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# “WISSENSCHAFT DES” MORMONISM: JEWISH STUDIES AS A FRAMEWORK FOR EXPLORING MORMON STUDIES

*Trevan G. Hatch*

RECENTLY, A SIGNIFICANT AMOUNT of attention has been directed at the *who, what, where, and how* of Mormon studies.<sup>1</sup> For example, since 2009, at least six major forums, comprising sixty-two essays and presentations (with dozens of other stand-alone pieces appearing in other venues), were dedicated to discussing the nature and future of Mormon studies as an academic field.<sup>2</sup> Many of these essays discuss

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<sup>1</sup>Richard Bushman, “The Commencement of Mormon Studies,” in *New Perspectives in Mormon Studies: Creating and Crossing Boundaries*, ed. Quincy D. Newell and Eric F. Mason (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), 197–214; Blair Hodges, “Mormon Studies: A Bibliographic Essay,” *Mormon Studies Review* 1 (2014): 223–35; Patrick Q. Mason, “Mormon Studies: The Emergence and State of the Field,” in *Directions for Mormon Studies in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Patrick Q. Mason (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2016), 1–12.

<sup>2</sup>Keith A. Erekson et al., “What Will We Do Now That New Mormon History Is Old: A Roundtable,” *Journal of Mormon History* 35, no. 3 (2009): 190–233; Rachel Cope et al., “New Ways In: Writing Interdisciplinary Mormon History,” *Journal of Mormon History* 38, no. 2 (Spring 2012): 99–144; *Mormon Studies Review* 1 (2014): 9–16, 29–102, 223–35; *Mormon Studies Review* 2 (2015): 1–74; Mason, *Directions for Mormon Studies in the Twenty-First Century*; Richard L. Bushman Colloquium, “Mormonism in the Academy: Teaching, Scholarship, and Faith; A Scholars’ Colloquium in Honor of Richard L. Bushman,” Brigham Young University, June 17–18, 2016.

the definitions, challenges, opportunities, research gaps, sources, and disciplines of Mormon studies from a variety of angles. Some are highly nuanced treatments of particular aspects of Mormon studies, and others are more general. This article presents the history and state of Jewish studies, which I offer as a framework for examining the current state of Mormon studies.

Jewish studies seems to be a useful model or point of comparison for Mormon studies. Unlike the academic study of other religions in the United States—such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam—which are primarily directed by outsiders,<sup>3</sup> Jewish studies and Mormon studies are largely directed by insiders, so they tend to experience similar tensions and dynamics, as presented in this paper. Jewish studies is also similar to Mormon studies in its journey into the American academy; both the Association of Jewish Studies and the Mormon History Association were founded in the 1960s.

The treatment here of Jewish studies includes a broad examination of particular themes, trends, phenomena, and tensions for the purpose of comparison. I will discuss the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement and its impact on the study of Judaism in the American academy. I will also explain the shift away from it to Jewish studies in the United States. The primary objective is to use the experience of Jewish studies as a means for scholars of religious studies to discuss the state and future of Mormon studies. Given space constraints I will not attempt to identify all the similarities between Jewish studies and Mormon studies. I will identify some of these similarities, but I encourage the reader to keep the field of Mormon studies in mind while proceeding through my explanation of Jewish studies. I conclude with my own preliminary assessment of the history and state of Mormon studies based on this comparison.

### WISSENSCHAFT DES JUDENTUMS

Jewish communities throughout Europe, particularly young Jews, gradually moved to a more secular worldview during the Enlightenment. The Haskalah—the “Jewish Enlightenment,” literally meaning “intellect” (from *sekhel*)—was an intellectual movement among European Jews that took shape in the last few decades of the eighteenth century. The father of the Haskalah, Moses Mendelssohn (d. 1786), became famous in Germany for his philosophical works, and

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<sup>3</sup>Richard C. Martin, in *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*, ed. Richard C. Martin (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1985), 9.

was known among Jews for his strong accommodationist approach. During the Enlightenment, rationalism was the dominant school of thought. As Auerbach explained: “The Enlightenment instigated nothing less than ‘a radical rupture not only with traditional habits and beliefs but with the fundamental vision according to which Jews had long understood the world.’ For the first time in eighteen centuries, since their loss of national independence, Jews were free to define themselves.”<sup>4</sup>

Mendelssohn became influential in redefining Judaism for many Jews. He argued that since religion is true it must also be rational; since Judaism is a religion and religion is true, then Judaism is true and rational. When Mendelssohn defined Judaism as a rational religion, it influenced the way some German Jews interpreted Judaism.<sup>5</sup>

