**Arendt’s Pariahs and Deutscher’s Non-Jewish Jews:**

**Heresy and Identity in Jewish Modernity**

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**Abstract**

This essay addresses the constitutive role of heresy in Jewish modernity. Heresy—defined here in terms of assimilation—is commonly considered destructive to Jewish tradition. I, however, examine Hannah Arendt’s works on the model of the Jewish pariah and Isaac Deutscher’s notion of the non-Jewish Jew to identify a model in which heresy gives structure to a new, modern Jewish tradition. In Deutscher, the analysis shows, this tradition of heresy suggests a universal worldview that eventually empties Judaism of any particular content. Arendt, on the other hand, connects the possibility of Jewish particularity in the present with her ideal of the pariah-as-heretic. Heresy is neither assimilation nor rejection of Judaism but rather offers a new foundation for Jewish particularity. The argument shows how the heresy of the pariah is also foundational to early formulations of Arendt’s politics of plurality.

**Keywords:** Hannah Arendt, Isaac Deutscher, Heresy, Jewish Identity, Pariah

**Introduction**

In an oft-quoted passage from his celebrated memoir, *From Berlin to Jerusalem* (1977), Gershom Scholem famously describes the agnostic atmosphere of his childhood home:

In our home there were only a few perceptible relics of Judaism, such as the use of Jewish idiomatic expressions, which my father avoided and forbade us to use, but which my mother gladly employed, especially when she wanted to make a point. […] The *Kiddush*, the Hebrew Blessing for the Shabbat, was still chanted but only half understood. That did not keep people from using the Shabbat candles to light a cigarette or a cigar afterwards. Since the prohibition on smoking on the Sabbath was one of the most widely known Jewish regulations, there was a deliberate mockery (bewußte Mokkerei) in this act.[[1]](#footnote-1)

This passage is usually taken to represent the rejection of Jewish tradition by assimilated German Jews, who, like Scholem’s father, abandoned their Jewish heritage to become citizens of the European community.[[2]](#footnote-2) These Jews fought against Jewish authority and repressed their Jewish identity. They acted as *heretics*: they abrogated their cultural and religious markers because of their wish to be accepted within the European secular community.[[3]](#footnote-3) Their heresy dismantled traditional Jewish ways of life and endangered the Jewish world.[[4]](#footnote-4)

In this by now commonplace description of Jewish modernity, assimilation is usually seen as being based on the acceptance of ideals of progress, or on the *Bildung* of the German *Aufklärung,* concepts which first allowed German Jews to join German secular society.[[5]](#footnote-5) The Jews adhered to the universal ideals of the enlightenment to gain the economic, social, and political advantages that assimilation offered. Put in different terms, heresy implied the rejection of Jewish identity or Jewish particularity in favor of a universal worldview, one that German secular society supposedly reflected.[[6]](#footnote-6)

In this article, I aim to revisit the place of heresy in Jewish modernity and suggest a different vision of heresy in which it is *constitutive* of Jewish particularity and identity. My claim is based on an examination of the works on heresy of the German-Jewish political philosopher Hannah Arendt and the Polish-born Marxist writer and activist Isaac Deutscher. I focus on Arendt’s writings on the model of the Jewish pariah (literally ‘outcast’), which she develops in the 1930s and during the Second World War, and on Deutscher’s famous notion of the non-Jewish Jew. Both Arendt and Deutscher, I argue, see in heresy a constitutive dimension of the modern Jewish experience.[[7]](#footnote-7) That is, while heresy is commonly considered destructive to Jewish tradition in modernity, Arendt and Deutscher offer a new Jewish tradition that is founded on heresy. Their work, I will show, suggests a vision of heresy beyond the basic opposition in Jewish modernity of orthodoxy versus assimilation. However, while Deutscher finds that this tradition of heresy opens up a universal worldview, which eventually empties Judaism of any particular content, Arendt, in my reading, connects the possibility of Jewish particularity in the present with her ideal of the pariah-as-heretic. She espouses a vision of Judaism that is based on heresy, while remaining very critical of the idea of abstract universal ideals and well aware of the danger presented by those who propagated such abstractness.

This essay focuses on Arendt and Deutscher, since both are usually taken to represent an internationalist worldview in response to the challenge that heresy poses to Jewish modernity.[[8]](#footnote-8) While Deutscher advances the argument that heresy generates a universalist vision of Judaism that entails the eradication of a Jewish particular way-of-being, Arendt, I argue, tackles the issue with her model of the Jewish pariah, and contrary to Deutscher presents a vision in which heresy is in fact foundational to the modern Jewish tradition. In other words, heresy in Arendt is neither assimilation nor rejection of Judaism, nor is it the source of a universal worldview; rather, it offers, perhaps counter-intuitively, a new foundation for Jewish particularity in modernity.

The present discussion of the interrelations between heresy and Jewish particularity begins with a description of Deutscher’s model of the non-Jewish Jew. Deutscher, who connects heresy with universal ideals, illustrates a conceptual challenge for Arendt’s model of heresy. The second part of the essay addresses Arendt’s early formulations of her model of the Jewish pariah, as discussed in her book on Rahel Varnhagen and her correspondence on the book with Karl Jaspers. Here, I argue, the pariah still serves as a model for the simple life of social outcasts and lacks the political gravity of her later work in the 1940s. In the third part, I articulate the radical implications of Arendt’s model of the “conscious pariah” for a theory of Jewish heresy as well as for her political theory. I argue that Arendt suggests a model of pariah according to which heresy is foundational to Jewish particularity in modernity. My argument will also show how heresy—specifically the heresy of the pariah—should be understood as foundational to Arendt’s politics of plurality. In the fourth part, I examine several implications of my argument on heresy in Arendt and Deutscher. I compare Arendt’s model of pariah to Franz Rosenzweig’s model of the Jew as a stranger and demonstrate how Deutscher’s and Arendt’s disparate models of heresy inform their criticism of Zionism.

**A) Deutscher**

Isaac Deutscher was born in 1907 to a Hasidic Jewish family from a small town in Galicia, only ten miles from Auschwitz, where his father and several other members of the family would later meet their death. The father, a printer of Jewish literature, including philosophical dissertations and historical treatises, expected Isaac, the eldest of his three children, to become a rabbi, a prospect Isaac never fulfilled. Instead, as a young student in Cracow, Deutscher, who lived through the pogrom of Jews in his native Chrzanów, audited classes in philosophy and history, organized a literary circle, and translated Hebrew poems by Bialik and Tchernikhovsky into Polish. At the age of 25 Deutscher joined the Polish communist party, which was unlawful at the time. He was expelled from it only a year later for exaggerating the dangers of Nazism. In April 1939, only a few months before the Second World War, Deutscher, then a writer for a Polish-Jewish daily, moved to England, where he would reside for the remainder of his life. In England, he wrote his famous trilogy of biographies of Trotsky, which would establish his prominent place in English, French, and Italian Marxist circles.[[9]](#footnote-9)

