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CHAPTER 28

The ideology of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*

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The first circle of university-trained professional historians, members of the Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden, assembled at a most anxious moment in history. In the second decade of the nineteenth century, a strong conservative tide swept Prussia and other German states following the defeat of Napoleon and the Congress of Vienna; among the prominent targets of this backlash were Jews, who had been partly emancipated in 1812, and yet whose demand for total "liberation" engendered hostility and resentment in both popular and elite strata of society. Anti-Jewish fulminations issued from the mouths of well-known intellectuals and academics, some of whom instructed the young Jewish scholars in university lecture halls.¹ The sharp polemics of these figures served as backdrop to a more violent expression: the Hep! Hep! riots of 1819 which broke out against Jews first in Bavaria, and then spread throughout Germany.

The Hep! Hep! riots undermined the incipient sense of security and confidence which German Jews had begun to develop. But the anxiety felt by this generation of German Jews was not fueled only by the threat of physical violence or by impudent rhetoric. Perhaps more troubling was a deep existential concern: would Jews and Judaism have a meaningful function to play in the modern age? Indeed, in a post-Enlightenment world where religious difference need no longer act to distinguish one group from another, would Jews find a sufficiently compelling rationale to continue their ongoing existence as a discrete collectivity?

This question lay at the heart of the Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden (Society for the Culture and Scientific Study of the Jews), which first assembled in Berlin in November 1819. One of the founding members of the Verein, J. A. List, asked with brutal

candor: "Why a stubborn persistence in something which I do not respect and for which I suffer so much?" (Ucko 1967, p. 326). In fact, earlier generations of modern Jews had already begun to pose this question.² Debate over the utility and malleability of Jews animated German Enlightenment discourse and polemics in the latter half of the eighteenth century. This debate prompted the leading German Jewish intellectual personality of that century, Moses Mendelssohn, to produce his famous exposition and affirmation of Judaism, *Jerusalem*, in 1783. Subsequent generations found it difficult to match Mendelssohn's exemplary, though delicate, balance between Jewish allegiance and philosophic openness, ritual observance and counter-normative critique of rabbinic authority. His disciples in the Jewish Enlightenment circles of Berlin, as well as his own children, responded to the question of the viability of Judaism in a way quite different from his – for instance, by calling for the reform of Jewish religious ritual or, more radically, by converting to Christianity. With increasing clarity, the post-Mendelssohn generations apprehended the terms of the social contract of Enlightenment: in order to gain societal acceptance and rights as citizens, Jews had to dilute, at times even abandon, their communal and religious bonds. The problematic features of this exchange became all the more apparent in the post-Napoleonic era of reaction, when Jewish political rights and social aspirations were subjected to new and unfavorable scrutiny.

At this ominous juncture, the founding members of the Verein proposed an agenda whose direction and scale were quite different from that offered by other Jews of their day. Through the illuminating powers of critical scholarship, they hoped to produce a comprehensive literary and historical account of the Jewish past. This account would not only serve to clarify the contours of the Jewish past; it might also yield a sharper image of Judaism's function and relevance in the present.

Actually, the imperative to provide such an account was first articulated shortly before the founding of the Verein by a young Jewish scholar named Leopold Zunz. Born into a traditional Jewish family in Detmold, Zunz reflected the extraordinary pace of change which German Jewry was experiencing in the early nineteenth century. Before the age of ten, he had neither read nor possessed a book written in the German language. But, over the next decade, Zunz graduated from a Jewish primary school run by Enlightenment devotees, was admitted as the first Jew to his local high school, and moved to Berlin to pursue studies at the newly opened university there (Schorsch 1977, pp. 109ff.). It was in Berlin that he encountered a group of Jews engaged in intense intellectual explorations. Initially, this group, calling itself the *Wissenschaftszirkel* (Scientific Circle), did not devote itself specifically to Jewish matters. Some years later, however, the same group of indi-

viduals reorganized as the Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden, with an explicit program to pursue Jewish scholarly themes.

