immortality of the soul formed the cornerstone of Voltaire's attack against Judaism. It proved the barbarity of this people and removed them once again from the mainstream of civilization. As Voltaire stated: all civilized peoples have known this doctrine. (XXVIII, p. 151) Conversely, "Aucune nation sauvage ne connut l'existence de l'âme". (XXXI, pp. 45-46) More importantly, this fundamental deficiency formed the base for Voltaire's attack against Christianity as derived from Judaism.

Voltaire used the Christians' own arguments to disprove the truth of Judaism. Bishop Warburton was an important source for Voltaire's arguments since he added an element of "respectibility" to Voltaire's oft repeated assertion that the Jews never knew immortality of the soul. Warburton admitted this deficiency among the Jews, but for another purpose. He contended that any nation not possessing this dogma must necessarily be sustained by divine providence. Voltaire seized upon War-
burton's admission and juxtaposed it with remarks made by other theologians which tended to strip Judaism of its claim to divinity and truth:

Toute religion qui n'est pas fondée sur le dogme de l'immortalité de l'âme, et sur les peines et les récompenses éternelles est nécessairement fausse: or le judaïsme ne connut point ces dogmes; donc le judaïsme, loin d'être soutenue par la Providence, était, par vos principes, une religion fausse et barbare qui attaquait la Providence. (XX, p. 348-349)

Voltaire made his true aim even more clear in yet another work, La Défense de mon oncle: "Si Dieu a laissé le peuple de l'Ancien Testament dans l'ignorance de l'immortalité de l'âme, et des peines et des récompenses après la mort, il a trompé son peuple chéri; la religion juive est donc fausse; la chrétienne, fondée sur la juive, ne s'appuie donc que sur un tronc pourri." (XXVI, pp. 396-397) Voltaire realized that he had struck upon the weakness which was the Achilles heel of Christianity. Hence he worked and reworked this argument constantly until it became a gaping wound. He seized upon various churchmen's attempts by means of allegorical or symbolical interpretations to find bases for this doctrine in the Old Testament. Voltaire characterized these efforts as desperate and pathetic twistings of passages that are abundantly and literally clear. As always, he restricted himself to a few well chosen examples, repeating them with a frequency which becomes mesmerizing.

First he cited the passage where Jacob, upon learning of the death of his son laments: "Je n'ai plus qu'à mourir; on me mettra dans le fosse avec mon fils." According to Calmet, "fosse" is equivalent to hell and thus a proof of the existence of the concept of immortality
among the Jews. Voltaire merely scoffed: a "fosse" is only a "fosse" after all. Similarly, Christian exegetes consistently maintained that Job held the doctrine of immortality. Voltaire replied that not only was this false, but that in any event Job was not a Jew but an Arab. (XXVIII, p. 170; see also: XXV, 8-11; XXVI, 199-200; XXVIII, 542; XXXI, 47)

We see Voltaire's line of attack developing. He first showed that Judaism was an abomination in itself and certainly not divinely inspired. Simultaneously, he showed that in any case, crucial dogmas of Christianity could not have derived from Judaism.

The ultimate foundations of Christianity lie not only in the doctrine of immortality of the soul, but also in the notion of original sin. Yet, according to Voltaire the Jews never interpreted Adam's fall from grace as the sin for which only the Messiah, Jesus, could atone. Voltaire stated categorically in the A,B,C that the Jews never heard of original sin. The development of this dogma is merely another example of Christian tinkering with the Old Testament to suit their own ends:

Cette sacrilège interprétation est d’autant plus inexcusable chez les Chrétiens qu’il n’y a pas un seul mot touchant cette invention du péché originel ni dans le Pentateuque, ni dans les Prophètes, ni dans les Evangiles...ni dans aucun des écrivains qu’on appelle les premiers Pères de l’Eglise. (XXVII, p. 337)

Adam's fall and punishment were never part of Jewish law. Indeed, the Jews regarded the first chapters of Genesis as pure allegory: "En un mot, les Juifs ne connurent pas plus le péché originel que les cérémonies chinoises, et quoique les théologiens trouvent tout ce qu’ils veulent dans l’Écriture...on peut assurer qu’un théologien raisonnable n’y trouvera jamais ce mystère surprenant." According to Voltaire,
this doctrine was only invented by St. Augustine. (XX, p. 152)

Yet another area which Voltaire endeavored to sabotage as legitimate bases for Christianity was the prophecies. The process used was essentially similar to that employed in the overall attack on Judaism: first, to reduce the credibility of the prophecies themselves; second, to show that they in no way related to Jesus and the eventual establishment of Christianity.

Voltaire's first argument runs parallel to his attack on Judaism as a whole. Earlier in this chapter we showed how he proved that far from being a unique, exclusive and intrinsically superior religious phenomenon Judaism was in many ways comparable to the experience of all primitive peoples. Here again Voltaire continued this tactic by denying that prophecy was the unique prerogative of the Jews. In the *Philosophie de l'histoire*, he affirmed that all nations have had prophets and prophecies. (XI, p. 89) If this be the case, how are we to judge if the Jewish prophecies are any more meritorious than those of other peoples? Like those of other societies, Jewish prophecies served the function of giving people what they wanted to hear: predictions of victories and eventual domination of neighboring peoples. One way of establishing the credibility of the prophecies would be to determine the credibility of those who made them. The character of the prophets is then of prime importance.

Voltaire took a dim view of all prophets. "Le premier prophète fut le premier fripon qui rencontra un imbécile." (XXVI, 217) He found evidence to show that Jewish prophets were no better than this definition implies. Rather than being mystical men of god, Voltaire painted them as ambitious, petty men consumed with pride and given to
sordid squabblings among themselves. (XXVI, p. 348) Elisée, successor of Elias, had a group of small boys devoured by bears simply for making fun of his baldness. (XXX, p. 227) Moreover, they seemed to jockey for political position as they mutually accused each other of falsehood: "Quelle plus grande preuve encore de la fausseté de ces prétendues prédictions que les reproches violentes que ces prophètes se faisaient les uns aux autres, de ce qu'ils parlaient faussement au nom de Dieu, reproches même qu'ils se faisaient, disaient-ils, de la part de Dieu?" (XXIV, p. 324)

The actions of the prophets thus do much to undermine the credibility of their predictions. Yet, it is the nature of many prophecies which casts doubt on the whole. Voltaire showed that many were trivial, ridiculous, scatological, or immoral. Furthermore, the conduct of the prophets supposedly acting on God's orders is an affront to the divinity and yet another proof of the barbarity of those who elevated these scabrous deliria to the level of divine revelation!

In his efforts to undermine the sanctity of the prophets and their pronouncements, Voltaire demonstrated a particular fascination with Ezechial. Whatever else this prophet may have said or done as God's emissary, Voltaire would have us judge the whole on the basis of a few episodes repeated ad infinitum. Thus God commanded Ezechial to sleep for 390 days on one side and 40 on the other, to eat parchment, to allow himself to be bound as a crazy man, or finally to partake of animal feces! The latter often referred to as Ezechial's "tartine", judging from the frequency with which Voltaire alluded to it, was the prophet's crowning glory. After thus summarizing Ezechial's career Voltaire asked his readers: Were these God's orders? (XXIV, p.324)
Faced with these embarrassing episodes churchmen, such as Guénée, attempted in vain to mitigate the negative impact declaring that these were but dreams and not of any import. Voltaire maliciously closed this avenue of escape by citing Calmet's "proof" in favor of a literal interpretation of at least one of Ezechial's exploits: It is indeed possible to sleep for 390 days on the left side. After all, there is a case on record of a madman who remained thus for 15 years. (XXIX, pp. 541-542)

In a more serious vein Voltaire criticized Ezechial and others on moral grounds.

Les passages les plus essentiels d'Ezéchiel, les plus conformes à la morale, à l'honnêteté publique, les plus capables d'inspirer la pudeur aux jeunes garçons et aux jeunes filles, sont ceux où le seigneur parle d'Oolla et de sa soeur Oolliba... Le Seigneur parle à Oolla:'Vous avez forniqué pour votre compte; vous vous êtes prostituée à tous les passants; vous avez bâti un bordel... vous avez forniqué dans les carrefours...' Sa soeur Oolliba a fait encore pis: Elle s'est abandonnée avec fureur à ceux dont les membres sont comme des membres d'ânes. (XXVII, pp. 306-307)

The prophets themselves were not exempt from moral turpitude. Thus Osaiash was commanded by God to fornicate and produce children by fornication. Later he was ordered to take an adulterous woman. Voltaire's remarks link the low moral tone of the prophet's conduct to the level of Hebrew culture:

Tous ces commandements de Dieu scandalisent les esprits qui se disent sages; mais ne seront-ils pas plus sages s'ils voient que ce sont des allégories, des types, des paraboles, conformes aux moeurs des Israélites; qu'il ne faut ni demander compte à un peuple de ses usages, ni demander compte à Dieu des ordres qu'il a donnés en conséquence de ces usages reçus? Dieu n'a pu ordonner sans doute à un prophète d'être débauché
et adultère; mais il a voulu faire connaître qu'il réprouve les crimes et les adultères de son peuple chéri. Si nous ne lisons pas la Bible dans cet esprit, hélas! nous serions révoltés et indignés à chaque page. (XXVI, p. 348)

Certain prophecies, then, are an affront to human standards of morality. Moreover, they are also an affront to God. Osaiah's sexual adventures cast the Almighty in the sordid role of a procurer. Others, such as the following example, once more make a mockery of divine perfection by depicting the Lord as an evil genie, and an impotent one at that. In _La Bible enfin expliquée_ Voltaire relates how during a war king Achab of Israel gathered his 400 prophets together to predict the outcome. The prophet Michas was likewise invited. The 400 predicted victory, but Michas declared that this prophecy was merely a trick designed by one of God's angels at the Lord's request to lead Achab to his death. According to Michas, the Lord called for an angel to trick Achab. Finding one, he asked how he would go about it, to which the angel replied that he would put lies in the mouths of Achab's prophets. Voltaire's objections to this episode should by now be obvious. First, he criticizes the morality of deliberate deceit by the divinity; second, he points out the seeming ignorance and impotence of the deity who was "forced" to call upon a subaltern for a plan; thirdly, he compares this sordid trick with those executed by Homeric deities. At least, Homer's gods were able to devise their own tricks. Finally, he expands this criticism to a general declaration of the inferiority of the Hebrew god vis-à-vis those of Greek mythology: He was always beaten, his people were always enslaved. (XXX, p. 223) It might be added that while Voltaire did not explicitly make the point, the passage does much to undermine the credibility of prophecy in general. If God placed
lies in the mouths of the prophets on one occasion, what guarantee do we have that other prophecies were not similarly tainted?

We see then how Voltaire sapped the credibility of the prophets and their pronouncements. His condemnation was a continuation of his attack on the Jewish deity as a reflection of Hebrew mores. Yet, this was only part of the plan. He also discussed the relationship between the Old Testament prophecies and Christianity. The prophecies were crucial to Christianity, for without them the legitimacy of Jesus as Messiah, Lord, and founder of the one, true and eternal Church was placed in jeopardy. Realizing this Voltaire set out to show that whatever one thinks of the prophecies in themselves, they were certainly not fulfilled by Jesus. On the contrary, here is merely another example of Christians tampering with the Old Testament to suit their needs.

Curiously, despite all that he said about the ancient Jews, Voltaire at this point enlisted the aid of the rabbis against the Church.

The direction the debate took was stated most aptly in the opening lines of the article "Propéthies":

> Ce mot, dans son acception ordinaire, signifie prédiction de l'avenir. C'est en ce sens que Jésus disait à ses disciples: 'Il est nécessaire que tout ce qui a été écrit de moi dans la loi de Moïse, dans les Prophètes et dans les Psaumes soit accompli.' Alors ajoute l'évangéliste, il leur ouvrit l'esprit, afin qu'ils comprirent les Ecritures.

> On sentira la nécessité indispensable d'avoir l'esprit ouvert pour comprendre les prophéties, si l'on fait attention que les Juifs, qui en étaient les dépositaires, n'ont jamais pu reconnaître Jésus pour le messie, et qu'il y a 18 siècles que nos théologiens disputent avec eux pour fixer le sens de quelques-unes, qu'ils tâchent d'appliquer à Jésus. (XX, pp. 282-283)

Voltaire's remarks indicate that Christians have distorted the meaning
of the prophecies to prove their case, whereas the Jews have right-
fully failed to recognize in them the prediction of Jesus as the
Messiah. The point becomes even clearer in section three of the same
article:

Il n'appartient qu'à l'Eglise infaillible de
fixer le véritable sens des prophéties: car
les Juifs ont toujours soutenu avec leur
opiniâtreté ordinaire qu'aucune prophétie ne
pouvait regarder Jésus-Christ; et les Pères de
l'Eglise ne pouvaient disputer contre eux avec
avantage, puisque, hors saint Ephrem, le grand
Origène, et saint Jérôme, il n'y eut jamais
aucun Père de l'Eglise qui sût un mot d'hébreu.
(XX, 288)

Voltaire bitterly concludes that not being able to argue the point rea-
sonably with the Jews, the Church has resorted to violence: "On a em-
ployé la force, les gibets, les roues, les flammes; cependant ils ne se
rendent pas encore." (p. 289) The Jews whom Voltaire so often vilified
as the most "insensés" of all peoples now become the arbiters of rea-
son. Their stubbornness, usually condemned by Voltaire as a vice, be-
comes a virtue. In short, the Jews are cast here as martyrs to reason.
It is important to note that Voltaire raised the question of the abili-
ity of the Church to correctly interpret prophecy on cultural grounds:
the theologians' ignorance of Hebrew language and culture. It became a
lethal weapon in Voltaire's hands, as the following example illustrates.

According to the Church, Isaiah had written: "'Voici une vierge
sera enceinte, elle enfantera un fils, et son nom sera Emmanuel.'"
Voltaire comments: "Le rabbin Isaace affirme, après tous les docteurs
de sa loi, que le mot hébreu alma signifie tantôt une vierge, tantôt
une femme mariée; que Ruth est appelée alma lorsqu'elle était mère;
qu'une femme adultère est quelque fois même nommée alma." (XX, p. 289)
A linguistic error thus led to the doctrine of the virgin birth. Voltaire did not stop here, however. It is dubious that "Emmanuel" actually refers to Jesus. The rabbis contend that the woman in question here is actually Isaiah's wife and that Emmanuel refers to the son she eventually bore him. This remark brings up another point: the Jews have consistently interpreted prophecy as short-range predictions relating to events close at hand. The Church, on the other hand, has always rejected the logical, immediate interpretation in favor of long range, and as we see here, far-fetched interpretations based on shaky linguistic grounds. In this regard, Voltaire cites a number of other examples which add credence to his case.

It was written: "'Et voilà que mon serviteur prospérera, sera honoré, et élevé très haut.'" The Church interpreted this prediction as relating directly to Jesus. The Rabbis, on the other hand, gave a more logical explanation. Written in the time of David, it related to this king who in effect did prosper. Jesus, the Rabbis and Voltaire point out, never did prosper. (XX, p. 290) Another example is that of a victorious chieftain who would dominate forever: "'Et toi, Bethléem d'Ephrata, qui es petite dans les milliers de Juda, il sortira pour toi un dominateur en Israël, et sa sortie est depuis le commencement jusqu'au jour d'à jamais.'" Voltaire ironically remarks: "Ils osent nier encore que cette prophétie soit pour Jésus-Christ. Ils disent qu'il est évident que Michée parle de quelque capitaine natif de Bethléem, qui remportera quelque avantage à la guerre contre les Babyloniens: car il parle le moment d'après de l'histoire de Babylone et des sept capitaines qui élurent Darius." (XX, p. 290)

Judging from these examples, the battle assumed the shape of a
conflict between a literal and a figurative interpretation of Scripture. Pascal for one had already attempted to deal with this question and his arguments in favor of "le sens caché" of prophecies are well known. Indeed, he admitted that if the prophecies had only the literal meaning, there would be no justification for the belief that they pertained to Jesus. Pascal condemned the Jews as "carnal" for failing to recognize this hidden, spiritual meaning. Voltaire, however, took their defense:

En bonne foi, le peuple le plus spirituel de la terre l'aurait-il entendu autrement. Ils étaient esclaves des Romains; ils attendaient un libérateur qui les rendrait victorieux, et qui ferait respecter Jérusalem dans tout le monde. Comment, avec les lumières de leur raison, pouvaient-ils voir ce vainqueur, ce monarque, dans un de leurs concitoyens né dans l'obscurité...et condamné au supplice des esclaves? Comment pouvaient-ils entendre, par le nom de leur capitale, une Jérusalem céleste, eux à qui le DÉcalogue n'avait pas seulement parlé de l'immortalité de l'âme? Comment un peuple si attaché à la loi pouvait-il, sans une lumière supérieure, reconnaître dans les prophéties, qui n'étaient pas sa loi, un Dieu caché sous la figure d'un Juif circoncis, qui par sa religion nouvelle a détruit et rendu abominables la circoncision et le sabbat, fondaments sacrés de la loi judaïque! (XXII, p. 37)

This passage brings us to another point: the question of the relation between the prophecies and the messiah. What did the Jews mean by this term? Christians believe that the prophecies predicted the advent of the Messiah and that he was none other than Jesus-Christ. They contend that it was the Jews' own fault if they failed to recognize their deliverer in Jesus. Again Voltaire took the side of the Jews against the Christians. Christians, he explained, distorted the concept of the Messiah out of all proportion to suit their own ends. First of all, the term "messiah" in Hebrew connotes merely a man deemed
to be an instrument of God's vengeance. Thus the ancient Jews hailed high priests and indeed idolatrous princes as "messiahs". (XX, p. 64-65) At the same time, of course, they did wait for the messiah, but their notion of this illustrious personnage was not at all what we consider him to be. Again criticizing Pascal's condemnation of Jewish blindness Voltaire wrote:

Il y a encore un autre défaut dans cet article. C'est qu'on y suppose que l'attente d'un messie était un point de religion chez les juifs. C'était seulement une idée consolante répandue parmi cette nation. Les Juifs espéraient un libérateur. Mais il ne leur était pas ordonné d'y croire comme un article de foi. Toute leur religion était renfermée dans le livre de la Loi. Les prophètes n'ont jamais été regardés par les juifs comme des législateurs. (XXII, p. 38)

Consequently, Christians erroneously attribute aspects to Judaism which never existed. Like monotheism, original sin, immortality of the soul, the sacred duty of the Jews to wait for a messiah assumes the rank of a myth created by Christians through ignorance or design to strengthen their case as fulfillers of the ancient Law. Since the Jews had no notion of original sin, it hardly follows that they were waiting for the son of God to deliver them from this plight. If they waited for a deliverer it was in the material sense as befits a nation so often enslaved and beaten. Moreover, contrary to what Christians arrogantly believe, the anticipation of a messiah was by no means the sole function of Judaism. Thus, what Voltaire was doing here was not only to undermine the bases for Christianity as the legitimate heir of Judaism, but to affirm, as do the Jews, the legitimacy of Judaism as a religion independent of Christianity. Typically, ethnocentric Christians have drawn Judaism to themselves as a handmaiden. Judaism's
sole function was to point the way to Christianity. Now, we discover that what we have taken to be the sole "raison d'être" of an entire religion and people was not ever viewed in this way by them! It is mere supposition after the fact. Consequently, and this was Voltaire's point, though Christianity can hardly function as a legitimate religion without the Jews' messianic mission, the concept of original sin, etc., the Jews can and do! Indeed they rightfully protest the distortion of their beliefs and their sacred writings by ignorant, self-serving fanatics.

Voltaire's use of the Jews against Christianity did not stop with the prophecies or the notion of the messiah. He used their arguments to discredit Jesus himself.

His first line of attack was the argument from obscurity. The Jewish historian Josephus for whom Voltaire normally had nothing but sarcasm was for once treated as an irreproachable source. This historian, who, according to Voltaire, normally exaggerated everything in favor of his people did not so much as mention Jesus. The Nazarene must not have created the stir Christians attribute to his coming and his deeds. His miracles evidently were not noteworthy enough to be recorded for posterity by a historian who customarily left no stone unturned to glorify his nation. (XXVIII, p. 166) What makes it even more bizarre that Josephus never mentioned Jesus and his miracles is the fact that Josephus was a contemporary, a close relative of Herod's wife, a son of a priest who must have known Jesus, and consequently in a position to have first-hand knowledge of the events. Other Jewish historians such as Juste de Tibériade and Philo, both contemporaries, likewise made no mention of Jesus. (XXVIII, p. 195) It would seem then
that for all his supposed miracles and teachings, Jesus was an obscure figure in the Jewish world.

Later in history, however, the Jews took an aggressive stance against Jesus. In such works as Le Rempart de la foi and Toldos Jeschut they made violent attacks on his person and his genealogy. Ostensibly these remarks sought to portray him as a rabblerouser of dubious origins. Though Voltaire himself normally avoided vicious attacks on Jesus himself, the Jewish arguments concerning Jesus' genealogy form the climax to a pre-existing Voltairean line of attack. In his treatment of Rahab, the prostitute who betrayed Jericho to the Hebrew invaders, as in his repeated diatribes against David and his crimes, Voltaire always stressed that both these seedy figures were direct ancestors of the founder of the Church. Elsewhere, however, he cited the rabbis' arguments that Jesus was the fruit of an illicit union between Mary and a soldier named Panther. (XIX, p. 218) The Toldos Jeschut further maintained that Jesus was no more than a seditious sorcerer, pointing out that he was with two thousand armed men when seized. (XXVIII, p. 197-198) These arguments are echoed by a fictional Jew whom Voltaire places in debate with a Christian in front of the emperor Marcus Aurelius. This Jew asserts that far from being the divine figure Christians have made of him, Jesus was merely a man of the people "qui voulut faire le prophète comme tant d'autres" and who ultimately was put to death for insulting the magistrates and for disturbing public order (XXVIII, p. 118)

Thus Voltaire used the Jews and the Old Testament to discredit Jesus as the true messiah. He went further, however. Not only is Jesus not the messiah, but Christianity is neither a fulfillment of Judaism
nor of the teachings of Jesus. Again the Jews and Judaism came to his aid as he developed this line of attack.

