



Hans Eysenck and the Jewish question: Genealogical investigations



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ABSTRACT

We present evidence establishing that Hans Eysenck was half Jewish. He went out of his way to conceal this fact and to disavow his Jewish ancestry until the publication of his full-length autobiography in 1990, long after he retired, when he revealed that one of his grandparents was Jewish. Using specialized genealogical techniques and resources, we trace his Jewish maternal grandmother, who died in Theresienstadt concentration camp in 1944, and his Jewish maternal grandfather, who practised medicine in Königshütte and later in Berlin. We discuss Eysenck's possible motives for disavowing his Jewish heritage for most of his life.

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1. Introduction

One of the most unedifying episodes in Hans Eysenck's long and eventful career was the response of his mentor and former PhD supervisor, Cyril Burt, to a suggestion that Eysenck might be his natural successor in the chair that he occupied at University College London. Burt blurted out that under no circumstances would he support the appointment of "that German Jew" (Rose, 2010, p. 407). When Eysenck was told about this, he retorted: "Burt knew perfectly well of course that I wasn't Jewish" (quoted in Buchanan, 2010, p. 31), and on many other occasions, he denied explicitly that he was Jewish. The truth is that he was half Jewish, but on his mother's side, making him strictly Jewish according to the traditional Rabbinic law (*Halacha*), irrespective of his father's ethnicity; but he went out of his way to conceal his Jewish ancestry even from those closest to him. For example, Arthur Jensen (2000, p. 343), his friend and devoted follower over many decades, asserted categorically after Eysenck died: "Because of his defection from Hitler's Germany, many have mistakenly believed that Eysenck himself was Jewish. Actually, his parents were Lutheran Christians and he never adopted any religion. His only Jewish relatives were his stepfather and his second wife, Sybil, the daughter of a noted Austrian concert violinist Max Rostal." This is all wrong, as we shall show.

It was only when Eysenck came to write his full-length autobiography, long after he retired, that he revealed that his beloved maternal grandmother, who had brought him up from an early age in Germany, was Jewish. He added that she had "embraced the Catholic faith"

(Eysenck, 1990, p. 10), a surprising revelation if her only child, Eysenck's mother Ruth, was brought up in the Protestant religion, as he wrote elsewhere (p. 6). Eysenck (1990, p. 80) gave the following account of how he discovered that his grandmother had died in a Nazi concentration camp:

"I was to learn, after the war was over, what had happened. I received a letter from two Catholic Sisters who had hidden her, as a fellow Catholic, from the SS who were trying to put her in a Concentration Camp. About a year before the end of the war they finally found her, took her to a Concentration Camp, and there she died."

Then, he (Eysenck, 1990, p. 80) went on to explain, was also when he discovered for the first time that his grandmother was Jewish:

"The letter from the Catholic Sisters also told me something I had not known before. Assuming that the fact was well known to me, they stated that the Gestapo were interested in my grandmother's Jewish origin; apparently she came from a Jewish family in Silesia."

Eysenck never offered an explanation for why he concealed his Jewish ancestry until late in his life. According to his biographer Buchanan (2010), his first wife, Margaret Davies, was upset and angry when she heard about the tragic fate of his grandmother. Buchanan quoted Eysenck's son Michael: "My mother was liberal-minded, so it was entirely the fact of him concealing something important that angered her, and not the fact that he was partly Jewish" (p. 36). More recently, Michael told us: "My mother firmly believed that his Jewish grandmother (who brought him up) could have been rescued from Germany and death in a concentration camp if my father had only been honest on this issue. I am 100% certain my father knew his grandmother was Jewish before the War and probably many years before" (M. W. Eysenck, personal communication, December 8, 2015).

