

# THE STATE OF JEWISH POLITICAL STUDIES: WHERE WE ARE, WHAT WE HAVE ACHIEVED, AND WHAT WE HAVE NEGLECTED — AFTER 30 YEARS

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*Thirty years after its beginning as a systematic field, Jewish political studies has succeeded in drawing attention to its subject matter and in bringing a small but highly competent group of scholars to consider that subject matter. We have established courses in over 25 institutions of higher learning, we have produced a quality list of publications — books, monographs, and articles, and a journal for the field. We have developed institutionalized venues for coming together and we have gained recognition by our colleagues. At the same time we have not succeeded in building the kind of academic institutional base as such that can be sure to guarantee Jewish political studies a continuing place on the academic scene as a separate field. We need to attract more researchers, teachers, and students, and to make Jewish political studies an essential part of the Jewish studies curriculum. To do this we need to capitalize on the interest shown in certain topics by the wider Jewish public such as the interest in Judaism and democracy, Israel-diaspora relations, or the government and politics of the State of Israel.*

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## Introduction

In 1664 the fledgling Jewish community in London, K.K. Saar Asamaim, consisting of Spanish and Portuguese *conversos* who had returned to Judaism, drew up and adopted *escamot* for their community. In true constitutional style, the document opened with a preamble.

Experience has shown that it is a necessary thing in all republics and nations to have statutes wherewith to be governed; and as all follow the example of our nation's government, and since in all the communities of Israel *escamot* are instituted in order to govern, and seeing that it is our obligation to imitate our ancestors...we have instituted the following *escamot*.<sup>1</sup>

The document continued with forty-two articles in Portuguese, concluding with the Hebrew "*hiscamti' kiyamti kol hakatuv l'ayil hen siyagim hen gezerot nahash v'zulatam laavor aleihem vekayam,*" signed by Yaakov Sasportas, Dayan, Samech-Tet, and the seventeen *parnasim* of the community of 228.

There are those who have commented on these *escamot* to the effect that they were designed to reflect the political philosophical climate of mid-seventeenth century England, a time of political and philosophic revolutions that led to modern ideas of republicanism and civil society. That is so, no doubt, but there is much more to this document. To begin with, *escamot*, which can be translated by the technical term "articles of agreement," is a corruption of the Hebrew *haskamot*, which, strictly speaking, means agreements. Historically, for at least 700 years prior to 1664, the term was used for constitutional articles of this kind, what in the Ashkenazi world were referred to as *takkanot hakahal*, implicitly or explicitly describing the process of drawing up and identifying those articles as much as the articles themselves.

In her studies of the subject, Miriam Bodian has shown that the London community drew upon the *escamot* of the Amsterdam community of Spanish and Portuguese Jews founded earlier in the seventeenth century, which in turn had drawn upon the even older community in Venice.<sup>2</sup> No doubt the form is even older. One can see the resemblances between this seventeenth century formulation and the much earlier medieval formulation in the *Sefer haShetarot* of Judah HaBarceloni (eleventh century).<sup>3</sup> Those eleventh century documents, says Yochanan Muffs, are derived from much earlier documents, some dating back to ancient Mesopotamia of 4,000 years ago.

The preamble asserts implicitly or explicitly the community's underlying understanding of Jewish self-government, namely, that the Jews are a nation, albeit in exile; that their institutions are republican; and that their governance is to be instituted by consent of the governed. These were the ideas that were very powerful in the England of the time, but for these Portuguese Jews who were well acquainted with the writings and public discussions of the Protestant world around them, it was understood that these were ideas derived in whole or part from the Hebrew scriptures and the Jewish political tradition.

Bodian, who places great emphasis on the influence of the English environment at the time, also sees it as ironic that this effort to establish the Jewish nation in the British Isles within the republican ideology of the times actually served to establish the institutional framework that helped the Jews assimilate into the modern emancipated world and thereby lose their separate political powers as a community. With the loss of those powers coming at the very onset of the modern epoch, when modern Jewish scholarship was born, came the loss of the sense of the Jewish political tradition on the part of scholars as well, perhaps even more than on the part of the Jewish public of the time. Since it is only in modern times that differentiated fields of Jewish scholarship appeared, it was not surprising, then, that Jewish political studies was neglected as a field and such attention as was paid to Jewish self-government and political life was confined to the field of Jewish history.