Time and again Voltaire repeated his notion that the basic doctrines of Christianity were in no way related to the Old Testament of Judaism. He used the Jews in his assault, but more than once placed the arguments in the mouth of a pagan observer. One such case is that of Julian the Apostate. In a lengthy discourse, emperor Julian addresses the Gentiles, formerly pagans, who have abandoned their ancestral beliefs to join the Hebrews, that is, the Christians. Julian informs them that they are deluding themselves, for the Christians, or, as he calls them, the Galileans, have nothing to do with the Hebrews and their faith. On the contrary, Christianity contradicts the Old Testament at every turn. Their god, Jesus, was not prophesied in the Old Testament. (XXVIII, p. 47) The Old Testament admitted only one god. Here Voltaire departs from all he has said before regarding the Old Testament and the Jews. In the person of Julian he accepts Moses and Jewish monotheism as facts. Secondly, contradicting his normal habit of singling the Jews out as models of stupidity, ignorance, and superstition, he admits them to the mainstream of civilization and extols their monotheism:

Il serait inutile et superflu si je m'étendais plus longtemps sur ce sujet, puisque j'en ai déjà parlé amplement, lorsque j'ai voulu prouver que les Juifs ne diffèrent des autres nations que dans le seul point de la croyance d'un Dieu unique. Ce dogme, étranger à tous les peuples, n'est propre qu'à eux. D'ailleurs toutes les autres choses sont communes entre eux et nous, les temples, les autels, les illustrations, plusieurs cérémonies religieuses; dans toutes ces choses nous pensions comme les Hébreux, ou nous différerons de fort peu de chose en quelques' unes. (XXVIII, p. 53)

For once, then, Judaism is seen as a legitimate religion almost totally
in keeping with those of the rest of the ancient world. Christianity, on the other hand, is an aberration.

The first problem, then, with Christianity is the so-called divinity of Jesus. It is no doubt for this reason that Voltaire insists here upon the monotheism of the Jews from time immemorial. Moreover, Christians have made substantial changes in Jewish rites, one example being the dietary laws which they no longer observe. Here again we would do well to recall how scornfully Voltaire treated these customs elsewhere: here, as it suits his purpose, he presents them as entirely respectable. Christians attempt to justify these changes by maintaining that Mosaic Law was destined to be only temporary, pending the arrival of Jesus. Unfortunately, as Voltaire and Julian point out, if one consults the Old Testament one finds that this law was declared by God to be eternal. Julian quotes amply from Moses to prove his point. Voltaire adds that the Jews, including Jesus himself, never altered the law by so much as one syllable. (p. 53) Christianity sins doubly then, for it is not only a departure from Judaism, but from the very teachings of its supposed founder.

First it must be said that Jesus never declared himself divine. While it is true that he was called on occasion "the son of God", this term had a limited connotation in Hebrew usage. It referred only to a faithful servant of God, as opposed to a servant of the devil. It never was used by the Jews to denote a second divinity. (XXVIII, p. 118; see also XX, p. 70, 523) We are faced once again with a distortion based either on ignorance of Hebrew or fanatical bias.

Secondly, Jesus was himself a Jew, a faithful one at that, who never declared himself the founder of a new religion. In the article
Dieu et les hommes Voltaire defies anyone to find proof from scripture that Jesus wished to break with Judaism. On the contrary, he is quoted several times as saying he wished to accomplish the Law not to break it as his successors have done. (XXVIII, p. 204; see also XX, pp. 91, 523-4) Moreover, Paul and the early church leaders always considered themselves Jews. (XXVIII, p. 206) Unlike the Christians, neither Jesus nor the Jews had dogmas per se: the Law was all, following it was the most important aspect of religious life. Dogmas announced by the Church are in Voltaire's words mere "chimera" which neither Jesus, nor for that matter Paul ever uttered. (XXVIII, p. 37) Voltaire concludes: "Si l'on veut bien y faire attention, la religion catholique, apostolique et romaine est, dans toutes les cérémonies et dans tous ces dogmes l'opposé de la religion de Jésus." (XX, p. 524) Indeed, if we wish to follow Jesus we should become Jews!

Where are the origins of Christianity, if not in Jesus and Judaism? Voltaire answers that it emerged from quarrels with the Jews having nothing to do with Jesus' teachings. (XXVIII, p. 210) The real beginnings of all the "mumbo-jumbo" of Christianity are to be found when the first Christians linked themselves with the Platonic Jews of Alexandria. This group of dissidents was fairly learned, had a beautiful temple, spoke Greek, but had gained the animosity of the Palestinian Jews by translating the Old Testament into Greek. The partisans of Jesus arrived on the scene and proceeded to exploit the hatred between the two factions. Eventually, they won the Alexandrians to their cause. One result of this alliance was the permeation of Platonic notions into Christian thought, thus further removing it from both orthodox Judaism and the teachings of Jesus: "C'est là que le verbe fut
connu des chrétiens, c'est là que Jésus fut appelé le verbe. Toute la vie de Jésus devint une allégorie, et la Bible juive ne fut plus qu'une autre allégorie qui prédisait Jésus." (XXVIII, p. 223) Voltaire places this argument in the mouth of a Jew who debates Christianity with a Christian in the presence of Marcus Aurelius. The Jew, whom Voltaire gratuitously presents as having "dirty and greasy pockets" is nonetheless his spokesman and eventually wins the debate. His arguments go to the character of Jesus himself, his activities, and his genealogy. Yet, near the end of the debate he declares that Christianity would never have flourished if Platonic ideas such as the trinity hadn't invested it with an elevated mystical flavor that shrouded the dubious claim of Jesus as messiah, prophet, and the son of God. (XXVIII, p. 118)

As his final point the Jew remarks that Christians have distorted Jesus' moral teachings into dogmas which breed violence. Finally, Marcus Aurelius intervenes putting an end to the arguments. He declares that while both the Jew and the Christian are crazy, "l'empire n'a rien à craindre des Juifs, et il a tout à redouter des chrétiens." Voltaire himself concludes that the emperor was right. (XXVIII, p. 118)

It is now clear that Voltaire felt no compunctions about doing a complete about-face in order to develop another line of attack. Earlier in the chapter we saw that he attempted to crush Christianity through an assault on the supposed source, Judaism. Elsewhere, however, he reversed himself by upholding Judaism as the legitimate religion while showing how little Christianity derived from it. As any Voltaireian knows, Voltaire was ever the chameleon: His rule of thumb was to cover all the bases, to use any and all arguments as the situation
warranted. This point becomes even clearer as we turn to the ques-
tion alluded to in Marcus Aurelius' last remark, the question of tol-
erance and fanaticism.

In an earlier chapter we pointed out that one of Voltaire's pri-
mary objections to the cult of the "chosen people" was that it provid-
ed a seedbed for fanaticism, and example being, the massacre of the
Canaanites by the Hebrews in their quest for their "promised land". In
this chapter, we noted that Voltaire pointed out another danger stem-
ming from the ancient Hebrews: the treatment of the so-called "false
prophets". Indeed, even as he tried to separate Christianity from Ju-
daism he refused to relinquish this point. While Christians distorted
Judaism, they nonetheless gleaned something from it:

Ils prétendent qu'il n'y a rien de bon et
d'honnête chez les Grecs et les Hébreux;
cependant ils se sont approprié, non les
vertus, mais les vices de ces deux nations.
Ils ont puisé chez les Juifs la haine im-
placcable contre toutes les différentes
religions des nations; et le genre de vie
infâme et méprisable qu'ils pratiquent dans
la paresse et dans la légèreté, ils l'ont
pris des Grecs. (XXVIII, p. 11)

He reiterated the same point elsewhere: "Vous n'avez pas recherché ce
qu'il y avait de bon chez les Hébreux, vous n'avez été occupés qu'à imi-
ter leur mauvais caractère et leur fureur: comme eux vous détruisez
les temples et les autels." (XXVIII, pp. 36-37) Christian intolerance
had a Jewish base, virtually the sole aspect of Hebrew tradition which
the Christians conserved.

Yet, with his customary flexibility Voltaire elsewhere denied
even this base for the excesses of Christianity. Again he changed his
position vis-à-vis the ancient Hebrews in order to score yet another
point against the legitimacy of Christian fanaticism. In his fight against religious persecution, particularly in the Calas affair, Voltaire showed how Christians failed to inherit the Jewish custom of tolerance for dissident sects!

Early in this chapter we saw how Voltaire sometimes criticized the Jews for recognizing deities other than their own. At other times, however, he used this same point to make a case for Jewish tolerance, ostensibly for the purpose of "shaming" Christians into a similar attitude. As he states in the *Dictionnaire philosophique*:

Les Juifs adoraient leur dieu; mais ils n'étaient jamais étonnés que chaque peuple eût le sien. Ils trouvaient bon que Chamos eût donné un certain district aux Moabites, pourvu que leur dieu leur en donnât aussi. Jacob n'hésita pas à épouser les filles d'un idolâtre....Voilà des exemples de tolérance chez le peuple le plus intolérant et le plus cruel de toute l'antiquité: nous l'avons imité dans ses fureurs absurdes, et non dans son indulgence. (XX, p. 520)

Indeed, it is precisely the existence of tolerance in the midst of cruelty and intolerance which makes Voltaire's case. Along the same lines he comments in his article "Ame":

Si nous passons des Grecs et des Romains aux nations barbares, arrêtons-nous seulement aux Juifs. Tout superstitieux, tout cruel, et tout ignorant qu'était ce misérable peuple, il honorait les pharisiens qui admettaient la fatalité de la destinée et de la météropsychose; il portait aussi respect aux saducéens qui niaient absolument l'immortalité de l'âme....Les esséniens, qui croyaient aussi à la fatalité, et qui ne sacrifiaient jamais de victimes dans le temple, étaient encore plus révérés que les pharisiens et les saducéens. Aucune de leurs opinions ne troubla jamais le gouvernement. Il y avait là de quoi s'égorger, se brûler, s'exterminer réciproquement si on l'avait voulu. 0 misérables hommes! profitez de ces exemples. Pensez et laissez penser. (XVII, p. 160)

It will be recalled that this is the same Voltaire who condemned Jewish
"fanaticism" as a cause for civil strife in Judea! This same tone carries over finally to the Traité sur la tolérance in which Voltaire outlines once again Jewish barbarism yet finds in this people "des rayons d'une tolérance universelle". Again he exhorts Christians to follow this example. (XXV, pp. 73, 77)

Elsewhere Voltaire made use of the Jews in a different way in order to condemn Christian intolerance. The crowning proof of the insanity of intolerance was Christian persecution of the Jews, particularly during the Inquisition. It was a constant source of "wonder" for Voltaire that Christians, who supposedly revered Judaism as the mother of Christianity, who supposedly viewed the Jews as God's chosen emissaries on earth, nevertheless proceeded to burn countless thousands of Jews. What added a tragic irony to this situation, according to Voltaire, was the fact that as their tormentors burned these unfortunates whose only crime was to be faithful to the Law Christians claimed to fulfill, they recited psalms and prayers derived from the very religion they wished to exterminate! For Voltaire this was the epitome of madness. (XXIV, p. 281) It may be said that he took a cynical pleasure in pointing out this final contradiction. No doubt, it is true, at least in part. Yet, his constant outcry against this abomination must be seen as his affirmation of the Jews' fundamental right to religious freedom. Though Voltaire did not recant what he said about their forefathers and their past conduct, he did cry out on numerous occasions "il ne faut pas les brûler".

We are left then with a curious portrait of Judaism. There can be no doubt that Voltaire's treatment had as its primary aim the destruction of Christianity and its views on the ancient Jews. It seems
nevertheless that Voltaire had little sympathy with Judaism itself, considering it an abomination emanating from the minds of a barbaric and ignorant people. A few comments among the thousands of words written on the subject point to a disdain extending beyond the ancient Jews to their modern descendants, particularly in the areas of personal hygiene and the supposed scornful attitude toward Gentiles stemming from the dietary laws. We have seen on one occasion at least a potentially "racist" remark on the inborn nature of Jewish fanaticism. Yet, on the other hand, we have cited passages in which Voltaire invited the Jews to forget the past and "bury the hatchet" as it were. Moreover, we have seen how for all he said Voltaire seemed to believe that the modern Jews were entitled to pursue their beliefs without fear. As ever with Voltaire the question arises: which of his remarks reflect the true Voltaire, which the polemicist who would say anything to win a point? Given the polemical nature of the whole it is a dilemma.

As we have seen both in this chapter and in those preceding it, Voltaire built a prodigious indictment against ancient Jewish civilization. In the next chapter, we will examine in some detail the entire question of the Old Testament as a cultural document and the role of Hebrew society in world civilization.
CHAPTER VI

VOLTAIRE AND JEWISH CULTURE

The portrait developed in the previous chapters has had one over-riding theme: the barbarity of the ancient Jews. In this chapter, then, we intend to place the cap on this portrait by a consideration of their intellectual and artistic achievements per se.

As we have noted, the vast majority of Voltaire's remarks on the Jews were destined ultimately to uproot them from the place they traditionally occupied in Christian thought and to destroy the Old Testament as a divinely inspired document. In dealing with the intellectual accomplishments of the Jews, Voltaire's aim did not change, for most of his comments were a direct response to the format laid down by Christians. The Jews had been portrayed as an intrinsically superior people by virtue of divine election. So Voltaire attempted to show them as an intrinsically inferior society. Christian exegesis had placed the Hebrew civilization and its foremost accomplishment, the Old Testament, at the very heart of world civilization. In this view, the Jews and their cultural experience as recorded in the pages of scripture formed the matrix from which other peoples derived what was to be best in their own cultures. It will be remembered that Bossuet had asserted that the good points of the legal systems of the great Mediterranean peoples were derived from the Mosaic code. (See Chapter III) Others, such as Huet, had gone even further in proclaiming that the greatest heroes and myths of the greco-roman world were imitations of original historical episodes recorded in the Bible. Thus Plato was reputed to have been the pupil of Jeremiah. Moses was considered a great physicist and the precursor of
Descartes. In brief, the Jews were seen as the teachers of the ancient world. Theirs was an original and exemplary society in the vanguard of world culture. Voltaire bluntly condemned this portrait as "a singular example of human stupidity" (XVIII, p. 39) and set out to destroy it once and for all. As can be expected, he answered the hyperbole of Christian accolades with hyperbole of his own, an unrelenting and often vicious diatribe against Hebrew culture.

To deflate the notion of the Jews as teachers Voltaire doggedly insisted first and foremost on the appalling ignorance of the ancient Hebrews. He consistently referred to them as "un petit peuple privé des arts", a people devoid of commerce and industry, or as a people who never invented anything. (XXII, p. 45; see also XXXI, 44-45) At one point he declared, "Tout ce qui regarde les arts de l'esprit leur était inconnu, jusqu'au terme de géométrie." (XIX, p. 506) Such abject ignorance was essential to his theory that the Jews could not have been the world's teachers. Being ignorant themselves, they hardly had anything to offer other peoples. Consequently, Voltaire's work abounds in assertions of Jewish ignorance. Nevertheless, the arguments against the traditional place of the Jews in world civilization depend for their impact primarily upon the historical socio-political situation of the ancient Hebrews and upon a comparison of their achievements with those of other peoples. As we will discover, viewed from this perspective, the notion of Jewish influence becomes untenable.

The Jews' original position as an itinerant band of thieves was simply incompatible with any degree of cultural development, much less sophistication. Using world history as his guide, Voltaire proclaimed that no people ever developed writing skills, the cornerstone of an ad-
vanced society, until it had organized into cities. As we know from a previous chapter, the Israelites managed to establish a capital only with the advent of King David, that is to say, some five hundred years after their arrival in Palestine. (XXVIII, pp. 160-161) Prior to that time, they lived as a nomadic troop of bandits deriving their sustenance from pillage. As such, Voltaire denied that they could have developed any industry, commerce, science or arts. As newcomers to the promised land, then, the Jews were in no position to have a cultural impact. Moreover, it is a fact, asserted Voltaire, that the peoples the Jews encountered in Palestine had already attained the urbanization necessary for cultural development:

Il est prouvé que la peuplade hébraïque n'arriva en Palestine que dans un temps où le Chanaan avait déjà d'assez puissantes villes: Tyr, Sidon, Berith florissaient. Il est dit que Josué détruisit Jéricho et la ville des lettres, des archives, des écoles, appelée Cariath Sepher; donc les Juifs n'étaient alors que des étrangers qui portaient le ravage chez des peuples policiés. (XIX, pp. 59-60)

Elsewhere he carried the juxtaposition: invading horde of barbarians versus civilized Canaanites to its logical conclusion:

N'est-il pas de la plus grande vraisemblance qu'un peuple commerçant, industrieux, savant, établi de temps immémorial, et qui passe pour l'inventeur des lettres, écrivit longtemps avant un peuple errant, nouvellement établi dans son voisinage, sans aucune science, sans aucune industrie, sans aucun commerce et subsistant uniquement de rapines? (XI, pp. 41-42)

The Jews' subsequent political history, replete as it was with turmoil and subjugation, adds yet another link to the case. In Chapter IV we concluded that the Jews never succeeded in building a stable society. Their history was one of alternating civil strife and
foreign domination. Surrounded and later subjugated by peoples both older and manifestly more advanced than themselves it is logical that if any teaching were taking place, it was the Jews who were the pupils. Older nations instruct younger ones, declared Voltaire: "C'est la marche de l'esprit humain". (XIX, p. 227) The powerful influence the weak: "Cornouailles est le singe de Londres" and not vice versa. (XXVI, p. 208) Living for so many years, not only in close proximity to the Phoenicians and Chaldeans, but also in subjugation to them and other peoples, is it not more likely that if there are similarities in culture they stem from Jewish borrowing? Thus the historical perspective sets the stage for the dethroning of the Jews as the world's teachers.

It must be admitted, however, that Voltaire with typical acerbity, pushed the notion of Jewish borrowings to an extreme. More than once he stated that the Hebrews were not only borrowers, but plagiarists. (XXVIII, p. 190) Thus brigand mentality extended to the realm of culture. Incapable of inventing themselves, the Jews stole the inventions of other peoples and attempted to pass them off as their own. (XIX, p. 61) Just as they never profited from their material pillage, destroying rather than building upon it, so their plagiarism never was put to good use. Indeed they managed to poison much of what they took from others. A case in point is that of their language which evolved, according to Voltaire, from contact with the Phoenicians and Chaldeans. Lest we think this a positive development Voltaire added that Hebrew was a corruption of the two languages and so poor that it lacked several modes of conjugation. Indeed, Voltaire often refused to honor it with the name language, preferring to refer to it as a "jargon".
(XVII, p. 54) By and large, despite foreign influence the Jews remained impervious to the finer elements of greater civilizations: "Ils ont imité leurs voisins en tout, excepté dans les sciences et les beaux arts, où ce peuple grossier ne put jamais atteindre." (XXVII, p. 188) Their language lacked even a term for geometry and they showed little interest in astronomy despite the example of their neighbors. (XIX, pp. 506, 521) In true brigand style, and this is the unkindest cut of all, the sole "science" they developed was that of usury. (XVIII, p. 189) Writing of the impossibility of Jewish influence upon other nations, he stated:

Les grands peuples ne peuvent tirer leurs lois et leurs connaissances d'un petit peuple obscur et esclave. Les Juifs n'avaient même pas de livres du temps d'Osisas. On trouva par hasard sous son règne le seul exemplaire de la loi qui existât. Ce peuple, depuis qu'il fut captif à Babylone, ne connut d'autre alphabet que le chaldéen: il ne fut renommé pour aucun art, pour aucune manufacture de quelque espèce qu'elle pût être; et dans le temps même de Salomon ils étaient obligés de payer chèrement des ouvriers étrangers. Dire que les Egyptiens, les Perses, les Grecs, furent instruits par les Juifs, c'est dire que les Romains apprirent les arts des Bas-Bretons. Les Juifs ne furent jamais ni physiciens, ni géomètres, ni astronomes. Loin d'avoir des écoles publiques pour l'instruction de la jeunesse, leur langue manquait même de terme pour exprimer cette institution. Les peuples du Pérou et du Mexique réglaient bien mieux qu'eux leur année. Leur séjour dans Babylone et dans Alexandrie, pendant lequel des particuliers purent s'instruire, ne forma le peuple que dans l'art de l'usure....Enfin, vous ne trouverez en eux qu'un peuple ignorant et barbare qui joint depuis longtemps la plus sordide avarice à la plus détestable superstition, et à la plus invincible haine pour tous les peuples qui les tolèrent et qui les enrichissent. Il ne faut pourtant pas les brûler. (XVIII, p. 189)

It would be difficult to find a more vicious slur on Jewish culture than the one cited above. Woven into the attack against the theory of
the ancient Jews as teachers is an attack on the Jews of Voltaire's
time. It would seem that even over the centuries Voltaire perceived
no change in their culture. Yet it seems that Voltaire realized that
he had gone too far since he added the caveat at the end in italics.
This mode of attack, is fortunately rare. Nevertheless, it is trouble-
some and must be taken into account.

Voltaire's relentless diatribe, though extreme, was not vilifi-
cation for its own sake. It aimed at the heart of the judeocentric world
view of Christianity and did a great deal to destroy the credibility of
the Bible, Voltaire's real target.

In dealing with the question of comparative culture and influence
the Church naturally turned to the greatest Hebrew achievement, the Old
Testament. So Voltaire also utilized the Bible as his most consistent
point of reference. Here, the relative age of the Hebrew nation, its
political position, and cultural development were joined to do damage
to biblical credibility. Most of the argument centered around the
events and heroes of the Pentateuch, the oldest books of the Old Testa-
ment. These five books, Voltaire informed us, are in Hebrew. The fact
that this language, both oral and written, developed only with Jewish
contact with the Chaldeans and Phoenicians at the time of the Babylon-
ian captivity renders the theory that Moses authored the books in the
desert and passed them on intact to future generations suspect. Moses
could hardly have composed in a language not yet invented. This,
coupled with the fact, mentioned previously, that the books allude to
events and places of a later period and contain contradictions, point to
the probability that the Pentateuch was composed, or at least tampered
with during or subsequent to Jewish contact with the Babylonian empire.
In any event, the theory of a book dictated by God and unaltered in its content is considerably weakened. If the Pentateuch is in part or in toto much younger than heretofore believed, and composed or revised at a time when the Jews were undeniably undergoing the influence of older and more dominant peoples, what are we to think of similarities in accounts of creation existing between the Old Testament and oriental myths?

