

Gavin Langmuir, "From Anti-Judaism to Antisemitism," from History, Religion, and Antisemitism

Some basic concepts:

Religion: GL generally uses this to mean the authoritative or "official" form of a socially and historically recognized religion. (There can be more than one "official" form.)

Religiosity: an individual's form of religious consciousness and identity, which can differ from the "official" version

GL believes that religious belief is *neither rational* (supported by purely empirical methods of thought and evidence) *nor irrational* (contrary to rational thought). It is **non-rational** (no empirical way to test whether it is true or false). So differences among religious beliefs cannot be settled by rational methods. But it is not irrational to hold one set of religious beliefs rather than another (e.g. to be a Buddhist rather than a Catholic, or vice versa).

Background theories about hatred of Jews and Judaism that GL is arguing against:

- 1) A view held by some 19th century Christian scholars that "pagan" (Roman/Greek/pre-Christian) opposition to Jews was not justified but that Christian theological opposition to Judaism was/is justified.
- 2) A later view that Christian forms of opposition to Jews and to Judaism (including the type that scholars in (1) thought was justified) based in Christianity are sharply distinct from, and exerted no influence on, the form of secular, "racial," and political Antisemitism (a term invented in 1879) that arose in Europe and especially in Germany toward the end of the 19th century [briefly discussed by Landau, ch. 3, pp. 59-61, and ch. 4, 79-83].
- 3) "Jew hatred" is a timeless sentiment that has not significantly changed since the pre-Christian era.

In this chapter GL does 4 things:

I. traces the history of Christian attitudes and behavior towards Judaism and Jews from the time of Jesus until the 13th century.

II. Answers the question, "At what point in this development do these attitudes and behaviors change from anti-Judaism to antisemitism?"

III. Provides a definition of "antisemitism" that supports that assessment:

Anti-Judaism: non-rational reaction to overcome non-rational doubts

Antisemitism: irrational reaction to repress rational doubts

[Blum's interpretation of this:

Anti-Judaism: hostility to Jews or Judaism based on characteristics that Jews actually possess (which is not to say that the hostility itself is justified)

Antisemitism: hostility to Jews based on characteristics that Jews do not possess, and that there is no basis for thinking that they do possess]

IV. Uses his definition of Antisemitism to argue (against (2) above) for a fundamental historical connection between the Medieval (Middle Ages) version of anti-Jew beliefs and sentiments arising from Christianity, and the modern secular, racial form out of which Nazism emerged.

So, against (1), GL argues that Christian theological differences with Judaism are nonrational and so (although not irrational) are not positively justified, any more than pagan differences.

Against (2), he argues that Christian hostility to Judaism, and then to Jews themselves, put in place a set of irrational beliefs and representations of Jews that endured through European history and provided fertile soil for 19th and 20th century anti-Semitism, including Nazism.

Against (3), there have been important changes in the character of Jew-hatred over this time period.