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HESS: THE HOLY HISTORY OF MANKIND AND OTHER WRITINGS

Moses Hess is a major figure in the development of both early communist and Zionist thought. *The Holy History of Mankind* appeared in 1837, and was the first book-length socialist tract to appear in Germany, representing an unusual synthesis of Judaism and Christianity that showed the considerable influence upon Hess of Spinoza, Herder, and Hegel. In due course many of Hess' ideas would find their way into the work of Karl Marx, and into subsequent socialist thought.

The distinguished political scientist Shlomo Avineri provides the first full English translation of this text, along with new renditions of *Socialism and Communism*, *A Communist Credo*, and *The Consequences of a Revolution of the Proletariat*. All of the usual reader-friendly series features are provided, including a chronology, concise introduction, and notes for further reading, in a work of special relevance to students of politics, modern European history, and the history of Zionism.

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HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT



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MOSES HESS

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*The Holy History
of Mankind
and Other Writings*

TRANSLATED AND EDITED WITH
AN INTRODUCTION BY
SHLOMO AVINERI
*Herbert Samuel Professor of Political Science
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem*



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Introduction

(1)

Moses Hess is today buried in the cemetery of the first Israeli kibbutz, overlooking the Jordan River and the Sea of Galilee. Yet after he died in Paris in 1875 he was interred in the Jewish cemetery in Deutz, near Cologne, and the epitaph *Vater der Deutschen Sozialdemokratie* (Father of German Social-Democracy) was inscribed on his tombstone; more than eighty years later, his body was transferred to Israel, where he is considered one of the forerunners of Zionism. This is an unusual odyssey for a person who was born in the *Judengasse* in Bonn, became involved in the pre-1848 German radical movement, and spent most of his life as a socialist exile in France.

When Hess is today mentioned in historical studies, he is usually connected with Karl Marx, as both colleague and protagonist in the early communist movement; on the other hand, in Israel he is revered as one of the forerunners of Zionism, since in his *Rome and Jerusalem* (1862), he advocated the establishment of a Jewish commonwealth in Palestine. Yet his writings are little known, and have been hardly translated. At the time, however, he exerted considerable influence, and it was he who introduced Marx – six years his junior – to communist ideas; the latter referred to him, in a somewhat ambivalent comment, as ‘my communist rabbi’.

Hess’ life story is emblematic of a whole generation of pre-1848 German radical thinkers and activists. Like Marx and Heine, he was born to Jewish parents in the Rhineland, which in the first half of the nineteenth century became the hotbed of radicalism in Germany. The reason for this radicalism was not only that the region was economically the most developed

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in Germany. At the Congress of Vienna of 1815 the area was annexed to Prussia, but for most of the preceding two decades it had been under French rule – Republican, and then Napoleonic. During this period all feudal privileges were abolished, the French Civil Code was introduced, all religious differences before the law were set aside, and the Jewish population (proportionally larger than in any other region of Germany) was granted equal civil rights. After Napoleon’s defeat, the newly established conservative Prussian administration tried to undo much of the French emancipatory legislation: this caused much tension among many of the population, who had grown up under the freer conditions of French rule and, knowing French, had access to French revolutionary literature. This was especially evident among the Jewish population, who found itself once more deprived of civil rights and virtually thrown back into pre-emancipation days. Thus, more than any other area in the German lands, the Rhineland became a breeding ground for revolutionary ideas.

It was into this ambience that Moses Hess was born in 1812 to an orthodox Jewish family of petty merchants. Like many of his background, he rebelled against the constricting education given to him at home and in the traditional Jewish *heder*; though he never attended a German-language *Gymnasium*, he hoped to enrol at the university. In the meantime, he and a group of his friends became avid readers of French and, to a lesser degree, German philosophical and political literature: as Hess mentions in his diaries, his reading included Benjamin Constant and Victor Hugo, Rousseau and Helvetius, Fichte and Goethe, Chateaubriand and Schiller, the medieval mystic Jakob Böhme and the romantic author Jean Paul. It was an eclectic self-education for a young boy whose family hoped he would join the family business; yet Hess wanted to become a writer – though in his diaries he admits his inadequacies:

A writer? What education did I receive? None. Where did I study? Nowhere. What did I study? It does not matter. I nonetheless became a writer immediately, because I wrote more than I have ever read; hence I thought more than I had food for thought.

It was in this atmosphere of looking for new horizons that Hess came upon Spinoza. To many Jews of his generation, Spinoza was the epitome of the first modern Jew, who transcended the limits of his Jewish background without embracing Christianity: it was a new secular option, just then presented in an historical novel *Spinoza*, published in 1837 by Hess’ close friend, Berthold Auerbach. Auerbach, who came from a similar Jewish

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background to that of Hess, also published a year earlier one of the first pleas for Jewish equal rights, linking this with a general liberalization of political life in the German states.

Spinoza thus became the mainstay of Hess' promise of a reformed intellectual world – and the focus of the first book to be published by him, anonymously, in 1837, *Die heilige Geschichte der Menschheit* (The Holy History of Mankind). We shall dwell more closely on this work later; suffice it to say that, under the guise of a philosophy of history which views both Jesus and Spinoza as the two poles of a new world order, Hess advocates a radical transformation of society aimed at achieving social equality and the introduction of common property.