One example is the very question of a Garden of Eden. Writing in the article "Genesis" in the Dictionnaire philosophique Voltaire pointed out that it resembles gardens in Saana in "l'Arabie Heureuse", famous in all antiquity. The Jews, as a very recent people, originally an Arab horde, could very easily have taken this fable for themselves. Whether or not the garden of Eden was Jewish in origin is unimportant, Voltaire added ironically, since this people was nonetheless led by the Lord. (XIX, p. 231) Obviously, it matters a great deal as it does much to minimize the position of the Jews as the exclusive bearers of divine truth.

Still another example of similarity between the Old Testament and pre-existing traditions is that of the creation of the universe in six periods. The Phoenicians, the Chaldeans, and the Indians all believed the same. These peoples all possessed a theology long before the Jews inhabited the Sinai and Horeb deserts, before they could have had writers. Voltaire concluded: "Plusieurs savants ont cru vraisemblable que l'allégorie des six jours est imitée de celle des six temps. Dieu peut avoir permis que de grands peuples eussent cette idée avant qu'il l'eût inspirée au peuple juif." (XIX, p. 230) Given the fact that the Hebrews were in close contact with the Phoenicians and later with the
Chaldeans, that they derived their very language from those of these peoples, it is logical that theological similarities result from Hebrew imitation also: "C'est la marche de l'esprit humain." (XIX, p. 227)

The question of imitation comes to a head, however, with the comparison fostered by Christians between the Greek myths and Old Testament stories. Similarities existing between Pandora and Eve, Isaac and Iphigenia, Lot and Orpheus, or Hercules and Samson were no mere coincidences but further evidence of Jewish cultural influence. Though Voltaire disputed all of these claims, he focused particular attention upon Moses and Bacchus.

There can be no doubt that in the judeo-christian tradition Moses was the single most important hero. With customary zeal Christian exegetes, not content to revere him as the founder of the Mosaic Law, attempted to prove that Moses figured in pagan mythology as well. Huet, for one, noted striking resemblances between Bacchus and Moses. Among these we find that both were saved from the water, that Bacchus was called Misem in remembrance of this adventure, that he, like Moses, was privy to the secrets of the gods, that he had a staff that he could transform at will into a serpent. Furthermore, both were reputed to have crossed the Red Sea and to have written laws on two stone tablets. In addition, both were represented as having horns or rays extending from the head. Given these facts, there could be no doubt for Huet, Bochart and others that Bacchus was a copy of Moses. Nor did it stop here, for Huet also found similarities between the Hebrew leader and such disparate figures as Appolo, Romulus, Adonis, Priape, Osiris and even Zoroaster. (XI, pp. 80-82) In their desire to establish the
overriding importance of the Jews and their writings it never oc-
curred to these Christian zealots that they were in fact sowing the
seeds of their own destruction.

For his part, Voltaire admitted the theory of imitation based on
the resemblances existing between Bacchus and Moses, but instead com-
bined this evidence with other bits of historical fact and common sense
to show that Moses was the copy and not the original. In so doing he
not only minimized the importance of the Jews in world culture, but
also threatened the very authenticity of the Old Testament.

We have already established that Voltaire convincingly questioned
the age of the books describing Moses and his exploits through a study
of the development of the Hebrew language, and by pointing up contra-
dictions and anachronisms. According to his theory, then, the Penta-
teuch was composed only at the time of the Babylonian captivity, an era
in which Bacchus had already gained considerable celebrity. (XVII, p.
518) This linguistic and historical evidence suggests then at least
the possibility of Jewish imitation of a pre-existing myth.

The case against Moses is further strengthened by the fact that the
Jews never permitted the translation of the Scriptures into other lan-
guages until the time of the Ptolemies: thus the Mediterranean peoples
would have had the enormous obstacle of obscurity to overcome in order
to imitate Moses or any other figure in Jewish history. Indeed, the
Jewish historian Josephus admitted that the Israelites were so isolated
and obscure that they were unknown to the Greeks for centuries. More-
over, is it logical to assume that the Greeks borrowed Moses from the
Jews and yet ignored other heroes and events of even greater universal
import such as Noah, the regenerator of the human race? (XVII, p. 519)
Finally, the fact is that Moses himself remained absolutely unknown to
the world at large while Bacchus' fame extended over the entire an-
cient world. Voltaire slyly noted that there was a reason for Moses'
obscenity: "Dieu permit donc que l'esprit de mensonge divulguât les ab-
surdités de la vie de Bacchus chez cent nations, avant que l'esprit de
vérité fît connaître la vie de Moïse à aucun peuple, excepté les Juifs."
(XI, p. 81)

This quotation brings up yet another crucial point: while sustain-
ing the theory of imitation, the church made an important distinction
between fact (Moses) and fable (Bacchus), unwittingly creating another
area of controversy. The comparison of the miraculous events of Moses'
life with those of Bacchus' effectively opened the door for all those
who would seize upon the resemblances to reduce the whole to the realm
of fable. After all, the sole element separating "fact" from fiction is
the slender thread of faith. It was this element that Voltaire glee-
fully pounced upon in his consideration of Guéria Durocher's Histoire
véritable des temps fabuleux. In this voluminous work the priest duti-
fully set out to prove that many fables of pagan mythology were in fact
imitations of true biblical accounts. Voltaire humbly suggested that
the author correct his title: "Nous commencerions par le prêtr de
réformer son titre, parce que les personnes moins instruites que lui
pourront croire que la véritable histoire des fables est précisément la
véritable histoire des mensonges. Toute fable est mensonge." (XXX, p.
390) The dichotomy between fact and fiction became serious when it
could be shown that it was more than likely that the Hebrew version was
the copy; favorite Bible stories once perceived as historical fact,
thence became the imitation of pure fable! Indeed Voltaire added that
it is rather bizarre that what the Greeks took as myth, the Hebrews attempted to pass off as historical truth. (XVII, p. 519) Thus, by insisting on a theory of imitation and by maintaining that the pagan versions were fictitious, the Church had created a potential dilemma which Voltaire was only too eager to exploit. He concluded: "Les hommes aiment tant les fables que quand ils ne peuvent en inventer, ils en copient." (XVIII, p. 185)

Voltaire carried the battle against Hebrew culture into the literary realm with sporadic attacks on the Old Testament from an esthetic point of view. His most concerted efforts concerned the Song of Songs, reputedly composed by Solomon. It is not surprising that he chose this book as his target as it had always been an embarrassment to the Church. Faced with blatantly sexual imagery, church commentators had shied away from a literal interpretation, preferring to explicate the book as an allegory. Typically, Voltaire seized upon some of the more "shocking" passages. He singled out one "beau tour d'éloquence orientale" for examination: "'Notre soeur est encore petite, elle n'a point de tétons; que ferons-nous de notre soeur? Si c'est un mur, bâtissons dessus; si c'est une porte, fermons-la!'" Voltaire noted that several rabbis had disputed Solomon's authorship of this passage, but concluded:

Cependant il est consacré, et on le regarde comme une allégorie perpétuelle du mariage de Jésus-Christ avec son Église. Il faut avouer que cette allégorie est un peu forte, et qu'on ne voit pas ce que l'Église pourrait entendre quand l'auteur dit que sa petite soeur n'a point de tétons. (XX, p. 389)

It was within the context of this anti-Christian sniping that Voltaire broached the question of biblical style. For example, Julian the Apostate declared in his discourse debating Christianity:
these and other apparent affronts to taste, Voltaire concluded with a sneer: "J'avoue que les élogues de Virgile sont d'un autre style; mais chacun a le sien, et un Juif n'est pas obligé d'écrire comme Virgile." (XX, p. 389)

If this were all that Voltaire wrote on the subject we might be forced to conclude with Arthur Hertzberg that he considered the Jews to be intrinsically inferior and hopelessly alien to western culture. Yet, how much of this acrimonious blustering, this absolute refusal to consider even the possibility of Hebrew poetic genius was the result of polemical policy? At least part of the answer lies in a review of Lowth's *Discours académiques sur la poésie sacrée des Hébreux, prononcés à Oxford* written by Voltaire in 1764. It must be emphasized that this review was published in the same year as the first edition of the *Dictionnaire philosophique* at a time when the philosopher's anti-biblical campaign was already in high gear. Yet, upon reading it, one would be hard put to recognize the vitriolic critic of all things Hebrew. Gone are the automatic condemnations, the rhetoric, the sneering condescension. Interestingly, absent also is any trace of anti-Christian propaganda. For once Voltaire devoted himself entirely to assessing the literary value of the Old Testament in what appears to be a reasonable and objective spirit. He exceeded the limits of his charge as reviewer in order to use the article as a forum for expressing his own views.

If, as we shall see, Voltaire approached his task with uncustomary objectivity, he provided us with the reason behind it:

On se moquerait d'un homme qui demanderait si la fin de la peinture est d'instruire ou de plaire; il en est de même de la poésie: elle est indifférente au vice et à la vertu, et peut également
Les Chrétiens ont poussé la sottise, non seulement jusqu'à croire ou à tâcher de croire ces livres d'un petit peuple détesté et persécuté par eux, mais jusqu'à admirer le style plat et grossier dans lequel ils sont écrits. C'est du sublime à ce que disent les pédants de collège. Virgile n'a fait rien de si beau que ce verset du psaume: 'Ouvre ta bouche bien grande et tu la trouveras remplie de viande.' (XXVIII, p. 42)

Judging from this passage the battle lines were drawn along a comparison of classical literature with Hebrew, a comparison invited by the Christians themselves.

Voltaire's criticism followed this line and revealed the philosopher's predilection for classical esthetic values. His most frequent objections involved supposed Hebrew infractions against the dictums of clarity, restraint, and above all, good taste, notably in the form of the "bienséances". On this score, the most vulnerable single book of the Old Testament is Solomon's Song. Voltaire admitted that the Song was an invaluable literary document, the only surviving example of Hebrew love poetry. He conceded that there are passages "qui respirent la naïveté et l'amour." These favorable comments, however, were virtually obliterated by an avalanche of sarcasm. Eschewing reasoned criticism, Voltaire took a bludgeon to the book making devastating generalizations which cast doubts on the existence of any Jewish poetic genius. His objections were those of a convinced classicist: "Le style est comme celui de tous les ouvrages d'éloquence des Hébreux, sans liaison, sans suite, plein de répétitions, confus, ridiculement métaphorique." (XX, p. 389) It was particularly the imagery which he found repugnant. There are no redeeming qualities in such comparisons as "Votre nombril est comme une coupe dans laquelle il y a toujours quelque chose à boire" or "Votre nez est comme la tour du mont Liban". Seizing upon
servir l'un et l'autre. Son but est d'attacher l'esprit en flattant l'imagination et l'oreille, soit que les idées ou les sentiments qu'elle veut exciter en nous soient bons ou mauvais, utiles ou nuisibles. Homère, en composant ses poèmes sublimes, ne s'embarrassait guère s'ils ne servaient qu'à accréder et à répandre des superstitions dangereuses ou absurdes; il ne cherchait qu'à amuser ses contemporains, en leur parlant de ce qui les intéressait davantage, de leurs dieux et de leurs héros. Nous osons même dire que la poésie, par sa nature, est plus favorable au mensonge qu'à la vérité; car son but est de tout exagérer, d'éveiller les passions, non de les calmer, et de troubler la raison plutôt que de l'éclairer. Enfin, le poète qui a peint la nature physique ou morale d'une manière vraie et intéressante a rempli les conditions de son art; il n'a pas satisfait aux devoirs d'un bon citoyen, s'il n'a pas respecté les moeurs et les lois de son pays, mais ces obligations n'ont aucun rapport avec l'essence et la nature de la poésie. (XXV, p. 202)

Thus Voltaire divested himself of the obligation of considering the truth or falsehood of the text. Freed of his role as anti-biblical polemicist he could evaluate the artistic merits of the Scriptures from a purely esthetic point of view.

The vehicle of poetry is language; its soul is imagery. Presumably a language so poor as to rate the term "jargon" could hardly qualify as a viable poetic tool. Yet here Voltaire admits that Hebrew is remarkable by the force and boldness of its imagery. The key word here is force, for much of the praise Voltaire accords the Old Testament writers revolves around this term. He speaks enthusiastically of Hebrew metaphors which he deems "clear and striking" since they are taken from familiar objects, especially the elements of nature. Comparing Hebrew poetry with that of the great Latin poets, he surprisingly concludes: "Les poètes latins se sont servis aussi des mêmes images, mais ils n'y ont pas mis la même force, la même chaleur de coloris....Les
poètes juifs s'expriment avec plus d'audace et d'enthousiasme." (XXV, p. 205) Indeed, the Jews were not obliged to write like Virgil. In some ways they did better, Voltaire concedes.

Going on he points out that the Hebrew poets were particularly effective in portraying the figure of God. If we recall how Voltaire decried the anthropomorphism of the Hebrew divinity, how he constantly complained of a debasement of the supreme being to barbaric standards, we can only marvel at the following comment: "Les poètes hébreux excellent particulièremenl à peindre avec énergie la grandeur et la ma-
jesté de Dieu, et surtout ses vengeance....Les poètes profanes n'ont point de tableau plus imposant et plus vigoureux." (XXV, pp. 205-206)
With their force, energy, and vigor, in some ways Hebrew poems are unrivaled. Generalizing about the whole, Voltaire states that they are more dramatic than those of any other nation. (p. 207)

In chapter four we demonstrated how Voltaire so often reduced the prophets and prophecies to absurdity. Here, on the other hand, his treatment is surprising in its enthusiasm, not only for the style but also for the ideas contained therein. He states that the Jewish prophecies were virtually unexcelled in world literature in the sheer num-
ber of bold and great ideas they held. Only the Greeks could be com-
pared to them on this count, the Romans being more interested in eleg-
gance, purity and correctness, than in the sublime. Surveying the pro-
phets Voltaire singles out Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezechial for praise and distinguishes the particular strengths of each. Isaiah was the Homer of the Hebrews by the variety and richness of his images and the majesty of his thoughts. Jeremiah moves us, inspires us with pity. Ezechial is bold, vigorous, but confused and savage in his style. Although he is
often difficult to follow, he communicates to the reader the violent sentiment, the indignation and fire which consume him. Evenhandedly, Voltaire adds that the same strengths and weaknesses are to be found in Eschylus. (p. 208)

So enthusiastic was Voltaire that he criticized Lowth for having neglected the Pentateuch in his commentary. These books formed the essence of the pastoral genre among the Hebrews, a genre in which they are unsurpassed: "C'est dans leurs livres qu'on trouve la peinture la plus frappante des moeurs des premiers âges." (p. 208)

Moreover, Voltaire fully realized that these landmarks of world literature were not created in a vacuum, but reflected the people and culture from which they emanated. The Pentateuch in its simple pastoral beauty evokes not the mindless horde of barbarians we have met previously, but "la voix naïve de la nature" of the patriarchs. "Leurs vertus et leurs vices étaient simples comme eux, aisément aperçus, et fortement exprimés." (p. 208) The rich nature imagery of the poetry in general is the mirror of the society which nurtured the poets:

Il y a, dans la situation de chaque pays et dans la manière de vivre des habitants, des particularités qui doivent affecter la poésie de chaque nation. Les Juifs, par leur religion et leur politique, étaient séparés du reste du monde. Leur commerce était peu considérable, et leur principale occupation était le soin des troupeaux et la culture de la vigne. De là cette multitude d'images tirées des travaux relatifs à ce genre d'occupation. (p. 207)

How far we are, then, from the pillaging hordes of Josuah and David! Jewish society was basically a simple agricultural one. Though Voltaire remarks that the Hebrews did not engage extensively in commerce for once he does not use this comment as a springboard for denigration.
If the situation of the Jews gave rise to some of the greatest beauties of their poetry, it also accounts for some of the defects. The ancient Jews did not possess the same notions of "bienséances" as Voltaire's contemporaries. Hence they made frequent allusions to pregnancy and "other infirmités of the fair sex" which could only shock 18th-century tastes. Nevertheless, Voltaire does not categorically condemn them for this lapse. He merely states that it shocks our notions of propriety. However, Voltaire does find it more difficult to excuse the "excessive" nature of certain images. He explains this excess by the simplicity of the manners of the Hebrews which were still barbarous, by the climate, the continual spectacle of war, the pomp of a majestic and terrible religion which excited the imagination of the poets. (p. 204) Despite this concession, he maintains that there are certain images which absolutely go beyond legitimate poetic license and which are offensive in all times and places. In this respect he returns to the Song of Songs.

Voltaire prefaces his criticism by saying that by and large the Song is "un poème plein de douceur et de grâces." (p. 204) Moreover, he quotes at length passages from the beginning of the work which he deems beautiful in all times and places. Turning to his criticism, he cites two comparisons in which he discerns something sweet and piquant, but in which is found "un je ne sais quoi de gigantesque qui en détruit la grâce de l'effet." (p. 204) A case in point is the comparison of the breasts of the beloved to "deux faons jumeaux qui paissent au milieu des lis." These, however, are the sole criticisms Voltaire offers.

There is present in this article, then, a distinctly different
attitude on Voltaire's part toward the Jews, their religion as poetic inspiration, and their greatest cultural achievement, the Old Testament. In general, Voltaire showed himself to be an enthusiastic reader of the Scriptures, deeply attuned to the beauties therein and completely willing to give the Jews credit for their accomplishments. There is moreover, no reason to doubt his sincerity. He did not attempt to flatter Lowth since he made several objections to his judgments and criticized the book on several counts. Nor was this a saccharine treatment of the Old Testament. Voltaire echoed some of the basic complaints we find elsewhere in his work though he couched them here in moderate terms.

The opinion that despite his violent outbursts Voltaire did in fact appreciate at least parts of the Old Testament for their beauty and literary merit is further strengthened when we consider that even in the midst of battle he could not resist his heartfelt enthusiasm for the stories of Ruth and Joseph. In his most complete analysis of the Bible, *La Bible enfin expliquée*, the philosopher fairly gushed over the tenderness of Ruth's famous answer to her mother-in-law: 'J'irai avec vous, et partout où vous resterez je resterai; votre peuple sera mon peuple' etc:

Cette histoire est bien différente des précédentes: elle n'a rien de toutes les cruautés que nous avons vues; elle est écrite avec une simplicité naïve et touchante. Nous ne connaissons rien ni dans Homère, ni dans Hésiode, ni dans Hérodote, qui aille au coeur comme cette réponse....Il y a du sublime dans cette simplicité...(*XXX*, p. 155)

Elsewhere in the same book Voltaire described Joseph's recognition of his brothers who had sold him into slavery as a milestone of literary history: "Ce morceau d'histoire a toujours passé pour un des plus
beaux de l'antiquité. Nous n'avons rien dans Homère de si touchant. C'est la première reconnaissance dans quelque langue que ce puisse être." (XXX, p. 64)

In this and the preceding chapters we have had conjured up before our eyes an unrelenting portrait of abject inferiority among the Jews. Voltaire examined Jewish society from a variety of standpoints but in each his aim was transparent. Taking the Christian view of the chosen people and the Old Testament as his guide, he destroyed the claims one by one.

It is clear by now that the Jews were pawns in Voltaire's quest to "écraser l'infâme", for in all aspects of his attack it was the Church and its prejudices in favor of the Jews which were in question.

The question then arises: how much of Voltaire's acrimony against all things Jewish was mere polemics against the Church? How much reflected his true attitudes toward the Jews? We have seen at least part of that question answered in the literary sphere where Voltaire permitted himself the moderation that the polemical Voltaire could ill afford.

There is another problem which arises and is not solved by a few pages of praise for ancient Hebrew literary genius. How did the otherwise bleak portrait of the ancient Jews relate to Voltaire's attitudes toward modern Jewry? On occasion, Voltaire pointedly included modern Jews in his diatribes. For instance we have seen him specifically condemn modern Jews as filthy, xenophobic, greedy, and usurious. Must these remarks be taken literally? Are they, on the other hand, examples of Voltaire being carried away in his polemical fury? Do they mean that the entire commentary within the biblical context attesting to Jewish
barbarism and inferiority in all domains was meant to apply to all Jews? Finally, was the anti-Christian campaign a convenient opportunity for satisfying a hatred of Jews in general? Endlessly debating quotations from the biblical context will not answer these questions for these quotes are tainted with anti-Christian intent. Instead, we must turn to the post-biblical domain where we can examine what Voltaire had to say about the Jews in a different setting.
CHAPTER VII

VOLTAIRE AND THE POST-BIBLICAL JEWS

The Old Testament excepted, Voltaire's so-called obsession with the Jews is non-existent. That is not to say that his interest in this people completely evaporates; yet, compared with the fury of the specifically anti-biblical tracts we have examined, the post-biblical Jews assume a relatively minor role in his overall thought. The dirth of comments upon modern Jewry seems to bear out Voltaire's oft-repeated remark that interest in the Jews is necessarily limited to the relationship between Christianity and Judaism, that is, as a religious issue:

Ce peuple doit nous intéresser, puisque nous tenons d'eux notre religion, plusieurs de nos lois et de nos usages, et que nous ne sommes au fond que des Juifs avec un prépuce. (XXI, p. 162)

In his treatment of the Old Testament, of ancient Judaism and of Jewish civilization, Voltaire played out the implications of this remark demonstrating the fallacy of Christianity through the fallacies of the Old Testament and the shortcomings of the Chosen People. Arriving at the modern, that is to say, Christian era and having already proved his point, Voltaire's interest in all things Jewish necessarily diminished. In the scattered remarks he did make, his emphasis shifted from the religious to the sociological point of view as he explored the relationship of the Jewish diaspora and the Gentile world. In the years following the advent of Christ the fate of the Jews went from bad to worse, culminating in the dispersal from Palestine. Henceforth, it was the Jews' destiny to wander the earth, ever the minority
in an alien culture. It is this situation that Voltaire examined in the course of his studies on the historical evolution of Europe.