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Why should anyone care about this issue? Whether Hans Eysenck had one or two Jewish grandparents may be of limited interest, except to religious Jews and people with particular concerns about racial matters; but his reaction to his partly Jewish heritage is of potential psychological interest. Rigorous concealment of such information was extremely unusual among Jewish immigrants into the United Kingdom, especially among members of the intelligentsia, and it is not easy to understand or explain. Furthermore, we will argue that some of the explanations that have received wide currency in the literature can be rejected with confidence. Eysenck's reaction to knowledge of his Jewish heritage is intrinsically interesting as a case study; and more generally, it may throw some light on the psychological problems faced by *Mischlinge* (part-Jews) in Nazi Germany and the diaspora. Case studies can sometimes help us to understand psychological phenomena, a good example being the influential case study of the 52-year-old man known as S.B., following his late recovery from lifelong blindness, that refuted certain long-held assumptions about the role of learning in visual perception (Gregory & Wallace, 1963). However, before discussing Eysenck's late recovery from his apparent blindness to his Jewish heritage, we must first clarify the genealogical facts of the case.

2. Tracing Eysenck's ancestors

In his biography of Hans Eysenck, Buchanan (2010) claimed to have identified his Jewish maternal grandmother. Eysenck himself, even after revealing in his autobiography that she was Jewish, studiously avoided disclosing her identity. Her married surname was Werner, a very common German surname, but Eysenck managed to write about her at considerable length without ever mentioning her first name, let alone her maiden name. In the index at the back of his autobiography (Eysenck, 1990, p. 310), he listed her as "Werner, A. (E's grandmother)", although other people appear in the same index with their full names, and he must surely have known hers. Nevertheless, Buchanan did some diligent detective work in an effort to identify the elusive grandmother. He eventually found records in the *Gedenkbuch Berlins der jüdischen Opfer des Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin Memorial Book of Jewish Victims of Nazism) of two women, about the right age and called A. Werner, who died in Theresienstadt concentration camp. Only one of them died towards the end of the war, when Eysenck said his grandmother died. This emboldened Buchanan (2010, p. 15) to declare: "Although Eysenck did not name her, it appears his maternal grandmother was Antonia Werner (*née* Sachs), born in 1863 in Hamburg."

Buchanan (2010) enlisted the help of the German historian Stefan Petrie and staff at the Landesarchiv Berlin (Berlin state archives) to trace Eysenck's grandmother, but found: "very little additional information that would help resolve nagging doubts about her identity" (p. 15, Footnote 7). Using genealogical research techniques and specialized Jewish genealogical resources, we have discovered several further records, including a posting at the online Yad Vashem central database of Shoah (Holocaust) victims, of the woman identified by Buchanan, who was actually called Antonie (not Antonia) Werner. But we have also found other genealogical evidence suggesting that Buchanan was led astray by Eysenck's false trail, and that Antonie Werner was a red herring. We believe that Eysenck's grandmother was Helene Werner, born Caro in Berlin in 1870.

3. New genealogical discoveries

Fig. 1 shows an alien registration document of Eysenck's mother, Ruth, after she fled to Brazil in 1943. This document names her father as Max Emil Werner and her mother as Helene Rozalia Werner (mistyped as Wener). Fig. 2 shows an earlier temporary visa issued with a photograph, leaving no doubt that the person in question was Eysenck's mother. She was a well-known film and theatre actress in Germany, under the stage name Helga Molander, and there are many

photographs of her in books and on the internet. In her visa document, Ruth cites her mother's maiden name as Carow and her father's surname as Wernerow, but the "-ow" ending on both surnames is of no significance: it is a pseudo-Polish suffix meaning "of" not integral to the names Caro and Werner, as we have confirmed in several other records that we have recovered. Caro was a well-known and long-established Jewish family name in Germany.

The records enable us to identify not only Helene Caro but also her husband—Hans Eysenck's maternal grandfather—Max Werner. Eysenck did not disclose his grandfather's first name but merely wrote that he was a doctor from Silesia who practised in Berlin and died in his early thirties (Eysenck, 1990, p. 6). Buchanan (2010) referred to him only by his surname and stated that "little is known of him" (p. 15). Was he also Jewish? According to a study of intermarriage in Germany, 92.3% of Jewish women in Germany at the time married Jewish men (Stoltzfus, 1996, p. xxvi), and we can confirm that Helene Werner followed the usual convention. We have located the handwritten marriage certificate of Max Werner and Helene Caro, who were married in Berlin, Germany, on 6 February 1892. It is written partly in Sütterlin script, an obsolete style of German handwriting that is exceedingly difficult to read today, even for people whose mother tongue is German. Fig. 3 shows a small extract from the marriage certificate. Translated into English, it reads as follows:

"The marriage: of the general practitioner doctor of medicine, Max Werner, identity recognized from his birth certificate, Mosaic religion [an obsolescent synonym for Jewish religion], born nineteenth August in the year one thousand eight hundred and sixty-eight in Deutsch-Marchwitz [a small village in Prussian Silesia, now Poland], Namslau district, residing at 94 Grüner Road, Berlin."