The book, published privately by Hess, did not receive much attention, and a few years later, in 1841, Hess published, again anonymously, his second book, *Die Europäische Triarchie* (The European Triarchy), in which he advocates a radical alliance between France ('politics'), England ('industry') and Germany ('philosophy'). Less esoteric in tone, this book brought Hess to the attention of a number of liberal Rhenish industrialists, who were looking for an editor for a new newspaper which they were about to found to advocate liberal reforms in Prussia and Germany in general. On 1 January 1842 Hess became an editor of the *Rheinische Zeitung*. His stewardship of the newspaper – and the newspaper itself – did not last long, and soon afterwards, like many other radicals, Hess left for Paris after being harassed by the Prussian authorities for his views. But the position brought Hess into contact with a wider public as well as with a group of young radical intellectuals and journalists. One of them was Karl Marx, and their life-long relationship started in the editorial offices of the *Rheinische Zeitung*.

It was a crucial meeting for Hess. Though his communist ideas were already well formed from the time of *The Holy History of Mankind*, the encounter with Marx provided him with a wider scope and philosophical foundation for his views. It also electrified him, as can be seen from a letter he wrote to his friend Berthold Auerbach, the author of *Spinoza*:

Be prepared to meet the greatest, perhaps the only real philosopher living now. When he will appear in public (both in his writings as well as at the university), he will draw the eyes of all Germany upon him . . . He goes beyond Strauss and even beyond Feuerbach . . . Such a man I always wanted to have as my teacher in philosophy. Only now do I feel what an idiot in philosophy have I been. But patience! I will still learn something.

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Dr Marx – this is the name of my idol – is still a very young man, hardly 24 years old; but he will give the final blow to all medieval religion and politics; he combines the deepest philosophical seriousness with a cutting wit. Can you imagine Rousseau, Voltaire, Holbach, Lessing, Heine, and Hegel combined – not thrown together – in one person? If you can – you have Dr Marx.

While written in Hess' customary flamboyant style, this also shows a generosity of spirit on his part: not only was Marx his junior, but at that time had not yet published anything, while Hess had already published two books and a number of articles. Hess' awareness of his inadequate education – which we have noted before – resounds here most clearly, and his deference to Marx, which continued throughout his life, must have had its foundation in this realization.

In exile in Paris Hess moved in the circles of his German radical friends, most of them equally from the Rhineland, many of them of Jewish origin. He was involved in a number of clandestine publications, like the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* (German-French Yearbooks) and others, in which his, as well as Marx's writings, were published. His articles on 'Sozialismus und Kommunismus', 'Philosophie der Tat' (Philosophy of the Deed), 'Der Sozialismus', 'Über das Geldwesen' (On Money), 'Über die sozialistische Bewegung in Deutschland' (On the Socialist Movement in Germany), 'Kommunistisches Bekenntnis in Fragen und Antworten' (A Communist *Credo*: Questions and Answers), 'Die Folgen einer Revolution des Proletariats' (The Consequences of a Revolution of the Proletariat) served, next to Marx's own writings, as the philosophical foundations of that brand of socialism which later found its expression in *The Communist Manifesto*. Hess helped Marx and Engels in the preparation of *The German Ideology*, and after joining the League of Communists in 1847 also participated in preparing parts of one of the earlier drafts of *The Communist Manifesto*.

Yet for all his close cooperation with Marx, some fundamental differences remain evident. Hess never shared Marx's views that the emergence of ideas ('superstructure') can always be traced to economic and social conditions. While Marx himself occasionally allowed the realm of the spirit some autonomy, Hess remained insistent that spiritual developments have their own, internal dialectics, and cannot be so easily subsumed under economic developments, as usually suggested by Marx.

It is because of this that Hess also maintained that national movements – so crucial in the pre-1848 period as well as during the 1848 Revolution

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itself – cannot therefore be seen just as epiphenomena of social and class struggle. To him, future liberation would always possess twin aspects – social as well as national. The theoretical basis for this insight Hess found in the Hegelian notion of mediation, and it is thus grounded in a philosophical consideration and is not just a political expression of sympathy for national movements. In an article in the *Kölnische Zeitung* in October 1843, Hess writes:

Nationality [*Nationalität*] is the individuality of a people. It is this individuality, however, which is the activating element: just as humanity cannot be actual [*wirklich*] without distinct individuals, so it cannot be actual without actual, specific nations and peoples [*Nationen und Volksstämme*]. Like any other being, humanity cannot articulate itself without mediation, it needs the medium of individuality.

This approach is similar to the humanistic, universalistic nationalism of Giuseppe Mazzini, who became, both before and after 1848, close to the circle of Marx – despite fundamental disagreements on the role of nationalism. Yet it is clear why Marx basically viewed Hess as an ‘idealist’, still stuck in a variant of Young Hegelianism.

In the 1848 Revolution, Hess, like Marx, returned to Germany and there put out in Cologne the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*. This time, however, it was Marx who was editor-in-chief, and the newspaper was an explicit mouthpiece for a radical revolution, though its communism was sometimes a bit muted.

With the defeat of the Revolution in 1849, both Marx and Hess, like other revolutionaries, had to leave Germany. Marx, after some vicissitudes, found refuge in England, where he stayed for the rest of his life; Hess returned to Paris, similarly staying there until his death.

The failure of the 1848 Revolution caused much soul-searching and re-thinking among the German radicals. Initially, Marx was carried away by the euphoria of the revolution, although in *The Communist Manifesto* he advocated, a mere few weeks before the Revolution’s outbreak, a long-term strategy of structural change. Now he became even more convinced that the end of capitalism would come only through a series of internal transformations coupled with patient reforms and organizational work on the part of the socialist movement. Consequently, in the late 1840s and early 1850s he purged the League of Communists of the Blanquist, radical elements who were advocating another attempt at a violent revolution

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(in the 1870s he followed a similar strategy in the First International against the Bakuninists).