In his by now famous article, “The Non-Jewish Jew,” which he originally presented as a lecture to the World Jewish Congress in February 1958, Deutscher suggests what may appear to be a counter-intuitive argument about the place of heresy in Jewish modernity. While Jewish heresy usually signifies a transgression against Jewish authority and tradition, Deutscher claimed that heresy is in fact *foundational* to modern Judaism. Taking his cue from the Talmudic tales about the heretic Elisha Ben Abuya, or *Acher* (the other), who, despite his ongoing transgressions, was admired and respected by several important sages of his time, Deutscher argues that “the Jewish heretic who transcends Jewry belongs to a Jewish tradition.”[[10]](#footnote-10) To make this claim, Deutscher focuses on several famous Jewish “heretics,” such as Baruch Spinoza, Heinrich Heine, Leon Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg, and Sigmund Freud. While born to Jewish families, these archetypal heretics, he argues, realized early on that traditional Judaism was “too narrow, too archaic, and too constricting.”[[11]](#footnote-11) However, compared to many others who assimilated, these heretics did not find fulfillment elsewhere. Rather, they adamantly insisted on a unique position: “They were *a priori* exceptional in that *as Jews* they dwelt on the borderlines of various civilizations, religions, and national cultures. […] Their mind matured where the most diverse cultural influences crossed and fertilized each other.”[[12]](#footnote-12) Thus, their intellectual ingenuity was grounded in the position of the modern Jewish heretic—in the Jewish world but not truly a part of it. It allowed them to transcend geographical, ethnical, religious, and racial borders. Marx, Deutscher’s argument goes, “rose above German philosophy, French socialism, and English political economy; he absorbed what was best in each of these trends and transcended the limitations of each.”[[13]](#footnote-13) Freud, similarly, overcame “the limitations of earlier psychological schools,”[[14]](#footnote-14) and Spinoza wrote his *Ethics* because he was not shackled by either Christian or Jewish worldviews.[[15]](#footnote-15) Unbounded by the constrictions of identity, Jewish or not, Freud, Heine, and Spinoza were able to rise high above them. “The very conditions in which they lived and worked,” Deutscher argues, “did not allow them to reconcile themselves to ideas which were nationally or religiously limited and induced them [instead] to strive for a universal *Weltanschauung*.”[[16]](#footnote-16) While others were confined to a specific place and time, committed to one religion, one nation, one worldview, Deutscher’s heretics, free from these limitations, came to learn the principal truths of humanity *in general*. Unrestricted by tentative human experience, they were able to perceive the universal laws we all obey.

Deutscher’s vision of Judaism as a universal *Weltanschauung* is based on his formulation of heresy. His tradition of heretics refashioned Judaism as the main propagator of universal ideals. Deutscher’s heretics were not simple renegades or apostates. Freud and Heine, Marx and Trotsky, envisioned, *as Jews*, principles that transcended orthodox Judaism. They inaugurated a new *Jewish* tradition, one built on fundamental truths and ideals. Their heresy operated a shift in Judaism from a particular religion to a universal ideology: Judaism was transformed by this group of heretics into a new and improved foundation of the modern world.

To be sure, Deutscher, an adamant Marxist and internationalist, diverges from the classical Marxist worldview in his attempt to identify a kernel of value in modern Jewish experience. If Marxists—even Trotsky and Rosa Luxemburg, his heretic heroes—customarily refuse to assign any significance to Jewish particularity, in “The Non-Jewish Jew” Deutscher anticipates a second wave of Jewish Marxists who try to subvert Marx’s supposed anti-Judaism, and even find a place for Jewish particularity within Marxism.[[17]](#footnote-17) Still, despite Deutscher’s efforts, I argue that his ideal of Jewish particularity actually empties Jewish experience in modernity. Admittedly, Deutscher’s version of modern Judaism is not exceptional. Indeed, a long chain of modern thinkers, including Hermann Cohen, have ascribed a universalist worldview to Judaism. And yet, Deutscher’s new Jewish tradition appears more radical than that of his predecessor, or even more radical than he himself was willing to admit. While Cohen insisted that Jewish monotheism is based on a set of concrete ethical values—which he established by way of a careful exegesis of the Jewish corpus—Deutscher was reluctant to assign any positive content to his Jewish tradition of heretics. Spinoza, Heine, and Freud, he argued, perceived the true dynamic nature of societies, and rejected the false assumption of those within, who “imagine that their way of life and their way of thought have absolute and unchangeable validity.”[[18]](#footnote-18) But when it came to defining these values and ideals, Deutscher did not make explicit what truths these heretics shared, precisely.[[19]](#footnote-19) His heretics formed a new, modern Jewish tradition, but he never established what this tradition entailed. What exactly was the particular nature of this new tradition in his eyes? He suggested a universalist vision of Judaism but was unable to explain what made one a Jew, besides having a critical attitude to narrow national values and ideals, or what connected Spinoza and Freud, Marx and Heine, besides their supposed discomfort with their Jewish origins.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Although Deutscher does not address this directly, I would like to further argue that his ideal of Jewish heretical tradition in fact turns heresy into a kind of utopian mission. Deutscher, I restate, advocated a humanity united across national, cultural, and religious boundaries. As he notes about Freud: “The man whom [Freud] analyses is not a German, or an Englishman, a Russian, or a Jew—he is the universal man, [whose] predicaments are essentially the same no matter to what race, religion, or nation he belongs.”[[21]](#footnote-21) Heresy provided the best method for realizing this vision. For Deutscher, the Jewish heretic was able to think about the possibility of a world beyond the limits of the nation-state.[[22]](#footnote-22) That is, he or she drew a roadmap to a better world. In Deutscher’s vision, all people should become heretics, transgress against their particular religion, nation, or race, and replace them, like Freud and Heine, with universal principles. All of us should live at the crossroad of cultures and religions and transcend the limits of our tentative origins. Remarkably, if this sweeping change ever occurred, and if the tradition of heretics ever succeeded, Judaism would no longer exist, just as there would no longer be any place for Christianity or Islam in the world, nor France, nor Germany. Heresy would annihilate all kinds of particularities—racial, national, or religious—and would turn the world into one infinite universality. Heresy, understood here as a form of transgression against particularity and even against identity, would therefore lead to utopia.

Deutscher’s critical perception of Jewish identity is further demonstrated in an interview he gave to *The Jewish Quarterly* in London in 1966, later published as the essay “Who is a Jew?” Here, Deutscher argues against the attempt to find positive attributes to modern Judaism. “In this period of the history of the world,” he writes, “is not Jewish consciousness a reflex, in the main, of Antisemitic pressures? I suppose that if Antisemitism had not proved so terribly deep-rooted, persistent, and powerful in Christian-European civilization, the Jews would not have existed by now as a distinct community—they would have become completely assimilated.”[[23]](#footnote-23) Deutscher—and here he echoes Sartre’s controversial position regarding anti-Semitism[[24]](#footnote-24)—was convinced that there can be no positive definition of Judaism in modernity, but only a negative definition based on anti-Semitism. That is, since there is no place for meaningful Jewish particularity in Deutscher’s ideal of universal Judaism, the definition of Judaism must come from the outside. Jews are Jews not because of their history, religion, heritage, or ethnicity, but because of external circumstances. “It is a tragic and macabre truth,” Deutscher therefore continues, “that the greatest ‘re-definer’ of the Jewish identity has been Hitler.”[[25]](#footnote-25) As in Marx’s *The Jewish Question*, modern Jewry is the product of certain tentative historical circumstances.[[26]](#footnote-26) There is nothing truly unique to this community, which should and would dissolve if the historical conditions for its existence faded away.

It is my suggestion that for Deutscher the dissolution of the Jewish people hints at the end point to which all nations, races, and religions should aspire. Indeed, if there is any meaning to Jewish particularity in Deutscher, it is to be found exactly here, in the Jewish people’s willingness to repress the meaning of their particular experience and accept universal ideals instead.[[27]](#footnote-27) The Jews, for Deutscher, are unique because they are the first to strive for the annihilation of their own identity. They are unique in their heretic wish to reject their uniqueness. In what follows, I turn to Arendt’s investigation of heresy. My purpose is to uncover in Arendt a different model of heresy, one that foregrounds Jewish particularity, rather than negates it.

**B) Arendt’s Pariah: Rahel Varnhagen**

Hannah Arendt was not always considered a Jewish thinker. The wide dissatisfaction with her controversial description of the Eichmann trial and her later correspondence with Gershom Scholem, in which the latter famously criticized her for her lack of “Love of Israel,” prevented many from acknowledging and appreciating her important political and social contribution to the Jewish cause—during and after the Second World War—and her theoretical work on Jewish matters.[[28]](#footnote-28) Her 1978 collected essays of Jewish writings, “The Jew as Pariah,” edited by Ron H. Feldman, and Elisabeth Young-Bruehl’s 1982 biography *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World*, which emphasized the central place of Arendt’s Jewishness in her life, are probably the first publications to have challenged the unfavorable reception of Arendt and her work. A few years later, Dagmar Barnouw’s *Visible Spaces: Hannah Arendt and the German-Jewish Experience* (1990) and Richard Bernstein’s *Arendt and the Jewish Question* (1996) solidified the importance of Arendt’s Jewish heritage and identity to her political philosophy. In the following pages, I revisit Arendt’s model of the Jew as pariah. My aims are to rethink the pariah as a model of heresy and, building on Arendt’s conceptual work, to reconsider the place of heresy in Jewish identity.