In general, Voltaire's remarks are unified by the theme of persecution. We find comments dealing with the psychology of anti-Semitism, its causes and effects, and the uses to which it was put by political and religious figures through the ages. As can be expected, many of the remarks deal with the Inquisition and its instrument, the auto da fé, but, as we will soon discover, Voltaire's treatment of the question of anti-Semitism was by no means one dimensional. He was contradictory at times, certainly not above uttering an occasional crude remark pertaining to Jewish business practices, but considering the whole, it will be seen that Voltaire had a better understanding of the workings of anti-Semitism than is usually conceded. In the following pages, then, we will attempt to ferret out Voltaire's attitudes toward the post-biblical Jews in hopes of arriving at some reasonable conclusions regarding his place, if any, in the history of anti-Semitism.

On a purely theoretical level, it could be reasonably argued that Voltaire viewed anti-Jewish sentiment as the inevitable result of Judaism itself. As we have established in chapter two, Voltaire took a dim view of the Jewish claim to be God's chosen people. Not only was this notion a groundless superstition, but it provided a springboard for what can only be termed fanaticism. It had resulted, for example, in the bloody usurpation of the so-called promised land by the Hebrews who had deluded themselves into believing the Canaanites were the enemies of God. For Voltaire, such actions were unconscionable, the notion fostering them in complete contradiction with the nature of a universal godhead. Given the central position occupied by the concept
of the chosen people in Jewish thought, Voltaire believed that there was something nefarious in the very kernel of the Jewish outlook.

Considering the specifics of the Mosaic Law itself, we find objections of a similar nature. Its dietary aspects, for example, effectively placed the Jews in eternal opposition to the rest of mankind. By deeming non-Jews unclean and by forbidding Jews to partake of "unclean" food, the Law not only isolated the Jew from the rest of humanity, but fostered resentment on the part of those whose hospitality was so arbitrarily rejected. Moreover, according to Voltaire, the Mosaic code legitimized usury, elevating it to a "sacred duty" on the part of the Jewish faithful. Of course, nothing could be further from the truth. The charge is a mere fabrication, a traditional slur against Jews which Voltaire did not originate himself, but one which he nevertheless echoed on numerous occasions in his quest to discredit Judaism as a viable religion. In any event, usury too, placed the Jew in opposition to the rest of the world. Voltaire thus summarized the status of the ancient Jews vis-a-vis the rest of mankind:

Il fallait, ou qu'ils subjugassent tout, ou qu'ils fussent écrasés. Il leur fut ordonné d'avoir les nations en horreur, et de se croire souillés s'ils avaient mangé dans un plat qui eût appartenu à un homme d'une autre foi.... Quand leurs yeux furent un peu ouverts par d'autres nations victorieuses, qui leur apprirent que le monde était plus grand qu'ils ne croyaient, ils se trouvèrent par leur loi même, ennemis naturels de ces nations, et enfin du genre humain. (XI, p. 164)

Obviously, Voltaire was speaking here of the Jews of Palestine whose history, as we have seen, was one of constant war and subjugation. As we move into the post-biblical era, however, the question shifts from that of a fanatical and warlike nation to one of a people dispersed
from their homeland and faced with the prospect of forever living as a minority group in a foreign environment. The Jews' religious beliefs did not favor such an arrangement. Thus, dispersed into the Roman empire,

Ils gardèrent tous leurs usages, qui sont précisément le contraire des usages sociables: ils furent donc avec raison traités comme une nation opposée en tout aux autres; les servant par avarice, les détestant par fanatisme, se faisant de l'usure un devoir sacré. Et ce sont nos pères! (XI, p. 164)

Leaving aside the obvious anti-Christian intent of the passage, it would seem that Voltaire was indeed justifying anti-Jewish sentiment and denying the possibility of harmonious relations between Jews and Gentiles. This is not the case, as Voltaire's examination of the rapport between the Jews and the Romans well illustrates.

Considering the Romans, Voltaire made an important distinction between attitude and action. On the one hand, the Jews retained their "anti-social" attitudes and customs. As for the Romans, they considered the Jews a bizarre and superstitious sect. (XI, p. 122) Yet, with few exceptions,\(^1\) the Jews managed to live in harmony within the empire, both religiously and economically speaking. Despite his avowed admiration of classical Rome, Voltaire did not seek to attribute this state of affairs to the sheer magnanimity of the Roman state. It is, of course, a question of tolerance, but for Voltaire, tolerance is not the result of pure generosity, but is rather a sort of social contract dependent upon the goodwill of the parties involved.\(^2\) In exchange for the privilege of being tolerated by the majority, the minority agrees neither to disrupt the social order of the state nor to seek to impose its beliefs upon others by use of force. In his treatment of
the relations between the Jews and the Romans Voltaire emphasized the fact that if the Romans tolerated the Jews it was precisely because the Jews were content to pursue their own beliefs and conduct their own affairs without posing a threat to other members of society or to the state itself. (XXVI, p. 263) They may have retained their so-called anti-social customs, yet they did not require others to adopt them nor did they declare themselves to be the implacable enemies of the state and the state religion. For this, they earned the toleration of the Romans, if not their respect.

In this regard, Voltaire contrasted the behavior of the Jews with that of the early Christians. Unlike the Jews, the Christians were indeed persecuted by Rome, but this persecution was not the result of a Roman predilection for cruelty and bloodshed, but rather was Rome's justified response to fanatical behavior. Explaining the hatred and persecution generated by the Christians Voltaire declared that they alone among all the religious sects admitted to Rome declared war upon the gods of the empire. (XVIII, p. 245) Contrasting the tolerance accorded the Jews with the persecution suffered by the Christians Voltaire remarked: "N'est-ce point parce que les Juifs, occupés de vendre des chiffons et des philtres, n'avaient pas cette rage d'exterminer la religion de l'empire et que les chrétiens intolérants étaient possédés de cette rage?" (XXVI, p. 263)

Voltaire's discussion of the Jews in ancient Rome is important, for it illustrates the fact that in Voltaire's mind, the Jews could indeed live peacefully as a minority culture. If they were permitted to do so in Rome, the situation abruptly changed when the Christians came to power.
With the rise of Christianity and the fall of the empire, the fate of the Jews was sealed in blood and misery. Christian persecution of the Jews stemmed from a complex network of sources and Voltaire demonstrated a remarkable understanding of the problem. Contrary to what one might believe, he did not reduce the sufferings of the Jews to the simplistic notion of pure religious fanaticism, but explored instead the interaction of ignorance, myth, economic factors and political expediency which provided the rationale for the opprobrium and terrorization under which the Jews labored for so many centuries. His analysis is neither systematic nor extensive, but his scattered remarks when taken as a whole present a powerful indictment of both the rhetoric and the methods used against the Jews.

Over the centuries, Christians developed a mythology surrounding the Jews which created an effective rationale for all manner of persecution and abuse. The Jews' fate, according to church propaganda, was to be eternally punished for the murder of Jesus and their continued intransigence against his law. Paranoia added to the problem as it was imagined that the Jews a priori detested Christians and were capable of the most heinous crimes against them. Given the fundamental malice of the Jew, his indubitable alliance with evil, it comes as no surprise that all his activities were viewed with suspicion. Not the least of these were his religious rites which were believed to include the blood of Christian children as a necessary ingredient. These were some of the ostensible causes of anti-Semitic activity. Voltaire did not make an in-depth study of all the myths surrounding the Jews. Nevertheless, he did seek to expose the fallacy of the charge of deicide and categorically condemned the persecution that it and all the other myths engend-
Voltaire attacked the premise of anti-Jewish hatred as he exposed the utter groundlessness of the charge of deicide. Time and again he pointed out that historically and culturally speaking it was impossible that the Jews were responsible for the death of Jesus. First of all, at the time of the crucifixion, the Jews did not possess "le droit de glaive" and therefore were in no position to execute anyone. Secondly, crucifixion was never a custom among the Jews, but was a distinctly Roman practice. (XXIV, p. 281; see also XXVI, p. 520) Moreover, as we have seen in chapter four, if the Jews did in fact reject Jesus as the Messiah and refuse the New Law, they were perfectly justified in doing so. He condemned categorically the fanaticism, fear, and ignorance which led to countless massacres against innocent people. He treated with sarcasm the butchery perpetrated by the gallant crusaders on their way to the Holy Land to do battle with the infidel. (XI, p. 163) He viewed with disgust the hysterical accusation of Jewish well-poisoning as a cause of the Black Plague. (XI, p. 163)

Voltaire fully realized, however, that brutality directed against the Jews was by no means confined to sporadic outbursts of violence caused by the fear or hysteria of the moment. Anti-Semitism was institutionalized thereby locking the Jew into a position of isolation, disgrace, and legalized exploitation. Voltaire enumerated the indignities heaped upon the Jews to maintain them in their position as "enemy". There were, of course, the infamous hats or badges which the Jew was required to wear to distinguish him from the Christian segment of the population. Of course, there was to be absolutely no social intercourse between the two groups. Jews were not permitted to employ Chris-
tians as servants. The penalties for sexual activity between Jews and Christians were severe. He described the ultimate indignity with sarcasm: "On avait toujours soin de les prendre entre deux chiens, lorsqu'ils étaient condamnés." (XI, p. 163) Thus, Jewish opprobrium and isolation were part and parcel of the legal code.

Ostensibly, the only recourse for the Jew was to rid himself of the source of his woes, that is, to renounce Judaism and join the majority. Given the Christian penchant for proselytism, it would seem logical that conversion would have formed the ultimate goal. That, however, was not the case. It appears that Christians were far more intent upon exploiting the Jews as enemies than upon winning them to the fold. Conversion was rendered virtually unfeasible through a law which proclaimed that the converted Jew must turn all his wealth over to his lord. Voltaire sardonically remarked: "Ce n'était pas un sûr moyen de les convertir, mais il fallait bien dédommager le baron de la perte de son juif." (XI, p. 162) With these words he exposed the reality of the relationship between Christian and Jew during the Middle Ages, and indeed in the modern era as well. In addition to their role as religious and psychological scapegoat, they were an economic convenience, easily exploited because of their religious differences. They could be used by the people to vent fears and superstition, by crusaders to satisfy an appetite for blood. By the powerful they could be employed as a political and economic tool to gain power and to fill their coffers. If religion provided the basic rationale for persecution, cynicism and greed did the rest.

Hated as they were, the Jews were allowed some measure of freedom in Europe. They of course were not permitted free access to all pro-
essions and trades, but they were allowed to perform tasks which Christians were either forbidden or loath to undertake. Usury was just such an enterprise. Despite his acerbic comments on usury in his battle against the Mosaic Law, Voltaire was well aware of the role Christians played in directing the Jews toward this hated, but necessary practice:

Réduits à courir de terres en terres, de mers en mers, pour gagner leur vie; partout déclarés incapables de posséder aucun bien fonds, et de n'avoir aucun emploi, ils se sont vus obligés de se disperser de lieux en lieux, et de ne pouvoir s'établir fixement dans aucune contrée, faute d'appui de puissance pour s'y maintenir, et de lumières dans l'art militaire. Le commerce, profession longtemps méprisée par la plupart des peuples de l'Europe, fut leur unique ressource dans ces siècles barbares; et comme ils s'y enrichirent nécessairement on les traita d'infâmes usuriers. (XIX, p. 524)

Before the debates of the 1780's which led to the Jewish emancipation, one would be hard put to find a passage which more graphically and sympathetically describes the plight of the Jew in Christian Europe. Be that as it may, it is clear that Voltaire perceived the role of the Jew in Christian society and the peculiar logic of anti-Semitism. The out-group was permitted, indeed driven, to perform a function deemed undesirable but necessary by the dominant group. Yet, the very performance of this task provided still another reason for hatred and persecution!

Adopting his role as demystifier, Voltaire stripped away layer upon layer of rationalization to arrive at the sordid truth of anti-Semitism. Using the only means permitted him for his survival, business and particularly money lending, the Jew not only survived, but in some instances prospered. His success was greeted with yet another
wave of hatred. Though the condemnations were couched in high sound-
ing religious rhetoric, Voltaire disclosed that the true motive behind
them was sheer jealousy. Speaking of the urban Jews, he commented
that:

Ils avaient leurs synagogues et leurs droits
municipaux qu'on leur faisait acheter fort
chèrement; et lorsqu'ils étaient devenus
 riches, on ne manquait pas, comme on a vu, de
les accuser d'avoir crucifié un petit enfant
le vendredi saint. C'est sur cette accusation
populaire que dans plusieurs villes de Languedoc
et de Provence on établit la loi qui permettait
de les battre depuis le vendredi saint jusqu'à
Pâques quand on les trouvait dans les rues.
(XI, p. 162)

When jealousy combined with greed, the result was thousands of Jews
tortured and killed for their supposed wealth, as was customary in
Bohemia, France, Germany, and England. (XII, p. 119; see also XIII, p.
407) A subtler but no less pernicious practice was the exploitation of
the Jews as a sort of "tax shelter". Persons reimbursed themselves for
taxes paid to the pope on benefices received by extorting money from
the Jews. (XIII, p. 407) Finally, if the Jews were persecuted to the
point of expulsion, there was always another country to take them in,
precisely for purposes of quick economic gain. Thus Voltaire pointed
out that Charles IV of France received the expelled German Jews -- for
a price. (XIII, p. 407)

Economic exploitation also had its political uses. As scapegoats
the Jews could be counted upon to win friends for those in power.
Wenceslas of Poland, for example, annulled all debts owed to Jews, hop-
ing by this ploy to gain the support of both the people and the mobili-
ity and thus strengthen his own political position. (XIII, p. 407)

With these examples, Voltaire emphatically exposed the plight of
the Jew in Europe as victim, not only of religious insanity, but of fanaticism at the service of jealousy, greed, and political expediency.

Voltaire's strongest and most unified attack on anti-Semitism, however, is found in his discussion of the events leading to the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 and the establishment of the Inquisition. Voltaire's attacks on the Inquisition are well-known as they form one of the hardest-hitting facets in his life-long struggle against religious fanaticism. From a polemical standpoint he took an obvious delight in exposing the contradictions basic to Christian persecution of Jews. He found it ironic, for example, that the Jews were tortured and killed precisely for remaining faithful to the religion of which Christians were the proud descendants. Moreover, to add insult to injury the Jews being burned at the stake were routinely serenaded by their very own psalms and hymns! (XXVI, p. 562; see also VII, pp. 183-184) For Voltaire, this was the epitome of lunacy. Irony aside, however, Voltaire was genuinely horrified by the apparent equanimity with which Christians viewed the torment inflicted on the unfortunate Jews, as this remark abundantly illustrates:

Il est très-sûr que dans les massacres de la Saint Barthélemy et dans les autos da fé, dans les saints actes de foi de l'Inquisition, nulle conscience de meurtrier ne se reprocha jamais d'avoir massacré hommes, femmes, enfants; d'avoir fait crier, évanouir, mourir dans les tortures des malheureux qui n'avaient d'autres crimes que de faire la Pâque différemment des inquisiteurs. (XVIII, p. 235)

In much the same vein he condemned Philip III for refusing to listen to his better judgment. Seized with pity, the king is reported to have exclaimed: "Voilà des hommes bien malheureux de mourir parce qu'ils n'ont pu changer d'opinion." Voltaire replied: "Il est très vraisem-
blable qu'un roi ait pensé ainsi, et que ces paroles lui aient échappé; il est seulement bien cruel qu'il ne sauvât pas ceux qu'il plaignait." (XI, p. 353)

Though this facet of his attack on anti-Jewish persecution in Spain has been by far the most publicized, it represents only a portion of the overall picture. For Voltaire pure religious fanaticism was only the tip of the iceberg under which were found much more sinister elements such as jealousy, greed, and paranoia. It is this aspect of Voltaire's exposé of the Spanish situation which is normally neglected by scholars, but which is nevertheless the most original and which demonstrates his understanding of the workings of anti-Semitism. In the final analysis, the Jews were the victims of a whole system of economic and political propaganda used by those in power to confiscate their wealth. It was from this perspective that Voltaire traced the events leading to the expulsion and establishment of the dreaded Inquisition.

Spain's preoccupation with the reconquest of the homeland from the Moorish invaders allowed a situation to develop in which the Jews attained a virtual monopoly in the economic affairs of the nation. Though Voltaire viewed this situation as ultimately undesirable, he emphasized that the Spanish had no legitimate grounds for complaint. As he pointed out, the Jews fulfilled a necessary function which Spain, "une nation qui ne savait que combattre", was evidently incapable of fulfilling at the time in question. In this regard Voltaire compared the Jews' economic activities to those of the Moors in the agricultural domain. (XII, p. 159) In any event, the Jews were allowed freedom to exploit the economy and to prosper as long as Spain was preoccupied with
the wars against the Moors. Once the reconquest was completed, however, the Spanish sought to rid themselves of the so-called Jewish parasites.

The most vocal adversaries of the Jews were the nobles who found themselves in dire economic straits. Voltaire exposed the hypocrisy of the anti-Semitic nobles by emphasizing the fact that their impoverishment was not the result of a Jewish plot but of their own prodigality. (XII, p. 159) Nonetheless, their views prevailed. They accused the Jews not only of exploiting the economy to the detriment of "true" Spaniards, but also of political subversion. Voltaire treated this charge with scorn: "Quelques Espagnols ont prétendu que cette nation commençait à être redoutable. Elle était pernicieuse par ses profits sur les Espagnols; mais n'étant point guerrière, elle n'était point à craindre." (XII, p. 160) The charge was unfounded from another, still more pragmatic point of view. Commerce, the primary vehicle of Jewish enterprise, could only function effectively in an atmosphere of political stability. Having established that the Jews were in fact prospering in Spain, Voltaire argued that it was absolutely contrary to their interests to seek to disrupt the political environment. (XII, p. 350) Moreover, once the expulsion was effected, the actions of the Jews furnished proof positive that they were no threat. Most left the country, preferring flight to rebellion. Those who remained sought to placate the Christian majority by at least feigning conversion. (XII, p. 350) There can be no doubt, then, that Voltaire viewed the charge of Jewish political subversion as a clumsy fabrication having no basis in fact.

From an economic point of view, Voltaire considered the expulsion as pure idiocy. He pointed out that though the Jews were indeed a power-
ful factor in the Spanish economy they were no parasites. Rather, they formed a positive economic resource which those in power should have perceived. The taxes the Jews paid the cities and the crown formed a long-term source of sure revenue for Spain, revenue irretrievably lost after the expulsion. This fact led Voltaire to declare: "Il est donc bien difficile de pouvoir attribuer à une sage politique la persécution qu'ils essuyèrent." (XII, p. 350) If reason did not dictate the expulsion, what did? Voltaire replied that greed, the seeking of a quick gain at the expense of a long-term investment, played the major role: "On prit enfin le parti de les chasser et de les dépouiller. On ne leur donna que six mois pour vendre leurs effets, qu'ils furent obligés de vendre au plus bas prix. On leur défendit sous peine de la vie, d'empporter avec eux ni or, ni argent." (XII, p. 159) If it was greed which expelled the Jews from Spain, greed also provided the means of reentry and was ultimately a prime factor in the establishment of the Inquisition: "Plusieurs revinrent feignant de s'être fait chrétiens. On les avait chassés pour s'emparer de leurs richesses, on les reçut parce qu'ils en rapportaient; et c'est contre eux principalement que fut établi le tribunal de l'Inquisition, afin qu'au moindre acte de leur religion on pût juridiquement leur arracher leurs biens et leur vie." (XII, pp. 159-160; see also XII, p. 350; VII, p. 184)

From the preceding pages it is clear that Voltaire's treatment of anti-Semitism was by no means one dimensional. The religious aspect was of course paramount, but the "philosophe" fully realized the economic and political myths and prejudices which contributed greatly to the misery of European Jews. Indeed, emerging from Voltaire's treatment of the question is the impression that the religious element functioned
primarily as a screen behind which operated baser motives such as greed, jealousy, and cynicism. Here as elsewhere Voltaire acted as the demystifier, sarcastically exposing the truth behind the rationalization and the rationalization as absolutely groundless.

The situation in Spain was the culminating point in Voltaire's treatment of the question of anti-Semitism. His discussion of the expulsion and the establishment of the Inquisition was his most unified and cogent attack. These events took place at the end of the fifteenth century. Yet, as we all know, anti-Jewish prejudice and persecution did not end there, but continued into the 18th century and beyond. The question then arises: how did Voltaire view his Jewish contemporaries and the problems they faced?

Among modern western European nations Spain and Portugal alone continued the systematic eradication of Jews through the Inquisition. This fact may have influenced the course Voltaire's writings took on the subject of modern anti-Semitism. With the exception of his continued attack on the Inquisition, his remarks on his Jewish contemporaries are scanty indeed. Of those made, the tone is distinctly optimistic.

Compared with the physical torments suffered by Jews on the Iberian peninsula, the situation elsewhere in Europe was more than tolerable, according to Voltaire. He states the existence of the apparent dichotomy with the following flippant remark: "C'est une preuve des caprices de l'esprit humain de les voir brûlés à Lisbonne et aspirant à tous les privilèges en Grande Bretagne." (XII, pp. 163-164) Outside the Iberian peninsula, Voltaire portrayed the Jews as prosperous and enjoying a freedom heretofore unheard of. His attitude toward the situation was one of approval, as the following passage demonstrates: In
England and Holland, "il jouissent de leurs richesse, et de tous les droits de l'humanité, dont on ne doit dépouiller personne." (XII, pp. 163-164) He noted that the Jews of Britain almost succeeded in attaining full civil rights in 1750, but that public outcry crushed the project. He concluded that the loss was not serious, the Jews being content to remain as they were: free and rich. (XII, pp. 163-164) Voltaire's survey of the position of western European Jews was as superficial as it was misleading, particularly in the case of France. While it was true that the Jews of Bordeaux were the most prosperous Jewish community in France, the fact remains that the condition of the average Jew was deplorable. The taxes, ostracism, restrictions and myths Voltaire condemned in relation to the Middle Ages continued to plague the modern French Jews. Does this apparent myopia on Voltaire's part point to a deep-seated hatred of Jews and a desire to maintain them in their traditionally downtrodden position? There is no substantial evidence to support this view.