It was not until the founding of the State of Israel that the issue of Jewish political studies was even raised in the scholarly community. True, Jewish communal organization had persisted in the intervening years in one form or another, often disguised in its form and intent. "The Jewish Question" had been on the international agenda since the Congress of Vienna in 1815 and Zionism had produced a political polemic and action on behalf of Jewish nationalism from the mid-nineteenth century onward.

Jewish philosophy, on the other hand, had increasingly abjured the political, especially in Germany where modern Jewish philosophy found its major early expression. This abjuration began with Mendelsohn's *Jerusalem*, a very political book that described the Jewish people in political terms in order to reject that traditional definition on behalf of a new one more suited to the age of Emancipation.<sup>4</sup> Even Orthodox Jewish thinkers such as Samson Raphael Hirsch managed to write about and advocate a depoliticized Judaism that would allow the most Orthodox Jews to be Germans of the Mosaic persuasion.<sup>5</sup> By the early twentieth

century, Hermann Cohen and Franz Rosenzweig, the two giants of German Jewish philosophy, had managed to spiritualize Judaism entirely in their works and no doubt in their minds.<sup>6</sup>

There were counter-currents, even in Germany where the founding of Agudath Israel in 1912 implicitly or explicitly involved a revival of the classic forms of the Jewish political tradition,<sup>7</sup> and the writings of Rabbi Haim Hirschensohn provided a basis for reestablishing the Jewish state within a *halakhic* framework and fully within the Jewish political tradition.<sup>8</sup> However, they were outside the mainstream of Jewish thought and scholarship.

All this was aided and abetted by the modern reformulation of what could be considered political after the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. Politics was redefined as having to do solely with politically sovereign states and the Westphalian state system. The true (and for most the only) subject of politics and its study became states and all that happened to them. All other forms of political organization and expression were excluded from political study. Thus, it took the reestablishment of the State of Israel to renew consciousness of the political dimension of Jewish life. Once the state was established, there were those who could see themselves as studying Jewish political issues by studying Israeli government politics.

In another irony, the establishment of the state in 1948 coincided with the ending of the modern epoch and the beginning of a postmodern one, two of whose major characteristics were decolonization and a revising of attitudes on racism and non-European peoples. These, in turn, led to a rediscovery of the importance of the political in institutional frameworks other than the Westphalian state and the beginning of a revision of the definition of what constituted the proper subject for political study. For some Jewish political scientists and specialists in Jewish studies, this led to a rethinking of the question of Judaism, the Jewish people, and the political. They were assisted in their efforts by such diverse factors as the application of the new critical methods of scholarship to the study of the Talmud and rabbinic Judaism, the not explicitly formulated but still barely disguised political dimensions of the thought of modernists such as Mordecai M. Kaplan with his ideas of Jewish peoplehood, and the rediscovery of the covenantal basis of Judaism by younger Jewish theologians in the United States in the 1950s and early 1960s.

## **The Birth of Jewish Political Studies as a Field**

We can trace the birth of Jewish political studies as an academic field to the year 5729 (1968-1969). My apologies for the personal tone of what follows, but since I am describing events in which I was involved, I can only describe them as I understand they occurred. I believe that I was the first to apply the term “Jewish political studies” in a systematic way to describing it a field of inquiry. I was brought to do so by a convergence of activities and events.

I had begun exploring Jewish community organization much earlier, in the early 1950s, at approximately the same time that I became a systematic student of federalism. Early on, I came to recognize the connection between covenant and federalism (federal is from the Latin *foedus* meaning covenant). Indeed, my first published discussion of the issue came in 1954 with the publication of a digest of a lecture that I gave at the Washington University Hillel Foundation that year when I was a graduate student at the University of Chicago.

Through both my general and Jewish studies, as I studied the origins of the United States from the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation and the seventeenth century revolution in political thought, and as I continued my Jewish studies at the College of Jewish Studies in Chicago and with Rabbis Ira Eisenstein and Mordecai Kaplan, his father-in-law, while Eisenstein was the rabbi at Anshe Emet Synagogue in the city, patterns began to emerge. My growing closeness to Leo Strauss brought me to an understanding that there was serious Jewish political thought in traditional sources, and my involvement in Jewish communal affairs brought me to understand not only the politics of Jewish communal life but also the special form which those politics, and the institutions through which they are conducted, took.