On the same marriage certificate, the bride's religion is also recorded as "Mosaic religion",² and her parents (Hans Eysenck's great-grandparents) are named as Hermann Caro, a merchant, and Rosalia Ratzky, both from Brieg, Middle Silesia. Hermann Caro's mother was a Mattersdorf, one of Brieg's most established Jewish families. Max Werner's parents (also Hans Eysenck's great-grandparents) are named as Elmar Werner, a local road tax collector (*Chausseezollpächter*), and Johanna Piorkowski. We learn from the marriage certificate that Helene Caro was born on 26 February 1870, and her husband Max Werner on 19 August 1868. The marriage of Max Werner and Helene Caro occurred a little over a year before the birth of their daughter Ruth on 19 March 1893 in Königshütte (now called Chorzów), Upper Silesia. Note that Ruth Eysenck exercised the prerogative of glamorous actresses of her era by shaving a few years off her age on her alien registration document (Fig. 1). In the *Adreßbuch der Stadt Königshütte, 1893* (Directory of the Town of Königshütte, 1893), the year in which Ruth was born in that town, a Max Werner is listed as a doctor practising at 63 Kaiserstraße. Bearing in mind that the population of Königshütte was only about 50,000 in 1893, it seems likely that this was Ruth's father.

Max and Helene's daughter Ruth was Eysenck's mother, about whom he wrote (Eysenck, 1990, pp. 5–6): "Silesia was fervently Protestant in its religion. Ruth Werner, my mother, although not very religious, was brought up in that faith."³ It is possible that her parents converted to Protestantism almost immediately after they married; but remember that Eysenck also said that Ruth's mother "embraced the Catholic faith" (p. 10). In Fig. 1 we can see that Ruth recorded her own religion as Catholic, although by then she was in a relationship

² The crucial word *mosaischer* (Mosaic) is hard to decipher. As a cross-check, sceptical readers may use the web site http://www.suetterlinschrift.de/Englisch/Write_your_name.htm. If the word *mosaischer* is inserted, with a lower-case initial *m* (in German, upper-case initial letters are reserved for nouns), then it is easy to see that the resulting Sütterlin script is virtually identical to the word in the marriage certificate.

³ Eysenck appears misinformed about this: Silesia was not fervently Protestant. Middle and Lower Silesia had predominantly Protestant populations, but Upper Silesia, where his mother was born, was almost 90% Catholic.

N.º SECRETARIA DA SEGURANÇA PÚBLICA
Superintendência de Segurança Política e Social
DELEGACIA ESPECIALIZADA DE ESTRANGEIROS
REGISTRO DE ESTRANGEIROS

NOME : RUTH ELLY EYSENCK (RELIG. CATOLICA)
Admitido em território nacional em caráter PERMANENTE ART. 24
Nacionalidade: POLONESA CASADA
Pai: MAX EMIL WERNER Mãe: HELENA ROZALIA WENER
Profissão: DOMEETICA (DE JANEIRO
Carteira de identidade n.º 491.897 Registro n.º 109.016 EXP/EM 15-7-41 RIO
Residência: PRAÇA JULIO MESQUITA Nº 34
Emprêgo:
Local:
9-6-43. *Sintofacto*
T. G. I. - Mod. 162 DELEGADO ESPECIALIZADO DE ESTRANGEIROS

Fig. 1. Alien registration document issued to Ruth Eysenck in Brazil in 1943.

(eventually to result in marriage) with the Austrian film director Max Glass, who was born Jewish and had converted to Catholicism.