Hess' response to the failure of the Revolution followed a different path. More than Marx he was impressed by the strength of the national ingredient in 1848 ('The Spring of Nations') – in Germany and Italy, as well as in Hungary and the Slavic lands. While Marx and Engels did eventually support Italian and German unification by arguing that only after the national question was solved would the proletariat in those countries be able to focus on class struggle, Hess, like Mazzini, viewed the struggle of oppressed nations for independence as immanent to universal emancipation. He thus supported Italian unification and independence, and viewed French support for it – though politically motivated by French *raison d'état* under Napoleon III – as a continuation of the post-1789 French revolutionary tradition both under Republican and Napoleonic rule.

It was in this context that Hess also shifted his position on the question of Jewish emancipation. As becomes clear in his *Holy History of Mankind*, the Jewish ingredient in both his reading of history as well as his political project is central: universal human liberation will also bring equality to the Jews, and because of the way in which he reads the Jewish contribution to history – through the Mosaic legislation as well as through Spinoza – the Jews bring to world history both a commitment to social justice as well as an existential need for it. Yet it is always within a radically transformed Europe that Hess saw the solution to the so-called 'Jewish Question': the integration of the Jews into a radicalized European culture and society is to Hess the only worthy and achievable goal.

The salience of nationalism in the 1848 revolutions, as well as subsequent developments in Germany, gave Hess pause and caused him to reconsider his position. Hess was the first to discern in German nationalism not only a strong and dangerous chauvinism and general xenophobia, but also the development by German nationalists of a virulent racist approach to the 'Jewish Question': under such conditions, even conversion ceases to be an option. It is a harsh premonition which moves Hess to write in 1862 in *Rome and Jerusalem*:

The Germans hate less the Jews' religion than they hate their race, they object less to the Jews' particular religion than to their particular noses. Neither religious reform nor baptism, neither Enlightenment nor Emancipation, will open the gates of social life to the Jews . . .

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You cannot reform the Jewish nose, nor can you turn through baptism the dark, curly Jewish hair into blond, nor will any comb ever straighten it.

And in another passage:

It did not help [the composer Giacomo] Meyerbeer that he was always careful not to include Jewish themes in his operas . . . Whenever mentioning his name, the respectable *Augsburger Allgemeine* adds parenthetically ‘actually Meyer Lippman Beer’. It did not help the German patriot [Ludwig] Börne that he Christianized his original name ‘Baruch’. He himself admits it, saying that ‘whenever my opponents are at a loss for an argument against *Börne*, they always bring up *Baruch*’.

Yet the basic argument in *Rome and Jerusalem* is positive: the Jews are a nation, and like all nations entitled to a polity of their own. Hess always viewed the Jews as a nation, not a mere religious community; but it was only now, under the impact of a heightened nationalism in Europe (and in Germany in particular) that Hess advocated the establishment of a Jewish commonwealth in Palestine – alongside the ‘rebirth’ of the ‘ancient Kingdoms of Egypt and Syria’ which would similarly emerge from the dissolution of the ‘sick man of Europe’, the Ottoman Empire. This, to Hess, was in tune with the general spirit of the age which leads to national, as well as social, emancipation. It is in the context of the ongoing unification of Italy (not yet fully achieved in 1862) that Hess opens his *Rome and Jerusalem* – subtitled *Die letzte Nationalitätenfrage* – The Last Nationality Question – with the following statement:

With the liberation of the Eternal City on the Tiber begins the liberation of the Eternal City on Mount Moriah; with the renaissance of Italy, begins the renaissance of Judea . . . The Spring of the Nations began with the French Revolution . . . The awakening of the dead has nothing alienating in it in a period in which Greece and Rome are being revived, Poland breathes anew and Hungary sets out to arm itself for the last struggle.

To this Hess adds that, because the Jews maintained a strong communitarian tradition of solidarity, based on the Mosaic legislation which he calls here ‘social democratic’, the new Jewish commonwealth in the Land of Israel will develop along socialist lines.

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While *Rome and Jerusalem* had hardly any impact when it was published – Hess’ socialist colleagues viewed it as an aberration, and few Jews cared for such ideas in the 1860s – it was later, after the founding of modern Zionism, to become one of the classics of the Zionist, and especially the socialist Zionist, canon. It has been translated into many languages, from Polish and Russian to Yiddish, Ladino, and Hebrew, and thus eventually emerged as the best known of Hess’ writings. It is for this reason that the Labour movement in Israel, under David Ben-Gurion, transferred Hess’ remains from Cologne to the kibbutz cemetery on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, which is as close to a mausoleum to socialist Zionism as exists anywhere in Israel.

After publishing *Rome and Jerusalem*, Hess remained active in the socialist movement, and for some time also served as Marx’s representative on the Council of the International Workingmen’s Association (the ‘First International’), since Marx could not freely travel to the Continent. Yet his writing activity diminished, though towards the end of his life he attempted, not very successfully, to compose an ambitious work, *Die dynamische Stofflehre* (The Dynamic Theory of Matter), in which he tried to present an overall dialectical philosophy of matter and movement, aiming to combine Spinoza’s pantheism, Hegelian dialectics, and modern evolutionary science. When he died on 6 April 1875, a non-religious ceremony was held in which he was eulogized by representatives of French radical democrats, German socialists, and the German workers in Paris.