It is true that Voltaire's concern for the Jews revolved first and foremost around the question of their physical safety and fundamental religious freedom. Given the record of Voltaire's writings, it is no less true that he viewed economic exploitation of Jews as equally repugnant. Nevertheless, Voltaire never undertook a campaign for full emancipation of the Jews. The fact is, however, that Voltaire made no campaign for the full emancipation of Protestants either. His attitude toward the persecuted Calvinists of France was equal to that toward the Jews in that he argued for their physical safety, their right to freedom of conscience, and "basic human rights", yet never pronounced himself in favor of full integration into society. Arguing for religious
toleration of Calvinists, he juxtaposed the fate of the persecuted
French Protestants with that of the French Jews. It is clear that the
Jews already possessed what he would have granted to the Calvinists:
"Nous avons des juifs à Bordeaux, à Metz, en Alsace; nous avons des
luthériens des molinistes, des jansénistes; ne pouvons-nous souffrir
et contenir des calvinistes à peu près aux mêmes conditions que les
catholiques sont tolérés à Londres?" (XXV, p. 37) These conditions in
no way involved full civil rights: "...ils ne demandent que la pro-
tection de la loi naturelle, le droit d'hériter de leurs pères, la
franchise de leurs personnes; point de temples publics, point de droit
aux charges municipales, aux dignités." (XXV, p. 37) Compared with
the Calvinists of France, the Jews of Bordeaux, England and Holland al-
ready enjoyed a considerable amount of freedom.

Secondly, whether or not Voltaire was correct in assuming wide-
spread Jewish prosperity, it is nonetheless clear from the passages we
have cited previously that he tolerated the principle. He consistently
maintained the right of the Jews to enjoy the fruits of their labors
and categorically condemned those who through physical, political or
legal intimidation sought to deprive them of their wealth.

One question that comes to mind when we consider Voltaire's atti-
tude toward the economic status of the Jews is the relationship between
the "philosophe" and his Jewish contemporaries in the financial domain.
According to a tradition stemming from the 18th century, Voltaire was
irrevocably embittered against all Jews because of two unfortunate busi-
ness deals involving Jewish agents.

The first of these was the famous Medina bankruptcy of 1728. As
described by Besterman, the bankruptcy was merely the last in a succ-
ession of events which convinced the young poet that he was destined for unhappiness. Beaterman observes that

there is no doubt that at first Voltaire was deeply distressed in his own mind. While his mistress went to the opera...with the man whose vanity and cowardice were responsible for his imprisonment, and his closest friend amused himself at Forges, Voltaire was resigned to the conclusion that he was fated to be unhappy. He soon found that the English character was by no means so limpid as he first thought nor English institutions so uniformly praiseworthy, nor the weather always good. Moreover, though he was by no means penniless, no sooner had he reached our shores than he suffered from a banker's failure; and soon after he received the news of his sister's death.\(^6\)

Voltaire himself described his reaction to the event in a letter to Theriot:

Let me acquaint you with an account of my forever cursed fortune. I came again into England in the latter end of July very much dissatisfied with my secret voyage into France both unsuccessful and expensive. I had about me only some bills of exchange upon a Jew called Medina for the sum of about eight or nine thousand French livres, reckoning all. At my coming to London, I found my damned Jew was broken. I was without a penny, sick to death of a violent aigüe, a stranger alone, helpless, in the midst of a city, wherein I was known to no body...I had never undergone such distress; but I am born to run through all the misfortunes of life.\(^7\)

Despite the reference to Medina as "my damned Jew", it is apparent that Voltaire did not seek to blame him for the bankruptcy. He interpreted it rather as mere bad luck. There is absolutely no evidence to show that Voltaire ever changed his mind. On the contrary, he rarely mentioned it again. If indeed the affair preyed on Voltaire's mind, he certainly kept it to himself.

A more serious matter, however, is the infamous Hirschell affair in which Voltaire's role was less than blameless. The incident took
place during Voltaire's stay with Frederick the Great. It involved a patently illegal speculation in bonds undertaken by the "philosophe" with the aid of Abraham Hirschell. The deal fell through and there followed a series of mutual recriminations between the Jewish agent and Voltaire. Voltaire accused Hirschell of attempting to swindle him out of the money he had invested in the bonds. Hirschell, for his part, alleged that Voltaire had forged letters of exchange incriminating him in the transaction. (Best. 3773) The "philosophe" sued the agent and received a favorable judgment some months later. Meanwhile, the litigation and the sordid nature of the whole business produced a colossal scandal which reached Frederick's ears and which did nothing to improve the king's already tarnished opinion of Voltaire. For Frederick this latest scandal was the last straw. Voltaire's position at court was placed in jeopardy as this letter written by Frederick clearly shows: Frederick began by complaining of Voltaire's conduct since his arrival at court, accusing him of causing nothing but intrigue and ill will:

Vous avez eu la plus vilaine affaire du monde avec le juif. Vous avez fait un train affreux dans toute la ville. L'affaire des billets saxon est si bien connue en Saxe, qu'on m'en a porté de grievées plaintes. Pour moi, j'ai conservé la paix dans ma maison jusqu'à votre arrivée; et je vous avertis que si vous avez la passion d'intriguer et de cabaler, vous vous êtes très mal adressé....En cas que vous puissiez vous résoudre à vivre en philosophe, je serai bien aise de vous voir; mais si vous vous abandonnez à toutes les fougues de vos passions, et que vous en voulez à tout le monde, vous ne me ferez aucun plaisir de venir ici, et vous pouvez tout autant rester à Berlin. (Best. 3813)

Voltaire was painfully aware of the gravity of his position and sought to exonerate himself by placing the blame on Hirschell: Writ-
ing to Frederick, he cast himself in the role of the innocent victim of an attempted swindle:

Votre majesté verra que je mettray à la raison le juif Hirshel aussi facilement. Je suis très affligé d'avoir un procez, mais s'il n'y a pas d'autre moyen d'avoir justice, si Hirshel veut abuser de ma facilité pour me voler environ onze mil écus,...s'il faut que je plaide contre un juif que j'ay convaincu d'avoir agi contre sa signature, c'est un malheur qu'il faut soutenir, comme bien d'autres. (Best. 3726)

Similarly, he declared in a letter to Darget:

Mon cher ami, j'ai tenté toutes les voies possibles, pour racheter à prix d'argent, la quatrième persécution que j'essuie depuis que je suis ici. On a empêché Hirshel de s'accommoder dans le temps que j'avais en main de quoi le faire mettre en prison. Enfin je me suis adressé à la justice, qui ne connaît rien aux intrigues et aux tracasseries, l'a fait arrêter. (Best. 3754)

Voltaire's case against Hirshel was based upon his alleged actions, not on his Jewishness. By and large, Voltaire refrained from using inflammatory and anti-Semitic tactics against Hirshel. In the literally scores of letters he wrote on the subject, only once did he descend to what can be described as an anti-Semitic diatribe:

Mon cher ami, je reçois votre lettre aussi aimable que raisonnable. Le juif est condamné dans tous les points; et de plus, il est condamné à une amende qui emporte infamie, s'il y avait infamie pour un juif. Mais tout cela ne me rend pas ma santé. Je suis dans un état qui ferait pitié, même à un juif. (Best. 3799)

This letter is unfortunate. It seems, however, that in it Voltaire spent his wrath against Hirshel, for once the ugly business was over, he rarely mentioned it again, and certainly never in the terms used in the letter cited above. Moreover, it is undeniable that Voltaire's rancor against Hirshel did not lead him to a generalized campaign of
vengeance against so-called Jewish chicanery.

Consider the facts. The most obvious point of attack against the Jews from the financial standpoint was the charge of usury. Indeed, this topic figured as the single most inflammatory issue in the late 18th-century debates on Jewish civil rights. In Voltaire's writings the question occupied a minor place and the "philosophe's" attitude was by no means totally negative. In the anti-biblical tracts and in passages whose ultimate goal is to discredit Christianity, usury was presented as scandalous. In the modern era, when it was discussed at all, it was treated either in a manner sympathetic to the Jews or in neutral terms. Earlier in this chapter we cited a passage dealing with the causes of Jewish usury. There Voltaire proclaimed the truth of the matter in almost lyrical terms. Christian prejudice left the Jew little choice, but to engage in practices which were necessary but tainted with infamy. This passage points to what became after Voltaire's death the main tenet in the case for Jewish emancipation. (Hertzberg, p. 329)

If Voltaire did indeed wish to vent his wrath against Hirschell, Medina, and Jewish infamy in business in general, he possessed a magnificent forum in the all-embracing Dictionnaire philosophique. Yet, such a campaign is nowhere to be found. There is no article on usury, for example, no mention of the Jews in the article "Avarice". The article "Banqueroute", which could have provided a platform for Voltaire's much vaunted grievances against Medina is curiously neutral. Money lending and the Jews are mentioned, but only in the most casual way: "On connaissait peu de banqueroutes en France avant le XVIe siècle. La grande raison, c'est qu'il n'y avait point de banquiers."

There he described it as a fact of life, neither good nor bad in itself, and certainly not the result of a Jewish proclivity toward greed: "Le haut intérêt de l'argent est la marque infaillible de la pauvreté publique." (XII, p. 56) Nor is usury the sole prerogative of the Jews. The Lombards were great usurers during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. (XII, p. 56) The "monts de piété" operated by both Christians and Jews were forms of usury as well. (XXVI, p. 539)

If Voltaire lambasted so-called "Jewish usury", then, it was solely in the attempt to discredit the Mosaic Law and indirectly the Christians who descended from it. Arriving at the modern era, the "philosophe's" attitude shifted abruptly to one of indifference to the concept itself and at times at least, sympathy for the Jews who were driven to it for lack of viable business alternatives. Also, in the modern era it is important to reiterate Voltaire's absolute disgust with those who sought to disenfranchise Jews on grounds of usury or "parasitism". Thus he criticized the Inquisitors' rationale for confiscation on the grounds that Jewish wealth constituted "ill-gotten" gains and that taking it from them was mere restitution. (XIX, pp. 477-478)

As for his Jewish contemporaries, we have shown that he viewed their so-called prosperity with equanimity and in no way sought to stir up hatred against it.

We are not prepared to argue that Voltaire was completely devoid of anti-Jewish bias, much less that he harbored an abiding affection for this people. As we have seen, he considered Judaism itself to be
a morass of superstition. It is clear that he accepted the stereotype of the rich Jew. He was not above leveling a crude anti-Semitic slur, as in the letter on Hirschell demonstrated. Nevertheless, whatever he may have written about the ancient Jews in his battle against the Bible and Christianity, however angry he was at Hirschell, however shortsighted he was regarding the actual status of his Jewish contemporaries, it is abundantly clear that he adamantly defended their right to life, religious liberty, and the enjoyment of their fortunes. Voltaire's ambivalent attitude toward the Jews is well illustrated in a letter he wrote on behalf of a Jew whose belongings were confiscated at the gates of Lyon. In it while pleading with the intendant to return the Jew's goods, he nevertheless adopted a bantering attitude in regard to the unfortunate man's religious persuasion:

Bénit soit, mons., l'ancien Testam't qui me fournit aujourd'hui l'occasion de vous dire que de ceux qui adorent le Nouveau il n'y a personne qui vous soit plus attaché que moi.

Un descendant de Jacob, honnête fripier, comme sont tous ces mess'rs, attendant très feremment le messie, attend aussi votre protection dont il a le plus de besoin. Les gens du premier métier de St. Matthieu, qui fouillent les juifs et les chrétiens aux portes de votre ville, ont saisi je ne sais quoi à un page israélite appartenant en toute humilité à ce circoncis. Permettez-moi, mons. de joindre mes amen aux siens. (Best. 8276)

It is unlikely that if Voltaire truly detested the Jews and wished them ill that he would have deigned to take up the case of this hapless Israelite.

While he reserved the right to criticize the Jews, while he poked fun at what he considered to be their vile superstitions, Voltaire nevertheless consistently proved himself ready to come to their defense when he felt their rights were being trampled on. He decried the base superfi-
stitions and prejudices which resulted not only in bloodshed, but in confiscation and intimidation. If he never managed to completely rid himself of a certain prejudice toward Jews, he nonetheless perceived the utter lunacy of anti-Semitism and the tragedy of its consequences.

Unlike those who, after his death sought to "regenerate" the Jew in their own image, Voltaire's attitude was one of live and let live, both physically and fiscally speaking. There are some who would say that Voltaire's seeming reluctance to undertake the battle for full civil rights for Jews belied his racist views; that is, that he despaired of even the possibility of any so-called regeneration because they were genetically condemned to intellectual inferiority and moral turpitude. This charge is easily disproved on several counts.

First, we have shown previously that when Voltaire was not involved in polemical disputes, he considered the Old Testament to be a literary marvel of the past, in many ways equaling or exceeding those of the classical tradition. Secondly, though he often equated the word "Jew" with superstition, he nevertheless perceived the "enlightenment" of such renowned Jewish scholars and philosophers as Abn Ezra, Maimonides, (XXVI, p. 516) and, in the modern era, Spinoza. These Jews, like Voltaire himself, sought to demystify the Old Testament and to approach it through the eyes of reason and common sense. Indeed, much of Voltaire's anti-biblical criticism bears the mark of Spinoza's work. Of course, the anti-Semite, through a curious process of mental gymnastics, can always distinguish between the "good" Jew who is the exception to the rule, and the rest which fit his preconceived notions. For his part, Voltaire perceived that the number of "good Jews", that is, Jews converted to "philosophy" was increasing especially in England
and Holland where they enjoyed relative freedom and prosperity. (Best. 11199) As for the rest, Voltaire displayed contradictory feelings. On one occasion, he condemned the lot as unconscionable swindlers, as in his letter on Hirschell. In other instances, he stated that the primary reasons the Jews survived as a people were the utter sobriety of their lives, their devotion to family, their pacifism and their untiring devotion to the Law. (XIX, pp. 523-4) This Voltaire accepted as a valid approach to life. If he was not willing to enthusiastically say, "Vive la différence", he nevertheless accepted it and advocated that others do so as well. This ultimately is the meaning of the oft-quoted quip: "Ce sont des fous mais il ne faut pas les brûler". (Best. 12457)

Condemning Voltaire as a diehard racist is then simply unjustifiable and unjust. It is clear that he suffered from some prejudice, but it is equally clear that he realized both intellectually and emotionally the absurdity and ugliness of anti-Jewish propaganda and persecution. If he showed himself to be enlightened at times and at others benighted, it should come as no surprise since it was during his lifetime and especially after his death that the position of the Jews in France was being re-evaluated. As we pointed out in Chapter One, only after his death did the battle for full civil rights take shape. Voltaire himself lived and died in the prelude to the storm of controversy. It is to his credit that he questioned as much as he did the myths surrounding the Jews and uncompromisingly defended their right to live as they saw fit. In the next chapter we will attempt to situate Voltaire's attitude into the general framework of 18th-century thought on the Jews and the battle for emancipation.
FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER VII

1The sole exception was a Jewish rebellion in the third century inspired by an earthquake which was interpreted as a sign of God's wrath against Rome. Voltaire reports the incident as an isolated example of Jewish religious fanaticism justly punished by the authorities. See: XI, p. 122

2Voltaire announces this theory in the Traité sur la tolérance in a response to the question: Is intolerance ever justified? In replying, Voltaire cites examples of fanaticism through the ages and concludes that such behavior and those who engage in it cannot be tolerated. See: XXVI, p. 263.

3There are many books dealing with the question. Among the most interesting are Léon Kahn, Les Juifs de Paris au XVIIIe siècle (Paris: A. Durlacher, 1894) and Roger Clément, La Condition des Juifs de Metz dans l'ancien régime (Paris: Imprimerie Henri Jouve, 1903). See above Chapter I.

4This argument was already announced by Montesquieu in L'Esprit des lois, but did not gain support until the 1780's when the Jewish question came to the fore. See above Chapter I.


7Voltaire, Correspondence, ed. Theodore Besterman (Genève: Musée les Délices, 1953), II, no. 294. All references to Voltaire's correspondence are taken from the Besterman edition and will henceforth be noted in the text with the abbreviation Best. and the number of the letter.

8This affair is commented on in literally scores of letters. The heart of the dispute is found in Best. 3725, 3726, 3771, 2772, 3773, 3775, 3878.

9Years later Voltaire recalled the treachery of Hirschell, but failed to launch a diatribe against him or the Jews. See Best. 16911.

CHAPTER VIII

VOLTAIRE AND HIS PHILOSOPHICAL CONTEMPORARIES

There is a danger inherent in discussing Voltaire's attitudes toward the Jews. It consists in the unconscious imposition of the vantage point of the twentieth century upon remarks made in an era two hundred years removed. Consequently, it is only fitting that in our final chapter we seek to situate Voltaire's commentary into the general intellectual atmosphere in which it was composed. There are two main questions to be answered here. First, how do Voltaire's attitudes compare with those of the other great "philosophes". Second, how do they relate in general to the prevailing attitudes of his time? It is only by answering these questions that we can justly evaluate Voltaire's place in the history of the "Jewish question".

Among the giants of the French philosophical movement Montesquieu is considered by most modern scholars to be the foremost champion of the Jews. In this regard Lehrmann hails him as "la figure la plus noble, l'esprit le plus éclairé des philosophes du XVIIIe siècle."

Montesquieu is deemed to be an impartial spirit, an investigator dedicated, not to wanton destruction of the past, but to a fair assessment of it, judiciously rejecting abuses while retaining the good. According to theory, then, it was this pervading spirit of justice which led Montesquieu to uphold Judaism and to condemn persecution, both economic and religious, directed against its faithful.

Relating Montesquieu's writings on the Jews to those of Voltaire, critics tend to establish a dichotomy, but one which is fraught with contradiction. First of all, it is maintained that, unlike Voltaire who
was "obsessed" with the Jews, Montesquieu

ne leur accorde pas une place hors de proportion;
il ne les attire qu'exceptionnellement aux fins
d'une démonstration soit de la vérité, soit de
l'erreur des croyances et des institutions établies.²

His remarks on the Jews then were incidental, rather than an end
in themselves. In point of fact, this situation did not differ appreci-
ably from that of Voltaire. The latter's seeming obsession with the
Jews was, as we have amply demonstrated, confined to the biblical era
while his remarks on the modern Jews occurred primarily in works whose
aim was the discussion of more general issues.

Secondly, Montesquieu's reputation as an unequivocal philosemite is
based upon a few well-known passages which decry persecution and intol-
erance. Yet, we know from chapter VII that Voltaire took a dim view of
the cruelties inflicted on European Jewry and was an outspoken advocate
of tolerance. These pleas for an end to persecution notwithstanding,
critics continue to maintain the theory of Voltaire's undying enmity
toward the Jews. What distinguishes Montesquieu from Voltaire apparent-
ly is the question of sincerity. While the former's pleas for tolerance
are accepted at face value, those of Voltaire are often rejected as mere
polemics.³ This rejection involves a paradox, for it implies a notion
of selective sincerity on Voltaire's part. The anti-biblical tirades
which were most surely polemical in nature and whose primary goal was
indeed the destruction of the biblio-centric world view are seen as
Voltaire's sincere expression of hatred for all Jews. On the other hand,
when Voltaire took up the defense of the modern Jews against persecution,
the remarks are seen as patently insincere, the goal being not to help
the Jews in any way, but to deflate Christianity. This logic which is
inherent in many of the criticisms we evaluated in chapter II is perplexing.

The problems involved in establishing a dichotomy between Montesquieu and Voltaire on the issue of the Jews will become still clearer as we move into a more detailed discussion of Montesquieu's writings. There, we will discover that his attitudes were not nearly so uniformly philosemitic as is believed. On occasion he echoed certain "idées reçues" regarding the Jews. Moreover, like Voltaire, Montesquieu showed himself to be unrealistically optimistic regarding the status of western European Jewry living outside the Iberian peninsula. It will be proved that neither man was an outspoken advocate of full civil rights for Jews, but that both considered persecution a nefarious element to be eradicated from civilized society. In short, with few exceptions, we will see that far from contradicting Montesquieu, Voltaire complemented him and that while neither was exempt from tinges of prejudice, both rose up to plead the cause of toleration.

By far the biggest difference between Voltaire and Montesquieu lies in the consideration of Judaism as a religion. There was in Montesquieu's writings on the subject an objectivity which was completely lacking in Voltaire. The difference is not surprising, however, since Montesquieu was never involved in an all-out campaign to destroy the theological and historical bases of Christianity. Unlike Voltaire, then, Montesquieu perceived something sublime in the Jewish outlook: "Il y a dans le système des Juifs, beaucoup d'aptitude pour le sublime, parce qu'ils avaient coutume d'attribuer toutes leurs pensées et toutes leurs actions à des inspirations particulières de la Divinité". Voltaire could never accept such a statement, for in his view a misguided
theory of inspiration provided the justification for the countless massacres which fill the pages of the Old Testament.

A second example of a fundamental difference in viewpoint is the consideration each man gave the Mosaic Law. Voltaire, impelled by the desire to overturn the judeo-centric world view which held that the Law was not only the finest legal code ever devised, but was the model for those of the greatest civilizations of antiquity, emphasized only its deficiencies. Montesquieu, on the other hand, demonstrated an attitude of true cultural relativism. Judging the merits of the laws of Solon as opposed to the laws of Moses he remarked that both codes were good given the context of time and space. Rather than praise or condemn certain precepts of either, he maintained that each had only a relative value and that the consideration of relativity precludes any criticisms one may level against them. (I, pp. 428-429)

Montesquieu's seemingly even-handed approach to Judaism did not exclude the possibility of criticism, however. While the tenor of his objections remained mild in comparison to those of the polemical Voltaire, he nonetheless demonstrated some of the same concerns. One of these involved the question of tolerance. Like Voltaire, Montesquieu was convinced that intolerance was a fundamental dogma of Judaism. (II, p. 149) Like Voltaire, Montesquieu reproved certain aspects of the Old Testament from a moral standpoint, suggesting as Voltaire did later, that it may not be right for young people to read such portions as the lusty "Song of Songs". (I, pp. 793-4)

Montesquieu's reticence concerning the Bible as suitable reading material for the young was not the only criticism he leveled at Jewish traditions. Like other thinkers of his time, Voltaire among them,
Montesquieu demonstrated a definite scorn for Jewish culture as it was reflected in the Talmud and rabbinical writings in general. Indeed, his criticism seems to impugn the very mentality of the Jewish people as a whole:

Les causes morales forment plus le caractère général d'une nation et décident plus la qualité de son esprit que les causes physiques. On peut trouver une grande preuve dans les Juifs, qui, dispersés dans toute la terre, venus dans tous les temps, nés dans tous les pays, ont eu quantité d'auteurs dont on en peut à peine citer deux qui aient eu quelque sens commun.