Haskalah’s proponents (called *maskilim*) sought to obtain secular education and adopt predominant European customs. Before the Haskalah, the Jewish community was largely isolated; consequently, the rabbi was the primary figure for disseminating ideas. Young Jews during this generation were raised in a society consumed with religious reform, political emancipation, and anti-Semitism.<sup>6</sup> Some Jews began matriculating in German universities, which exposed them to the methods of history, classics, and philosophy. In 1819, the first generation of trained Jewish academics formed a society in Berlin, which later became known as *Wissenschaft des Judentums* meaning the “scientific study of Judaism.” The purpose of it was to apply critical historical scholarship to Jewish sources. Schorsch identified *Wissenschaft des Judentums* as the most important legacy of German Jewry because “it embodies a basic shift in perspective from the dogmatic to the undogmatic, from the exegetical to the conceptual, [and] from the acceptance of unexamined knowledge to a deep concern with method.”<sup>7</sup> Hughes explained, however, that the society’s vision was “not simply academic, but political: Jewish

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<sup>4</sup>Jerold S. Auerbach, *Rabbis and Lawyers: The Journey from Torah to Constitution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 72.

<sup>5</sup>Amos Elon, *The Pity of It All: A History of Jews in Germany, 1743–1933* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002), 33–100.

<sup>6</sup>Aaron Hughes, *The Study of Judaism: Authenticity, Identity, Scholarship* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press), 41.

<sup>7</sup>Ismar Schorsch, *From Text to Context: The Turn to History in Modern Judaism* (Hanover, NH: Published for Brandeis University Press by University Press of New England, 1994), 153.

self-improvement through scholarship would ideally lead to full political emancipation.”<sup>8</sup> Self-improvement was a focus because many Jews had become disenfranchised with the religious aspects of Judaism. The founders of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* had a twofold objective: “[They sought] to bring ordinary Jews into the orbit of German *Kultur* and at the same time reinforce their Jewish identity by bridging the gulf between secular and religious education. . . . [They] were eager to spread knowledge about the former and help young Jews to remain Jews even as (like many young Christians) they lost some of the latter.”<sup>9</sup>

The new society sought to illustrate to young Jews that Judaism as a cultural tradition and civilization deserved attention and appreciation, which, in turn, might revitalize their religious connection. The means to achieve this objective was through adoption of scientific inquiry—that is, methods of academic exploration of Jewish history, literature, music, poetry, philosophy, and even liturgy.<sup>10</sup>

Because several protagonists of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* in Germany were rabbis,<sup>11</sup> the fundamental motivation was grounded in scholarship, not as much for scholarship’s sake as for convincing young Jews to stay connected to Judaism. In other words, it had the appearance of scholarship but was really a “religious enterprise,” grounded in apologetics.<sup>12</sup> It was not meant to explain the Jewish experience but to serve the Jewish faith. The reader familiar with the work of Mormon scholars in the past two generations—most of whom were employed at either Brigham Young University’s department of Religious Education or the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Church History Department—might see the similarity with this approach. Most of the publications coming from Mormon scholars who study religion were being published by the church or by Deseret Book Company; this body of literature had the appearance of scholarship but was really a religious enterprise grounded in apologetics.

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<sup>8</sup> Hughes, *The Study of Judaism*, 42.

<sup>9</sup> Elon, *The Pity of It All*, 110.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Two of the three founders of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* were practicing rabbis: Abraham Geiger and Zacharias Frankel.

<sup>12</sup> Michael A. Meyer, “Two Persistent Tensions within *Wissenschaft des Judentums*,” *Modern Judaism* 24, no. 2 (May 2004): 105–19, esp. 116n1; see also Hughes, 39–56.