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This volume includes Hess’ first publication, *The Holy History of Mankind*, and three of his later articles, composed during the height of his socialist literary activity prior to the 1848 Revolution. They represent different stages in the evolution of his thought, yet point, despite their different style, to the same critical thread running through all his writings.

The Holy History of Mankind, published anonymously in 1837, when Hess was twenty-five years old, is also the first full-length socialist tract to appear in Germany. By hiding behind the appellation ‘A Young Disciple of Spinoza’ (*‘Von einem Jünger Spinozas’*), the author sends a double message to his readers. At a time when radical philosophers in Germany viewed themselves mainly as ‘Young Hegelians’, the reference to Spinoza suggests an alternative intellectual provenance; and by invoking

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Spinoza – the first modern Jewish philosopher – Hess also subtly tells those of his readers who may be Jewish that, like the Master of Amsterdam, he may be rooted in the Judaic tradition, but intends also to transcend it.

As the first socialist book in Germany, Hess' tract stands out as an unusual amalgam: an attempt to propose a socialist synthesis of Judaism and Christianity mediated through an original, if not idiosyncratic, reading of Spinoza's pantheism. Its structure is cumbersome, its sometimes eclectic erudition attests to the author's self-taught learning, its language ranges from the poetic to the wooden, combing quasi-prophetic pathos if not bombast with shrewd social and political analysis.

It abounds in mottoes and quotations, mainly biblical, which seem both to ward off the censors with an apparent display of piety, as well as to relate its pronouncements to an older moral tradition. That sometimes those mottoes – as well as the subheadings of the chapters – have very little to do with the substance discussed under them, may only add to the perplexity of the reader and to the neglect which the book has suffered from the general intellectual reading public as well as from scholars dealing with early socialist thought (or, for that matter, the emergence of Zionism). It can easily be shown that many scholars who mention the book in their writings have obviously not taken the trouble to plough through its sometimes foggy and often repetitive prose.

Yet, despite all this, the book possesses a coherent overall structure and leads towards a clear political and ideological message. Its two parts (I: 'The Past as the Foundation of What Would Happen' and II: 'The Future as the Consequence of What Has Happened') clearly divide the book into an historical and a programmatic section, with the political message advocated at the end already determining the construction of the philosophy of history proposed in the first part.

Hess' philosophy of history is developed under the overall influence of Herder and Hegel, though neither writer is mentioned explicitly in this context. It views historical development as determined by a successive march of cultures anchored in specific nations (*Volksgeister*), each drawing on the accumulated heritage of its predecessors and bequeathing its own contribution to historical progress to those following it. As in Hegel, transitions are mediated through the work and acts of world-historical figures; as in Herder, each historical period or nation goes through the three stages of growth, flourishing, and decline (under the impact of some writers on natural sciences, the botanical and biological analogies are more pronounced in Hess than in Herder himself).

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Yet while this structure of world-historical development, and its dialectical internal relations and ultimate telos, are typical of early nineteenth-century German intellectual writing, its context is innovative and might even have been disturbing to many of Hess' readers. The conventional reading of world history then prevalent in historical writing in Germany (whose traces can still be discerned even today in many conventional history books) would start with ancient Greece and Rome, perhaps preceded by the Orient (ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia), then move through the Middle Ages towards the modern age. In this structure, the Jews (if mentioned at all) would appear on the margin, as a footnote or an almost irrelevant curiosity; though because of the origins of monotheism and Christianity it would be difficult to disregard them completely. Certainly they would disappear almost completely from any meaningful scheme or periodization of history after the appearance of Jesus or the destruction of the Temple in AD 71.

As already implied in the reference to Spinoza, Hess turns the tables on this marginalization of the Jews in the conventional scheme of history: rather than presenting the pagan-Christian (i.e. Gentile, though Hess never uses the term) component as the central axis of history, with the Jews relegated to the margin, he proposes a philosophy of history which (at least in its headings) is Judeo-centric: it is Abraham, Moses, David, and Ezra – and eventually Spinoza – who are the pivots of history, rather than Pericles, Socrates, Caesar, and Constantine. 'Gentile' history is relegated to the margins, and is drawn into the mainstream of world history only through the mediation of that Jew – Jesus – who bridges the gap between the old particular Jewish covenant and the universality of humanity, and whose message Hess views as central to the progress of humanity. This historical progression is to be further elaborated and truly annunciated by another universalizing Jew – Spinoza. One can imagine both Christian and Jewish readers being uncomfortable – for contradictory reasons – with this unusual reading of history. What also stands out is Hess' clear reference to the Jews as a people and a nation (*Volk* or *Nation*), and not a merely religious community.

Equally discomfiting to both Christian and Jewish readers would be the principle of Hess' periodization of history. Following Joachim of Fiore, Hess views history as divided – in the manner of the Trinity – into three parts: the periods of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. But having adopted this highly Christian reading of the history of salvation, and following conventional Christian theology in anchoring

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the beginning of the period of God the Son when ‘a child is born to Mary’, Hess introduces a highly unusual element by suggesting that the third stage of history (‘God as Holy Spirit’) begins with ‘when our Master [i.e. Spinoza] was born to Jewish parents’ in Amsterdam.