The death of Helene Werner, Eysenck's Jewish grandmother, is recorded in a number of documents that we have recovered, including a database of Holocaust Victims in the Czech Republic ([Database of Victims, n.d.](#)). It occurred on 24 April 1944 in Theresienstadt concentration camp, Czechoslovakia, less than a year after she was transported there on 17 June 1943. The most unusual genealogical record is the *Stolperstein* (stumbling block) embedded in the pavement outside a house in Berlin where she lived. Stumbling blocks are memorials to victims of the Nazi Holocaust, first laid in Berlin by the artist Gunter Demnig in 1992. Fig. 4 shows the house at 49 Güntzelstraße in the Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf district of Berlin, with several brass stumbling blocks in the pavement outside its front door, and on the right is a close-up of the block dedicated to Helene Werner. The inscription reads: 'Here lived Helene Werner, born Caro, in 1870, deported 1943, Theresienstadt, murdered April 1944'. According to background

information published by the Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf Bezirksamt (District Office), Helene Werner's block was laid by Gunter Demnig on 20 March 2007. The background information also reveals that, at the time of her deportation to Theresienstadt, she was not being hidden by Catholic nuns but was a patient at the Jewish Hospital in Iranian Street, and that she was deported as part of a group of "lying sick"—presumably bed-ridden people. It is worth noting that the Jewish Hospital had by then become, in part, a transit camp for the disposal of Berlin Jews to concentration camps ([Jüdisches Krankenhaus Berlin, n.d.](#)), although several hundred Jews were still there at the time of liberation. The background information states that there are no other records of Helene Werner.

What about Hans Eysenck's paternal ancestry? We have obtained a copy of the handwritten birth certificate of his father, Eduard Anton Eysenck. It turns out that Eduard Anton was born in Bergisch Gladbach on 27 March 1889 to a father who was a restaurateur named Ernst Friedrich Eysenck, whose religion was Catholic, and a mother named Emilie

REPÚBLICA DOS ESTADOS UNIDOS DO BRASIL
FICHA CONSULAR DE QUALIFICAÇÃO
38245

Esta ficha, expedida em duas vias, será entregue à Polícia Marítima e à Imigração no porto de destino

Nome por extenso Ruth-Elly Eysenck
Admitido em território nacional em caráter TEMPORARIO
(temporário ou permanente)
Nos termos do art. 25 letra b do dec. n.º 3.010, de 1938
Lugar e data de nascimento Königshutte, 19/ 3 / 1899
Nacionalidade Poloneza Estado civil casada
Filiação (nome do Pai e da Mãe) Max Wernerow e Helène Carow
Profissão autora
Residência no país de origem Paris

	NOME	IDADE	SEXO
FILHOS			
MENORES			
DE 18 ANOS			

Passaporte n.º 29/40.1066 pedido pelas autoridades de Consulado de Polónia em Toulouse na data 23 de Julho de 1940 visado sob n.º 71

ASSINATURA DO PORTADOR:
Ruth Eysenck

NOTA—Esta ficha deve ser preenchida a máquina pela autoridade consular, sendo as duas vias em original.

SELO CONSUL
Consulado do Brasil
em Marselha
de 29 de Julho de 1940
C/CONSUL
[Signature]

Fig. 2. Temporary visa issued to Ruth Eysenck for visiting Brazil in 1940.

der Eheschließung:

1. der *gebürtliche Arzt, doctor medicinae, Max Werner,*

der Persönlichkeit nach *Stumpf Gabriel Jakob*

aus kannt,

aus Religion, geboren den *aus*

August des Jahres tausend acht hundert

aus zu *Deutsche Marschwitz*

aus, wohnhaft zu *aus*,

aus 94,

Fig. 3. An extract from the marriage certificate of Max Werner and Helene Caro.

Scheibel, also Catholic. Notes added later to the birth certificate indicate that Eduard Anton Eysenck died on 28 May 1968 (not 1972 as reported almost everywhere) in Rodenberg, Lower Saxony. There is virtually no possibility that either of Eduard Anton's parents were converts from Judaism, because neither Eysenck nor Scheibel is a surname significantly associated with Jewish families in 19th-century Germany (Menk, 2005). It is clear that Hans Eysenck's father and paternal grandparents were Catholic, from a largely Catholic part of Germany (the Rhineland). We can therefore conclude with confidence that Hans Eysenck was half Jewish, on his mother's side only.