The conceptual (and linguistic) thread linking the earlier and later groups was Wissenschaft, connoting both scientific study and an all-encompassing scope of inquiry. Even before the Verein was formed, Leopold Zunz set out to demonstrate how this ubiquitous concept in German intellectual life could be applied to the study of the Jewish past. In May 1818, he published "Etwas über die rabbinische Literatur" in which he outlined in considerable detail the mission of "unsere Wissenschaft" (our science). "Our science," Zunz explained in this essay, must entail a comprehensive survey of rabbinic literature (Zunz 1875, p. 1). But rabbinic literature, for Zunz, was not confined to the classical sources of rabbinic learning – Mishnah, Talmud, and halakhic codes and commentaries. It also included writings in history, theology, philosophy, rhetoric, jurisprudence, natural science, mathematics, poetry, and music – indeed, the full expanse of cultural expression in Hebrew from biblical to modern times.

Zunz believed that the time had arrived to undertake a systematic study of this vast Hebrew literary legacy. Jews in his native Germany no longer read Hebrew with ease nor faithfully turned to Hebrew sources for spiritual or intellectual inspiration. Their cultural frame of reference was less determined by talmudic virtuosity than by Bildung, embodying a quest for German culture and self-refinement. At this point of transition, Zunz observed with barely a wisp of sentimentality, Wissenschaft "steps in demanding an account of *what has already been sealed away*." No "new significant development" in rabbinic (that is, Hebrew) literature was to be anticipated; the canon had been closed (Mendes-Flohr and Reinhartz 1980, p. 197). A humorous episode from Zunz's later life seems to confirm this belief. Once, a prominent Russian Jew visiting Berlin called upon Zunz, and introduced himself as a Hebrew poet. Zunz drew back and was said to have asked with incredulity: "When did you live?" (Stanislawski 1988, p. 123).

If this anecdote accurately reflected Zunz's belief that Hebrew literature was essentially an historical relic, what might have been his motivation for pursuing scholarly research of it? Was it the archeologist's attempt to reconstruct an ancient, though fossilized, civilization? In his programmatic essay of 1818, Zunz often evinced an air of detachment and a concern for scientific rigor that would appear to preclude any present-day application of his research conclusions. But there are also moments in his essay when Zunz exhibits another sensibility. His tone becomes passionate, even agitated, when he discusses the neglect of Jewish literary and cultural history by various groups: first, by traditionally observant Jews who regard critical methods of scholarship as sacrilegious; second, by secular Jews and others who find no value

whatever in scholarly investigations of the past; and, third, by Christian scholars who have studied and distorted classical Jewish sources in order to validate their own religious tradition (Mendes-Flohr and Reinhartz 1980, pp. 197–201).

And yet, the impulse to reclaim the Jewish literary past from incompetent or hostile hands was but part of Zunz's motivation. Traces of a deeper inspiration reside in the very formulation "unsere Wissenschaft" which Zunz used to designate his labors. At first glance, the phrase appears oxymoronic, for Wissenschaft implies a standard of scientific validation which requires a clear demarcation between subject and object.

At second glance, however, this seemingly ironic phrase underscores the existence of a pervasive instrumental quality to Jewish scholarship in Germany from the early nineteenth century. In his important programmatic essay of 1818, Zunz observed with cautious optimism that "the complex problem of the fate of the Jews may derive a solution, if only in part, from this science" (Mendes-Flohr and Reinhartz 1980, p. 197). In other words, Wissenschaft could help to ameliorate the status of the Jews in this age of anxiety. A far more ebullient characterization came thirty-five years later from the scholar Zacharias Frankel, who described Wissenschaft as "the heart of Judaism through which blood flows to all the veins" (Brann 1904, Appendix 1).³ From Zunz's time to Frankel's in mid-century, scholarship had emerged as the arena of discourse in which Judaism was to be defined. Indeed, it was Wissenschaft, Zunz averred, that could "distinguish among the old and useful, the obsolete and harmful, and the new and desirable" (Mendes-Flohr and Reinhartz 1980, p. 197).