But it is not only this unique periodization of history which is peculiar to Hess, but also the content he gives to each period. In the first period of history (‘God the Father’), which is basically the history of the Jewish people from its inception to the appearance of Jesus, Hess ostensibly follows the biblical narrative. Yet there is a subtle subtext to the narrative, determined by Hess’ political agenda which is to appear only towards the end of the book: it is unorthodox, radical, and subversive, and is basically a socialist reading of the Hebrew Bible.

What characterizes, according to Hess, the Mosaic legislation and the old Jewish commonwealth is an internal unity between the political and the moral. Institutionally this meant that religion was not separated from the state (hence the Hebrew commonwealth was a ‘holy kingdom’); politically it meant that moral-religious precepts guided the polity; morally it meant that legislation referred to the inner as well as outer man – hence no alienation; and socially it meant that well-being had to be sought in the here-and-now, and not in the hereafter. Hence the old Hebrew commonwealth was based on the community of property (*Gütergemeinschaft*), limiting the inheritance of property and periodically redistributing property so as to achieve permanent mechanisms of equalization, if not total equality. The ‘holy history’ for Hess starts with a sort of primitive communism anchored in the Mosaic legislation.

Yet this proto-socialist commonwealth had to disappear – because of internal dissension, arrogance, and the merely tribal nature of the Mosaic legislation. As Hess shows when discussing the second historical period (‘God the Son’), Jesus and Christianity overcame this Jewish particularism and created a universal kingdom of the spirit.

Christianity, however, was not only tainted by the corruption of power, which became evident especially in the late medieval Church (here Hess echoes the conventional Protestant criticism of the Roman Catholic Church and the Papacy). Christian spirituality, in Hess’ reading, also meant that the New Testament related solely to the inner man, religion was divorced from politics and – this is the crux of Hess’ social and moral criticism of Christianity – ‘the Christians never possessed a social order based on God; they never had a holy state or a divine law’. It is for this reason, according to Hess, that Christianity too had to be

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overcome (*aufgehoben*), while preserving its universal message of salvation; but this salvation had to be re-directed to the here-and-now, to terrestrial, social reality. This to Hess was the contribution of Spinoza's pantheism: it recovered, within a universal framework, the unity of matter and spirit which had characterized the ancient Jewish commonwealth – hence it is the ultimate apex of history, the true dialectical synthesis of Judaism and Christianity, now appearing as a new teaching relating to a modern society formed by the development, across the Atlantic, of commerce and industry, leading towards social equality and the abolition of inheritance: while community of property is explicitly mentioned as a desired goal, this is done in a circumspect language – partly due to considerations of censorship, partly apparently as an expression of Hess' own aversion to violence and his preference for gradualism.

All this is sometimes expressed in Delphic language, overburdened with botanical analogies which obfuscate many of Hess' arguments. But as one progresses from the historical Part I to the programmatic Part II, the explicit social criticism becomes more and more apparent.

Yet Hess approaches his criticism of contemporary conditions gingerly, and it is only slowly that the full range of his radical project becomes apparent. In what is called *An Interlude* between Part I and Part II, he refers to the turmoil and *Zerrissenheit* of his age by exclaiming:

Men have once again reached the point where they are lost without a compass in a sea of errors, finding themselves in the middle of a Noahite deluge of ideas. Where is the ark, where is deliverance?

He is aware that dramatic changes will occur: he hopes they will happen peacefully, and explicitly wishes to defend himself against the claim that 'we intend to bring about or stir up revolutions' and insists that 'we do not wish to excite blind passions'. He is, however, aware that existing social inequalities, which now appear for the first time in Hess' text as the cause of current unrest, can be overcome either 'by peaceful mediation or by violent strife'. He implores humanity to launch an overall effort both to find out the causes of social inequality as well as to develop programmes to overcome them, because if they 'will not be mediated peacefully – namely through appropriate, new laws – they will in the end turn violently into revolutions'. So, despite the apparently careful language, the revolutionary potential is not overlooked, though it is clearly not advocated.

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Yet when Hess moves on to the causes of the current crisis as understood by him, the radicalism of his thinking comes into the open.

To Hess, the root of social evil has been the emergence of inheritable private property. Hess does not attack private property as such, though he commends the community of property: it is the heritability of private property – ‘historical right’ in the language of contemporary German jurisprudence – which replaces individual effort and initiative by passive, corrupting enjoyment of one’s parents’ achievements. In an interesting parallel Hess compares the heritability of private property with the idea of inherited chosenness which had corrupted the ancient Israelites. Here as there, one generation’s achievement turned into the next generation’s unmerited claim of possession, and it does not matter whether the goods thus handed over from one generation to another are spiritual (chosenness) or material (property); and just as the ancient Hebrew nation’s chosenness has been transformed and transcended by Jesus into a universal link to the divine, so inheritable private property has to be transcended.

Hess does not propose a detailed plan for this radical transformation of society. Yet he explicitly envisages the need to ‘create new states’, though he is unclear how this would come about, and his radical vision lacks an operational plan; in this he not different from many of the other early socialists, like the Saint-Simonians and the Proudhonists. His message is sometimes contradictory. On the one hand he maintains that ‘it is unnatural and atrocious to wish to abolish suddenly all inequality’, yet a few pages later he insists that eventually, in what he calls humanity’s ‘old age’, ‘all distinction between “mine” and “thine” can again disappear’, and ‘the primordial equality has to be mediated through the abolition of the right of inheritance’. On another occasion Hess declared that

Our era strives towards equality – this cannot be denied; but [does this imply] that it is headed immediately towards the community of property? Let this happen one day in the future, let it be the last goal of ageing mankind.