Arendt’s first reflections on the model of the Jew as pariah are developed in her biography of the German-Jewish writer, who hosted one of the most famous Berlin salons of the 1800s, Rahel Varnhagen. The book was written in the 1930s as Arendt's *Habilitationsschrift* (habilitation thesis), but was not published until 1957. In this book, “written from the perspective of a Zionist critique of assimilation,”[[29]](#footnote-29) Arendt first introduces her key distinction between the pariah and the parvenu.[[30]](#footnote-30)

As a Jew Rahel had always stood outside, had been a pariah, and discovered at last, most unwillingly and unhappily, that entrance into society was possible only at the price of lying, of a far more generalized lie than simply hypocrisy. She discovered that it was necessary for the parvenu—but for him alone—to sacrifice every natural impulse, to conceal all truth, to misuse all love, not only to suppress all passion, but worse still, to convert it into a means for social climbing. Courage could not be hers, the courage to take a position outside of society, because the pariah does not voluntarily renounce; he can only assume acquired heroic poses after renunciation has been forced on him.[[31]](#footnote-31)

The parvenu is a term designating the assimilated Jew, a symbol for inauthentic Jewish life. The parvenu is the Jew who desires financial profit and social success and therefore leaves behind his or her Jewish heritage for the lucrative prospects that assimilation offers. The parvenus, Arendt adds, sacrifice their desires and hopes, their past and their future, their homes and their relationships and, most importantly for Arendt, their individuality.[[32]](#footnote-32) They renounce themselves in order to climb the social ladder, to become members of the “good society.”[[33]](#footnote-33) Arendt’s Rahel Varnhagen was different. Despite the fact that Varnhagen eventually converted to Christianity, Arendt sees in her a model for a modern experience of the Jewish pariah.[[34]](#footnote-34) Varnhagen, she claims, was unwilling to “sacrifice every natural impulse.” Instead, she chose to remain “outside,” a pariah. Assimilation was not a natural immaculate movement from one society to another, but a painful act in which one is stripped of that which defines the self. The pariahs, explains Arendt, are reluctant to pay this price. Like the parvenu, they reject the traditional Jewish world; however, unlike the parvenu, they also refuse to become lost in the world outside. Like Deutscher’s heretics, Arendt’s pariahs are foreign to traditional Judaism, and, at the same time, never part of the society they inhabit. For this reason, when Arendt cites examples of her pariah tradition, she suggests a list of figures that conspicuously resembles that of Deutscher. Heine, Franz Kafka, and Charlie Chaplin, who feature among her Jewish pariah heroes, could have easily populated Deutscher’s tradition of heretics.[[35]](#footnote-35)

Nevertheless, in contrast with Deutscher, Arendt offers more than a negative meaning to her tradition of pariahs. As she writes to her friend and mentor Karl Jaspers:

Judaism doesn't exist outside orthodoxy on the one hand or outside the Yiddish-speaking, folklore-producing Jewish people on the other. There are also people of Jewish background who are unaware of any Jewish substance in their lives in the sense of a tradition and who for certain social reasons and because they found themselves constituting a clique within society produced something like a “Jewish type.” This type has nothing to do with what we understand under Judaism historically or with its genuine content. Here there is much that is positive, namely, all those things that I classify as pariah qualities and what Rahel called the “true realities of life” “love, trees, children, music.” In this type there is an extraordinary awareness of injustices; there is great generosity and a lack of prejudice; and there is more questionably but nonetheless demonstrably present respect for the “life of the mind.” Of all these things only the last one can still be shown to have a link with originally and specifically Jewish substance.[[36]](#footnote-36)

This letter was written to Jaspers in September 1952, in response to the latter’s review of the Rahel Varnhagen manuscript, which Arendt hoped to publish soon after. Thus, although it was written after Arendt’s 1944 article “The Jew as Pariah,” I argue that this short text reflects Arendt’s early model.

In the letter, the figure of the pariah is characterized by several *specific* qualities. Compared to Deutscher’s negative definition of Judaism, Arendt’s pariahs assume something concrete: they represent certain “realities of life” which Arendt’s Varnhagen describes as awareness of injustice, great generosity, lack of prejudice, and respect for the life of the mind. In a word, the pariah possesses “a passionate comprehension unknown to the privileged […] passionate empathy which constitutes the humaneness of the pariah.”[[37]](#footnote-37) Arendt, however, insists that most of these qualities do not have “a link with originally and specifically Jewish substance.” Simply put, in this letter, generosity and awareness of injustice should not be considered “Jewish types” nor essential to Judaism.[[38]](#footnote-38) In the next few pages, I demonstrate how Arendt’s somewhat naïve appreciation of the pariah as representing “love, trees, children, music” turned into a concrete political action plan. Still, even at this stage, I would argue that Arendt’s proposition that most of the “pariah qualities” are disconnected from “Jewish substance” is certainly debatable. Awareness of injustices, generosity and a lack of prejudice are surely quintessential to the Jewish experience in the East-European village, as Shalom Aleichem and Shmuel Yosef Agnon, to name but a few, so carefully portrayed. So are “love, trees, children, [and] music.” It is not surprising, therefore, that in a 1943 essay “We Refugees,” Arendt herself defines these pariah qualities as “Jewish.”[[39]](#footnote-39)

Arendt’s letter to Jaspers also hints at her early notion of heresy. Arendt, to clarify, does not use the term heresy in her work. Still, for Arendt, the pariah signifies a break from traditional Judaism: the pariah should not be understood “with Judaism historically.” Judaism, she argues, exists only within orthodoxy and the Yiddish-speaking Jewish world. The pariah is, alternatively, a disruptive figure that contents their authority. As Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin argues, the pariah relations with Judaism remind us of other heretical movements in Jewish history: “for both Scholem and Arendt, the Jewish heretic—the subversive figure who challenges tradition and authority—had a constitutive role in the definition of what they regarded as ‘Jewish politics.’ The heretical Jew was portrayed by both as the authentic nonreligious Jew and as the one who conducts the historical process and conserves the genuine Jewish tradition.”[[40]](#footnote-40) Still, at this stage, the pariah does not seem to offer a model of *deliberate* heresy. This is mostly because the pariah is “unaware of any Jewish substance in their lives in the sense of a tradition.” Pariahs do not demonstrate a conscious rebellion or willful intent. They are simply, perhaps even unintentionally, a “clique” of outsiders. They resort to the “true realities of life,” and thereby lose touch with their Jewishness, rather than deliberately negating or opposing it.

Arendt’s early formulation of the pariah as a heretical figure would evolve in the 1940s. One important catalyst for this change was the model of the “conscious pariah” of Bernard Lazare, the Jewish-French thinker and journalist. Lazare, who was an early defender of Dreyfus, and is considered an early champion of Zionism (he even joined forces with Theodor Herzl for a short while), argued that the Jewish people should accept and even be proud of their pariah position in Europe. Like so many in the Jewish world, Lazare realized in the aftermath of the Dreyfus affair that the Jews would never be accepted as Jews into the European community. They would forever be outcasts. Their assimilation could only lead to anti-Semitism, not fruitful collaboration. However, unlike Herzl and other Zionist activists, who contemplated the reconstitution of the Jewish national identity in Palestine, Lazare believed that the pariah position should be an important aspect of Jewish national identity. If assimilation was historically unsuccessful and supposedly impossible, Lazare wished the Jewish people to be conscious of their pariah status and adopt it as their true fate. In *Le fumier de Job* (Job’s Dungheap), a series of aphorisms about Judaism that Lazare wrote shortly before his death, he declares: “Let us ceaselessly lay claim on behalf of our unhappy brothers to the rights of man, but let us at the same time show them that assimilation is not the end of their wretchedness, but, on the contrary, the source of their miseries.”[[41]](#footnote-41) The Jews were the Other of the western world, and this otherness, in Lazare’s view, was the source of their strength and uniqueness. Even more so, this otherness, he claimed, should inform their place on the world stage: the Jews were supposed to become the representatives of the “rights of man.” They were meant to be at the forefront of many other struggles; a voice for all those who were silenced and oppressed. Arendt would make this principle a cornerstone of her work on the modern Jewish condition.