From its inception, Wissenschaft des Judentums marked the intersection of competing impulses and influences. The explicit desire to seal the canon of Hebrew literature stood in tension with the implicit aim of revitalizing Judaism for the present. These competing impulses created a divided personality for the Verein, whose members belonged to a generation nervously approaching an intellectual and existential crossroad. The members of the Verein were, after all, children of the Enlightenment who faithfully believed that Judaism was – and must be acknowledged as – a vital constituent of European civilization (Ucko 1967, p. 320). But their Enlightenment-inspired ecumenism (and the resulting apologia) did not wholly consume the Verein scholars. Chronologically and temperamentally, they were situated in a decidedly Romanticist era. Non-Jewish contemporaries, inspired by the example of J. G. Herder and J. Fichte, strove to grasp the essence of the German Volkgeist. This quest for a unique national spirit acquired depth through historicism, a perspective which emphasized the dynamic

development of an individual historical organism. Those "children of the Enlightenment" who founded the Verein came of intellectual age just as this Romanticist historicism was taking root. Reflecting the imprint of the broader milieu, some spoke of the need to define the unique inner spirit and cultural heritage of the Jewish nation (Ucko 1967, p. 328). That is not to say that they, or German Jews generally, were precocious proponents of an independent Jewish nation-state. Politically, they continued to profess loyalty to Germany. And intellectually, Verein members envisaged a Jewish culture which fitted seamlessly into European society (Meyer 1967, p. 165).

But the stamp of Romanticism was clearly visible. Even Gershom Scholem, a fierce critic of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, noted with begrudging admiration that Leopold Zunz's programmatic statement of 1818 demonstrated "a new attitude to the past, a celebration of the splendor and glory of the past in and of itself, an evaluation of sources in a new light . . . and above all – a turn to the study of the people and nation."⁴

Zunz was especially committed to studying the literary past of the Jewish nation, for that past could serve as a "gateway to a comprehensive knowledge of the course of its [i.e., the nation's] culture throughout the ages" (Mendes-Flohr and Reinhartz 1980, p. 198). Notable here is the search for holism, for comprehensive knowledge of the historical-cultural organism. This search informed the very notion of *Wissenschaft* which reigned in Germany in the early nineteenth century. An encyclopedia article from 1820 defined *Wissenschaft* as "the embodiment of knowledge systematically united into a Whole, in contrast to a mere aggregate" (*Allgemeine deutsche Real-Encyclopädie* 1820, p. 761).

In fact, the aspiration for holism has a rich pedigree in modern German thought, receiving an important early formulation in Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment*. Later, in the writings of Herder and Fichte, the search for holism became closely associated with the Romanticist mission of identifying an organic *Volksgeist*. By the second decade of the nineteenth century, the idea of the whole, animated by an absolute spirit, had become the province of G. W. F. Hegel. In this period, Hegel's influence was rapidly spreading throughout the German academic world, reaching Jewish intellectual circles such as the Verein. Eduard Gans, an exceptional young legal historian and guiding force behind the Verein, sought to replicate in his work "the simple and grand architectonic of a deeply-rooted edifice" which anchored Hegel's notion of *Wissenschaft*.⁵ As a confirmed disciple of Hegel, Gans also sought to apply the master's model of historical dialectics to recent Jewish history. Thus, for Gans, the Jewish Enlightenment (*Haskalah*) was an antithetical response to a traditional Judaism whose animating

ideal had been lost. But in its own antithetical excess, the *Haskalah* offered up only "scorn and disdain for the traditional without taking pains to give that empty abstraction another content" (Meyer 1967, p. 167). Though he offered this criticism of the *Haskalah* antithesis, Gans failed to provide a synthetic response, in large measure because he seemed to share Hegel's own intuition that Judaism was incapable of spiritual vitality.

Curiously, Gans' most memorable epitaph for Judaism is also one of the most enigmatic prescriptions for Jewish existence in modern times. In an address to the Verein membership in 1822, Gans expressed the hope, through a bewildering metaphor, that Jews "live on as the river lives on in the ocean" (Mendes-Flohr and Reinhartz 1980, p. 192). If his subsequent life path be seen as commentary, then this cryptic statement should be read as a call for full social and cultural integration. For only a few years after serving as president of the Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden, Gans chose the ultimate path of integration. In 1825, he converted to Protestantism, thereby overcoming the chief obstacle to a regular professorial appointment in Germany.