These ‘new states’ which will, eventually, be organized on a principle transcending private property, will also be organized as national states: ‘states must separate themselves according to their distinct tongues’; Hess quickly adds: ‘though all are encompassed in a higher bond and live in harmony’. This gentle aside is, of course, quite radical and revolutionary in a pre-1848 context, and hints towards Hess’ insistence that future

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emancipation be social as well as national: the seeds for his call for an independent, socialist Jewish commonwealth in *Rome and Jerusalem* can already be discerned here.

The language of Hess' call for a society transcending private property, and his insistence that the modernizing trends of commerce and industry lead towards it, owe, of course much to Saint-Simonian ideas, and Hess acknowledges as much. But on one fundamental issue he disagrees with them: while Saint Simon, and even more his followers like d'Enfantin, grounded their socialist vision in Christianity, for Hess Christianity – for all of its centrality in his world-historical scheme – is the cause of modern alienation because it preached a kingdom which is not of this world, and thus left terrestrial reality to the rapaciousness of human passions and private property. It is in the ancient Hebrew commonwealth, and not in Christianity, that Hess anchors his social vision, since under Mosaic legislation 'the Jews did not know the difference between religious and political commandments, between what is due to God and what is due to Caesar'. 'Highest equality', Hess argues, 'cannot emerge directly, as the [Saint] Simonists maintain, from Christianity, that peak of inequality'.

The enemy of a just social order, according to Hess, is not the old feudal aristocracy, whose power – both political and economic – has already been broken both by the French Revolution and the emergence of industry. It is the new 'aristocracy of money', and it is through them that man becomes 'beholden to this money-devil [*Geldteufel*]'.

It is interesting to cull from Hess' sometimes disorganized and meandering account the characteristics he attributes to the rule of the aristocracy of money – and compare them with the language used by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in their *Communist Manifesto* ten years later. There is no evidence that, despite their close relations in Paris in the early 1840s, Marx and Engels had ever read *The Holy History of Mankind*; yet Hess repeated many of his ideas in some of his later articles, of which Marx was clearly aware: they also sometimes appeared in collections which he himself edited. Be the intellectual archaeology of these articles characteristic of modern society as they are, and in a general sense they represent the common discourse of the *Zeitgeist* in which many of the socialists operated, the similarities are worth pointing out.

According to Hess, the rule of the aristocracy of money causes the following :

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Polarization of society between rich and poorer.

Further pauperization.

The poor have 'neither fatherland nor family'.

Also with the disappearance of the old guilds and corporations, the middle classes and the artisanate are being squeezed out of business and will disappear before the power of large conglomerates.

Hess also believed, however – and here he follows the Saint-Simonians and clearly anticipates the Marxist argument, though his language is less coherent and less doctrinaire – that the emergence of modern industry, while causing the crisis of modern society, is also the key to the emergence of a new world of social justice. The characteristics of this new society are spelt out by Hess in some detail, and the description is again reminiscent of some of Marx's later formulations, both in the *Communist Manifesto* as well as in the earlier 1844 *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts*.

Hess' future society, which will transcend private property, will develop along the following lines:

Abundance, created by socially controlled industry, will integrate over-all social interests, and society will be based on altruism, solidarity and harmony, 'because all interests are interwoven . . . Old contrasts between the low and the high, plebeians and patricians, the poor and the wealthy – this source of all collisions, disturbances, iniquities, and horrors – have all lost their poison'.

Peace will reign in society, both internally and externally.

The distinction between town and country will disappear, as 'villages will adorn themselves with wonderful buildings and cities with inspiring gardens'.

Women will be equal to men, and be given the same education.

Free love will replace the shackles of matrimonial bonds which were always linked to property.

Public education will be freely available to all children.

Society will take care of the health and welfare of the sick and the elderly; with the disappearance of poverty, crime will disappear as well.

Formal law will disappear, with people obeying their internal law which will reflect Spinoza's *amor dei intellectualis*.

The people's sovereignty will be guaranteed by the political structure organized through freely associated communities, subordinated to the

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overall supervision of the states; the states, in their turn, will be associated in a universal league of nations.

And finally, with industry guaranteeing abundance, human beings will be able to turn their activities to their highest calling – artistic creativity.

These are the main features of what Hess calls ‘The New Jerusalem’. While its elements of solidarity are anchored in the old Jewish commonwealth, its universalistic message has been mediated through the appearance of Jesus and Spinoza. To make clear that he is not reverting to another version of particularistic Jewish messianism, Hess makes clear that it is ‘in the heart of Europe [that] the New Jerusalem will be founded’ – i.e. not in distant Palestine.

Yet the book ends on a high note with a strange and moving ode to the Jewish people, who have incorporated over generations the divine spirit and who through Moses, Jesus, and Spinoza have, according to Hess, given mankind the ability to move from one stage of history to another. The Jewish ‘ancient, holy nation-state [*Volksstaat*] . . . perished long ago, but continues to live until this very day in the feelings of its members’. This nation, Hess continues, ‘has been summoned from the very beginning to conquer the world – not like pagan Rome by its force of arms, but through the inner virtue of its people . . . [and] this spirit has already permeated the world’.

It is indeed a strange, if not a bizarre, note which thus ends the first socialist book published in Germany. It is a testimony both to the crisis of modern society on the verge of industrialization as well as to the inner turmoil of a young Jewish intellectual who belonged to that generation which – in the memorable phrase of Isaiah Berlin – taught itself German by reading Hegel and Latin by the study of Spinoza.

