

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

*The Roots of
Anti-Semitism*

"American Anti-Semitism: A Reinterpretation" by Michael N. Dobkowski, in *American Quarterly* (Summer 1977), 4025 Chestnut St., Philadelphia, Pa. 19174.

American historians have had to face the task of reconciling widespread anti-Jewish prejudice during the late 19th and early 20th centuries with a society generally regarded as democratic and libertarian. But by stressing the "transitory" social and economic roots of prejudice, contends Dobkowski, professor of religion at Hobart and William Smith Colleges, scholars have ignored "religious, ideological, and popular attitudes that were more extensive and intense than has been previously recognized."

Analysts of the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era, says Dobkowski, fall into two camps: those who minimize the significance of anti-Semitism and those who seek its origins in populist rhetoric and the movement of immigrant Jews into the "gilded enclaves of patrician America." But Dobkowski believes the virulent anti-Semitism of the period had less to do with "agrarian protest" or "social claustrophobia" than with the "pervasive negative image of the Jew propagated by the popular culture."

In the literature, press, and theater of the time, he notes, Jews were almost exclusively represented as narrow-minded fanatics, arsonists, fraudulent pawnbrokers, and petty criminals; as unscrupulous capitalists, radical agitators, and unpatriotic foreigners. Shady Jewish merchants appeared regularly in Horatio Alger sagas; the *New York Police Gazette* in 1862 blithely stigmatized Jews as "receivers of stolen goods." Such stereotypes were typical, Dobkowski concludes; they reflected widely held "nativist attitudes toward the immigrants, the blacks, the Indians, and the Jews."

*When the
Kago Comes*

"Cargo Cults of the South Pacific" by Thomas Merton, in *America* (Sept. 3, 1977), 106 W. 56th St., New York, N.Y. 10019.

"Everything will be all right when the Kago comes," the natives of the South Pacific often heard the white man say. "When the Kago [pidgin for cargo] comes, we shall have beer and whiskey and rice."

According to Merton, the noted poet and Trappist monk who composed this article shortly before his death in 1968, "cargo cults" have recurred in the Pacific over the past 75 years as a response to the artificial culture thrust upon the natives by Europeans. While the bizarre native rituals designed to make the Kago come may now seem remote, he writes, the rituals tell us as much about ourselves as about the natives.

To the islanders, the coming of Kago meant the coming of the millennium; through cargo cults, they sought to reconcile their ties to the powerful white man with their own deeply disturbed culture. In

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Melanesia, one group of natives destroyed all their worldly goods—houses, crops, livestock—in order, Merton states, to erase all links with the past. Someday, they believed, the Kago would reward their act of faith. In a New Guinea cult, natives decorated their villages with flowers, copying the Europeans' habit of keeping freshly filled vases in their homes, in the hope that the Kago would come to them, too. (The Europeans responded by taking the natives' flowers away, thus confirming the cultists' view that the flowers indeed had some strange power.)

Primitive people, Merton contends, yearn for "moral reciprocity" with the white man, as illustrated by such ritual acts. And in their need to preserve a myth of their own superiority, Westerners provided non-whites with the elements from which to build their own new myths. Is there much difference, he asks, between Kago cults and modern consumer advertising, which holds out the promise of the Good Life while suggesting that past satisfactions are now obsolete? In essence, the Kago myth is no more pathetic than the complaisant materialism of civilized man.

Real Problems or Verbal Problems?

"Linguistic Philosophy: Forty Years On" by E. W. F. Tomlin, in *The Cambridge Quarterly* (Summer 1977), 2 Summerfield St., Cambridge CB3 9HE, England.

The 1953 publication of Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, two years after his death, was greeted with fanatical enthusiasm by a younger generation of philosophers in England and America who found in it the basis for "a whole new way of doing philosophy." Forty years after its informal introduction in private seminars at Cambridge, notes Tomlin, himself a Cambridge philosopher, Wittgenstein's "linguistic philosophy" remains a subject of controversy.

Wittgenstein's novel doctrines restricted the aims of philosophy. In his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922), he had contended that only the propositions of the natural sciences were meaningful; the *Tractatus* gave rise to the logical positivist belief of the 1920s and 1930s that metaphysics had at last been expelled from the philosophical paradise. The *Philosophical Investigations* encouraged a later generation in the 1950s and 1960s to believe that the natural sciences had been expelled as well. Philosophy was now perceived as a "purely descriptive" exercise aimed at exposing the confusions of ordinary language that produce philosophical perplexity. Linguistic analysis, it was said, "leaves things as they are."

But things have been left as they are long enough, argues Tomlin, who laments its current dominance in academia as a "deviation." By abandoning "real problems for verbal problems," philosophy has ceased to display the speculative daring and social compassion that have been its noblest characteristics since the days of Plato. It is time for philosophers to recover their nerve lest a "linguistic mortmain" extinguish the light of philosophy.