One example is from Rabbi Zacharias Frankel, one of the founders of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and the first president of the Jewish Theological Seminary in Breslau, starting in the 1850s. In the introduction to the seminary's first publication, Frankel wrote that the history of Judaism is synonymous with Heilsgeschichte: "Salvation history." Frankel maintained that if nothing else, the history of Judaism illustrates "a manifestation of the divine [and the] revelation of religion." The very purpose of studying Jewish history, according to Frankel, was to learn about God's plan for his people and to increase the "will to believe." In the same publication, Frankel argued that history and *Wissenschaft des Judentums* "manifest themselves as the most effective lever to set weary spirits back into motion and to awaken renewed interest in higher things."<sup>13</sup>

Not everyone agreed with Frankel. For example, Leopold Zunz, another founder of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* lamented that the society's ideal was being appropriated by seminarians. His primary objective was to find a home for the study of Judaism in the university (not the seminary) in order to legitimize Jewish scholarship in the academy.<sup>14</sup> Despite the efforts of Zunz and others, the connection between *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and apologetics was inevitable, especially given the revival of anti-Semitism in Germany in the last few decades of the nineteenth century. For some, it became even more crucial to portray Jewish history and texts in a positive light, which meant that unfavorable historical phenomena and potentially offensive texts were omitted from the scholarship. Throughout the early twentieth century, Jewish thinkers continued to wrestle with the question of whether *Wissenschaft des Judentums* was useful if it did not serve the Jewish community.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Meyer, "Two Persistent Tensions," 106, 110; Zacharias Frankel, "Einleitendes," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* (MGWJ) 1 (1852): 3–4.

<sup>14</sup> Michael A. Meyer, "Jewish Religious Reform and Wissenschaft des Judentums: The Position of Zunz, Geiger and Frankel," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 16, no. 1 (January 1971): 25–26; Meyer, "Two Persistent Tensions," 107.

<sup>15</sup> Meyer, "Two Persistent Tensions," 113. For a more detailed discussion and bibliography on the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement, especially the history of scholarship, see K. v. d. Krone and M. Thulin, "Wissenschaft in Context: A Research Essay on the Wissenschaft des Judentums," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 58, no. 1 (June 2013): 249–80.

The first forty years of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* in Germany (1820s to 1860s), with its tensions between sage and scholar, is referred to by Glatzer as the “beginnings of modern Jewish studies.”<sup>16</sup> As Jews migrated out of Europe, they took with them its scholarly assumptions and methods. Both in Israel and in America before the 1960s, the scholar was not the authority but a puppet, with the Jewish community—particularly the rabbinic establishment—serving as puppet master. The community spoke through the scholar, whose writings and ideas represented Jewish community interests. In some ways this relationship dynamic has continued to the present.

Aside from sixteen or so Jews teaching in university Semitics departments, Jewish scholars had not made inroads into the academy in America before the 1960s.<sup>17</sup> Prominent scholars of Jewish studies in the early to mid-twentieth century—such as Harvard’s Harry Wolfson and Brandeis’s Alexander Altmann—along with seminar-ians and rabbis perpetuated the legacy of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. As products and witnesses of the prior anti-Semitic generations of Europe, these figures were engaged in an insular, “ghettoized,” and apologetic enterprise. Many hoped that Jewish studies would be accepted in the academy, but similar to those in nineteenth-century Germany, they were not interested in the purely academic pursuit of the Jewish experience.<sup>18</sup> When Jewish studies finally became accepted in the academy, some believed that “the final realization of the *Wissenschaft* dream” had arrived.<sup>19</sup> The inclusion, however, of Jewish studies in American universities meant that Jewish studies scholars were forced to make a decision regarding their masters. Would they continue to serve the Jewish community, or would they pivot and seek to serve the academy?

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<sup>16</sup> Nahum Glatzer, “The Beginnings of Modern Jewish Studies,” in *Studies in Nineteenth-Century Jewish Intellectual History*, ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), 27.

<sup>17</sup> Judith R. Baskin, “Jewish Studies in North American Colleges and Universities: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow,” *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 32, no. 4 (2014): 10.

<sup>18</sup> Aaron W. Hughes, *Jacob Neusner: An American Jewish Iconoclast* (New York: NYU Press, 2016), 16.

<sup>19</sup> Arthur Green, “Jewish Studies and Jewish Faith,” *Tikkun* 1, no. 1 (1986): 85.

**AFTER WISSENSCHAFT: JEWISH STUDIES IN AMERICA**

What is the cost of acceptance in the academy? According to Arthur Green, who presented his opinion on this topic in 1986, the cost is that Jewish studies scholars must reject the motives and objectives of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*: “Jewish scholarship can no longer serve as the handmaiden of Jewish apologetics. The university scholar, unlike his seminary colleague, cannot teach that Judaism is the unique repository of truth, that it is ‘better,’ either morally or theologically, than other faiths. . . . We Jews of the academy have learned to be cautious about our own uncritical enthusiasm for Judaism.”<sup>20</sup>

The transition, however, from *Wissenschaft des Judentums*-minded scholarship to academic scholarship in America was a messy process. This would be expected considering that the movement pursued a scholarly examination of Jewish sources in the academy that was a politically motivated, religious enterprise grounded in apologetics. Such an approach would necessarily be out of place in the academy. Perhaps the most prominent figure to challenge the assumptions and culture was Jacob Neusner.