A more affirmative Jewish adaptation of Hegel came from another Verein member, Immanuel Wolf, in his 1822 essay, "On the Concept of a *Wissenschaft des Judentums*." Along with Zunz's 1818 manifesto, Wolf's essay provided an intellectual foundation for the incipient *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. Notwithstanding the fact that both extolled the virtues of *Wissenschaft*, the men who authored the two programmatic statements had little in common. Zunz was a careful and methodical scholar who came to be regarded as one of the founding fathers of modern Jewish scholarship. Though he briefly studied with Hegel at Berlin, he deliberately eschewed Hegelian teleology in favor of a more mundane empirical method. Indeed, his formative scholarly training came not in philosophy but rather in classical philology at Berlin under August Boeckh and F. A. Wolf.

By contrast, Immanuel Wolf was a man of limited training and skill, according to what little is known of him. His scholarly résumé effectively begins and ends with the 1822 essay. Still, the essay has importance beyond Wolf's career. First, it signals the absorption of an Hegelian framework and vocabulary into the Verein circle. The quest for holism, so ubiquitous in German intellectual circles of the day, was everywhere evident. *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, Wolf declared, must capture "the systematic unfolding and representation of its object in its whole sweep" (Wolf 1822, p. 17). The object to be represented was Judaism, whose controlling idea was the unity of God. Wolf borrowed the Hegelian dialectical apparatus to argue that this grand idea had struggled with, and ultimately transcended, the material form of a

nation to persist as a vibrant spiritual force. It was now the task of Wissenschaft to comprehend this grand idea.

Apart from its absorption of Hegelian idealism, Wolf's essay is important for exposing the competing impulses mentioned earlier as constitutive of modern Jewish scholarship. On one hand, Wolf believed it imperative to develop a scholarship that "is alone above the partisanship, passions, and prejudices of the base life, for its aim is truth" (Wolf 1822, p. 23). On the other hand, he regarded Wissenschaft as the "characteristic attitude of our time," a method and language which Jews must acquire in order to render themselves fit for the modern age. Wissenschaft was both purely scientific and instrumental, both critical method and medium of self-definition. These overlapping sets of functions emanated from a larger pair of aspirations underlying modern Jewish existence: the desire to attain intellectual (and professional) validation through appeal to non-Jewish standards; and the desire to reshape, without altogether obliterating, the visage of traditional Judaism.

Although Immanuel Wolf's text is one of the earliest and clearest articulations of these dual values, it is hardly the only one. The poles of Wissenschaft, as science and as source of identity formation, served as boundary markers for the generation of Wolf and Zunz, and have continued to do so for every subsequent generation of Jewish scholars. In light of this, one is surprised to discover the steadfast unwillingness of Jewish scholars to mediate between the poles, to recognize the fundamental tension between them, to undermine the sacred claim to *reine Wissenschaft*. But so powerful has been the guiding rhetoric of scientific objectivity as to repress any acknowledgement of tension. Indeed, acknowledgement of tension might yield an acknowledgement of prejudice.⁶ And, for Jewish scholars, the price of such an acknowledgement has been too high to pay.

Why has the price been perceived to be too high? Part of the answer surely lies in the question of institutional power. Unlike contemporaneous non-Jewish scholars, German Jewish researchers desperately craved, but never achieved, privileged positions in a state-sponsored university system. They were not offered professorial appointments nor was their field of study introduced in the university curriculum. Despite this lack of acceptance by the German university system, Jewish scholars rarely wavered in their adherence to the ultimate standard of German (and gentile) validation: Wissenschaft. For them, Wissenschaft was more than scholarly method; it was an instrument of power through which to achieve social and intellectual acceptance. To question the utility or composition of this instrument was to diminish the capacity to reshape Judaism and, hence, block full entrance to German society.

The relationship of German Jewish scholars to institutional power mirrored the position of the broader German Jewish community in the nineteenth century. Initially encouraged by the promise of Emancipation, German Jews soon encountered formal and informal obstacles in their path. Their response was not wholesale self-abnegation but rather the construction of an identity and communal structure parallel to those of the surrounding gentile society. As David Sorkin has persuasively argued, Jews from the late eighteenth century formed a Jewish "subculture" which served as the primary repository of their group identity. This subculture offered a circumscribed public sphere where Jews could engage in activities from which they were excluded in the surrounding non-Jewish society (Sorkin 1988, pp. 5-6).