**C) Arendt’s Conscious Pariah**

Arendt’s fully formed model of pariah is inaugurated in her 1944 essay, “The Jew as Pariah: A Hidden Tradition,” where the political implications of the model are fundamental, especially the emphasis on the pariah as a model of political resistance, informed by Lazare’s “conscious pariah.”. It is my claim that here heresy is formative to her model of the pariah.

In the pariah essay, Arendt deals with several *Ur*-figures of the Jewish pariahs. The first is Heine’s schlemiel, who is “excluded from formal society,” but unlike the parvenu has no desire to be embraced within it and therefore turns “to that which entertains and delights the common people.”[[42]](#footnote-42) In a description that closely follows her book on Rahel Varnhagen (who, incidentally, was a close friend of Heine), the schlemiel is a hero of innocence who rejects the economic logic of the parvenu, and prefers instead the joys and sorrows, “that simple *joie de vivre*”[[43]](#footnote-43) of the social outcast.[[44]](#footnote-44)

Arendt’s description of Heine’s schlemiel does not add much to her earlier work on Varnhagen. Nevertheless, it is Heine who unravels the radical implications of her new model. “Heine is the only German Jew,” she writes, “who could truthfully describe himself as both a German and a Jew. […] By seeing Phoebus Apollo in Rabbi Faibusch, by boldly introducing Yiddish expressions in the German language, he in fact put into practice that true blending of cultures of which others merely talked.”[[45]](#footnote-45) Assimilated Jews, she claims, were reluctant to “speak Yiddish.” Heine, in stark difference, enforced the Jewish vernacular on his German audience. He celebrated that which his fellow Germans—and the assimilated Jew—were eager to silence. In other words, Heine, in contrast with the proponents of the Science of Judaism (who focused on the *privileged* Jewish past of the biblical poets), introduced the plain, uneducated, and poor schlemiel to the German *Kultur*. This transgression, Arendt argues, marked Heine’s membership of the Jewish pariah tradition (despite the fact that he, too, like Varnhagen, converted to Christianity):

Heine was not deceived by this nonsense of “world citizenship.” He knew that separate peoples are needed to focus the genius of poets and artists; and he had no time for academic pipe dreams. Just because he refused to give up his allegiance to a people of pariahs and schlemiels, just because he remained consistently attached to them, he takes his place among the most uncompromising of Europe's fighters for freedom-of which, alas, Germany has produced so few.[[46]](#footnote-46)

In Arendt’s formulation, Heine rejected the ideal of “world citizenship,” which Deutscher so ardently promoted. Heine was not at the crossroad of different cultures and ideology. He was a *Jewish* writer who eagerly inserted the Jewish schlemiel into the German world. He rejected “academic” internationalism, which Deutscher advocated, and fought to give voice to outcast people and their ideals, which German society supposedly suppressed. One of “Europe's fighters for freedom,” he did not search for abstract universal principles. Rather, he fought—as a Jew—to create a “blending of cultures,” a mixture of Germanness and Jewishness, within the German culture.

What is particularly relevant here is that Heine, in his role of pariah, is seen as acting in the name of Judaism, that is to say, in the name of what is supposed to have been rejected. Heine does not aim to transcend Judaism, but seeks to utilize his Jewish origins. As opposed to Deutscher’s heretics, the pariah takes from what is supposed to have been abandoned, in order to fight against the uniformity that lies beyond. This counter-intuitive formulation of the relationship the pariah maintains with Judaism is further developed in Arendt’s discussion of the “conscious pariah,” where Lazare’s work transforms Heine’s aesthetic transgressions against a political action plan.

[…] in contrast to his unemancipated brethren who accept their pariah status automatically and unconsciously, the emancipated Jew must awake to an awareness of his position and, conscious of it, become a rebel against it - the champion of an oppressed people. His fight for freedom is part and parcel of that which all the downtrodden of Europe must wage to achieve national and social liberation.[[47]](#footnote-47)

There is much to unpack in this quote. First, note that in Arendt’s 1944 essay, the pariah is not only a symbol of someone who leads a happier, simpler life than the schlemiel, but one of rebellion against the forces that oppress the Jewish people.[[48]](#footnote-48) The schlemiel is satisfied with the current condition, indifferent to the dominating political forces, whereas the conscious pariah is aware of social and political injustices and calls for action so that “every pariah who refuses to be a rebel [is] partly responsible for his own position and therewith for the blot on mankind which it represented.”[[49]](#footnote-49) In line with Lazare’s model, this fight is now seen as the model for other similar battles that rage throughout Europe. The pariah is a symbol of resistance, a symbol of the revolt against injustice. Furthermore, in “The Jew as Pariah,” heresy is clearly *duplicated*: the heretic attitude against traditional Judaism is reproduced as a more generalized attitude against European society in general. Pariahs not only struggle with their Jewish tradition, but they also reject the uniformity around them. Pariahs transgress against the surrounding peoples, against European society, and in fact against all other societies or communities: they reject the German and the French as they reject the Jewish tradition.

Arendt’s model of pariah thus suggests a unique formulation of heresy. While the pariah struggles with Judaism, he or she must also identify as a Jew in their relations with the society in which they live. The pariah must be both inside and outside Judaism: outside Judaism in their relations with Jewish authority, and inside Judaism when they struggle with other nations or religions. In other words, the heresy of the pariah does not invalidate Judaism, but rather secures it as a new basis for future political action. The heretic must be a Jew in order to be a pariah. Here an essential difference can be observed between Deutscher and Arendt: while for Deutscher the heretic acts against the Jewish tradition in order to promote a universal worldview, which will eventually invalidate Judaism, in Arendt, the heretic pariah is able to act as pariah only as part of the Jewish people. Rather than emptying Judaism, as Deutscher’s vision suggests, Arendt invents a form of double-barreled heresy which in fact safeguards Judaism. Pariahs are truly *Jewish* heretics: their heresy is grounded in the fact that they are different, that is, in their participation in what they also reject.

Put in more general terms, Arendt’s heresy is a form of transgression that simultaneously destabilizes and sustains identity. The pariah represents a struggle with cohesive uniformity and social and political conformity. Yet this struggle is based on the possibility of being an “outsider” or a “stranger,” that is, a different, subversive identity, which negates the homogeneity the pariah meets. The pariah must always affirm a certain identity in battling against another. Thus, when Jewish heretics struggle with worldly injustices, they must affirm their Jewish identity first. If in her work on Rahel Varnhagen, the pariahs seem to have no identity—they lack any identificatory mark as they enjoy a “simple *joie de vivre*”—in her model of the conscious pariah, Arendt understands that the fight against homogeneity must be conducted from a concrete position. To fight against uniformity, one has to have a particular identity.

I would argue that this formulation of the pariah-as-heretic has important reverberations with Arendt’s political philosophy, especially with her emphasis, in her later work, on the political importance of the ideal of plurality. Let us briefly recall that for Arendt a healthy political reality is one in which many diverse opinions and political positions are expressed. Uniformity and homogeneity are the markers of a failed political system, while a heterogeneous political sphere promises an ongoing exchange of ideas and ideals, which is crucial for a dynamic and thriving political system. As she would famously put it more than a decade later in the celebrated opening lines of *The Human Condition* (1958):

Action, the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter, corresponds to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world. While all aspects of the human condition are somehow related to politics, this plurality is specifically the condition—not only the *conditio sine qua non*, but the *conditio per quam*—of all political life.[[50]](#footnote-50)

As noted earlier, the place of Arendt’s Jewish heritage in her later political philosophy is hotly debated. I follow Richard Bernstein, who argues in *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question* for the importance of Arendt’s earlier work on Jewish matters for her philosophical worldview. “[…] one should not forget that *The Human Condition* was published in 1958, when Arendt was 52. Her political education had begun 25 years earlier, and her primary concern had been to understand Jewish politics or, rather, the failures of Jewish politics.”[[51]](#footnote-51) Taking my cue from Bernstein, I would like to suggest that for Arendt, the pariah sets up a model for the battle against uniformity. The pariah stands on the outside, alienated from the majority. The conscious pariah, however, is neither ashamed of this strangeness, nor shunned by alienation. Rather, pariahs embrace their otherness because it is formative to their identity. Their alienation does not signal a resignation from the political. Rather, this alienation institutes the unique political role and function of the pariah. Pariahs thus introduce otherness to the political: they inject into a political homogeneity the possibility of plurality. They ensure that even in the most harmonious and homogeneous political system, there is still one, at least one, who is different.