*Jacob Neusner and the New Jewish Studies*

Neusner began his academic career in the 1960s, just as Jewish studies was finding its way into American universities. The Holocaust, the founding of the State of Israel, the Six-Day War, and a rise in both area studies and secular studies of religion at state universities in the 1960s all contributed to the acceptance of Jewish studies in America;<sup>21</sup> however, the field of Jewish studies continued to struggle to define its identity and determine whom it would serve.<sup>22</sup>

Neusner, who died in 2016, was the most influential scholar of Jewish studies in America. He produced nearly one thousand books (an average of two per month for forty years) and wrote countless articles and book chapters. Early in his career, he wrote a review for every new Jewish studies monograph published. An ordained rabbi before completing his PhD, Neusner was successful in bringing the classical rabbinic texts out of the yeshiva and into the American academy. The combination of his intellectual ability and mental stamina was unparalleled. He was criticized by many for his productivity and

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 85, 86.

<sup>21</sup> Baskin, “Jewish Studies,” 11.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Alter, “What Jewish Studies Can Do,” *Commentary* 58, no. 4 (1974): 71–76; Hughes, *The Study of Judaism*, 67–72.

dogmatic opinions. As one who fought against the old *Wissenschaft des Judentums* mind-set, Neusner seemed to constantly be in heated arguments with other scholars, deans, university presidents, boards of professional associations, and other administrators.<sup>23</sup>

Even before he completed a PhD in 1960 at Columbia, Neusner found himself challenging the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* mentality of the two previous generations. Throughout his career, he frequently emphasized in his writings that “if you can’t show it, you don’t know it,”<sup>24</sup> a position that is granted in every other secular academic field and discipline. The notion among many religion faculty, especially those in theological seminaries, that you must “believe unless you have to doubt” was turned on its head by Neusner in relation to Jewish studies: “Doubt until you must affirm (and believe nothing!). . . . We have a body of knowledge about times past, but not solid evidence to demonstrate it as true. We know only what we can show, and therefore we presuppose only what we demonstrate to be fact. . . . What we learn from [Jewish texts and history] always struck me as a question to be investigated, not a premise to be postulated. And the question dictates the only reasonable answer: ‘what we cannot show, we do not know.’”<sup>25</sup>

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Neusner feared that the Jewish community would hijack the newly created Jewish studies programs, which would then quickly become an “ethnic enclave entrenched in identity politics”<sup>26</sup>—basically an extension of Hillel, a campus foundation, the mission of which involves “enriching the lives of Jewish students so that they may enrich the Jewish people and the world.”<sup>27</sup>

Neusner grew impatient with scholars who seemed to welcome the role of local spokesperson for the Jewish community and the State

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<sup>23</sup> Hughes, *Jacob Neusner*.

<sup>24</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Rabbinic Literature and the New Testament: What We Cannot Show, We Do Not Know* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1994), 10; Neusner, *Judaism in Late Antiquity: Part One; The Literary and Archaeological Sources* (Leiden: Brill), 130; Neusner, *A Theological Commentary to the Midrash: Sifra 7* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2001), 49; Neusner, *Studying Classical Judaism: A Primer* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 66.

<sup>25</sup> Neusner, *Rabbinic Literature and the New Testament*, 10.

<sup>26</sup> Hughes, *Jacob Neusner*, 117.

<sup>27</sup> See the mission and visions statements on the Hillel International website, <http://www.hillel.org/about>.

of Israel. A “scholar,” by definition, argued Neusner, is a nonpartisan critic, not a caretaker, of the subject under investigation. If Jewish scholars remained beholden to the Jewish community, then the field would lack authenticity and intellectual honesty. Neusner warned that scholars in the academy must not be used for “propagandist purposes of any kind. It is not the responsibility of the historian of Judaism, or of Hebrew, to interest himself in the state of the soul of his students, whether Jewish or gentile. It will render his true task impossible if he does so.”<sup>28</sup>