On peut, cependant, croire que les rabbins avaient quelque avantage, du côté de l'esprit, sur le reste de leur peuple, avec autant de raison qu'on peut penser que ceux qui ont la réputation d'hommes de lettres en Europe ont quelque avantage, du côté de l'esprit, sur les autres Européens. Cependant, parmi cette foule de rabbins qui ont écrit, il n'y en a pas un qui n'eût un petit génie. La raison en est naturelle: les Juifs revenant d'Assyrie étoient à peu près comme les captifs délivrés d'Alger, que l'on promène dans les rues; mais ils étoient plus grossiers, parce qu'ils étoient nés dans l'esclavage. Quoiqu'ils eussent un respect infini pour leurs livres, il en avaient peu de connaissance; ils n'entendoient presque plus la langue dans laquelle ils étoient écrits; ils n'avoient que des traditions des grandes merveilles que Dieu avoit opéré en faveur de leurs pères.

L'ignorance, qui est la mère des traditions, c'est à dire, du merveilleux populaire, en créa de nouvelles; mais elles naissaient avec le caractère de l'esprit qui les produisoit, et prenoient encore la teinture de tous les esprits par où ils passoient. Des savants c'est à dire des gens qui avoient la tête pleine de ces traditions grossières, les recueilli- rent, et, comme les premiers écrivains de toutes les nations, bons et mauvais, ont toujours une réputation infinie par la raison qu'ils ont toujours été, pendant un temps, supérieurs à tous ceux qui les lisoient, il arriva que ces premiers misérables ouvrages furent regardés par les Juifs comme de parfaits modèles, sur lesquels ils formèrent et ont toujours formé depuis leur goût et leur génie. (III, pp. 421-422)

I quote this passage in full because it seems to reflect the dilemma of the 18th-century mentality vis-à-vis the Jews and their culture. The "enlightened" mind, enamored of reason and seeking to liberate it-
self from the superstitions of the past, was extremely leery of anything which smacked of mysticism and casuistry such as the Talmud. The rejection of the rabbinical tradition reflected, moreover, a certain ethnocentrism in which "taste" developed over centuries to suit the ideals of one culture was elevated to an absolute standard which tolerated no deviation. Yet, such prejudices did not preclude the possibility of more favorable judgments. While rejecting the rabbis, Montesquieu perceived the "sublime" quality of Judaism and the relative value of the Mosaic Code. Likewise, Voltaire in his private moments, was capable of appreciating the literary qualities of the Old Testament, deeming parts of it as unsurpassed by anything in greco-roman literature. (See above pp. 129-136)

Aside from judgments on the Bible, on Judaism, or on culture, Montesquieu's most frequently cited remarks on the Jews concern their socio-economic status and the question of religious tolerance. Here again, although some of the remarks are positive, even progressive, it is apparent that Montesquieu in no way advocated full emancipation of the Jews. Like Voltaire, Montesquieu was ambivalent in his attitudes, at once liberal and conservative, openminded and yet prone to time-honored clichés.

Concerning the socio-economic status of the Jews, Montesquieu was drawn to the question of commerce and particularly moneylending. In a remark found in _L'Esprit des Lois_, which is justly considered a milestone in the evolution of a more fairminded attitude toward Jewish involvement in business, he argued that the origins of the so-called Jewish predilection for business and usury lay in Christian prejudice. Since Christians of the Middle Ages considered commerce and moneylending
sinful these occupations were passed over to the Jews: "Le commerce passa à une nation pour lors couverte d'infamie; et bientôt il ne fut plus distingué des usures les plus affreuses, des monopoles...et de tous les moyens malhonnêtes d'acquérir de l'argent." (I, p. 514) This comment which strikes us as obvious was nevertheless revolutionary for it embodied the kernel of the arguments for emancipation which were developed late in the century. If usury could be shown to be a sort of bondage inflicted by Christians upon the Jews who had no other professional recourse, then it was possible to reverse the process by opening up more wholesome areas of endeavor for the Jews. Though Montesquieu did not carry his observation to its logical conclusion, he is rightly credited as being the first to question the traditional view that the Jews were enamored of usury and sordid business practices. As we pointed out Voltaire echoed Montesquieu's observation in the *Dictionnaire philosophique*.

Montesquieu's apparent sympathy for the Jews as victims of Christian prejudice was more fully elaborated in the pages following the passage cited above in which the "philosophe" deplored the fact that throughout the Middle Ages and even in the 18th century in Poland Jews were cruelly exploited by Christian rulers seeking to confiscate their wealth: "Et je remarquerai, en passant, combien on s'est joué de cette nation d'un siècle à l'autre. On confisquait leurs biens lorsqu'ils voulaient être chrétiens; et, bientôt après, on les fit brûler lorsqu'ils ne voulaient pas l'être." (I, p. 515) Again, it is interesting to note that Voltaire voiced the same sentiment, developing it even further than Montesquieu. (XI, p. 162) Thus, Voltaire and Montesquieu seem to have agreed that the Jews had been placed in an impossible position by Chris-
tian hatred. Both deplored not only persecution but the cynical ex-
ploration the Jews suffered through the ages. On the strength of
these attitudes Montesquieu has been deemed the greatest philosemite of
the philosophical movement. Despite these attitudes, Voltaire is often
considered the Jews' greatest enemy.

In spite of the obvious sympathy expressed by Montesquieu toward
the economic plight of the Jews as manifested in *L'Esprit des lois*, on
other occasions he did not refrain from making some rather gratuitously
snide remarks regarding the Jews and their relationship to money. These
remarks attest to the fact that like Voltaire, Montesquieu was not ex-
empt from certain prevailing patterns of thought prejudicial toward the
Jews. A case in point occurs in *Les Lettres persanes*: "Tu me demandes
s'il y a des Juifs en France? Sache que, partout où il y a de l'argent,
il y a des Juifs. Tu me demandes ce qu'ils y font? Précisément ce
qu'ils font en Perse: rien ne ressemble plus à un Juif d'Asie qu'un
Juif européen." Elsewhere, speaking of the Dutch, we see that even in
Montesquieu the word "Jew" in and of itself evoked the image of chican-
ery: "Tout ce qu'on m'avait dit de l'avarice, de la friponnerie, de
l'escroquerie des Hollandais, n'est point fardé; c'est la vérité pure.
Je ne crois pas que, depuis un homme célèbre appelé Judas, il y ait
jamais eu de Juif plus juif que quelques uns d'eux." (II, 1290) This
quotation can be related to one of Voltaire in which he described the
"monts de piété" operated by Christians as "juiveries". (XXVI, p. 539)
These remarks are typical of 18th-century attitudes in which the very
word "Jew" was equated with sharp business practices.5

In yet another instance, speaking of the German court Montesquieu
wrote: "Il est étonnant que l'empereur qui a quinze ou seize millions
de sujets, n'ait trouvé pour remplacer Penterriedter, que le fils d'un Juif, Fonseca, et, dans toute cette cour, il n'y ait pas un seul sujet propre pour les affaires." (II, p. 983) There is certainly a note of disdain here. Yet, neither this passage nor the one which precedes it is cited by critics bent on establishing Montesquieu's philosemitism as opposed to Voltaire's supposed anti-Semitism.

The association which Montesquieu made between the Jews and money influenced his proposals for the creation of a "Jewish city" in France:

Il faudrait faire une ville juive sur la frontière d'Espagne, dans un lieu propre pour le commerce, comme à St. Jean de Luz ou à Giboure. Ils y passeront en foule et achèveront de porter toutes les richesses qu'ils ont dans ce royaume. Leur donner seulement les mêmes privilèges qu'ils ont à Livourne ou même plus, si on voulait. (II, p. 107)

It should be emphasized that this passage did not represent a solution to the so-called "Jewish problem". Rather, it was presented as part of a plan to strengthen and expand the French economy. That this was the thrust of the statement is further demonstrated elsewhere in the Pensées where Montesquieu proposed importing Jews to Sicily for purposes of economic expansion. (II, p. 61) In yet another passage he advocated reform of the tax structure and the creation of additional revenue through the sale of more privileges to the Jews. (II, p. 118) Though these proposals might have ameliorated the situation of the Jews in France, it is important to note that this was not Montesquieu's primary aim. Nowhere did he broach the question of Jewish rights per se or take up the question of actually attempting to integrate the Jews into society at large. In fact, judging from the quotation given above, he treated the issue of rights and privileges for Jews in a most casual fashion. Neverthe-
less, it is clear that Montesquieu viewed the Jews as potentially useful elements in the economy.

If Montesquieu seems to have been somewhat callous or insensitive to the economic plight of French Jews, he nonetheless manifested a rather outspoken sympathy for them as a persecuted religious group. Indeed, it is primarily on the basis of his remarks on this subject that Montesquieu has earned the reputation as the greatest friend of the Jews among the leading French "philosophes".

His oft-quoted plea for tolerance in *L'Esprit des lois* through an impassioned diatribe against the Inquisition clearly represented a great leap forward in humanitarian thinking. (I, pp. 120-123) As such, it should in no way be denigrated. However, like Voltaire, Montesquieu suffered from a sort of intellectual myopia regarding anti-Jewish persecution and sentiment. Thus, in a statement which can only be considered premature, Montesquieu hailed the advent of a new age in Judeo-Christian relations: "Les Juifs sont à présent sauvés; la superstition ne reviendra plus et on ne les exterminera plus par principe de conscience." (II, p. 262) Again referring to the situation of contemporary European Jewry he wrote in *Les Lettres persanes*:

*Ils n'ont jamais eu dans l'Europe un calme pareil à celui dont ils jouissent. On commence à se défaire parmi les chrétiens de cet esprit d'intolérance qui les animait: on s'est mal trouvé en Espagne de les avoir chassés; et en France, d'avoir fatigué des chrétiens dont la croyance différait un peu de celle du prince...* (I, p. 126)

These passages bespeak an admirable desire for a new age, yet they ignore the fact that prejudice was still very much alive and flourishing in western Europe and in France in particular. (See above pp. Like Voltaire, Montesquieu seems to view the problem of prejudice and
persecution as a foreign issue confined to the Iberian peninsula or eastern Europe. Hence the campaign against the Inquisition. When the two looked to western Europe both saw signs of progress and observed with satisfaction that the Jews had never been so well-off. Similarly, the myopia of both Voltaire and Montesquieu extended to the socio-economic sphere as well. As we have seen, Voltaire saw the Jews of western Europe as secure and prosperous, "aspirant à tous les privilèges". In like manner, when Montesquieu spoke of economic exploitation he pointedly referred to Poland, ignoring the all too real existence of similar practices in his own homeland. (I, p. 514) If one were to judge the situation solely from the writings of either Montesquieu or Voltaire one would be led to assume that there was no Jewish "problem" in France or in any other area of Europe save the Iberian peninsula. This point is brought home particularly in Montesquieu's case in the quotation cited above. Speaking of anti-Jewish persecution the "philosophe" pointedly alluded to Spain. Moving to a consideration of intolerance in France, however, he shifted to the question of the Protestants. Of course, it would be folly to read too much into these remarks. In point of fact, large scale religious persecution of Jews was at a minimum in France during the 18th century. (See above p. 6) However, though no campaign of the awesome magnitude of the Inquisition existed in France, the insidious forces of religiously based anti-semitism persisted throughout the century.

To assess Montesquieu's opinion of the Jews as a whole based on the few and scattered remarks found in his writings, we find a curious mixture of prejudice, ignorance, and enlightenment. Indeed, if we were to isolate certain quotations, as has been done in the case of Voltaire,
we would be hard put to view the author of *L'Esprit des lois* as the unqualified champion of the Jews as Lehmann and others have done. Viewing the whole spectrum several conclusions may be drawn.

First of all, Montesquieu did take a rather objective and relativistic stance regarding Judaism and the Old Testament. While such an attitude is admirable, it should be remembered that, unlike Voltaire, Montesquieu was not involved in an all-out battle against Christianity and therefore had no polemical axe to grind with the ancient Jews and their writings.

Secondly, Montesquieu like Voltaire never made a concentrated and sustained effort to study the Jews and their situation in modern Europe in any detail. Rather, his comments were by and large to be bound up in more general issues. Though without a doubt favorable to the Jews on the question of religious toleration and the origins of usury, the main thrust of the remarks was to be conservative in nature. While at one point Montesquieu decried the existence of ghettos as "barbaric" and a "health hazard" (II, p. 1189) at another he advocated the establishment of a Jewish city in the south of France. No doubt the Jews would have flourished there, but they would in no way have been more integrated into society. Hence, the plan seems to be little more than a "gilded ghetto".

While condemning financial exploitation of Jews by ruthless monarchs, Montesquieu proposed a sort of "benevolent" exploitation in the form of the purchase of further privileges as part of a reformed tax structure. Civil rights was not an issue discussed by the philosophe. Instead, in proposing the Jewish city, Montesquieu offered only a vague extension of privileges, "si on voulait". The net impact of his pro-
ossals was then to retain the Jews in a special, isolated and exploited category as tools of the state. While demonstrating an admirable lucidity regarding the sources of the so-called Jewish affinity for business, Montesquieu nonetheless maintained the traditional view of the Jews as financial harpies.

Finally, though Montesquieu perceived the "sublime" quality of the Jewish religious outlook, he demonstrated a clear scorn for their intellectual tradition as manifested in the writings of the rabbis.

In the final analysis, one is led to question the blind enthusiasm of certain critics who extol Montesquieu's comments as unparalleled examples of disinterested broadmindedness. Moreover, the dichotomy established between Montesquieu and Voltaire is simply not borne out by the facts. Both men demonstrated an ambivalence regarding the Jews. Neither was completely liberated from traditional patterns of thought. Yet, both regarded persecution as cruelly absurd and strove for its abolition. In some ways, indeed, Voltaire went further than Montesquieu in unmasking the fallacies and utter sordidness of anti-Semitism. On the other hand, despite the conservative nature of his economic proposals, Montesquieu surpassed Voltaire in demonstrating that the Jews could be an important factor in expanding the French economy. In short, both men simultaneously embodied and departed from the prevalent attitudes of the age. Though neither can be deemed a champion of the Jews, neither can legitimately be dubbed their enemy.

Rousseau's comments on the Jews were even fewer than those of Montesquieu and were almost all restricted to the biblical Jews. In general, his attitude toward the Jews reflected his attitude toward the Scriptures themselves, that is, one of reverence in accordance with
the Protestant tradition. Moreover, one senses in regard to the modern Jews a solidarity of the persecuted. The Jews naturally appealed to Rousseau as fellow pariahs. (Poliakoo, p. 124) Rousseau appears to have admired nothing so much as strength in adversity and it is not surprising to find that this theme colored many of his writings on the Bible and the role of the Jews as guardians of God's word.

Consider, for example, his comments on Moses and the Law. Moses earned the respect of the "philosophe" primarily because he single-handedly molded the Jews from an ignorant swarm of servile fugitives "sans arts, sans armes, sans talents, sans vertus, sans courage," into a real people, a nation. Rousseau's esteem for the Law stemmed from the fact that it had stood the test of time and adversity so that if the Jewish nation no longer subsisted geographically, it continued spiritually and culturally. This miracle of preservation resulted, according to Rousseau, from the provisions of the Law itself which effectively separated the Jews from the rest of mankind:

C'est par là que cette singulière nation, si souvent subjuguée, si souvent dispersée, et détruite en apparence, mais toujours ido-lâtre de sa règle, s'est pourtant conservée jusqu'à nos jours éparse parmi les autres sans s'y confondre, et que ses moeurs, ses lois, ses rites, subsistent et dureront autant que le monde, malgré la haine et la persécution du reste du genre humain. (V, p. 255)

Obviously there is here a deep admiration for the will of this indestructible people who seemingly defy the world in the pursuance of their beliefs. Perhaps Rousseau saw in the example of the Jews' intransigence against assimilation a reflection of his own battle against the corrupting forces of society.

Rousseau's sense of solidarity with the persecuted led him to make
some rather original comments on the contemporary Jewish situation. In *La Profession de foi du vicaire savoyard*, for example, he went beyond the notion of religious toleration to make some remarkably penetrating observations.

Considering the rapport between Judaism and Catholicism Rousseau wryly observed that the Church established its authority itself. That is to say, what Catholics knew of other religions, Judaism in particular, was seen through the filter of Catholic writings, not through the works of the Jews themselves. In other words, what one knew of Judaism was second-hand knowledge obtained from a source whose interest it was to show the inferiority of Judaism. Rousseau further asserted that anyone publishing a book favoring the Jewish point of view would be burned, adding: "Cette police est commode et sûre, pour avoir toujours raison." (IV, p. 97) To be sure, Voltaire uttered much the same criticism both in his attacks on narrow-minded Christian exegesis and the censorship imposed by the Spanish Inquisition. Nevertheless, Rousseau carried his criticism to its logical conclusion: "Je ne croirai jamais avoir bien entendu les raisons des Juifs, qu'ils n'aient un état libre, des écoles, des universités, où ils puissent parler et disputer sans risque. Alors seulement nous pourrons savoir ce qu'ils ont à dire." (IV, p. 98)

This passage is extraordinary as it represents the boldest cry for a true intellectual emancipation of the Jews to be found among the "philosophes" in question. It indicates far more than a mere desire to live and let live so often found in Voltaire and Montesquieu. Rousseau calls for a free and open dialogue between intellectual equals devoid of ulterior motives and an a priori sense of cultural superiority.

Moreover, Rousseau, far more than Montesquieu and Voltaire, demon-
strated a keen understanding of the psychological ravages which centuries of persecution had inflicted upon the Jews:

Ceux d'entre nous qui sont à portée de converser avec des Juifs ne sont guère plus avancés. Les malheureux se sentent à notre discrétion; la tyrannie qu'on exerce envers eux les rend craintifs; ils savent combien peu l'injustice et la cruauté coûtent à la charité chrétienne; qu'osent-ils dire sans s'exposer à nous faire crier au blasphème? L'avidité nous donne du zèle, et ils sont trop riches pour n'avoir pas tort. (IV, pp. 97–98)

It is interesting to note here that Voltaire too commented upon the sources of persecution, pointing out how often it was based on greed.

However, where Voltaire concentrated on the psychology of the persecutor, Rousseau pushed the inquiry into that of the victim, thereby adding a new dimension to the discussion. It is unfortunate that he did not carry his investigation further.

Rousseau's remarks, although certainly progressive, were decidedly scanty in number and narrow in scope. Restricted as they were to the religious and intellectual domain, they offered little insight into the "philosophes'" views on the economic status of the Jews other than an apparent indignation concerning confiscation. Like most of his contemporaries, Rousseau too accepted the stereotype of the rich Jew. Nowhere did he demonstrate a knowledge, much less a concern for the thousands of Jews locked into a never ending cycle of poverty through discriminatory legislation. While advocating an intellectual emancipation, Rousseau nowhere spoke of complete integration into society at large. His allusion to an "état libre" is much too vague to speculate about, yet seems to have referred to the creation of a "separate but equal" status in the intellectual and educational spheres. Finally, it must be said that Rousseau never took up the banner for full civil rights
and his few remarks on the Jews remain buried in volumes of writings devoted to other topics.

The case of Diderot presents a unique interest in what it reveals of the methods and criteria used by critics in attributing the labels philo- or anti-Semite to each of the four major French "philosophes", especially Voltaire and Montesquieu. The double standard used to pit Montesquieu against Voltaire is again employed to pit Diderot with Voltaire against Montesquieu or Diderot against Voltaire. Examination of scholarly criticism of Diderot's writings on the Jews together with the writings themselves effectively calls into question the time-honored clichés regarding the positions of the various "philosophes" vis-à-vis the Jews and anti-Semitism.

In many ways, Diderot mirrored Voltaire. Like Voltaire, Diderot took only a limited interest in modern Jewry. His main concern lay with Judaism as a religion and with the biblical Jews. An enemy of Christianity, most referenced to Jews to be found in Diderot's writings are contained in works destined to undermine "superstition". If Diderot dealt with the Jews in these works in an essentially flippant manner and seemed eager to point out what appeared to him as patent absurdities in the cult itself, in the Old Testament and in its heroes, the decidedly unfavorable light thrown on the biblical Jews was somewhat counterbalanced by the equally iconoclastic spirit with which Christianity and the New Testament were treated.

The Promenade du sceptique is a case in point. Using a technique well known to readers of Voltaire, Diderot pitted the Old Testament against the New in an effort to reduce them both to absurdity:

Deux volumes épais, remplis de merveilles et d'ordonnances, tantôt bizarres et tantôt
Elsewhere Diderot invoked the Jews as witnesses against Christianity, a ploy oft-used by Voltaire. Thus in the *Pensées philosophiques* while considering the validity of the miracles as proofs of Christianity he was led to ask why the miracles of Jesus are true and those of Mohammed false. All the Jews should logically have been converted by Christ's miracles, he reasons. Far from it, he replied, since they crucified him. He concluded:

> Il faut convenir que ces Juifs sont des hommes comme il n'y en a point; partout on a vu les peuples entraînés par un seul faux miracle, et Jésus-Christ n'a pu rien faire du peuple juif avec une infinité de miracles vrais! C'est ce miracle-là d'incréduilité des Juifs qu'il faut faire valoir et non celui de sa resurrection. (I, pp. 161-162)

When he was not engaged in pitting Christians against the Jews, Diderot's attention seems to have been particularly drawn to Moses and the Mosaic Law. Here again he exhibited a fundamentally irreverent attitude.