4. Motives

In his biography, Buchanan (2010, pp. 30–31) speculated at some length about Eysenck's motives for concealing his Jewish ancestry and suggested three reasons: because he had no religious beliefs and probably felt non-Jewish; because he may have worried about the implications for his father, who remained in Germany during the Nazi era, if it became known that his son was partly Jewish; and because “a non-

Jewish identity was probably the simplest, most expedient one for Eysenck to take on once he arrived in England” (p. 31).

We do not believe that a feeling of being non-Jewish is an adequate explanation, because even in the absence of any religious beliefs, Eysenck knew from immediately after the war, if not earlier, that he was partly Jewish. Could Eysenck have repudiated his Jewish heritage because he had no religious beliefs and came from a family in which his parents were not practising Jews? Could he have been speaking the literal truth, at least as he saw it, when he repeatedly denied that he was Jewish? The problem with this explanation is that, for most people, the question of whether or not one is Jewish (or partly Jewish) has next to nothing to do with religion; it is a matter of ethnicity and descent. Furthermore, that is clearly how Eysenck saw it himself. In his autobiography and elsewhere, he frequently referred to the many Jews that he had hired at the Institute of Psychiatry, although they were nearly all (if not literally all) non-practising Jews without religious beliefs; and he also described his second wife as Jewish, although the same could be said of her and of her father before her. We quote a typical comment along these lines later in this article.

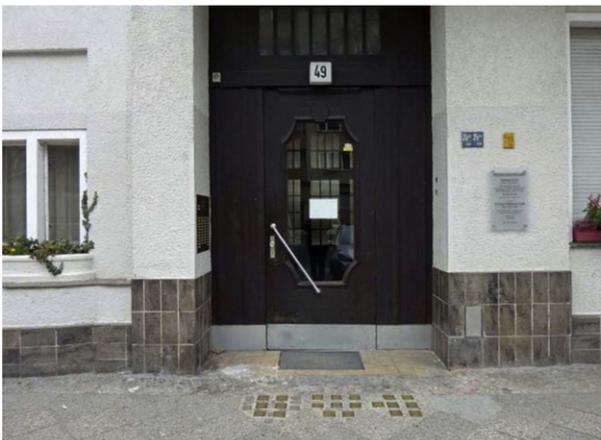


Fig. 4. Güntzelstraße 49, Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf, Berlin, and the Stolperstein (stumbling block) commemorating Holocaust victim Helene Werner.

Buchanan's (2010) second possible motive, Eysenck's concerns for his father's safety, might explain his reluctance to acknowledge his Jewish ancestry during the Nazi era, but not his continuing reticence after the war. As regards the third suggestion, Buchanan does not spell out convincingly why a non-Jewish identity was the simplest and most expedient one for Eysenck to maintain until a few years before he died.

Eysenck's own explanation for leaving Germany was his abhorrence of Nazism. When he tried to enrol as a student at Berlin University, he was told that he could do so only if he joined the SS: "I didn't have to make any kind of decision; I knew that I couldn't live in that uniform, and with those people, and that emigration was the only possibility for me" (Eysenck, 1990, p. 39). Buchanan (2010, p. 29) suggested that this may have been a self-serving distortion of the truth: "Yet in the full knowledge of hindsight there are other ways to read his actions. Political principles become something of a luxury . . . leaving the fatherland was a matter of survival."