### *The Association for Jewish Studies*

One of Neusner’s frustrations with the new field of Jewish studies was its major professional association, the Association for Jewish Studies. In 1969, a group of forty-seven scholars, all Jewish, convened at Brandeis University to discuss the state of the field. This convention became the first AJS meeting.<sup>29</sup> Neusner was involved in early discussions about the AJS and the future of Jewish studies. With Neusner, many other scholars involved in the foundational meetings, including Irving Greenberg, expressed concern that if Jewish studies and the AJS were to continue to gain academic respectability, they must not develop close associations with and be beholden to the concerns of the Jewish community.<sup>30</sup>

Despite their lip service, Neusner disputed with the Association for Jewish Studies for its Jewish community ties, and he eventually distanced himself from the association after writing a memo to its leadership: “Why did we found the AJS? Was it to serve ‘the Jewish community’? The ‘Jewish community’ is not our business, and even if it were, nothing worthwhile is likely to come from it, through it, or with it.”<sup>31</sup> This was not the only concern for Neusner; he believed that associations such as the AJS would further solidify the “ghettoization” of Jewish studies and turn it into an ethnic enclave. He proposed that Jewish studies be part of broader organizations, such as the

<sup>28</sup> Hughes, *Jacob Neusner*, 119.

<sup>29</sup> Leon Jick, “Introduction,” *AJS Newsletter* 2 (1989): 3.

<sup>30</sup> Kristen Loveland, “The Association for Jewish Studies: A Brief History,” 40th Annual Conference of the Association for Jewish Studies, 3–4, <http://www.associationforjewishstudies.org/docs/default-source/ajs-history/ajs-history.pdf?sfvrsn=2>.

<sup>31</sup> Hughes, *Jacob Neusner*, 120–22.

American Academy of Religion. He later referred to the organization as a “halfway house” for those transitioning from yeshiva approaches to the study of Judaism to academia.<sup>32</sup> Years later, in the early 1980s, Neusner continued to criticize it, lamenting that its annual meeting “[makes] room for every topic, but makes progress in none. It allows for masses of trivialities and makes provisions for few important statements. Everyone has a place . . . but non-Jews scarcely show their faces. . . . [It] disgraces the field by the mediocrity and cacophony of discourse.”<sup>33</sup> But Neusner blamed himself for this problem, as he was a key figure in the early stages for determining who should be admitted into the Association of Jewish Studies:

Some of us, whose lives and careers find their sole location in universities, imagined that the AJS would serve our fields and disciplines as other *academic* learned societies serve theirs. But I personally ruined the organization by insisting that every “qualified person” should be a full member, and no “unqualified person” should gain access. . . . I personally missed an important distinction: if AJS were to serve the academic sector, it could *not* also serve any other sector. When we chose to admit all qualified people, with scholarship the sole qualification, we turned the AJS into an amalgam of several quite distinct groups: learned rabbis, yeshiva-erudites, amateurs of every conceivable sort, seminarians with scholarly pretensions, and also, but in a functional minority, university professors and graduate students. Scholarship means too many things to serve to differentiate.<sup>34</sup>

For Neusner, gatekeeping was necessary because the academic associations must, by definition, *only* serve the needs and interests of the academy. Ideally, then, an academic association should be a place for graduate students seeking ideas and feedback for their dissertations, young faculty chasing tenure, senior scholars seeking feedback on groundbreaking research, deans and department chairs discussing curriculum and program funding issues, and scholarly networking events meant to strengthen the academy and its programs. Thus, an amateur historian, a retired businessman researcher, and an independent author might have good ideas and compelling arguments,

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>33</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Judaism in the American Humanities, Second Series: Jewish Learning and the New Humanities* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 40, 41.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

but they are not tied to an academic institution. By serving them and their independent research interests, the association would drown out or squeeze out some of those who are in the academy. Allowing everyone to have a voice might generally be good for expanding the knowledge base on certain topics, but it does not serve the needs and interests of the academy.

To be sure, Neusner was not alone in these concerns and criticisms, but he was perhaps the most outspoken on these issues. In 1978 he was the coordinator for the Study of Judaism section in the American Academy of Religion. While in this position, he outlined his vision for Judaism's place in the association. He articulated that the "success for our board's tenure . . . is measured by the attendance of a fair number of specialists in other areas, responding to raising questions, within the study of Judaism, relevant to work in other areas."<sup>35</sup> Neusner's proposal, explained Hughes, "as modest as it is revolutionary, does nothing less than make Jewish texts relevant to others working in the study of religion. What Neusner is doing here is diametrically opposed to the mandate of the AJS."<sup>36</sup>