The key to Moses' personality, according to Diderot, lay in the unbridled quest for personal power. Exploiting the credulity of the Hebrews, Moses convinced them that he had been selected by God to lead
them out of Egypt. According to Diderot, the appointment was a mere delusion and the subsequent exodus a rebellion against legitimate authority. (I, p. 200-201) Once out of Egypt the self-appointed lieutenant of God turned his cruelty and trickery against the Hebrews in an effort to maintain his absolute mastery:

Le vieux berger...voulut assujétir de haute lutte ses compagnons à tous ses règlements. Aussitôt on murmure, on s'attroupe, on lui conteste son autorité, et il la perdait sans ressource, s'il n'eût détruit les rebelles par une mine pratiquée sous le terrain qu'ils occupaient. On regardait cet événement comme une vengeance du ciel, et l'homme au miracle ne détronta personne. (I, p. 203)

Having thus dismantled Moses' credibility as a holy man, Diderot moved on to attack his legislation. To this end the "philosophe" delighted in emphasizing some of the more extreme features of the Law. He ridiculed such practices as eating a pancake without butter or salt and a salad of dandelions without oil once a year or that of having the hands tied behind one once a week as an appeasement for original sin. He concluded: "Le reste est un amas de règles arbitraires sur la forme des tuniques et des manteaux, l'ordonnance des viandes de facile ou de dure digestion, le temps de la promenade..." (I, p. 202)

Having traced Moses' rise to power, the exodus, and the establishment of the Law, Diderot arrived at the final chapter of Moses' career in which the aged leader took leave of his charges and went off to die in the desert. Before departing, however, Moses made two last recommendations to the Hebrews which, according to Diderot, dictated the course that Jewish history was to take in the future:

Après mainte aventure, on approcha du pays dont on devait se mettre en possession. Le conducteur, qui ne voulait pas la garantir à ses sujets, et qui n'aimait la guerre que de loin, alla mourrir de faim dans une caverne, après leur avoir
As interpreted by Diderot, the first recommendation referred to the carnage which filled the pages of the Old Testament, a theme previously exploited by the English deists and Voltaire. The second was a slur reflecting a commonly held prejudice of the day, namely that the Jews were commanded by their religion to engage in usury. With these remarks Diderot capped his antibiblical campaign in the Promenade having established what he considered to be the unworthiness of Moses as a spiritual leader, having demolished the Mosaic Law, and having implied that Moses' descendants carried out his recommendations and that they were no better than he.

In the Moïsade Diderot's thrust was much the same. Here he adopted the pose of a man engaged in an earnest search for religious truth who, repelled by various religions' concept of the deity, happened upon Judaism. At first, Judaism seemed to provide the answer to his quest; the Jews along seem to have possessed a fitting image of God, one that did not demean him by rendering him too anthropomorphic. Their God was a pure and perfect spirit. (IV, p. 119) However, pursuing his inquiry further, the man's opinions underwent a complete reversal:

En parcourant ce livre reçu, dit-on, des mains de Dieu par l'entremise de son serviteur Moïse et de ses autres prophètes, je suis indigné d'y trouver des traits qui blessent la grandeur et la majesté divine, et qui le dépeignent aussi mauvais qu'il doit être bon. Tout me révolte, je crois errer dans le champ de l'imposture; tout porte le sceau du fanatisme; tout est marqué au coin de l'impertinence et du ridicule, de la cruauté, et de la barbarie. (IV, p. 120)

These remarks formed the basis of the criticism which followed.
After enumerating Old Testament episodes which the author considered to be criminal and which reflected a concept of a cruel and unjust God, Diderot launched a diatribe against Moses as the principal author of this religion. As in the Promenade, however, Diderot did not confine his attack to Moses, but categorically condemned all those who followed his precepts:

Est-ce bien là le Dieu de l'univers, le Dieu que je dois reconnaître et adorer? Ai-je en effet trouvé la vérité que je cherche? Meurs Moïse, meurs tyran destructeur. Que le ciel t'écrase de ses foudres vengeurs; que la terre irritée comme le ciel, de ta perfidie et de ta cruauté, s'entrouvre sous tes pas criminels et t'engloutisse, monstre abominable, dont l'haleine empeste a soufflé sur toute la surface de la terre les semences empoisonnées du plus horrible fanatisme dont elle est encore malheureusement infectée;...

Et vous, peuple furieux et insensé, hommes vils et grossiers, dignes esclaves du joug que vous portez...allez, reprenez vos livres, et éloignez-vous de moi. (IV, p. 126)

This passage echoes a theme exploited by Voltaire in much of his biblical criticism: the condemnation of Judaism and Christianity as perpetrators of a horrific fanaticism which demeaned the nature of God and was a blight upon humanity. Yet, the violence of tone exhibited here far surpasses anything Voltaire wrote on the subject. What is particularly chilling is the condemnation of the Jews: "dignes esclaves du joug que vous portez". The remark seems to smack of hatred, to reflect a bitter satisfaction in the fact that the Jews indeed have paid for their supposed fanaticism through persecution. Was Diderot's wrath polemical or personal? In short, was this an anti-Semitic diatribe or polemical theatrics?

There is a marked difference of opinion among critics which is interesting in itself and of particular import to the general discussion
of Voltaire's relations with the Jews. For Meyer and Lehmann, Diderot was not anti-Semitic, although he reserved no particular warmth for the Jewish people and did not actively battle against persecution. For Lehmann particularly, the key issue is the existence or nonexistence of evidence of personal resentment against Jews. Thus he acquits Diderot of anti-Semitism as he declares:

Malgré une série d'incartades de fort mauvais goût, on constate, en résumé que Diderot n'a pas, comme Voltaire...des ressentiments personnels contre les Juifs. Il ne s'intéresse à eux que dans la mesure où il peut s'en servir pour combattre la religion chrétienne. (Lehmann, p. 150)

This statement is interesting in what it reveals of the methods used to attach labels to the two "philosophes". We have shown in the previous chapter that Voltaire's so-called grudge against Medina and Hirshell was non-existent and could not then have colored his writings on the Jews. On the other hand, it will be seen later that Diderot did in fact bear a very personal and deep seated hatred for one Jew, Isaac da Pinto, which reflected itself in several clear and vitriolic passages directed against the man and his character. Lehmann is either unaware of this personal vendetta or chooses to ignore it. In any event, the dichotomy he established between Voltaire and Diderot is simply not borne out by the facts.

If Lehmann creates an opposition between Diderot and Voltaire on the Jewish issue, Arthur Hertzberg lumps the two men together in opposition to Montesquieu. For Hertzberg, both Diderot and Voltaire were allies in a campaign to expose, condemn, and liberate Europe from the blight of the oriental outlook of Judaism. Their fanatical hatred, however, was not confined to a philosophical viewpoint, but attached itself
directly to those persons embodying it, that is the Jews themselves. For Voltaire and Diderot the nefarious "oriental" world view and the Jewish character were one and inseparable. In short, Hertzberg considers both men to be confirmed racists animated by a fanatical allegiance to a principle of cultural absolutism which brooked no deviation. Against this racist absolutism Hertzberg pits what he deems the true cultural relativism of Montesquieu. In contrast to Diderot and Voltaire, Montesquieu was not only capable of appreciating cultures other than his own, but also demonstrated a true concern for the plight of his Jewish contemporaries. In the following pages we will examine Hertzberg's evaluation in more detail.

Hertzberg is willing to concede that Diderot's remarks on the Bible were first and foremost attacks on the divinity of the Scriptures rather than assaults on the Jews themselves. Nevertheless, this concession is more apparent than real since it is nullified by Hertzberg's interpretation of Diderot's "total approach":

Diderot's total approach was to find something in the Jewish spirit, not merely in the dogmas of their religion...and to define that something as the enemy of humanity....Once he turned to the account of Jewish history after the destruction of the temple...his subject suddenly became the nature of the Jewish people. Of those who took refuge in Egypt after the temple was destroyed, he wrote, 'They brought with them their spirit of sedition and revolt and this caused a new massacre there.' (Hertzberg, p. 311)

It is evidently Mr. Hertzberg's contention that this statement referring to a small group of emigrating Jews and wrested from its context represents Diderot's definitive judgment on the "Jewish character". In making such a categorical statement, he fails to mention that earlier in the article under consideration Diderot designated Alexandrian Jews
as faithful and brave subjects. (XV, p. 329) Surely then this quotation cannot be taken as an absolute indictment of all Jews, as Hertzberg would have it.

Nevertheless, Hertzberg offers other evidence of Diderot's disdain for the "Jewish spirit". He comments on the "philosophe's" scorn of the Talmud and his contempt for Jewish thinking processes in general:

When Diderot reached his discussion of esoteric Jewish philosophy...he wrote as follows; among the Jews one will not find 'any rightness of thought, any exactness in reasoning or precision of style, in a word, any of that which ought to characterize a healthy philosophy. One finds among them, on the contrary, only a confused melange of the principles of reason and revelation, a pretentious and often impenetrable obscurity, principles that lead to fanaticism, blind respect for the authority of the rabbis and for antiquity, in a word, all the faults that mark an ignorant and superstitious people.'

This diatribe is to be read in the light of his well-known opinion that Europe could be saved if the right philosophy could be substituted for superstition....But Diderot's basic view was, that the Jews could not be incorporated into other peoples: 'This people should be kept separate from others'. (Hertzberg, pp. 311-312)

Mr. Hertzberg's comments require explanation and refutation. His interpretation of Diderot's so-called diatribe must be viewed in the light of his basic contention that Diderot (and by extension, Voltaire) was a cultural absolutist and a racist. According to Hertzberg, the primary goal of the philosophes was to restore Europe to the greco-roman tradition of reason and to uproot the "oriental" philosophy represented by the Judeo-Christian establishment. In essence, it was a movement of purification, a return to the true and "native" European culture which had been eclipsed for centuries by a philosophical invasion from without. In the fanatical pursuance of their goal, the "philosophes" deemed that all those who would not or could not accept their beliefs
were to be scorned, if not persecuted. The Jews' position in this scheme was unfortunate. Christian Europe could hope to shake loose the chains of fanaticism since it was essentially an oriental blight imposed upon it. The Jews could not, their philosophy and character being one. Thus, they were to be ostracized, kept separate from the rest.

Unfortunately, Mr. Hertzberg offers little hard evidence to support his case other than the citations reprinted above. It will be seen that these quotes, far from proving his point, actually weaken it.

In examining the evidence offered, there are three issues that come to mind: the question of context, the accuracy of translation, and finally the value of the quotes themselves as proof positive of anti-Semitism. In the preceding pages, we have already dealt to some extent with the question of context, particularly as it refers to Hertzberg's claim that Diderot considered all Jews fanatical and seditious by nature on the basis of the example of the Alexandrian immigrants.

However, the problem becomes much more serious as it applies to the second passage cited. There Hertzberg juxtaposes two disparate citations inviting us to believe that the first can only be understood through the second. The first passage shows Diderot castigating the Jews' philosophical writings and we do not dispute the fact that the "philosophe" had no patience whatever with the rabbinical tradition. The quotation speaks for itself. However, if this is evidence of anti-Semitism, then Montesquieu must stand equally condemned since Diderot's comments differ neither in tone nor in content from Montesquieu's critique previously cited. Hertzberg remains silent on Montesquieu's criticism, but insists that Diderot's remarks reveal their true meaning only through the second passage:
"This people should be kept separate from others." For Hertzberg, this final citation proves Diderot's racist views. Let us examine this essential quotation.

First of all, the passage as rendered by Hertzberg is a mistranslation of the grossest sort. Moreover, situated in its proper context it simply does not reflect a desire to ostracize the Jews because of their philosophical shortcomings, but merely offers an explanation of the continued existence of this people as a distinct ethnic group despite dispersal to all corners of the globe. The full quote reads:

La raison démontre que naturellement la nation juive devrait être éteinte. La raison démontre au contraire, que les Juifs se mariant et faisant des enfants, la nation juive doit subsister. Mais, direz-vous, d'où vient qu'on ne voit plus ni Carthaginois ni Macédoniens? La raison en est qu'ils ont été incorporés dans d'autres peuples; mais la religion des Juifs, et celle des peuples chez lesquels ils habitent, ne leur permettent pas de s'incorporer avec eux, ils doivent faire une nation à part. D'ailleurs, les Juifs ne sont pas le seul peuple qui subsiste ainsi dispersé; depuis un grand nombre d'années, les Guèbres et les Banians sont dans le même cas. (II, p. 97)

Clearly this passage has nothing whatever to do with either the Jewish character or the Jewish philosophical tradition. Obviously, Diderot was not seeking to hurl the Jews forever into outer darkness or to impugn their character, as Hertzberg would have us believe. Rather he was merely trying to explain an historical phenomenon. Instead of making a moral judgment Diderot was simply establishing an empirical fact which up to his time was true.

The discussion of Hertzberg's approach to Diderot forcefully brings forth the problems of current criticism involving the "philosophes" and the Jews. It is undeniable at this point that there exists a "parti pris" in favor of Montesquieu which ignores all his more negative comm-
ents and against Voltaire which discounts all his positive remarks. In the case of Diderot, opinion is indeed divided. However, whether we consider Lehrmann who absolves Diderot at Voltaire's expense, or whether we investigate Hertzberg's juxtaposition of misquotes proving Diderot's supposed alliance with the "racist" Voltaire, we arrive at the same conclusion. Ignoring the possibility of complexity, critics tend to suppress and distort the facts in order to present a one dimensional portrait.

Let us briefly return to Diderot in order to establish a more cogent view of his opinions and thus complete our panorama of the four major philosophes' writings on the Jews.

We have already established the fact that in works specifically destined to dispel superstition Diderot was abundantly critical of the Old Testament, Moses in particular. That he bore no personal grudge against Moses as a representative of some sinister "Jewish character" can be established from his treatment of the great legislator in the article "Juifs" in the Encyclopédie. In this article which appears to have been destined not as sheer polemics but as a fairly even-handed exposition of Jewish religion, philosophy, and history, Diderot expressed from the outset an admiration for the patriarchs and for Moses in enthusiastic terms:

...mais quels hommes nous offre-t-elle qui soient comparables en autorité, en dignité, en jugement, en piété, en innocence, à Abraham, à Isaac, et à Jacob. Joseph se fit admirer par sa sagesse chez le peuple le plus instruit de la terre, et le gouverne pendant quarante ans. Mais nous voilà par-venus au temps de Moïse; quel historien! Quel législateur! Quel philosophe! Quel poète! Quel homme! (XV, p. 318)

Here Diderot went even further in his accolade placing the prophets above the Greek philosophers. And this from a man who supposedly desp-
ised the "oriental" character of the Jews.

Diderot did manifest the prejudice of his age against the Talmud, the rabbinic tradition and Jewish esoteric philosophy, as did Montesquieu and other purportedly pro-Jewish writers. But it is imperative to ask why and if this malediction can justly be interpreted as a condemnation of the Jewish "character" per se. In speaking of the Talmud, for example, Diderot's main objection was that this body of commentary on the Law, this compilation of "cas de conscience" represented a departure from the written Law. He criticized what he deemed the Jews' blind preference for the Talmud at the expense of the literal word of the Law as dictated by God. As for the rabbinic commentaries, Diderot complained that instead of clarifying the ancient laws and rites, instead of trying to capture the literal sense of the Scripture, they became embroiled in mystical interpretations which obscure the goals of the original writer. (XV, p. 372)

On the other hand, Diderot found, as did Voltaire, that a few Jewish doctors, particularly Aben-Ezra and Maimonides of the 12th century, strayed from traditional patterns of mysticism and obscurity to point the way toward an "enlightened" biblical exegesis. Speaking of Aben-Ezra he declared:

Au lieu de suivre la méthode ordinaire de ceux qui l'avaient précédé, il s'attacha à la grammaire et au sens littéral des écrits sacrés, qu'il développe avec...pénétration et...jugement....Il a montré le chemin aux critiques qui soutiennent aujourd'hui que le peuple d'Israël ne passa point au travers de la Mer Rouge; mais qu'il y fit un cercle pendant que l'eau était basse, afin que Pharaon les suivit et fut submergé. (XV, p. 373)

While it is evident that Diderot demonstrated a certain prejudice
here since he admired Aben-Ezra principally for his "philosophical" approach to supposedly miraculous events, his esteem for the scholar does something to minimize Hertzberg's contention that Diderot believed the Jews as a people were entirely unable to think clearly and rationally.

Diderot did believe that by and large Jews were slaves to a tradition of obscure and mystical casuistry which he found repugnant. However, the example of Aben-Ezra, isolated as it is, points to the hope that this tradition could be broken. In this regard Diderot reflected the view of other writers who determined that the Jews could be rescued if they could be made to turn away from the Talmud and toward a more rational approach to the Scriptures. (Hertzberg, pp. 257-258)

Though no one can reasonably deny that Diderot did harbor the prejudice common to most of the "philosophes" and pro-Jewish writers of the late 18th century, that is a refusal to accept Jewish traditions and culture on their own terms and an admiration for those Jews who most resembled accepted philosophical criteria, one cannot assert that he was implacably opposed to all Jewry and denied them any hope of "redemption" through philosophy.

Regarding his Jewish contemporaries Diderot offered little insight. His comments on the situation of the Jews in Europe are virtually nonexistent except for a few observations stemming from a trip to Holland. These remarks are presented in a matter of fact tone except for a bit of irony regarding the ceremonies at the synagogue:

Les Juifs ne sont nulle part si rapprochés de la condition des autres citoyens. Ils ont leur quartier; il y en a de rasés, il y en a de barbus. Ils ont treize synagogues à Amsterdam; c'est plutôt une école qu'une temple; après la prière, on les y croirait indécents; ils y parlent
d'affairs et de gallanterie. Ce mépris apparent pour le bien de leur oraison leur rappelle que le vrai temple n'est plus.

Les synagogues sont fort belles à Amsterdam, à Rotterdam et à la Haye. Il y a la synagogue allemande et la synagogue portugaise. Les Allemands se prétendent les descendants de la tribu de Juda, et les Portugais de la tribu de Benjamin. Ils font toutes sortes de commerce; ils exercent la médecine, mais ils ne sont d'aucun métier.... Ils acquièrent des biens fonds, ils héritent, ils testent, et jouissent de toute la protection accordée aux citoyens; ils n'entrent point dans la magistrature. (XVII, p. 433)

Obviously, Diderot was not editorializing one way or the other on the question of Jewish rights. One might surmise that the apparent prosperity and relative assimilation of the Jews into Dutch society was not repugnant to him since he made no criticism of it. Nevertheless, he made no comparisons between the well-being of the Dutch Jews and the misery of those of France. Indeed, one has the impression that his interest in the Jews of Holland was simply that of the curious tourist and no more.

Nevertheless, if Diderot demonstrated a seeming indifference to his Jewish contemporaries as a whole, he clearly harbored a grudge against one individual Jew, Isaac da Pinto. Da Pinto, who according to Hertaberg and other scholars, figures into the Enlightenment as a leading Jewish "philosophe", was mentioned several times by name in Diderot's writings. In all cases, Diderot never mentioned da Pinto as a "philosophe", but constantly impugned his character branding him an incorrigible libertine.

In his account of the trip to Holland Diderot declares: "Ce Juif Pinto que nous avons connu à Paris et à la Haye, a passé deux ou trois fois par les pattes du bailli; et malgré sa vieillesse, je ne le crois pas encore à l'abri de cet accident." (XVII, p. 405) Later in the
article, speaking of the social customs of that country, Diderot remarked that in general there was little promiscuity since work and the desire for money left little time for such activities. However, he went on to say that whatever libertinism there may have been among married men was severely punished, an example being the two hundred ducats paid by Pinto. (XVII, p. 416)

The most interesting as well as the most disparaging allusion to da Pinto occurs in Le Neveu de Rameau where "Lui" recounts how da Pinto through greed and lust finally receives his due. By way of preface to the anecdote "Lui" observes: "Mon Juif était un homme qui savait sa loi et qui l'observait raide comme une barre, quelquefois avec l'ami, toujours avec l'étranger." (V, p. 479) This statement refers to the widespread belief that Jews were commanded by the Law to take advantage of Gentiles in their business dealings. Da Pinto, a true renegade, went even further sometimes cheating his co-religionists. The anecdote demonstrates two characteristics of da Pinto, his chicanery and his lasciviousness. The full story goes as follows.

Da Pinto desired the services of a certain courtisane. In order to fulfill his lust he sent her a "lettre de change" by way of an offer. She refused, but the messenger bearing the note offered her wife in exchange for the "lettre de change". Da Pinto was delighted since he now assumed that he could have both the woman and the note, since no husband worth his salt would reveal that he had been cuckolded simply to redeem a note. Unfortunately for the Jew, the husband in question had more greed than shame and da Pinto was forced to pay.

Da Pinto, then, seems to have played a small but effective role in Diderot's repertoire as a standard example of greed and lust. One is
led to wonder why since in the only existing study of da Pinto's life and works there is nothing to suggest that he was less than an upstanding and respected scholar and citizen. Diderot evidently had personal reasons for castigating da Pinto, though what these reasons may have been remains a mystery.

From the preceding pages we can conclude that of the four "philosophes" under consideration Diderot demonstrated the least interest in the social plight of the Jews. While he echoed many of Voltaire's arguments against the biblical Jews and joined with both Montesquieu and Voltaire in deriding the Jewish rabbinical tradition, Diderot alone raised no voice against the cruelties inflicted upon this people through the ages. Be that as it may, there is no conclusive evidence pointing to racism on his part. In fact, the manner in which Diderot treated the relative assimilation of the Dutch Jews into that society suggests, at the very least, a toleration of the principle. Nevertheless, we are left with the overall impression that the Jews did not occupy a place of singular esteem in his thought. Moreover, Lehmann's denials notwithstanding, it is beyond doubt that Diderot harbored a personal grudge against at least one Jew, the much maligned Isaac da Pinto. Whether there was a connection between Diderot's silence on the Jewish predicament and his feelings toward da Pinto cannot be proved. The fact remains, however, that the "philosophe" did not convert his wrath into a full scale campaign against all of his Jewish contemporaries.

Against the panorama created by the examination of the writings of Montesquieu, Rousseau and Diderot, Voltaire emerges as a man of his time. Though each of the men in question exhibits certain distinguishing characteristics in his appraisal of the Jews, there is, neverthe-
less, a body of commonly held attitudes which unifies them all.

Of particular interest to us is the dichotomy frequently established by critics between Montesquieu and Voltaire. As we have shown, such a dichotomy is simply not borne out by the facts. For better or for worse, both men shared a mixture of enlightenment and prejudice vis-a-vis the Jewish population. Traditionally, Montesquieu is deemed the unequivocal champion of the Jews despite his use of clichés, his adamant rejection of the Jewish rabbinical heritage, and the fundamental conservatism of his few proposals for the creation of Jewish cities and the purchase of additional privileges. Voltaire, in the other hand, has been condemned despite his struggles against religious persecution and his manifest disgust with the blatant social and economic oppression suffered by the Jews over the centuries. In our view, then, the continued adherence to such a dichotomy can only be attributed to ignorance of the facts or the application of a double standard.