The realm of scholarship offers an illuminating example of this structural and psychological mechanism. Trained in German universities, but prevented from teaching in them, Jewish scholars faced professional and intellectual marginalization. In the first stage of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, commencing with the establishment of the Verein, Jewish scholars operated without institutional support for their research. Leopold Zunz, for example, led a peripatetic existence through his forties, unable to find stable and satisfying employment. The most secure job he was able to hold, for a period of some twelve years, was as director of a Jewish teachers' seminary in Berlin. Similarly, Zunz's childhood friend and classmate I. M. Jost supported himself as a teacher and director of various high schools in Frankfurt. Even without stable employment or subvention for research, Zunz and Jost undertook monumental scholarly labors in their early careers. Zunz produced a major study of the history of Jewish homiletics, *Die gottesdienstliche Vorträge der Juden*; Jost, meanwhile, published a nine-volume history of the Jews, *Geschichte der Israeliten*, from 1820 to 1828. These efforts went far toward fulfilling Zunz's programmatic call for "sundry and good preliminary works," expansive syntheses which "take upon themselves to describe the literature of hundreds, even thousands of years" (Mendes-Flohr and Reinhartz 1980, pp. 197-8). But they did not rest upon nor hasten the prospects of financial or institutional support from German universities. Instead, Jewish scholars of this era were pushed, through benign neglect or malicious intent, to the periphery of the German academic culture.

What concluded this first, one might say heroic, phase of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* was the creation of a modern rabbinical seminary in Breslau in 1854. The opening of the Breslau seminary not only addressed the growing demands for a modern, professionalized rabbinate in Germany. It also inaugurated a new era of institutional support for Jewish scholarship. Several decades later, two other seminaries, the Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums and the Orthodox

Rabbinerseminar, were opened in Berlin. They too emerged as centers of Jewish scholarly research and teaching. Nevertheless, several ironies regarding this process of institutionalization warrant elaboration. First, though the seminaries did provide a new home for critical research, they could employ only a fraction of the pool of qualified, university-trained Jewish scholars. Moreover, some of the most prominent Jewish scholars of the time, such as Leopold Zunz and the bibliographer Moritz Steinschneider, refused to accept appointments to the seminaries. Their opposition stemmed from the fear, as Steinschneider put it, that the seminaries would become "the new ghetto for Jewish scholarship" (Baron 1950, pp. 101-2). But this fear related to an even larger irony. The relegation of Jewish scholarship to rabbinical seminaries confirmed the circumscription of Jewish identity to the private or domestic sphere of religion. In the post-Enlightenment world, there were strong social pressures on Jews to regard their religion as a private confession of faith rather than as an all-embracing guide to social conduct.

The expected benefits of this privatization of religion – rapid integration into the majority culture – did not materialize instantly. To compensate for the unfulfilled promise, German Jews developed institutions within their subculture which simulated those in the surrounding society. For example, the rabbinical seminaries became institutions of higher learning, quasi-universities, where Jewish scholars could pursue their research interests.⁷ In this regard, the seminaries created and inhabited a kind of *Jewish* public sphere (Habermas 1989, p. 72). Simultaneously, they symbolized, in paradoxical fashion, the privatization of Jewish identity. For one of their primary missions was to train a new breed of rabbis to cater to the diminishing religious demands of German Jews and, at least in part, to facilitate the accommodation of Judaism to modern German culture.

Straddling public and private domains, vocational and more purely academic functions, the seminaries manifested some of the central tensions of Wissenschaft des Judentums and German Jewish identity in the nineteenth century. To be sure, the three did not do so in identical fashion. In fact, each was home to a competing interpretation of, and a different denominational strain in, German Judaism. The first seminary in Breslau arose as an attempt to lift Jews out of the "currently wretched inner condition of Judaism" (Brann 1904, Appendix 1: i/iii). Toward that end, the founders of this seminary felt it necessary to reconcile the extremes of Jewish religious expression in their day – on one hand, a narrow-minded traditionalism which countenanced no historical inquiry or developmental perspective of Judaism, and, on the other, an increasingly bold Reform movement which advocated large-scale changes in Jewish ritual practice, as well as a model of a dynamically-evolving Judaism. The Breslau founders attempted to forge a

middle ground which preserved a reverential attitude to the tradition, and still integrated critical modes of historical analysis. The foremost adepts of this "positive-historical" approach were the seminary's first director, Zacharias Frankel, and its first professor of Jewish history, Heinrich Graetz, whose eleven-volume history of the Jews represents one of the great achievements in nineteenth-century Jewish historiography.