The debate over the propriety of the Association of Jewish Studies' close association with the Jewish community has continued. Recently, in 2014, the organization revised its mission statement. Originally, the primary mission was to "promote, facilitate, and improve teaching and research in Jewish Studies at colleges, universities, and other institutions of higher learning"—precisely Neusner's position. Now, the mission includes the addendum "to foster greater understanding of Jewish Studies scholarship among the wider public." This addition concerned some, who thought that "wider public," given the association's significant majority of Jewish membership, is code for "the Jewish community."<sup>37</sup>

### *Stakeholders of Jewish Studies*

In a 2014 piece in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Jewish scholar Aaron Hughes questioned whether Jewish studies is too Jewish: "Of the over 200 professors in endowed chairs in Jewish studies listed on the website of the AJS, well over 95 percent have recognizably Jewish

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<sup>35</sup> Hughes, *Jacob Neusner*, 128.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> "AJS's New Mission Statement," April 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.ajsnet.org/newmission.htm>.

names.”<sup>38</sup> It is undoubtedly the case that more Jews are interested in Jewish studies than are members of other groups; however, Hughes also mentioned that “the number of Jews academically studying Judaism dwarfs the numbers of people studying other religions and self-identifying as practitioners (for example, in Islam, Buddhism, or Hinduism).”<sup>39</sup> Hughes’s article was criticized in a response piece for “blaming the victim for her own marginalization, [which] will provide colleagues across the university additional impetus to marginalize an already marginalized field.”<sup>40</sup>

Hughes’s criticism of the self-marginalization in Jewish studies’ might be valid. For example, in Harvie Branscomb’s 1970 piece, “A Note on Establishing Chairs of Jewish Studies,” he argued that academic institutions *should* consult with the local Jewish community in establishing new Jewish studies chairs and in hiring for the position; doing so would certainly result in the exclusion of non-Jews and the appointment of a practicing Jew.<sup>41</sup> Later, when one of Neusner’s non-Jewish students was overlooked by the University of Nebraska, Neusner threatened a lawsuit. He and his student later learned from the chair at the university that the committee could not offer the job to a non-Jew because a local Jewish federation was funding the position and expected the professor to teach various classes in and for the local Jewish community. According to Neusner, not only was this a violation of the university policy but it obliterated the academic integrity of both the position and the field.<sup>42</sup> In 1996, the *New York Times* reported that when Queens College hired a non-Jew Yiddish professor to head the Jewish studies program, he resigned two weeks later amidst outrage from the Jewish community. His new appointment made the front page of two major Jewish newspapers.

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<sup>38</sup> Aaron Hughes, “Jewish Studies Is Too Jewish,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 24, 2014, <http://www.chronicle.com/article/Jewish-Studies-Is-Too-Jewish/145395/>.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> “Who Gets to Define Jewish Studies?,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 5, 2014, <http://www.chronicle.com/article/Who-Gets-to-Define-Jewish/146267>.

<sup>41</sup> Harvey Branscomb, “A Note on Establishing Chairs of Jewish Studies,” in *The Teaching of Judaica in American Universities: The Proceedings of a Colloquium*, ed. Leon A. Jick (Waltham, MA: Association for Jewish Studies, 1970), 95–99.

<sup>42</sup> Hughes, *Jacob Neusner*, 142.

A Jewish professor at Queens College disagreed with the new hire, commenting that “Jewish studies exists to give Jewish students a role model.”<sup>43</sup>

Stakeholders within the Jewish community—Jewish agencies, synagogues, local rabbis, parents of Jewish students, wealthy donors, and Hillel foundations—have always influenced Jewish studies and the academy. Donors who funded Jewish studies chairs and programs envisioned Jewish studies and the academy as vehicles for teaching young Jews about their history and strengthening their Jewish identity.<sup>44</sup> In the 1960s and 1970s the adult community, which feared mass assimilation of their children, hoped that a strong Jewish presence in the academy would “save their [children] from the Jesus Freaks, the Eastern gurus, the New Left, and from Gentile spouses.”<sup>45</sup> Some within the Jewish studies community have argued that professors must, of necessity, take on the role of Jewish community leaders. Note, for example, the position of Hal M. Lewis, former president of the Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies in Chicago: “The congregations, federations, and Jewish organizations in our communities ought to look upon Jewish Studies professors as communal leaders . . . Rabbis, senior executives, and prominent philanthropists should seek their counsel on issues of relevance, and together they should strategize other ways in which to organically incorporate scholarly insights and perspectives into the on-going programs and activities of Jewish life.”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Pam Belluck, “Gentile Professor, Citing Bias, Quits as School’s Head of Jewish Studies,” *New York Times*, July 16, 1996, <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/07/16/nyregion/gentile-professor-citing-bias-quits-as-schools-head-of-jewishstudies.html>.