Buchanan (2010) suggested that leaving Germany as "a matter of survival" could explain Eysenck's disavowal of his Jewish ancestry and his continued concealment after the war, because of the "moral capital he had been able to accrue in promoting himself as a moral opponent of Nazi fascism. Admitting his partial Jewishness would potentially weaken this line of special pleading" (p. 304). In a generally favourable review of Buchanan's biography, Rose (2010, p. 407) endorsed this interpretation, but we find it unpersuasive, for three reasons. The first is a general principle that we ought to take people's stated reasons at face value in the absence of good grounds for rejecting them, and there is no evidence to back up the suggestion that Eysenck's frequently repeated reason for leaving Germany was insincere. Given his left-leaning political views and his obviously subversive and non-authoritarian personality (see Buchanan, 2010; Corr, 2016; Gibson, 1981; *passim*), the reason that he gave seems quite believable. Second, an unstated premise of the Buchanan–Rose argument seems to be that he felt ashamed about fleeing from the Nazis because of his Jewish ancestry and therefore needed a different reason to show himself in a better light, but this does not ring true. People who fled the Nazis as a matter of survival were not despised as cowards, at least not in England; on the contrary, they were almost universally regarded with admiration, respect, and considerable curiosity. Third and most important, the Buchanan–Rose argument collapses entirely when we consider that Eysenck left Germany in the spring of 1934 (Eysenck, 1990, p. 40), far too early to have anticipated that the Nazi regime would threaten the actual survival of Jews and *Mischlinge*. Persecution of Jews began as soon as the Nazis took power, and by 1934 many Jews had good reason to fear for their livelihoods and even their physical safety, because opportunistic beatings by gangs of storm trooper thugs were not uncommon; but the policy of Jewish extermination (the Final Solution), unprecedented in human history, was not formulated until the Wannsee conference on the outskirts of Berlin on 20 January 1942. Eysenck could hardly have left as "a matter of survival" in 1934, although he may well have left because he felt that he had no future in Germany—essentially the reason that he gave. His most recent biographer, Corr (2016, p. 28), concluded: "the young Eysenck wanted no part of Nazi Germany and the simple historical fact is that he voted with his feet." We have seen no arguments or evidence for doubting this interpretation.

If we accept Eysenck's stated reason for leaving Germany, then we still lack any explanation for why he disavowed his Jewish ancestry. Could this have been because he held anti-Semitic attitudes, in spite of being partly Jewish? No; he was strongly and consistently pro-Semitic throughout his life. For example, in his autobiography, Eysenck (1990, p. 35) wrote:

"Certainly at school and later on in life most of my friends were Jewish, as is my second wife. So were many of my colleagues at the Institute of Psychiatry. When it is remembered that only about one

person in a hundred in England is Jewish, it is obvious that the Jews have an attractive quality for me."

We cannot be sure of Eysenck's motives for concealing his Jewish ancestry, but we have provided reasons for rejecting some of the motives that have been suggested. By narrowing the range of probable motives, we have perhaps made some progress towards the truth. Even when we cannot establish the truth, the elimination of false hypotheses enables us to approach more closely to it, and this is a valid method of contributing to the growth of knowledge (Popper, 1963, chap. 10).

Although Eysenck's motives may never be known with certainty, the following seem most likely to us. When he first came to the UK, anti-Semitism was quite widespread, and many Jewish immigrants went out of their way to tone down their more salient Jewish traits in order to make life easier for themselves and to enable them to assimilate more comfortably and unobtrusively into British culture. Those with obviously Jewish surnames sometimes changed them into more English-sounding versions: Bernstein to Burns, Rabinowitz to Robinson, Morgenstein to Morgan, and so on. Eysenck did not have to change his surname, because it was not stereotypically Jewish, but he may well have wished to play down his Jewish ancestry for similar reasons. A second reason for concealment before the war ended may have been force of habit. As a *Mischling* in Nazi Germany he may have acquired the habit of concealing his Jewish ancestry, and there are people for whom such habits die hard. After the war, a third motive for concealment may have been his wish to avoid the appearance of capitalizing on his partly Jewish identity, and a fourth may have been a feeling of remorse about his failure to rescue his grandmother Helene from her terrible fate. His failure to act on his grandmother's behalf can be explained in part by a reasonable assumption that the responsibility fell more naturally to her daughter Ruth and wealthy future son-in-law Max Glass. Nevertheless, Eysenck must surely have felt remorseful about the tragic outcome, and this could also explain why he tried to obscure the identities of his Jewish maternal grandparents in his autobiography, because he would probably not have relished the prospect of someone digging the story up from archival records, as we have just done. The motives that we have suggested seem most persuasive to us; but they are also speculative, and the real reason will probably never be known with certainty.

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