While initially, in Arendt’s Rahel Varnhagen book, the pariah is only accidently a part of a “clique” and enjoys the “true realities of life,” disinterested in the Jewish tradition, in Arendt’s 1944 essay, with its political focus, the pariah becomes an *active* *heretic* or a *conscious rebel*. The pariah is not merely “outside,” but is conscious of this position, and harnesses it for the sake of concrete political action. Heresy, here understood as a form of transgression against all kinds or orthodoxies and hegemonies, is the principle of the pariah’s *way-of-being*.

My argument here offers a new perspective on Arendt’s early vision of the political. In many works, Arendt is a thinker of the political sphere - not of individuality or of individual political actions. She is focused on analyzing, examining, and explaining the principles of the political, especially ideals of active citizenship and civic engagements, rather than the actions of individual agents. Yet, her early work on the pariah highlights a different vision as it illustrates the role of the outcast in the construction of plurality. To clarify, Arendt’s ideal of plurality is usually seen as a *fact*, a basic quality of the political. It is the foundation of Arendt’s vision of the healthy political environment. For example, Judith Butler in *Parting Ways* (2012) recently discussed the ideal of plurality in the context of contemporary criticism of Zionism. In her analysis of Arendt, Butler focused on what she terms co-habitation. Co-habitation, to explain, is a principal political fact according to which we all essentially share a land and live next to one another, which in Butler’s work explains the demand for a binational state in Israel. In brief, since we are all in a position of plurality and cohabit the land, Butler claims with Arendt that the nation-state, which aims to unify the political under one nation, is a categorical mistake, a sort of perversion of the political. In Butler’s strong words, “for Arendt, one reason why genocide is radically impermissible is that, in fact, we have no choice with whom to cohabit the earth. That diverse population always precedes us; it is always plural, multilingual, and spatially distributed. There is no one part of the population that can claim the earth for itself. To do so is to enter into a policy of genocide.”[[52]](#footnote-52) What is interesting here is that cohabitation informs the logic of a healthy political system. More generally, the fact of cohabitation (or the fact that we essentially live alongside one another, in a constant condition of diversity) is for Butler’s Arendt an indisputable fact of human existence that reinforces the possibility of the political.[[53]](#footnote-53) Plurality is the *ontological* foundation for a shared human reality.

My analysis, however, focuses on Arendt’s earlier formulation of the political vis-à-vis her work on the pariah, where she is concerned with outcast individuals and their political role. Her work at this stage suggests that plurality is an *achievement*, not a *fact*.[[54]](#footnote-54) As Arendt personally experienced, the political is in constant danger of destruction - in Arendt’s political philosophy, this translates as the danger of homogeneity which she identified in authoritarian regimes. The pariah seems to offer the solution to this danger. The political needs the heresy of the pariah—there needs to be one who refuses, who breaks down the uniformity of the majority—so that plurality is *essentially* possible. Plurality is safeguarded by the pariah’s *resistance*, by freedom fighters like Heine and Lazare. In Arendt’s work, the figure of the heretic is thus foundational to the political. A robust and flourishing political system needs to be founded on plurality. The pariah—as a figure of heresy which fights for the possibility of otherness, and indeed for the possibility of individuality—promises this plurality.

In what follows, I examine the implications of Arendt’s model of heresy for her criticism of Zionism and explore the important similarities between her model of the pariah and Franz Rosenzweig’s ideal of Jewish alienation from the world and from history.

**D) Arendt’s Pariah, Judaism, and Zionism**

In thinking of the pariah as constituting a modern Jewish tradition, or “Jewish type,” Arendt comes close to several Jewish philosophers, like Franz Rosenzweig and Emmanuel Levinas, who focused on experiences of homelessness, strangeness, and otherness as important dimensions of Jewish history and identity. Rosenzweig, for example, famously argued in *The Star of Redemption* (1921), that the Jewish people are essentially travelers,[[55]](#footnote-55) who live on the shores of history: while all other nations participate in history, the Jews, he argued, are strangers to the world. This estrangement hasa special purpose: because of their rejection of worldly endeavors, the Jews are able to create a unique kind of community, which all other nations should copy and follow. Jewish estrangement from the world and from history is what founded their role in world redemption: “its peoplehood is already at that place to which the peoples of the world only aspire. Its world is at the goal.”[[56]](#footnote-56) Arendt echoes this model when she focuses on the strangeness of the pariahs, on the importance of their distinct reality. However, one important difference highlights their opposing viewpoints on the role of Judaism in world history: while Rosenzweig believed that Jewish otherness informs their negation of the world and history, and that the Jewish exile is a sign of the essential Jewish indifference to history, Arendt claims that Jewish pariahs should impose their otherness onto the world. The otherness of the pariah is not a form of refusal as in Rosenzweig, but, rather unexpectedly, a form of involvement in the world and in history: the pariah must be active in the world as a pariah. In political terms, the conscious pariah is expected to take up the pariah position to fight for plurality. If Rosenzweig believed that Jewish alterity should be grounded in a Jewish *alienation* from the world, Arendt suggested conversely that Jewish alterity should be based on their *participation* in the world. That is, while she fought against Jewish immersion within the world, she nonetheless envisioned Jewish engagement with the world. Arendt, herself a refugee, was well aware of the hardship and suffering of statelessness and despised the Jewish ideal of worldlessness. Being on the outside, she said, is not an achievement, as glorified by Deutscher and Rosenzweig. What she admired most was the attempt to re-engage with the world, *always* as a pariah. In this sense, her heroes are truly heretics: they do not simply leave, as apostates (משומד), but rather aim to rejoin and refashion their world from the outside.[[57]](#footnote-57)

This insight into the role of Judaism in world history formed the foundation of Arendt’s work on anti-Semitism. As Arendt argues in the first chapter of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), the fact that Jews misunderstood the ideal of Jewish alterity, and chose to distance themselves from the political, rather than to make their alterity a principle for their political activity, is one of the reasons that led to their inapt response to the danger of modern anti-Semitism:

Ignorance or misunderstanding of their own past were partly responsible for their fatal underestimation of the actual and unprecedented dangers which lay ahead. But one should also bear in mind that lack of political ability and judgment have been caused by the very nature of Jewish history, the history of a people without a government, without a country, and without a language.[[58]](#footnote-58)

Mere alterity amounts to conformity, even if unintentionally, according to Arendt. Otherness needs to be represented; alterity must be pronounced. This principle is extremely important for Jewish people: they have to be conscious pariahs not only to support a healthy political system, but also to secure their survival. [[59]](#footnote-59) Here again, while Judaism slowly evaporates because of heresy in Deutscher’s case, for Arendt, heresy secures the survival of the Jewish people.

Arendt’s work on the pariah also informed her early appreciation of the Zionist project. This would become another source of contention between herself and Deutscher, with his tradition of heretics. To explain, at the end of her pariah essay, Arendt suggests a shift in the medium of the struggles of the pariah. If her work up to this point focused on the pariah as an individual, who, first, enjoys “the simple *joie de vivre*,” and later becomes a conscious political agent, who transgresses against the homogeneity of the surrounding political order, Arendt realizes in 1944 that the battle of the Jewish pariah should turn into a national project. “The pariah Jew and the parvenu Jew are in the same boat,” Arendt observes, “rowing desperately in the same angry sea. Both are branded with the same mark; both alike are outlaws.”[[60]](#footnote-60) As individuals, she argued, the Jewish pariah and the parvenu fail, as the devastation of the Jewish people during the Second World War had clearly proven. The struggles of the future, therefore, must be on a different scale: “For only within the framework of a people can a man live as a man among men, without exhausting himself. And only when a people lives and functions in consort with other peoples can it contribute to the establishment upon earth of a commonly conditioned and commonly controlled humanity.”[[61]](#footnote-61)

The mission of the pariah had to be channeled into a national framework. The Jewish people had to turn into a nation, a nation of pariahs. The pariah condition, she believed, should uphold Jewish national identity. The Jewish people were to become a pariah nation, which, like the individual pariah, would ensure the ideal of plurality, in the present and at the global level. Consequently, Zionism, she believed, should not be primarily about the negation of the *Galuth*, nor should it be about the reconstitution of a long-lost national home for the Jewish people in the Land of Israel. Rather, Zionism should concern the formation of a Jewish heretic tradition of pariahs at the national level.[[62]](#footnote-62) More concretely, Zionism, as a pariah nation, should combat western expansionism and lead the fight, alongside other outcast nations, against imperialism and colonialism.