I began lecturing and publishing on the subject matter of Jewish political life, although not as yet on the subject of Jewish political studies as a comprehensive whole. In 1967, I was asked by Milton Himmelfarb, then co-editor of the *American Jewish Yearbook*, to prepare a bibliographic article covering residual categories of historical and social scientific materials on the Jewish people that had been published in 1966 and 1967. I reformulated his request as an article on the literature of Jewish public affairs in those years. In it I set out a systematic, informative delineation of the subject matter of the field and why Jewish life could and should be studied in political terms, identifying and discussing

works prepared for other fields that dealt with those themes in a serious way.<sup>9</sup>

At about the same time I was asked by John Slawson, then at the head of the American Jewish Committee, to be part of a task force on American Jewish life and to write a piece on the organization and functioning of the American Jewish community.<sup>10</sup> A few months later that same year I was approached by Steven Roth, then head of the Institute for Jewish Affairs of the World Jewish Congress, headquartered in London, to undertake a worldwide study of organized Jewish communities for the IJA. Since I was to be in Israel on sabbatical in any case, it seemed feasible to take on this project as well and it was agreed that I would begin the work by stopping in London and other European centers on my way to Israel to organize it. Then Roth and I planned to meet with Moshe Davis, then head of the Institute for Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University, to enlist their cooperation and, hopefully, support.

When we did meet in Israel, it soon became clear that Professor Davis was interested in cooperating but was unable to provide support beyond a few connections. It also became clear to me that if I continued this project as an individual, I would be caught between those two institutions, so I brought the Center for the Study of Federalism at Temple University which I headed into the group and then proceeded to organize a working consortium of colleagues and graduate students interested in the subject in Israel.

The group included Charles Liebman and Ernest Stock, two close friends with whom I had been discussing issues of Jewish political life for nearly a decade. Both were also doing research in the field. Liebman, who had begun as a student of urban politics at the University of Illinois, had since shifted his interest to studying the Jewish community, but, seeing no political field in which to do so, had been redefining himself as a sociologist even though he continued to teach in political science departments and had come to Israel to join the new Department of Political Studies at Bar-Ilan University. Stock, who had been trained as a journalist and political scientist, in part at the Woodrow Wilson School for Public Affairs at Princeton University, had studied under its head, noted professor of political science Marver Bernstein, who later became President of Brandeis University.

Stock had gone on to work for the Council of Jewish Federations and then settled in Israel to head the United Israel Appeal, Inc., the oversight body established by the American Jewish Federation movement to supervise Jewish Agency expenditure of United Jewish Appeal funds in Israel. Always academically inter-

ested in Jewish public affairs as well, Stock had asked Bernstein years earlier whether it was not possible to make a career as a scholar in that field. Bernstein, who had been a student of my father's in St. Paul in the 1930s and was himself involved in Jewish community activities, replied that "it is not serious enough." When Stock told me that story, I made a quick calculation of the amount of money spent by the organized Jewish community on its institutions and activities, which in those days amounted to hundreds of millions of dollars if not more, and said to him, "that amount of money is serious." He was convinced.

A fourth American-Israeli joined us, Abraham Kessler, a consulting economist who was interested in Jewish public finance in a practical way, having done studies of voluntary Jewish fundraising in Israel and overseas for JAFI and the UIA in the 1950s and 1960s. I hired Hebrew University graduate students Steven Ashheim, originally from South Africa; Miriam Mundstock from Brazil; and Adina Weiss from the United States, to be the project's field workers.