With Breslau as the center of the new positive-historical movement, two competing institutions were established in Berlin in the 1870s to propagate alternative religious-ideological visions. The Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums was an institution whose very name was intended to evoke the exalted standards of a German academic institution; however, it was also the home of a Reform rabbinical seminary. It is no coincidence that the Hochschule hired, in the last years of his life, Abraham Geiger, the most distinguished Reform rabbi and scholar of his day. Geiger's research generated the image of an historical Judaism which had passed through various phases of development, most recently from an age of "rigid legalism" to one of emancipation and enlightenment (Wiener 1962, p. 168). His unabashed willingness to expose Judaism to critical analysis bespoke a spirit of free inquiry which inspired the Hochschule, and animated Reform innovations in Jewish theology and ritual.

The balance between free inquiry and religious devotion was quite different at the third major rabbinical seminary in Germany, the Rabbinerseminar founded by Rabbi Esriel Hildesheimer. According to Hildesheimer, the primary objective of the seminary was not a critical appreciation of Judaism in its historical development, but rather the "advancement of religious life" based on "knowledge of Biblical and Talmudic literature" (*Jahresbericht* 1873-4, p. 59). Its faculty consisted of eminent Orthodox rabbi-scholars such as David Zvi Hoffmann, Abraham Berliner, and Jakob Barth who instructed a scrupulously observant, "Torah-true" student body.

Separated by their respective ideological visions, the three seminaries emerged as competitors in a struggle to define the contours of German Judaism in the late nineteenth century. Consequently, it can be concluded that the institutionalization of Wissenschaft des Judentums in the seminaries did not yield a monolithic definition of Judaism. And yet, there were common features among them. For instance, the curricula of the seminaries were remarkably similar, emphasizing Talmud and rabbinic codes, Bible and medieval commentaries, and Hebrew and Aramaic languages. But an even most pervasive commonality must be noted. While there may have been differences in the degree of appreciation, scholars at all three seminaries professed allegiance to Wissenschaft. Ismar Schorsch has observed that, even at the Orthodox

Rabbinerseminar, the critical historical approach which anchored wissenschaftlich method was applied "no less assiduously than at Breslau or the Hochschule" (Schorsch 1975, p. 11). And indeed Esiel Hildesheimer insisted that the seminary's students be well acquainted with this scientific method (Ellenson and Jacobs 1988, p. 27). Wissenschaft had become the ubiquitous language of exchange (and polemic) among German Jewish scholars – from the Reform to the Orthodox extremes. This ubiquity also attested to the global predicament of Jewish scholars vis-à-vis the German academic establishment. Though they occupied an academic world of their own, the Jewish scholars remained university professors manqués. Lacking formal institutional acceptance, they turned again and again to Wissenschaft in the hope of demonstrating their scholarly merit, and achieving ultimate social validation.

The reliance on Wissenschaft sustained a pervasive discourse of objectivity in nineteenth-century Jewish scholarship. At the same time, another connotation of Wissenschaft, as a disciplinary whole, underwent an important transformation. There can be little doubt that the work of figures such as Frankel, Graetz, Geiger, and Hoffmann reprised the monumental scope and erudition of the Verein generation. Yet, those whom they trained in the seminaries eschewed the holism of the earlier generation, a development which had strong parallels in broader German historiographical circles (Iggers 1983, p. 131). This younger generation devoted itself not to massive syntheses but to smaller projects such as critical editions of classical religious texts. In the words of one observer, Jewish scholarship by late century had become "Kleinarbeit", research of extremely modest scope and aim (Elbogen 1922, p. 17).