Importantly, Arendt’s early critique of Zionism focused precisely on the Zionists’ inability to comprehend their important role as a pariah nation. In a long paragraph from her famous essay “Zionism Reconsidered,” published but a few months after her pariah essay, Arendt expresses her frustration:

Those who are dismayed at the spectacle of a national movement that, starting out with such an idealistic elan, sold out at the very first moment to the powers that be; that felt no solidarity with other oppressed peoples whose cause, though historically otherwise conditioned, was essentially the same; that endeavored even in the morning-dream of freedom and justice to compromise with the most evil forces of our time by taking advantage of imperialistic interests - those who are dismayed should in fairness consider how exceptionally difficult the conditions were for the Jews who, in contrast to other peoples, did not even possess the territory from which to start their fight for freedom. The alternative to the road that Herzl marked out, and Weizmann followed through to the bitter end, would have been to organize the Jewish people in order to negotiate on the basis of a great revolutionary movement. This would have meant an alliance with all progressive forces in Europe; it would certainly have involved great risks. The only man within the Zionist Organization known to have ever considered this way was the great French Zionist Bernard Lazare, the friend of Charles Peguy - and he had to resign from the Organization at the early date of 1899.[[63]](#footnote-63)

The Zionists wanted the Jews to be “a people like other people.” They wanted to abolish the abnormal Jewish existence in exile, and to return to history. Again, in this, Arendt claims, the Zionists refused the Jewish pariah identity: they dismissed the opportunity offered by their unique pariah position and turned the Jewish people into a nation of parvenus. They went on “seeking the protection of the great powers,” instead of fighting against them.

Deutscher, like Arendt, was also dismayed by the Zionist project. In “The Non-Jewish Jew,” he argues: “All this has driven the Jews to see their own State as the way out. Most of the great revolutionaries, whose heritage I am discussing, have seen the ultimate solution to the problems of their and our times not in nation-states but in international society.”[[64]](#footnote-64) Like Arendt, Deutscher was critical of the Jewish nation-state and believed that Zionism was a colossal mistake. If his ideal encapsulated by the Jewish tradition of heretics should have turned the Jewish people into educators of universal ideals, the Zionist instead focused almost exclusively on the narrow national interests of the Jews. In short, for both Arendt and Deutscher, the Jews were wrong to renounce their heretic essence. If Zionism usually signals a kind of heresy—against Jewish orthodoxy, for the most part—for both Arendt and Deutscher, those Jews who welcomed Zionism also turned their backs on their heretic mission. Zionism manifested an attempt to renounce the Jewish heretic potential, not to embrace it.

Still, the reasons for their criticism of Zionism are disparate. Deutscher was frustrated by Zionism’s insistence on Jewish particularity and the consequent refusal to accept universal ideology. For Arendt, on the other hand, the problem was that Zionists happily accepted universal worldviews and rejected their pariah potential. In Deutscher, the Zionist turned the Jewish people into a “normal” nation by emphasizing their uniqueness over and above any universal ideal. In Arendt, they became “normal” because they rejected their unique pariah position and became completely identical with the rest of the world. The problem, in short, was not that Zionism was a national movement, but that as a national movement, Zionism rejected its pariah role on the world stage.

**Afterthought: Kafka’s *Das Schloss* and the Critique of Jewish Universalism**

Along with the importance she attached to figures such as Heine, Charlie Chaplin and Lazare, Arendt was especially impressed by Kafka’s essay, “The Jew as Pariah”. She was equally captivated with Kafka’s *Das Schloss (The Castle)*, which offers, according to Arendt, the ultimate example to support her work on the Jewish parvenus and pariahs.[[65]](#footnote-65) In Arendt’s reading, Kafka’s K. faces the same alternatives as those of any Jew in modernity: to assimilate and join the rulers in the castle or to stay in the village and seek happiness among the masses. His reasons for rejecting assimilation are of special interest here. In Arendt’s reading of Kafka, the demands of the assimilated Jew interestingly translate into a desire to become “indistinguishable.”[[66]](#footnote-66) To assimilate, Arendt clarifies, Jews need to lose all their identifiable traits: they need to be like everyone else. Assimilation is not a transition from one identity to another. Rather, assimilation for the Jewish people represents their wish to be like their neighbors: the parvenus desire a house, a family, and citizenship. These wishes, however, entail important conceptual consequences.

In Arendt’s essay, the wish of the assimilated Jew to become like others translated into an inclination to develop abstract, universal ideals. K., Arendt argues, “in his effort to become ‘indistinguishable,’ is interested only in universals, in things which are common to all mankind. His desires are directed only toward those things to which all men have a natural right.”[[67]](#footnote-67) Assimilated Jews develop a universal worldview only because of their need to become invisible. Their wish is to be like ‘the others’, and they therefore think like ‘the others’, that is in the most abstract and universal ways possible. In stark contrast to Deutscher, it is the assimilated Jew, and not the Jewish heretic, who develops a universal worldview, which foregrounds one’s ability to become lost in the masses. In opposition to Deutscher, Arendt claims that a universal worldview is not a measure of originality but the lack thereof: by thinking in universal terms and promoting universal values, one in fact loses and not gains oneself. Universal ideals result from one’s wish to assimilate - to lose all detectable attributes or recognizable dispositions. In having a universal worldview, we can claim with Arendt, one loses one’s individuality: cosmopolitanism is not a sign of independent thought that transcends the limits of national, racial, or cultural ideologies, but rather of a wish to assimilate, to think “like the others do.” Arendt, in this last point, inverses the position of Deutscher. Universality is the ideology of assimilation, not of heresy: it is a sign not of originality, but of the acceptance of the principles of an abstract majority, which the castle in Kafka’s book represents. Spinoza’s *Ethics*, in this sense, is not the achievement of a Jew who was able to move beyond the limits of Christian and Jewish moral philosophy, but an attempt to decipher the abstract logic of the residents of the castle of Spinoza’s time.

Arendt’s model of heresy is essentially different. Heresy provides a basis for Jewish particularity, not universal ideals. This Jewish particular experience is expressed in Arendt’s politically orientated model as an experience of *alienation* and alterity, which, I suggest, are essentially and principally *Jewish* qualities. Put succinctly, the Jewish pariah utilizes his or her Jewish origins to fight against widespread injustice: the pariah turns the experience of *Galuth*, one of the most basic identificatory marks of Jewish existence, into a key political force. The Jews are ideal heretics not because they are the first to relinquish their particular identity, as Deutscher suggests, but because their history exemplifies the principle of pariah existence: the Jews have always been pariahs, and therefore they have always been, in some form, heretics too.