We have seen that in his later writings Hess would depart from the quasi-religious language which characterizes – and perhaps mars – *The Holy History of Mankind* and to many readers appears to obfuscate his argument. His later writings focus more on social criticism and political action. While he inspired much of Marx’s thinking, he also came closer to the latter’s vision of historical development which looked more to social and economic realities and less to the heavy Hegelian emphasis on the Spirit, which so much characterized *The Holy History*. In *Rome and Jerusalem* he also switches from his dream of Jewish integration into a socialist, universalist Europe to a more complex approach: he now advocates Jewish integration into a radicalized world through the establishment of a Jewish

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commonwealth in Palestine. But the major themes of his first book appear again and again, and are preserved in his later writings; a short excerpt from *Rome and Jerusalem* on Jesus and Spinoza suggests only one aspect of this remarkable continuity.

The three other pieces in this volume come from the period of the mid-1840s, spent by Hess in Paris and Brussels, where he was closely associated with Marx and other German exiles who founded the *Bund der Gerechten* (The League of the Just), which later changed its name to *Bund der Kommunisten* (The League of Communists). Reading these articles suggests how the ideas which eventually became crystallized in *The Communist Manifesto*, written by Marx and Engels for the League, had been germinating for some time among the group of German exiles in Paris and Brussels. While it is obvious that the *Manifesto* owes both its analytical depth as well as rhetorical power to its immediate authors, it represents ideas which had been thrashed out in numerous meetings and previously expressed in other publications – though never in the same forceful manner. Hess' contribution to this is evident from the three articles included here. They also represent three different modes of writings: theoretical, popular, and programmatic.

The first, *Socialism and Communism*, is ostensibly a review of a book written by a Prussian official, Lorenz von Stein, on French revolutionary ideas. Stein, a moderate Hegelian, meant his book as a cautionary tale, warning against the dangers of French-style communist and socialist ideas; yet Hess – like other German authors of the period – uses this book as a way to acquaint readers in Germany with French revolutionary ideas, but also to suggest how incomplete Stein's account of them is. While Hess agrees with Stein about the provenance of French radical social ideas from the general French revolutionary tradition, he shows their affinity with some critical aspects of German idealist philosophy, and points to the immanent tension between the ideas of *Liberté* and *Egalité*, leading necessarily to a critique of private property.

In *A Communist Credo: Questions and Answers* Hess tries his hand at a popular mode of writing; rather than the dense philosophical discourse which has characterized his own previous writings – and as well as that of other German thinkers like Marx, which was aimed at the radicalized German intelligentsia – this is the first attempt by a German radical not to address his intellectual peers but to 'seize the masses'. This mode is a natural outcome of the emergence of the kind of revolutionary

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socialism which eventually found its expression in the Social Democratic movement, which tried to combine the theoretical insights of radicalized intellectuals with the social and political power of the proletarian masses.

By adopting the quasi-liturgical mode of the catechism, Hess' *Credo* is, in its format and language, the forerunner of many later socialist tracts. One may wonder how effective this was, but the fact that it was reprinted several times in the 1840s must suggest that it had gained some responsiveness. It is difficult, though, not to feel slightly embarrassed by the whiff of a patronizing style which creeps up here and there; apparently, when adopting the ecclesiastical style of a hieratic and hierarchic liturgy, this may be unavoidable. Yet despite these handicaps, Hess manages to convey in relatively simple language some of the more fundamental tenets of the socialist and communist social criticism developed by him in his more theoretical writings. Of special significance is Chapter IV ('Of the Transition to Communist Society'), in which Hess insists that for all its revolutionary ideology, a proletarian revolution should not aim at an abrupt nationalization of all means of production, but rather create economic and political mechanisms which will, over a lengthy process of fundamental transformation, make private property redundant and supplanted by social property. This would also involve the eventual abolition (*Aufhebung*) of the state as a mechanism expressing class hegemony.

On a theoretical level these ideas are further amplified in Hess' 1847 series of articles, *Consequences of a Revolution of the Proletariat*. Of the four articles under this title, only the second has been included here: it is theoretically the most significant. These articles were written at the time of the close cooperation among Hess, Marx, and Engels in the deliberations of the *League of Communists*, and comparing it with the *Communist Manifesto*, written a few months later, suggests the common pool of ideas which inspired the small group of German radicals then in exile in Paris and Brussels. In pointing out that the crisis of modern bourgeois society stems from over-production, that economic crises are thus endemic to capitalist production and hence only a social control of production can bring about the kind of wealth inherent in the productive possibilities of modern industrialization but hampered by private property – in all this Hess appears here at his closest to the ideas eventually to be propagated by the mature Marx. Equally significant is his repeated insistence that the revolutionary transformation should entail a gradual phasing out of private property, not a sudden and total nationalization,

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which would only bring out chaos and dislocation – a point crucial to the Marxian project of a proletarian revolution.

Like other early socialists – Saint Simon, Fourier, and Proudhon – Hess lacks the conceptual cohesion, intellectual rigour, and dramatic presentation of Marx, who brought to socialist thought what all his predecessors lacked: systematic academic education and an unprecedented sure grounding in philosophy, history, and economics; to this was added a powerful rhetorical gift, sometimes verging on stinging invective. Marx thus superseded his predecessors, and while his sometimes disdainful manner towards them smacks of arrogance and superciliousness, his claim to be in a different league is basically justified. Yet he stood on their shoulders, and without them his opus would in all probability not have been conceived or carried out.