<sup>44</sup> Martin Goodman, “The Nature of Jewish Studies,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Studies*, ed. Martin Goodman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 9.

<sup>45</sup> Robert Alter, “What Jewish Studies Can Do,” *Commentary* 58, no. 4 (1974). <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/what-jewish-studies-can-do/>.

<sup>46</sup> Hal M. Lewis, “The Jewish Studies Professor as Communal Leader,” *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 24, no. 3 (2006): 133, 134.

Others, like Neusner, have fundamentally rejected this position.<sup>47</sup> One rabbi, Alfred Jospe, wrote that the role of professors must not be to “Judaize young Jews, stimulate their Jewish commitment, or strengthen their Jewish identification.”<sup>48</sup> Arthur Green explained that the community “puts these scholars in a terribly difficult position, glorying in their efforts to have Judaica treated as a full member of the university curriculum, but then treating them as though they were our personal representatives on the college campus. It is hard to have it both ways.”<sup>49</sup> More recently, Hughes criticized the field of Jewish studies regarding this conflict-of-interest relationship:

We should be ashamed that we have allowed foundations that push a particular vision of what Judaism is or should be to operate within the administrative structures of universities. None of these foundations, despite appeals to the contrary, are interested in funding scholarship simply for its own sake. . . . I’m worried that not enough non-Jews are in or entering the field. I’m worried that well-funded and ideologically charged foundations are defining the questions we ask. Jewish studies stands at a crossroad. It can go down the path of ethnic politics, the path on which a scholar seeks funding from the private foundation that is most closely aligned with the scholar’s views of Judaism and Jewish values. Or it can become a field of research that checks politics, identity or otherwise, at the door.<sup>50</sup>

Hughes does not suggest in his work that Jewish studies scholars, both Jew and non-Jew, are not producing sound scholarship. His contention is that too many scholars are being used to achieve the objectives of special interest groups and wealthy donors within the Jewish community. Too many points of connection exist between the Jewish community and Jewish studies programs and faculty.

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<sup>47</sup>When the president of Brown University, for example, told Neusner that he would need to raise \$2 million if he wanted another Jewish studies appointment—implying that funds would need to come from the Jewish community—Neusner questioned whether the Catholic and Protestant communities were required to pay for academic appointments in medieval history and the Reformation, respectively. Hughes, *Jacob Neusner*, 162.

<sup>48</sup>Alfred Jospe, “Academic Jewish Studies: Objectivity or Advocacy,” in *To Leave Your Mark: Selections from the Writings of Alfred Jospe*, ed. Eva Jospe and Raphael Jospe, (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV, 2000), 78.

<sup>49</sup>Green, “Jewish Studies and Jewish Faith,” 86.

<sup>50</sup>Hughes, “Jewish Studies Is Too Jewish.”

In summary, modern Jewish studies developed as an apologetic enterprise that had the appearance of scholarship. Yes, those in Jewish studies—as manifested through the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement—utilized scholarly methods to examine Jewish history and texts, but the motive was to save Judaism, to convince young Jews who were attending the German academies to stay connected to the Jewish community. As Jewish studies made inroads into the American academy in the mid-twentieth century, numerous Jewish studies scholars, many of whom were rabbis, perpetuated the ideals of the movement. Consequently, conflicts-of-interest became more apparent. Jewish professors who researched and taught Jewish studies were beholden to the Jewish community. Their allegiance was not to the secular academic study of Judaism for the sake of understanding Jewish history and texts; their allegiance was to Jewish stakeholders, religious community leaders, and local Jewish federations who wanted Jewish studies scholars to be apologists for Judaism. Jacob Neusner directly and abrasively challenged the propriety of such an approach.

#### **SOME THOUGHTS IN RELATION TO MORMON STUDIES**

As a Jewish studies scholar who has only dabbled in Mormon studies, I can only make broad observations about whether Mormon studies scholars have experienced (and continue to experience) similar tensions. Here are a few cursory observations.