Closely related to this narrowing topical focus was a concerted effort by turn-of-the-century Jewish scholars to introduce new methodologies, to expand inquiry beyond the predominant interest in philological and literary analysis to the study of social, economic, urban, and legal history. The twin effects of a narrowed focus and methodological expansion point to a new professionalization (and fragmentation) in the institutional phase of Wissenschaft des Judentums.

It is curious that a new professional ethos developed in rabbinical seminaries. It is especially curious given that one effect of the new professionalism was to forswear any instrumental function for Jewish scholarly activity. Evidence of this effect comes from Sigmund Maybaum, a professor at the Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums in Berlin from the late nineteenth century. In 1907, Maybaum declared:

Wissenschaft des Judentums is, above all, not a Jewish Wissenschaft. . . . The subject stands opposite the object with

so little consciousness of, or connection to, his Jewishness that we can not speak of a Jewish Wissenschaft or Jewish art. On the contrary, so much depends on the object that Wissenschaft des Judentums can be cultivated and advanced by non-Jews.

Maybaum 1907, p. 643

These remarks reflect a new consciousness that the dual functions of Wissenschaft, as science and as agent of Jewish self-definition, could no longer coexist. Intuitively aware of the tension between these two features, Maybaum sought to resolve it. In his view, scholarship, even in a seminary, could not serve as the tool of denominational partisanship. Wissenschaft des Judentums was to be a purely academic pursuit, as legitimately the domain of the non-Jew as of the Jew.

The institutional phase of Wissenschaft des Judentums, commencing in the mid nineteenth century, was marked by the growing specialization, fragmentation, and methodological expansion of Jewish scholarship. By the early twentieth century, some important Jewish thinkers had begun to call attention to the deficiencies of these processes. The most distinguished among them were neither historians nor philologists but rather philosophers with a deep concern over the use and abuse of historical method: Hermann Cohen and Franz Rosenzweig. Both thinkers had become disenchanted with the dispassionate and detached nature of Wissenschaft des Judentums in their day. Cohen, for instance, took a position in complete opposition to Sigmund Maybaum. The study of Judaism, he maintained in 1907, could "only be treated scientifically [wissenschaftlich] by one who belongs to it with inner piety" (Cohen 1907, p. 12). His aim was to encourage Jewish scholars to re-establish an intimate bond between their scholarly and spiritual interests. Franz Rosenzweig, Cohen's one-time student at the Berlin Hochschule, shared this aspiration. In 1917, Rosenzweig wrote a long letter to Cohen in which he called for the creation of an Academy for Jewish Scholarship (Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums) in Berlin. This institution would employ a cadre of one hundred and fifty teacher-scholars who would divide their time between pure research and communal service (Rosenzweig 1918, pp. 23-4).

Rosenzweig's proposal emanated from the same sense of dissatisfaction which Cohen earlier expressed toward Jewish scholarship. Both men favored a conscious acknowledgement of the link between academic pursuits and spiritual concerns in Wissenschaft des Judentums. Only through such an acknowledgement, they believed, could the full constructive potential of Jewish scholarship, as a vitalizing force of Judaism, be realized. Their call was for an unapologetic recognition of the instrumental value of Jewish scholarship – a value which had

been present from the time of the Verein in the early nineteenth century, though only episodically articulated in explicit fashion.

The antidote which Cohen and Rosenzweig proposed for the malaise of Jewish scholarship was the Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums, which was formally established in 1919. Very quickly, this institution assumed a direction quite different from that imagined by Cohen or Rosenzweig; it became an institution of pure scholarly research (Myers 1992, p. 121). Notwithstanding this paradoxical development (which, incidentally, attests to the staying power of Wissenschaft qua science), Cohen's and Rosenzweig's criticism serves as a fitting culmination to a century of Jewish scholarship. Like the Verein generation, they felt a certain anxiety over the fate of Judaism in their day, an anxiety which they hoped could be ameliorated through a vital, holistic Wissenschaft des Judentums. But, unlike the first generation of researchers, Cohen and Rosenzweig also felt antipathy toward an historical method which contextualized and, to their minds, atomized Judaism. It was precisely this historicization of Judaism which led another prominent Jewish scholar of this century, Salo Baron, to call Wissenschaft des Judentums "the richest Jewish movement of the nineteenth century" (Baron 1937, p. 218).