1. Gershom Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem: Memories of My Youth*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1980), 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. I use the term assimilation in the widest sense, to include all forms of assimilation, acculturation and naturalization. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For the purpose of this work, I define heresy as the conscious rejection of or transgression against Jewish tradition or Jewish authority. I leave the frequently asked question in post-secular thought about the applicability of religious terms to modernity—especially the applicability of heresy to tendencies of modernization and acculturation of the Jewish community in modernity—for another discussion. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. For a few examples relating to the general discussion of the place of heresy in modernity, see Peter L. Berger, *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1979); Peter Gay, *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy* (New York: Norton, 2008); and Christoph Schmidt, *Der häretische Imperativ: Überlegungen zur theologischen Dialektik der Kulturwissenschaft in Deutschland* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The literature on the modern German Jewish world is immense. George Mosse’s *German Jews beyond Judaism* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1997) is the canonical entry point. For other good discussions on the subject, see Jacob Katz, *Out of the Ghetto: The Social Background of Jewish Emancipation, 1770-1870* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973) and David Sorkin, *The Transformation of German Jewry, 1780-1840* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). For a historical survey of the struggles of the post-assimilatory generation, see Michael Brenner, *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998) and Shulamit Volkov, *Germans, Jews, and Antisemites: Trials in Emancipation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. This essay suggests an opposition between assimilation and orthodoxy in German Jewish modernity. These two opposing positions certainly do not represent the multi-varied topography of Jewish experience in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For example, in many cases of German Jewish bourgeoisie, an attempt was made to refashion the religious experience as only one dimension of a larger experience, in which the Jew could also become a political and economic agent. Still, for the purposes of my argument here, I follow Deutscher and Arendt who focused on these two major groups in modern Jewish life. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Arendt, to be clear, does not use the term heresy in her work on the pariah. In this paper I address the reasons for my application of the term to her model. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. For a few attempts to consider the works of Arendt and Deutscher together, even if indirectly, see David Caute, *Isaac and Isaiah: The Covert Punishment of a Cold War Heretic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 262-274; Susie Linfield, *The Lion's Den: Zionism and the left from Hannah Arendt to Noam Chomsky* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019); Naomi Seidman, “Fag-Hags and Bu-Jews: Toward a (Jewish) Politics of Vicarious Identity,” *Insider/Outsider: American Jews and Multiculturalism*, eds. David Biale, Michael Galchinsky, and Susannah Heschel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Deutscher never wrote an autobiography. For a detailed description of his childhood, see the introduction to the edited volume, *The Non-Jewish Jew*, written by his wife, Tamara Deutscher. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Isaac Deutscher, “The non-Jewish Jew,” *The Non-Jewish Jew and Other Essays* (hereafter *NJJ*), ed. Tamara Deutscher (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968), 26. For the figure of *Acher* and its reception, see Alon Goshen-Gottstein, *The Sinner and the Amnesiac: The Rabbinic Invention of Elisha ben Abuya and Eleazar ben Arach* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Deutscher, “The non-Jewish Jew,” *NJJ*, 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Ibid, 27, emphasis added. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Ibid, 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Ibid, 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Indeed, it is for this reason that “Spinoza’s ethics were no longer the Jewish ethics, but the ethics of man at large.”XXX [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Ibid, 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. See, most recently, Viren Murthy, “Beyond Particularity and Universality: Moishe Postone and the Possibilities of Jewish Marxism,” *Jewish Social Studies*, 25 (2): 127–167 (2020). For a good entry point to the still hotly debated question of Marx and Judaism see Enzo Traverso, *The Jewish Question: History of a Marxist Debate*, trans. Bernard Gibbons (Leiden: Brill, 2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Deutscher, “The non-Jewish Jew,” *NJJ*, 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Deutscher only briefly gives the following common ground: “although their philosophies vary […] they are all, from Spinoza to Freud, determinists, they all hold that the universe is ruled by laws inherent in it and governed by *Gesetzmässigkeiten*.” Ibid, 35. It is clear why, as a Marxist, Deutscher would emphasize determinism, yet I am uncertain whether Heine could be considered a determinist, and how and why Leibniz, for example, is not a better candidate for a group thus defined. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Shmuel Almog writes: “Deutscher proposed a kind of alternative Judaism, which is neither a religion nor an ethnic group; without Jewish solidarity and without affinity to the activities of a Jewish collective. In fact, there is nothing left in his definition but a sense of commitment to the Jewish origin. It is not clear from this, whether it is tribal atavism, or whether Deutscher also attributed to these figures a common consciousness. In his eyes, however, they were all partners in one Jewish tradition.” Shlomo Almog, *The Jewish Point: Jews as Seen by Themselves and by Others* (Bnei-Brak: Poalim, 2002), 179. [In Hebrew] [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Deutscher, “The non-Jewish Jew,” *NJJ*, 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. “Most of the great revolutionaries, whose heritage I am discussing, have seen the ultimate solution to the problems of their and our times not in nation-states but in international society.”XXX [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Deutscher, “Who is a Jew?,” *NJJ*, 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. See more recently in Jonathan Judaken, *Jean-Paul Sartre and the Jewish Question: Anti-antisemitism and the Politics of the French Intellectual* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Deutscher, “Who is a Jew?,” *NJJ*, 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Ibid, 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Viren Murthy, “Beyond Particularity and Universality: Moishe Postone and the Possibilities of Jewish Marxism,” *Jewish Social Studies*, 25 (2): 127–167 (2020), 144. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. To give one example, Karl Jaspers, in a 1953 letter on Arendt’s Rahel Varnhagen manuscript, urges her to revise her work, for the following reason: “it is my wish that in the public eye you be a sovereign figure for the Jewish question and that what you publish on it be able to stand up over time.” Hannah Arendt and Karl Jaspers, *Hannah Arendt/Karl Jaspers correspondence*, 1926-1969, ed. Lotte Kohler and Hans Saner, trans. Robert and Rita Kimber (New York: Harcourt, 1992), 195, Aug 23, 1952. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Ibid, 197, Sep 7, 1952. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. For Arendt’s model of pariah, see Leon Botstein, “The Jew as Pariah: Hannah Arendt’s Political Philosophy,” *Dialectical Anthropology*, 8 (1/2): 47-73 (1983); Gabriel Piterberg, “Public Intellectuals and Conscious Pariahs: Hannah Arendt, Edward Said, and a Common State in Palestine-Israel,” *Holy Land Studies*, 12 (2): 141–159 (2013); Judith N. Shklar, “Hannah Arendt as pariah,” *Partisan review*, 50(1): 64-77 (1983); Magdalena Zolkos, “Arendt's Metamorphic Figurations in ‘The Jew as Pariah,’” *Action and Appearance: Ethics and the Politics of Writing in Hannah Arendt*, eds. Anna Yeatman, Charles Barbour, Phillip Hansen, and Magdalena Zolkos (New York: Continuum, 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Hannah Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewish Woman*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Harcourt, 1974), 208. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Arendt puts it bluntly in a letter to Jaspers: “I still believe today that under the conditions of social assimilation and political emancipation the Jews could not ‘live.’” Arendt and Jaspers, *Hannah Arendt/Karl Jaspers correspondence*, 198, Sep 7, 1952. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen*, 176. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Clearly, Arendt’s description of Rahel Varnhagen, who famously converted to Christianity, as a pariah, is questionable. Yet, Arendt insists that Varnhagen’s conversion did not signify the rejection of her Jewishness: “She had let herself be driven by the winds, had stubbornly insisted upon her rights, upon human rights, had resolutely refused to share the general fate of the Jews, to place her hopes in political measures which would benefit all. And the more she did these things, the more typically Jewish her fate turned out to be, the more illuminatingly she demonstrated to the observer—and finally to herself as well—all that a Jew could undertake without ceasing to be a Jew. She had walked down all the roads that could lead her into the alien world, and upon all these roads she had left her track, had converted them into *Jewish roads, pariah roads*; *ultimately her whole life had become a segment of Jewish history in Germany*.” Ibid, 222, emphasis added. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. We can find important echoes of Deutscher in Arendt’s “top of the mast” metaphor in her description of Walter Benjamin in the introduction to *Illumination*, the first collected papers of Benjamin in English, which Arendt edited: “Benjamin was forced into a position which actually did not exist anywhere which, in fact, could not be identified and diagnosed as such until afterwards. It was the position on the ‘top of the mast’ from which the tempestuous times could be surveyed better than from a safe harbor, even though the distress signals of the ‘shipwreck,’ of this one man who had not learned to swim either with or against the tide, were hardly noticed—either by those who had never exposed themselves to these seas or by those who were capable of moving even in this element.” Hannah Arendt, “Introduction: Walter Benjamin 1892-1940,” *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken, 1968), 22. Arendt also opens her essay “The Jew as Pariah” in a similar tone to that of Deutscher, when she condemns the “short shrift and perfunctory recognition” of “those who really did most for the spiritual dignity of their people, who were great enough to transcend the bounds of nationality and to weave the strands of their Jewish genius into the general texture of European life.” Arendt. “The Jew as Pariah,” *The Jewish Writings* (hereafter JW), ed. Jerome Kahn and Ron H. Feldman (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 275. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Arendt and Jaspers, *Hannah Arendt/Karl Jaspers Correspondence*, 199-200, Sep 7, 1952. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen*, 214. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. As Richard Bernstein claims, “Arendt was much more insightful about the parvenu and pariah as ideal human types than about the Jewishness of these types. […] it is not entirely clear what is the intrinsic relation between being ‘free,’ ‘rebellious,’ ‘an outsider,’ and being Jewish. After all, these are also characteristics of others who are stigmatized as pariahs but refuse to passively accept the status ascribed to them.” Richard J. Bernstein, *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. In her 1943 essay “We Refugees,” Arendt indeed defines these pariah qualities as “Jewish”: “Modern Jewish history, having started with court Jews and continuing with Jewish millionaires and philanthropists, is apt to forget about this other thread of Jewish tradition—the tradition of Heine, Rahel Varnhagen, Sholom Aleichem, of Bernard Lazare, Franz Kafka, or even Charlie Chaplin. It is the tradition of a minority of Jews who have not wanted to become upstarts, who preferred the status of ‘conscious pariah.’ All vaunted Jewish qualities—the ‘Jewish heart,’ humanity, humor, disinterested intelligence—are pariah qualities.” Arendt, “We Refugees,” *JW*, 274. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, “Binationalism and Jewish Identity: Hannah Arendt and the Question of Palestine,” *Hannah Arendt in Jerusalem*, ed. Steven E. Aschheim (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 176. Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin further argues that “Arendt’s pariah functioned in the same way that Marranos and messianic figures had done in Scholem’s description of Jewish history. Arendt regarded the pariah as the only authentic representative of Jewish action in the modern world.” Ibid, 177. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Bernard Lazare, *Job’s Dungheap: Essays on Jewish Nationalism and Social Revolution* (New York: Schocken Books, 1948), 44. In a lecture given before the Association of Russian Jewish Students in 1897, he connected this ideal with a Jewish search for freedom: “I want to be a man fully free, I want to enjoy sunshine, I want to have a right to my dignity as a man. I want to escape the oppression, to escape the outrage, to escape the scorn with which men seek to overwhelm me.” Ibid, 73. For more, see: Joel Swanson, “We Spring from that History: Bernard Lazare, between Universalism and Particularism,” *Religions* 9(10): 322. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Arendt, “The Jew as Pariah,” *JW*, 278. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Ibid, 278. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. In more political terms, the schlemiel gains a liberation enjoyed by “an outcast [that] is able to live beyond the struggle between bondage and tyranny.” Ibid, 280. In Charlie Chaplin’s dramatic portrayal, Heine’s schlemiel turns into the “little man”—the third figure of the pariah—who, as a representative of a simple life, becomes an eternal suspect: Chaplin’s twentieth-century hero is not indifferent to the law, but rather harassed by the law, incessantly suffering from the disturbances it creates. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Ibid, 281. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Ibid, 282. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Ibid, 283. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt claims that pariahs form “an effective tradition of rebellion.” Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harvest, 1973), 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Arendt, “The Jew as Pariah,” *JW*, 285. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Bernstein, *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question*, 31. Elsewhere, Bernstein adds: “I want to argue that such a split between Arendt's Jewish concerns and the rest of her work is untenable. I hope to show how her confrontation with the Jewish question (in its complex and varied aspects) shaped many of the fundamental issues that preoccupied her throughout her life. Approaching Arendt's thinking from this perspective provides a more nuanced reading and interpretation of her entire corpus.” Ibid, 9. Leon Botstein in “The Jew as Pariah: Hannah Arendt’s Political Philosophy” makes a similar claim: “Arendt's basic theoretical claim, the separation of the social from the political, and her call for a return, in modern times, to the primacy of the political originated in her understanding of the Jewish problem as decisively political rather than social in character.” Botstein, “The Jew as Pariah: Hannah Arendt’s Political Philosophy,” 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Judith Butler, *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 24. For Arendt’s concept of plurality in the context of her work on Judaism and Zionism, see Michal Aharony, *Hannah Arendt and the Limits of Total Domination: The Holocaust, Plurality, and Resistance* (New York: Routledge, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Elsewhere, Butler writes on Arendt: “In her view, cohabitation *is not a choice, but a condition* of our political life. We are bound to one another prior to contract and prior to any volitional act.” Butler, *Parting Ways*, 23, emphasis added. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. For a similar claim, see Seyla Benhabib’s review essay of *Parting Ways*: “The crucial distinction between Arendt’s concept of plurality and Butler’s concept of cohabitation is that, for Arendt, plurality emerges for human beings through speech and action. While it is in some sense grounded upon our being members of the same species, who are more or less equal and equally vulnerable, speech and action constitute a world of individuation and differentiation against this background of givenness. […] By contrast, in Butler’s account of cohabitation there is no emphasis either on speech or action. Often cohabitation in her text sounds more like a Heideggerian condition of ‛thrownness.’” Seyla Benhabib, “Ethics without Normativity and Politics without Historicity: On Judith Butler’s *Parting Ways, Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism*,” *Constellations: An International Journal of Critical & Democratic Theory*, 20 (1): 150-163 (2013), 156. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. Barbara E. Galli (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 348. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Ibid, 349. For more on Rosenzweig and Jewish alienation, see Louis P. Blond, “Franz Rosenzweig: Homelessness in Time,” *New German Critique*, 37:3 (2010) 27-58. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. In this sense, the Jew’s status of pariah is not a temporary, unpleasant condition, as some have wrongfully argued, but an essential part of a new Jewish tradition that foregrounds the place of Jewish people in the world. See, for example, Botstein: “Jewish political participation in the citizenry of a commonwealth could free the Jew from being a pariah—unfree, incomplete in human terms, a stranger, and homeless—in the Western world.” Leon Botstein, “Liberating the Pariah: Politics, the Jews, and Hannah Arendt,” *Thinking in Dark Times: Hannah Arendt on Ethics and Politics*, eds. Roger Berkowitz, Jeffrey Katz, and Thomas Keenan (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 168. More generally, the purpose of the pariah’s political action is not to dissolve into the political, but to oppose all political homogeneities. The pariah maintains the status of a pariah, fully conscious of its importance and value. Pariahs, then, are not “unfree” or “incomplete” but rather a symbol of liberty and individuality. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. In a short article from the same period, “We Refugees” (1943), Arendt explains: “History has forced the status of *outlaws* upon both, upon pariahs and parvenus alike. […] Those few refugees who insist upon telling the truth, even to the point of ‘indecency,’ get in exchange for their unpopularity one priceless advantage: history is no longer a closed book to them and politics is no longer the privilege of gentiles. They know that the outlawing of the Jewish people in Europe has been followed closely by the outlawing of most European nations. Refugees driven from country to country represent the vanguard of their peoples—if they keep their identity. For the first time Jewish history is not separate but tied up with that of all other nations.” Hannah Arendt, “We Refugees,” *JW*, 274, emphasis added. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Arendt, “The Jew as Pariah,” *JW*, 296. Arendt reasserts this analysis of the historical demise of the individual Jewish pariah in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, in the chapter “The Jews and Society.” [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Arendt, “The Jew as Pariah,” *JW*, 297. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. To Lazare, she writes, “the territorial question was secondary—a mere outcome of the primary demand that ‘the Jews should be emancipated as a people and in the form of a nation.’” Arendt, “Herzel and Lazare,” *JW*, 339. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Arendt, “Zionism Reconsidered,” *JW*, 363. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Deutscher, “The non-Jewish Jew,” *NJJ*, 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. “No better analogy,” she claims about the book, “could have been found to illustrate the entire dilemma of the modern would-be assimilationist Jew.” Arendt, “The Jew as Pariah,” *JW*, 291. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Arendt, “The Jew as Pariah,” *JW*, 291. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Arendt, “The Jew as Pariah,” 292. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)