Since we had a very small budget, our methodology was simple. We would use the advantage of being in Israel to interview diaspora Jewish leaders when they came to the country, which they almost all did on a regular basis, and build community reports on a country-by-country basis. That first year we prepared reports on the Jewish communities of South Africa, Belgium, the Scandinavian countries, and the Balkans, along with my study of the United States and the studies I had commissioned in Europe.<sup>11</sup> We developed and used a standard outline based on local politics studies.<sup>12</sup> Simultaneously, the senior scholars undertook studies of selected topics including sources of authority in the Jewish community (Liebman), Jewish public finance (Kessler), the political dynamics of Jewish communal organization (Stock), and patterns of Jewish community organization (Elazar).<sup>13</sup>

Our group met regularly throughout the year and, for the summer of 1969, we organized a session at the World Congress of Jewish Studies on the Study of Jewish Community Organization, the first public session anywhere on Jewish political studies as such. When I returned to the United States, our consortium continued and I sought to expand it. At that time a group of Jewish scholars involved in Jewish studies was seeking to develop and define the overall field of Jewish studies, to bring together the many professors of Jewish studies then newly appointed at universities throughout the United States as a result of the Jewish studies explosion then taking place, and to remove the field from

the elitist and controlling hands of the American Academy for Jewish Research.

We assembled in Boston in December 1969 for what became the founding conference of the Association for Jewish Studies. One of the challenges raised at that meeting was that, while there was a growing amount of academic research in Jewish studies in the United States, there still was very little teaching. In conversations with my Temple colleague, Gerald Blidstein, who was then a professor in the Temple University Department of Religion specializing in rabbinics and Jewish thought, we agreed that we should give a joint seminar in Jewish political studies at Temple.

We did so that next fall (1970), with the first course listed by that title, with the possible exception of a course at the Boston Hebrew College with a similar title launched at the same time. Ours was cross-listed in the political science and religion departments. Many of its students were also students at the new Reconstructionist Rabbinical College pursuing their Ph.Ds, as was then required by the RRC, in the Temple University Religion Department. Among them was Jonathan Woocher, who had been trying to combine his attraction to Jewish studies with his attraction to political science, and was to do so through Jewish political studies, first as a scholar at Brandeis and then in the Jewish public service as the head of the Jewish Education Service of North America (JESNA). Woocher joined our group early on. Many of the others in that seminar also went on to make careers in Jewish life. The materials produced in that seminar were among the first published materials in the emerging field.<sup>14</sup>

Meanwhile, in Israel, Liebman began developing courses in Jewish political studies in the Bar-Ilan Political Studies Department. He was joined by Eliezer Don-Yehiya, then completing his doctorate in Israeli politics at the Hebrew University, who had consulted with me about the full possibilities of Jewish political studies the previous year. Don-Yehiya, who had rabbinical training and *semikha* as well as political science training, began teaching a year-long course in Jewish political thought, while Liebman taught a course in the American Jewish community.

In addition, Liebman was hiring new people to join the political studies faculty. They included including Baruch (Bernard) Susser from Yeshiva University and Ella Belfer from Tel Aviv University, both in political theory; Ilan Grielsammer from the University of Paris, in politics; and Stuart Cohen from Oxford University, in international relations. In addition to their specific fields in political science, all also had strong interests in various aspects of Jewish political and community studies.



By that time I, too, was considering joining the Bar-Ilan faculty, which I did in 1973. By then, Bar-Ilan was clearly the pre-eminent institution in what was becoming Jewish political studies. In addition to those already mentioned, David Vital, the senior member of the department, was developing an interest in contemporary Jewish affairs, and many of the department's junior faculty and graduate students were as well, each in their own way.

In these early years there also was a small group connected to the political science department at Haifa University who had begun to systematically study Jewish political sources in the Bible. Chief among them were Dan Segre, a former Israeli diplomat turned academic, and Avraham Wolfensohn, who had a long and abiding interest in the subject which he was able to activate in combination with Segre. Segre and I developed a close connection and later he joined us as one of the first founders of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs.

Once at Bar-Ilan I took several steps to institutionalize our emerging field. I founded the Workshop in Covenant and the Jewish Political Tradition which met regularly at Bar-Ilan for a number of years and produced a series of working papers on various aspects of Jewish political studies. It continued to be a vehicle for publication of working papers testing new work in the field. Its nucleus consisted of members of the Bar-Ilan Political Studies Department, to which we added others from other universities and fields, and developed a worldwide mailing list of hundreds around the world, Jews and non-Jews, who were interested in our materials.

I also introduced a course in Political Institutions in Judaism which I continued to teach for the next twenty-five years, alternating it with a second course, Issues in Jewish Politics, which I offered during that period. I prepared a reader on Jewish political institutions for that course, at the beginning principally comprised of material by historians and other non-political scientists that dealt with the subject matter of the course, but over time increasingly based on political science material, much of it produced through Bar-Ilan and its workshop.<sup>15</sup>

The department hired Stock on a part-time basis to teach contemporary Jewish political institutions. Don-Yehiya, Grielsammer, and Liebman also added additional Jewish studies courses to their repertoires. We established an undergraduate and graduate subfield in Jewish political studies within the Political Studies Department.

