

EPILOGUE

En Europe, les Juifs ont suivi une école de dix-huit siècles, chose que ne peut prétendre aucun autre peuple, et cela de telle sorte que ce n'est pas tant la communauté mais surtout les individus qui ont profité des expériences de cette effroyable période d'épreuves. En conséquence, les ressources spirituelles et intellectuelles des Juifs d'aujourd'hui sont extraordinaires; dans la détresse, ils sont, entre tous les habitants de l'Europe, les derniers à recourir à la bouteille ou au suicide pour échapper à un désarroi profond ce qui est si tentant pur quelqu'un de moi doué. Tout Juif trouve dans l'histoire de ses pères et de ses ancêtres une mine d'exemples du sang-froid et de la ténacité les plus inébranlables au milieu de situations terribles, des ruses les plus subtiles pour tromper le malheur et le hasard en en tirant profit; leur courage sous le couvert d'une soumission pitoyable, leur héroïsme dans le spernare se sperni (« mépriser d'être méprisé ») surpassant les vertus de tous les saints.

— Friedrich Nietzsche¹

In Europe, the Jews have followed a single school of thought for eighteen centuries, something which no other people can claim to have done, and have carried this out in such a way that it was not so much the community but individuals who have profited from the experiences of this frightful period of testing. Consequently, the spiritual and intellectual resources of the Jews of today are extraordinary; in their distress, they are, out of all the inhabitants of Europe, the last to escape from

1 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Aurore*, cited in Stephane Zagdanski, "Anerie d'Arendt: Post-Scriptum a *De l'anti semitisme*" (Paris, 2005-2006) online at <http://parolesdesjours.free.fr/arendt.pdf> (seen 25 July 2011). *De l'antisemitisme* was published by Julliard, 1995 and again in a new enlarged edition by Climats Flammarion, in 2006. Nietzsche's *Morgenröte – Gedanken über die moralischen Vorurteile*, first appeared in 1881 and is now available in French as *Aurore. Réflexions sur les préjugés moraux*, trans. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Paris: Gallimard, 1989) and in English as *Dawn: Thoughts on the Presumptions of Morality*, trans. Brittain Smith (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011).

profound disorientations through recourse to the bottle or to suicide, which have been such temptations to anyone less endowed. Every Jew find in the history of his fathers and ancestors a mine of examples of self-control and of the most unshakable tenacity, of the most subtle tricks to enable them to triumph over unhappiness and adversity and to profit from it; their courage under the cover of a pitiful submission, their heroism in the *sper-nare se sperni* (“to scorn being scorned”) surpasses the virtue of all the saints.²

At this point, where Nietzsche in 1881 seems to pre-empt my descriptions of Dreyfus under duress, in love, and asserting his intellectual prowess, my preliminary excursion into showing how a careful reading of Dreyfus’s letters, journals and workbooks allows for a fairly radical re-assessment of his personality and achievements, indeed, his potentiality as a major thinker, must come to an end. The metaphor of the phantasmagoria, which is the one Dreyfus himself used—and which is found repeatedly in the writings of his favourite authors—becomes not only increasingly more apt as we study his style, conceptual framework and psychological profile, but transforms itself into the contours of a midrash. The midrash we are talking about, however, goes beyond the specificities of rabbinical enhancement of sacred texts to include a series of strategies, conscious and unconscious, developed by Jews in Europe under the pressures of persecution and assimilation, to protect and develop their Jewish values, modes of perception, continuities of memory, and creative engagements with the world. These midrashings of experience reveal the most interesting and unexpected features of Dreyfus’s character and intellectual activities.

The next volumes in this series will not only continue the close-readings of the *cahiers* begun in this opening book, providing them with an enhanced set of intellectual, psychological and religious contexts, but will probe more deeply into the special, creative relationship between Alfred and his wife Lucie. Though each book can be taken as a separate study, they also each overlap with one another, and deepen the understandings reached in previous exercises.

2 My translation.