In a way, both of these opposing perspectives bear elements of truth. Both Cohen and Rosenzweig, on one hand, and Baron, on the other, apprehended that Jewish scholars in the nineteenth century held loyalties to different masters. Divided between a commitment to redefining and reviving Judaism and obedience to scientific discipline, these scholars took refuge in the realm of Wissenschaft. Their significance is not limited to the annals of arcane scholarship. For they embody the tensions between centrifugal and centripetal impulses, between inner spiritual fulfillment and external social validation, that shaped the complex historical experience of modern German Jewry at large.

NOTES

- 1 Leopold Zunz, a founder of Wissenschaft des Judentums, briefly studied history with a leading anti-Jewish publicist, Friedrich Rühs, at the University of Berlin. After one semester, Zunz decided to stop because Rühs "writes against the Jews." Zunz's recollections are quoted in Meyer 1967, p. 158.
- 2 Anxiety over Jewish survival, either physical or spiritual, was hardly a modern innovation. The shattering experience(s) of exile – following the demise of the First and Second Temples and the expulsion from Spain (a kind of double exile) – engendered deep anxiety over the prospects of a continued existence for the Jewish people. In each of these generations, anxiety yielded creative reformulations of Judaism (such as Babylonian Judaism, rabbinism, Lurianic kabbalah, etc.).

- 3 See Frankel's statement in Appendix 1 of Brann 1904, p. i.
- 4 While noting these exemplary Romanticist features, Scholem maintained in 1944 that Zunz's program ultimately failed; it was the product of an assimilationist and apologetic generation, and not sufficiently devoted to "the building of the Jewish nation." See Scholem 1979, p. 156.
- 5 Gans acknowledged this desire in his foreword to a volume of Hegel's writings. G. W. F. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts, oder Naturrecht und Staatswissenschaft im Grundrisse* (Berlin, 1840), p. vi, quoted in Reissner 1965, p. 59. More generally on Hegel's influence, see Wallach 1959, pp. 10–16.
- 6 Hans-Georg Gadamer argues that "[w]e must raise to a conscious level the prejudices which govern understanding," especially historical understanding. Gadamer 1979, p. 156.
- 7 The three seminaries did insist that students undertake studies at a German university leading toward a doctorate. Thus, professional scholarly training, especially in critical historical method, was also acquired in the universities. However, it was only in the seminaries that a student received broad and deep exposure to the classical sources of Jewish literature and history.

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CHAPTER 29

Samson Raphael Hirsch

Harry Lesser



Blessed be God, who in His wisdom created Kant.

Isaac Breuer (grandson of Hirsch)¹

Samson (ben) Raphael Hirsch (1808-88, chief rabbi of Oldenburg) was one of the main defenders of Orthodoxy in Germany in the nineteenth century. He took very seriously the critique provided by Reformers, and argued that on the contrary there was no need for a reform of religion, only of the Jews who constituted it. He opposed the separation of Orthodox and Reform Judaism, but came reluctantly to regard it as inevitable. Although he was a staunch defender of Orthodoxy he was by no means an enemy of secular subjects as part of the education of Jews, and also advocated the use of Hebrew as a means of communication between Jews in the Diaspora. In many ways he is the founder of that form of Orthodoxy which seeks to reconcile the letter of the law with the possibility of living a modern life, and as such he has been very influential.

The first question to be considered is whether it is appropriate to regard Hirsch as a philosopher. Certainly he was not a theologian: his concern was with Torah, with law and observance, and "nothing could be more senseless . . . than to call the Torah 'theology'" (quoted in Grunfeld's introduction, 1962, p. xlix). Indeed, Hirsch has, either implicitly or explicitly, five arguments against either trying to do theology or regarding Torah study as theological. These are first, that theology as a systematic science is, like any other transcendent metaphysics, impossible; second, that human thoughts about God are necessarily vastly inferior to divinely revealed legislation; third, that theology, unlike Torah, has no relevance to our practical duty; fourth, that the way to come to know God is to study his thoughts, not human thoughts; fifth, that to call Torah "theology" would imply that it was the province of study of a special group of theologians, rather than