Similarities between the Association for Jewish Studies and the Mormon History Association are conspicuous. Neusner complained that the organization was being dominated by groups of people with scholarly pretensions, but who were not tied to an academy. For a quick data point, a review of the MHA's 2017 conference presenters list reveals that approximately 19 of 173 participants (11 percent) were not Mormon and approximately 40 percent were not tied to the academy. Is this a problem that very few non-Mormon scholars are involved in this (or any other) Mormon scholarly association? Is it problematic that nearly half of all participants (at least in 2017) were not tied to an academy? Neusner would say yes, but how would Mormon scholars respond? Is the goal of MHA to serve the academy (i.e., graduate students, pre-tenured faculty, seasoned faculty who serve as department chairs and Mormon Studies Chairs, curriculum, etc.) or to serve the local Latter-day Saint communities?

Patrick Mason, the former Mormon studies chair at Claremont Graduate University (and currently the Mormon studies chair at Utah State University), has acknowledged that Mormon studies tends to

serve the community, that it is beholden to the concerns and interests of faithful Mormons, and it necessarily should be, in his opinion. The MHA annual meetings, for example, are “wonderfully populated mostly by community members and enthusiasts who care deeply about their collective history and are there to remember, honor, and connect with the past.”<sup>51</sup> In 2016 the LDS Church donated one million dollars to help fund the Mormon studies program at Utah State University. Mason admitted that he often fears that his work will offend some in his community, “that their faith will somehow be challenged, that I will give the wrong impression, or I will say something that a missionary or a bishop or an LDS Public Affairs representative or an apostle simply won’t like.”<sup>52</sup>

On the question of the faith community establishing Mormon studies chairs, Mormon scholar John Gee seemed to favor a relationship between nonscholarly Mormon donors and Mormon scholars. Gee lamented that the interests of Mormon scholars “will not necessarily align with the desires of Latter-day Saints” because the scholars will be more beholden to their non-Mormon religious studies colleagues who will determine their future. Gee wondered: “Will work in Mormon Studies conform to the expectations of the Religious Studies departments? Will it serve the academy, and not the Kingdom?”<sup>53</sup> As we have seen, Neusner would probably answer, “Yes, of course; that’s the point of Mormon studies!” Gee concluded that Mormon studies scholars must not only serve the interests of the faith community but must be overtly apologetic: “As Hugh Nibley warned, for those who do not defend the kingdom of God, their ‘whole career will become one long face-saving operation—at the expense of the Church.’”<sup>54</sup>

Is Mormon studies really stuck in an apologetic trajectory of its development? If so, is that a bad thing? Should Mormon studies (or Jewish studies) necessarily move beyond Wissenschaft-minded scholarship? I am not one to adjudicate the current state of Mormon Studies and place value on the answers to these questions. I simply use the tensions and debates that occurred within Jewish studies

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<sup>51</sup> Patrick Q. Mason, “Scholars, Saints, and Stakeholders: A Forgotten Alternatives Approach to Mormon History,” *Journal of Mormon History* 44, no. 1 (2015): 218.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> John Gee, “Whither Mormon Studies?,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 4 (2013): 107–8.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 108.

circles to raise questions about Mormon studies. My objective here was to identify and focus on the crux of the matter. We can ask ad nauseam, for example, whether we need more female scholars or more research in particular regions or periods, but what does that matter if Mormon studies is insular, ghettoized, beholden to nonacademic stakeholders, and largely apologetic? Maybe Mormon studies is not insular and ghettoized. I leave it to Mormon studies scholars to further grapple with these questions and to determine whether Mormon studies really is serving the academy or serving the faith community, and where it must go from here.

I conclude with the following observation: How did Jewish studies grow to include over two hundred chairs across America since the 1960s, while Mormon studies grew to fewer than five chairs? A combination of guilt from the dominant culture toward Jews after the Holocaust and a growing interest among Christians in the Jewish roots of Christianity fostered interest in Judaism in the academy, especially among Christian students. Further, many wealthy Jews were pouring money into the academy to establish Jewish studies chairs. In comparison, Mormonism does not have a holocaust. The dominant culture does not feel guilty about the Mormon experience as it does about the Jewish experience. Mormons have the Mountain Meadows Massacre, race and priesthood tensions, polygamy, and the Book of Mormon. These issues will not foster compassion and guilt from outsiders, but they may foster intrigue. Can Mormon studies survive if controversy is what drives the field? The guilt about times past comes not from outsiders but from insiders. The rich history, the controversy, the ambiguity, the faith and supernatural elements of the Mormon experience are what drive the field for insiders, but what about outsiders? In order for Mormon studies to continue to grow, albeit very slowly, it may need to rely on its faith-community stakeholders for funding and support. This compromise may be inevitable.