Voltaire and Montesquieu differed solely in the approach to the Biblical question. Voltaire, by virtue of his vitriolic campaign against the Bible, Christianity, and above all, the Judeo-centric worldview, has achieved notoriety. Anti-biblical polemics aside, however, the two men manifested almost identical attitudes. These attitudes, although fraught with contradiction, nevertheless pointed the way, not only toward religious tolerance, but to the beginnings at least of a revolt against the social and economic oppression which had plagued the Jews since the Middle Ages. To be sure, these remarks were narrow in scope, but they represented some of the first attempts to question the correctness of the eternal cycle of persecution, exclusion, and opprobrium under which the Jews of Europe had labored for so long.
Within the writings of the four major French "philosophes" the Jews occupied an interesting if marginal position. One notes that the remarks on the Jews themselves, on their religion and on their cultural heritage by and large did not spring from a sustained interest in the Jewish people per se, but usually were contained in discussions of wider issues. Hence, as we have seen, Diderot's diatribes against Moses were part of the larger attack on the Bible and Christianity. Montesquieu's remarks on the economic role of the Jews formed part of his proposals for general fiscal reform designed to benefit the country as a whole. There was a general tendency among the four to use the Jews for polemical purposes, whether it be Rousseau castigating Christians for omitting Jews from religious discussions or Montesquieu pitting the concept of the Inquisition against that of basic Christian charity. To some degree, then, the Jews themselves were abstracted into pawns in a larger philosophical debate.

Despite the fact that none of the "philosophes" was exempt from employing mindless clichés connecting the Jews with money, one notes, with the exception of Diderot, a definite sympathy toward this people as a persecuted religious group and a revulsion for the cruelties inflicted upon them through ignorance, superstition, prejudice, and greed. This sympathy notwithstanding, none of the "philosophes" in question called for a full emancipation of the Jews and their total assimilation into society.

Though each man, however obliquely, questioned the role of the Jews as scapegoats in western society, the major preoccupation remained religious persecution. The work of actually freeing the Jews was left to a second generation of "philosophes" writing primarily in the 1780's.
Only then, long after the deaths of Montesquieu, Voltaire, Diderot, and Rousseau, did the humanitarian movement evolve to the point of considering the "regeneration" of the Jewish population and its assimilation into the society as an issue to itself.

The history of the movement for full emancipation of the Jews is complex, but was nevertheless outlined in Chapter I. It should be reiterated here that the battle for full civil rights for Jews erupted nationwide in France only after 1785. In that year the Academy of Metz sponsored an essay contest on the question: "Est-il moyen de rendre les Juifs plus heureux et plus utiles en France?" With this provocative question the Jewish dilemma came into national prominence. With the inauguration of this debate, for the first time ever, the entire literate population was officially challenged to take a stand on the place of Jews in French society. The battle was joined, then, in 1785, but it was only years later with the Revolution that the Jews of France finally achieved emancipation.

In conclusion, the "philosophes" were not involved in the actual struggle for a pragmatic solution to the "Jewish problem". They lived and died in an era which was awakening, but not yet liberated from the prejudices and patterns of thought of the past. As members of this period of fermentation preceding the storm, they manifested the contradictions of all those who undergo a radical change in viewpoint. From the vantage point of the late 20th century it is easy to condemn them for their weaknesses, but considering them within their own time one must admit that they had moved beyond the past and posed questions which their descendants were forced to answer.
FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER VIII


⁴Montesquieu, "Pensées," in Oeuvres complètes, ed. André Masson (Paris: Editions Nagel, 1950), II, 37. All references to Montesquieu's works are taken from this edition and will henceforth be noted in the text with the volume and page numbers.


⁷Jean Jacques Rousseau, "Lettre sur le gouvernement de Pologne," in Oeuvres de Jean Jacques Rousseau, ed. V. D. Musset-Pathay (Paris: P. Dupont, 1826), V, 254. All references to the works of Rousseau are taken from this edition and will henceforth be noted in the text with the volume and page numbers.

⁸Denis Diderot, "La Promenade du Sceptique," in Oeuvres complètes, ed. Assezat (Paris, 1875), I, 190-191. All references to the works of Diderot are taken from this edition and will henceforth be noted in the text with the volume and page numbers.

⁹Jacob Samuel Wijler, Isaac de Pinto: Sa vie et ses oeuvres (Apeldorn: C. N. B. Dixon, 1923).
CONCLUSION

At the outset of this study we determined that over two hundred years of scholarship has not definitively resolved the question of Voltaire's attitudes toward the Jews. Though there exists a veritable plethora of articles on the subject, each dutifully based upon quotations from the author, no one basic view emerges. Instead, we are faced with a bewildering assortment of contradictory opinion.

No one disputes the fact that Voltaire was inimical to Judaism as a religion and to the Old Testament as a religious document. What is at issue is the relationship between the overwhelmingly negative comments contained in the anti-biblical works and the author's personal attitudes toward the Jews themselves. It is this issue which we have attempted to resolve through a careful analysis of the biblical commentary, a comparison of these remarks and those made outside the biblical context, and finally through a comparison of Voltaire's apparent attitudes and those of his contemporaries.

Taken as a whole, Voltaire's attacks on the Bible not only damaged the credibility of the document, but impugned the very worth of Jewish civilization. Bombarding the Jews from every point of view imaginable, Voltaire created the overwhelming portrait of a society composed of violent, superstitious bandits, devoid even of the rudiments of refinement, incapable of self-government, living on the fringes of the civilized world. Added to this already dismal panorama was one other, even more disturbing point: the lack of change. The Jews, according to Voltaire, never advanced much beyond their origins as a band of roving brigands. Given this element of cultural inertia, the attentive reader is
drawn to the conclusion that the Jews were an inherently inferior people.

Stripped of its context, this portrait smacks of racism. Indeed, several critics have maintained that Voltaire turned a crusade ostensibly directed against the Bible and the Church into an unconscionable campaign against the Jewish people. It has been argued that the author could have successfully disputed the validity of the Scriptures without resorting to tactics which cast aspersions on Jewish culture and civilization. We have shown this argument to be spurious.

We demonstrated how the nature and the vehemence of Voltaire's attacks were dictated point by point by the intellectual conditions surrounding him. These conditions can be summarized in what has been called the bibliocentric world view. Bibliocentrism, which has been equated with "worship of the Jews" was much more than a mere religious orientation. Stemming from the twin axioms of the doctrine of the chosen people and the divinity of the Scriptures it encompassed an entire system of beliefs and claims which not only guaranteed the absolute validity of Christianity as a religion, but also insured that the Jews and their civilization occupied a place of intrinsic superiority in world culture. It was to this entire network of beliefs that Voltaire directed his commentary.

His aim was two-fold: first, to discredit the theory of divine election of the Jews and the divinity of the Scriptures as a means of destroying the validity of Christianity as a religion. Second, he wished to dismantle the entire structure of cultural, political, historical and moral beliefs built upon the theory of the intrinsic superiority of the Jews and their writings. His attack, then, was
directed not only to the text and the Jews in their relationship to God and the Church, but also the cultural relationship between the Bible and the Jews on the one hand and the rest of mankind on the other. The accolades heaped upon the Jews and the Scriptures were hyperbolic in nature. Responding to them, Voltaire answered in kind, thus creating an unrelenting accumulation of negativism.

His first area of attack, and one to which he constantly returned, was the pivotal concept of the chosen people. Examining it through the eyes of reason and justice, he showed that the notion was both ridiculous and dangerous. It was ridiculous as it contradicted the very notion of a universal godhead, the father of all men. It was dangerous in that it had promoted nothing but fanaticism and bloodshed, the usurpation of the so-called promised land by the Jews being a case in point. Turning to the Jews themselves Voltaire proved that they in no way could be considered God's favorites. Their history was replete with broken promises on the part of the deity. Moreover, for their part they simply did not measure up to the expectations placed upon them as chosen people. The failings of the Jews was Voltaire's greatest weapon and it was the theme which he most consistently elaborated throughout the biblical commentary. By demonstrating their faults Voltaire effectively separated the Jews from the divinity and opened the way for a consideration of this people from a purely human perspective.

This process was in evidence in his treatment of the Scriptures as history. He examined the question from two perspectives: first, the Scriptures themselves as a divinely inspired historical document; second, the Old Testament as a reflection of the Jewish historical experience.
Taking the first point, Voltaire showed that the Old Testament could not possibly have been the work of an all-perfect deity, riddled as it is with error, contradiction, and implausibility. He undermined the historical authority of the Pentateuch by questioning its authorship and date of composition, showing it to have been written long after the events it describes. Finally, he demonstrated the total lack of corroborating evidence in secular histories for the facts described therein. Given these facts, it is more than likely that the Old Testament was the work of the Jews themselves operating independently of any divine guidance. The Jews, like other primitive peoples, created myths to explain events they could not understand which tended to cast them in a position of importance that they did not in fact enjoy. Thus, Voltaire arrived at one of his main themes: the Old Testament as a reflection of the Jews and their state of culture.

Bibliocentrism held that the Jews, as God's elect, were not only a great people, but the central figures of ancient history. Examining the Jewish political experience from the time of Moses to the final dispersal by the Romans, Voltaire proved this theory to be patently absurd.

Voltaire traced the origins of Jewish history to the time of the Exodus, showing this people to have been at first a nomadic group of bandits lead by the sanguinary, but inept Moses. As he studied the failings of Moses as a leader and lawgiver he set the stage for the unfolding of the rest of Jewish history: brigandry and fanaticism at the service of ineptitude. Deluded into believing themselves the instruments of God's will on earth the ancient Hebrews spread destruction everywhere in their path, first through the usurpation of the so-called
promised land, subsequently, in the countless massacres which fill the pages of Scripture. Ever prone to violence, the Jews never managed to establish a truly stable regime. Their history was a never-ending cycle of internal upheaval and foreign domination. Indeed, Voltaire maintained that it was only during periods of foreign rule that the Jews managed to achieve some semblance of order. He concluded that it is folly to imagine that this people, so incapable of self-rule, prone to violence, and continually conquered from without, enjoyed God's special favor. To advance that all human history revolved around them is sheer nonsense.

Nowhere was Voltaire's polemical intent clearer than in his treatment of Judaism. Bibliocentrism placed enormous expectations upon the Jewish religious experience. Divinely instituted, uniquely monotheistic, guided by a Law both original and perfect, Judaism stood out against the religions of the world as a model of enlightenment. Moreover, as progenitor of Christianity it guaranteed the absolute legitimacy of the New Law. Voltaire attacked these premises one by one.

Judaism, far from being divinely instituted, was the work of the Jews themselves and, as such, reflected the ideals and moral outlook of its authors. This fact is most clearly evinced through an examination of the concept of the divinity as portrayed in the Old Testament. There it is revealed that the Jewish deity was conceived in terms totally in keeping with those of other peoples. Anthropomorphic in nature and endowed with all manner of human failings, he was distinctly limited in power. Like his pagan counterparts, he was a local deity. Moreover, according to Voltaire, the Scriptures prove that the ancient Jews were not consistently monotheistic, but alternately recognized and worshiped
foreign gods. Thus, far from being unique and superior, Judaism, as seen by Voltaire, was just another primitive cult.

As for the Mosaic Code, Voltaire demonstrated that it could in no way have been inspired by God. His analysis showed that though the Jews possessed a plethora of ridiculous and sometimes sanguinary laws and rituals, they ignored the fundamental dogma of immortality of the soul and eternal rewards and punishments. Other peoples, presumably devoid of divine guidance, had divined these precepts. The Jews, for all their inspiration, did not. Lacking this dogma, Judaism was then deficient in itself and, even more importantly, as a source for Christianity which relies so heavily upon the concept of an afterlife. Thus, Voltaire struck a blow at the legitimacy of Christianity as successor to the Mosaic Law.

He continued this line of attack through an examination of the prophecies and the theory of a messiah. Considering the prophecies, Voltaire employed a double-edged sword. He first impugned their credibility through an assault on the prophets themselves and the worth of their pronouncements. Second, he demonstrated that in any case Jesus could not be considered as having fulfilled them. Here Voltaire did a curious about face as he rallied the Jews to his cause. He attacked Christian interpretation of prophecy as far-fetched and self-serving. He advanced that the Jews were right in rejecting Jesus as the fulfillment of certain prophecies and that the Jewish method of interpreting prophecy literally and in relation to events close at hand was both logical and irrefutable.

The same tactic was applied to the theory of the messiah. Voltaire asserted that the concept of a messiah destined to save the world
from original sin and to institute a new religion was a Christian invention which ran absolutely counter to Jewish tradition. Again Voltaire and the Jews were momentarily united in a campaign against the Church. Elsewhere Voltaire showed that other key doctrines such as original sin are curiously absent from the Old Testament. Moreover, in his greatest departure from his normal rhetoric against ancient Jewish fanaticism, he argued that Christianity had distorted Judaism, an essentially tolerant cult, in order to promote intolerance and persecution of dissenters. Thus, Voltaire robbed the Church of its greatest argument for authenticity: the continuation and the fulfillment of the Old Testament and Judaism. The fact that Voltaire so often enlisted the aid of the very Jews he had so often condemned to present his case underscores the fundamentally polemical nature of his commentary.

Polemics was found to be at the heart of Voltaire's assault on Jewish cultural achievements as well. Voltaire's primary point in lambasting Jewish culture was to deflate the Christian notion of the all-importance of Jewish influence in the ancient world. For the biblicocentricists the ancient Jews were the teachers of mankind. Using historical arguments such as the late establishment of Jewish society vis-à-vis that of other Mediterranean peoples and the evidence of a consistent pattern of foreign domination, Voltaire asserted that it was more likely that the Jews borrowed from their neighbors. With typical acerbity, however, he carried this notion of imitation to an extreme, maintaining that nothing in Hebrew society was original, save the depths of its barbarism.

The Anti-Christian campaign was at work here as Voltaire turned Christian arguments for the originality and superiority of Jewish cul-
ture into a devastating attack on the credibility of the Old Testament. Christian historians asserted that the myths of pagan cultures derived from the true stories of the Bible. Using historical arguments once again Voltaire proved that it was much more likely that it was the Hebrew versions which were imitations. If the pagan stories were mythical, then many episodes and characters of the old Testament were fictitious.

The assault on the Church continued as Voltaire examined the literary value of the Old Testament. The Song of Songs, for example, was an embarrassment to Christian exegetes given its blatant sexual imagery which they tried to explain away as symbolism. More seriously, however, certain Christian scholars claimed that the Old Testament surpassed the greco-roman classics in literary merit. Voltaire answered this claim by pointing out passages which could only offend those who subscribed to classical ideals. His attack tended to cast the Jews in the onerous role of an intellectually inferior people totally impervious to taste. Nevertheless, we established that in his private moments, liberated from the task of discrediting the Old Testament and bibliocentrism, Voltaire showed himself to be an ardent admirer of the Scriptures. His so-called prejudice against all things Jewish disappeared as he proclaimed the literary value of the Old Testament and the unparalleled greatness of Hebrew poetic genius. The existence of this unsolicited praise reveals a dichotomy between Voltaire, the polemical enemy of the Jews and their culture, and the private Voltaire.

The theory of a dichotomy was further strengthened as we turned to Voltaire's remarks on the Jews in the post-biblical context. The single greatest piece of evidence pointing to the fact that Voltaire was simply not consumed with a personal desire to denigrate the Jews is
the absence of commentary. As one moves away from the biblical domain, the number of remarks on the Jews dwindles considerably. In the remarks that Voltaire did offer on the subject the primary theme was that of persecution. Though his analysis of the question was not extensive, the impact of his commentary is clear: Voltaire neither tolerated nor advocated ill-treatment of the Jews on any level.

On the contrary, the "philosophe" exposed the fallacies of the myths designed to justify anti-Jewish prejudice and persecution through the ages. Contrary to what one might surmise, he did not reduce the causes of Jewish suffering to religious fanaticism, but explored the political, economic and social factors which produced the institutionalized oppression imposed on the Jews since the rise of Christianity. He pointed out how the Jews were traditionally used as political scapegoats by cynical rulers. He demonstrated how the Jews were unconscionably exploited economically, being used in tasks considered taboo for Christians. Usury was a case in point. Voltaire asserted that Christians drove the Jews to usury and then condemned them as parasites. In all, Voltaire continually pleaded not only for religious toleration of the Jews, but for social, political and economic toleration as well.

Voltaire's most penetrating analyses of anti-Semitism related to the Middle Ages and the early modern era. Arriving at his own time, however, he became somewhat shortsighted. Judging from his writings, the problem of persecution was a phenomenon confined to the Iberian peninsula. Elsewhere in Europe Voltaire judged the Jews to be well off. He noted the religious freedom of French Jews and contrasted it with the persecution suffered by Calvinists. He applauded the gains made by the Dutch and English Jews in the political and economic spheres. Yet,
he failed to take up the question of a similar emancipation for the Jews of France who were, as we have seen, languishing in deplorable conditions. Indeed, he seemed unaware of the situation. Was this apparent oversight intentional, stemming from a personal grudge against his Jewish contemporaries?

We examined the question and found no evidence to substantiate such a view. While Voltaire did have two unfortunate business dealings with Jewish agents, there are no indications either in his correspondence or in his public writings that these episodes produced a generalized rancor against all Jews. First, it must be stressed that once the affairs in question were terminated Voltaire ceased to refer to them. Second, there was no campaign in any of his writings directed against his Jewish contemporaries and their business practices. Usury, the greatest weapon in the anti-Semite's arsenal, was treated either neutrally or in a manner highly sympathetic to Jews.

In all we find that though Voltaire showed no abiding affection for the Jews, their religion, or their customs, though he accepted some stereotypes, though he was not above uttering an anti-Semitic cliché in a fit of rage, he realized the ugliness of anti-Semitism, understood its workings, and condemned its consequences. The vast differences in both quantity and quality of the remarks existing between the biblical and the post-biblical contexts point to the fact that the obsessive "hatred" evident in the polemical writings was rhetorical.

Finally, as we compared Voltaire with the greatest of his philosophical contemporaries we discovered that he emerges as a man of his time. Of the "philosophes" in question the comparison between Montesquieu and Voltaire is the most crucial, since critics have pitted the
two men against each other. Montesquieu, by virtue of his protests against the Inquisition and an isolated remark on the origins of usury, has been labeled a philo-semitic. Voltaire, on the other hand, has usually been saddled with the notoriety of being one of the greatest anti-Semites of the 18th century. Upon examination neither label is correct and the dichotomy created between the two writers is manifestly false.

Montesquieu's most liberal comments were echoed by Voltaire and there is no substantial reason to doubt the sincerity of the latter. Moreover, if one delves deeper into Montesquieu's writings one finds evidence of a certain ambivalence toward the Jews which indicates that Montesquieu, like Voltaire, was not completely liberated from the prevailing patterns of thought regarding Jews.

In terms of practical reform, Montesquieu, like Voltaire, was primarily concerned with eradicating religious persecution. Like Voltaire, he naively believed this to be an isolated phenomenon more or less confined to the Iberian peninsula. Elsewhere, he prematurely hailed the advent of a new era in Judeo-Christian relations. Nevertheless, Montesquieu did toy with some proposals which, had they been implemented, would have altered the economic, though not the social status of French Jews. It must be emphasized, however, that these proposals were made, not with the fate of the Jews foremost in his mind, but with the view to ameliorating the fiscal well-being of the country as a whole. Any benefits which might have accrued to the Jews were incidental. Indeed, if one were not aware that such thinking was typical of the time, one would be tempted to decry Montesquieu's almost insensitive approach to Jewish rights and privileges. A liberal in theo-
ry, in terms of practical reform Montesquieu was very much the con-
servative.

The greatest difference between the writings of the two men lies in the biblical domain. Montesquieu seems much more objective than Voltaire in his evaluation of Judaism and the merits of the Mosaic Code. Of course, Montesquieu was never involved in an unrelenting war against the Church and the bibliocentric world view. Nevertheless, his much vaunted cultural relativism did not prevent him from adhering to the general consensus of his time regarding the rabbinical tradition. In this, Montesquieu revealed himself to be every bit as caustic as Voltaire, and indeed, the majority of gentile thinkers.

Given the evidence summarized above, the uncritical acceptance of Montesquieu as an unequivocal philo-Semite and the blanket condemnation of Voltaire as anti-Semitic are unwarranted. Indeed, it seems to suggest a double standard. Our aim in comparing Montesquieu with Voltaire was not to denigrate the former in favor of the latter. We merely wished to show that the ambivalence we perceived in Voltaire's attitudes toward the Jews was present in the writings of other "philosophes" as well. It was of course manifest in Montesquieu. We have shown it to exist in Rousseau, though to a lesser degree. The fact is, then, that none of the major "philosophes" was totally devoid of prejudice. Yet, all, with the exception of Diderot, were grappling with the problem, at least theoretically. Each in his own way made significant contributions to the eventual dismantling of traditional prejudices against Jews. These contributions, however, did not include a campaign for civil rights.

Montesquieu, Rousseau and certainly Voltaire were appalled by re-
ligious persecution. They offered some valuable insights into the causes and the disastrous results of social and economic abuse of Jews. They questioned anti-Semitic myths and superstitions. Yet none of them foresaw, much less tackled the problems of concrete reform designed to bring the Jews into full participation in society. This was to be the work of the next generation of "philosophes", the men of the 1780's who, compelled by the growing crises in Alsace, took up the battle for the Emancipation of the Jews.

In conclusion, Voltaire's reputation as the arch enemy of the Jews is unwarranted. His so-called obsession with the denigration of this people has been shown to be confined to the polemical sphere. Although there can be no doubt that Voltaire harbored certain prejudices toward Judaism and its adherents, we have shown that despite his reservations, despite a certain ambivalence in his attitudes, he consistently sought to eradicate the myths which had led to persecution. His attitude is the antithesis of fanaticism; it represents the essence of tolerance, which is, in our opinion, Voltaire's greatest legacy.
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