Moses Hess, with his unique blend of biblical zeal and prophetic vision, contributed a distinct ingredient to what was to become the corpus of European socialism. What the moral fervour of his socialist critique lacked in systematic economic analysis was amply compensated for by his sensitivity to human suffering and his innovative thinking on social and national issues. In the pantheon of the minor prophets of European nineteenth-century social thought, he deserves his place.

In his understanding of the centrality of nationalism to modern history Hess was aware of a cultural and intellectual force to which many of his socialist colleagues were almost totally blind. It was this aspect of social life which some schools of socialism – like the Austro-Marxists and in a way Soviet Leninism and Titoism as well – later tried to integrate, not always very successfully, into socialist theory. Hess was the first to realize that an abstract universalism, without cultural mediation, may turn out to be hollow, and thus paved the way for a more nuanced, and less dogmatic, socialist approach to issues of national culture, history, and memory.

Chronology of the life of Moses Hess

1812	Born (21 January) in Bonn, Judengasse 807
1816	Hess' father, David, moves to Cologne, leaving the son with his grandfather, so he could attend an orthodox Jewish school
1825	On the death of his mother, Hess rejoins his father in Cologne, continues his Jewish education and starts working in his father's shop
c.1828	Breaks with his Jewish orthodox environment, moves in radical, Young Hegelian circles in the Rhineland
1837–8	Attends, on an irregular basis, philosophy classes at Bonn University for about two semesters
1837	Publication of the anonymous <i>Die heilige Geschichte der Menschheit</i> (The Holy History of Mankind) in Stuttgart
1841	Publication of the equally anonymous <i>Die europäische Triarchie</i> (The European Triarchy) in Leipzig; meets Karl Marx
1842	(January to December) Editor of the liberal <i>Rheinische Zeitung</i> in Cologne; meets Friedrich Engels
1842 or 1843	Meets Sibylle Pesch, a seamstress from a Catholic working-class family in the Aachen region, his future life companion

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1843	Travels to Paris, later to Zurich, as correspondent of the <i>Rheinische Zeitung</i> ; close contacts in Paris with Marx and Heine
1843–5	Writes a number of articles on communism for radical publications, including the essay ‘Über das Geldwesen’ (On Money); moves between the Rhineland, Brussels, and Paris
1846	<i>Kommunistisches Bekenntnis</i> (A Communist Credo) appears
1847	In Paris and Brussels; publishes a series of articles entitled <i>Die Folgen einer Revolution des Proletariats</i> (Consequences of a Revolution of the Proletariat); member, with Marx and Engels, of the League of Communists
1848–9	During the revolutionary period, attempts unsuccessfully to revive the <i>Rheinische Zeitung</i> , moves in connection with various revolutionary activities between Paris, Cologne, Geneva, Basle and Strasburg
1850–1	In Geneva, as head of the local branch of the League of Communists
1852	In Liège and Antwerp; Prussian authorities issue a general order of arrest (<i>Steckbrief</i>) against him; consequently expelled from Belgium
1853	Finds refuge in France where he stays, more or less continuously, for the rest of his life
1854–9	Starts writing on matters of natural sciences for various publications in France
1858	Joins the Freemasons (Lodge Henri IV de Grand Orient)
1860	Begins his work on <i>Rom und Jerusalem</i>
1861	In the wake of a general amnesty in Prussia, returns to the Rhineland; begins correspondence with Heinrich Graetz, the German-Jewish historian
1862	Publication of <i>Rom und Jerusalem</i> ; begins activity in Ferdinand Lassalle’s Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiterverband (General German Workers’ Association); returns to exile in Paris

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1864	Following the reactions to his <i>Rom und Jerusalem</i> , publishes <i>Lettres sur la mission d'Israël</i> (Letters on the Mission of Israel); becomes Paris correspondent for the German <i>Der Social-Democrat</i>
1865	As part of his activity in Jewish affairs, joins the <i>Alliance Israélite Universelle</i> in Paris
1866–7	Translates into French vol. III of <i>Die Geschichte der Juden</i> (The History of the Jews) by Graetz and some of his other writings
1868	Begins to write for the Viennese socialist <i>Arbeiter-Blatt</i> ; in September, represents the Basle and Cologne Sections at the 3 rd Congress of the International Workingmen's Association (The First International) in Brussels
1869	Publishes <i>La Haute Finance et l'Empire</i> (High Finance and the Empire) in Paris as well as an anti-Bakunin tract <i>Les Collectivistes et les Communistes</i> , in which he generally supports Marx's line against Bakunin's Anarchists
1870	Expelled from Paris during the Franco-German War; finds refuge in Brussels
1871	Writes numerous anti-Prussian articles in various radical Belgian publications; with the defeat of France and the abdication of Emperor Napoleon III, returns to Paris in December
1872	Begins work on <i>Die dynamische Stofflehre</i> (The Dynamic Theory of Matter)
1875: 6 April	Dies after a stroke; the next day a secular service is held in Paris, attended by French and German socialist groups as well as Polish exiles and Jewish activists
8 April	Buried, according to his will, next to his parents in the Jewish cemetery in Deutz am Rhein, near Cologne
1877	<i>Die Dynamische Stofflehre</i> (The Dynamic Theory of Matter) published posthumously by his widow

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1961: 9 October	Hess' and his parents' remains are transferred from Germany to Israel at the initiative of the Israel Federation of Labour (<i>Histadrut</i>) and re-buried in the cemetery of the first kibbutz in Kinnereth, on the shores of the Sea of Galilee
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