Unfortunately, that specialization did not attract more than a small handful of students, probably being seen as too esoteric for

the very practically-oriented Israeli students who go to university to gain the credentials necessary for them to pursue livelihoods or careers. Indeed, one of the failures of the field in the past thirty years has been the failure to attract significant numbers of students. This, in turn, has limited the teaching opportunities.

In a sense, Jewish political studies today is like Jewish studies as a whole was in 1968. A reasonable amount of research has been and is being undertaken, considerably less is being done in the way of teaching, and the number of students interested in more than an occasional course is very small. Since it soon became apparent to us that few students would declare for Jewish political studies as such, we had better develop other channels as well. Thus, in the Institute of Local Government at Bar-Ilan, which I headed, my colleague, Chaim Kalchheim, instituted a course in Local Government and the Jewish Tradition to help our students satisfy Bar-Ilan's basic Jewish studies requirement which all students must fulfill to earn their degrees. Kalchheim prepared a reader in classic Jewish sources from the Bible and Talmud onward for the students to use.<sup>16</sup> He continues to teach the course himself.

Meanwhile, developments continued in the field beyond Bar-Ilan and Israel. The worldwide Study of Jewish Community Organization continued its work and began to publish its results first as working papers and then primarily through the *Jewish Journal of Sociology* which published the papers from the 1969 World Congress of Jewish Studies. By the end of 1970 studies were being undertaken in all parts of the world. The most significant of these were the SJCO studies of Canadian Jewish communities funded by the Canadian Jewish Congress and directed by Professor Harold Waller of McGill University. All of the organized Jewish communities with more than 1,000 Jews in Canada were studied by researchers in each community. The results were published as working papers by the SJCO — and ultimately were used to prepare a book by Waller and this writer.<sup>17</sup>

The next year, the project severed itself from the Institute for Jewish Affairs and became independent. To house it, the Center for Jewish Community Studies was organized under my direction with my original colleagues and some others including Blidstein, Steven Goldstein of the University of Pennsylvania School of Law (we collaborated on the first study of the legal status of American Jewry<sup>18</sup>), Peter Medding of Monash University in Australia, Segre in Israel, and Waller at McGill among the founding Fellows. The Center was incorporated under the laws of the Commonwealth of

Pennsylvania and gained tax-exempt status as an educational institution.

This early period may have been said to have come to an end when in 1975 the Center, in cooperation with the Institute for Judaism and Contemporary Thought, later the Kotler Institute, collaborated to devote the Institute's annual week long summer workshop to Jewish political studies. That workshop was a landmark including some of the greatest scholars in Jewish studies, including Menachem Elon, Blidstein, Lawrence Berman, S.D. Goitein, Moshe Greenberg, Gerson Cohen, Moshe Weinfeld, and others and some of the then newer scholars such as David Hartman, Liebman, Medding, and Segre. The papers it produced were edited into the founding volume of the field, *Kinship and Consent: The Jewish Political Tradition and Its Contemporary Uses*, originally published in Israel in 1979 in English and a decade later expanded and published in Hebrew, and after still another decade reissued in English, revised and expanded, by Transaction Publishers, to remain the anchor text in the field.<sup>19</sup> This mixture of veteran scholars from various subfields of Jewish studies and the younger scholars who consider themselves in Jewish political studies marked the transition point toward the separation of Jewish political studies as a subfield in its own right. In 1976 a second summer workshop was held, this time directed by Ernest Stock, focusing on Israel and Zionism, to make the transition complete by bringing it full circle.

### **The Second Phase**

In 1976, the Center for Jewish Community Studies became one of the founding pillars of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, a more comprehensive policy studies institute in Israel. CJCS continued to function in the United States as a separate corporation affiliated with the JCPA which served as its Israel branch while it served as JCPA's North American office. From that point onward JCPA took on responsibility for the work of the CJCS through several programs within the new body. These included a continuation of the study of contemporary Jewish communities, the expansion of the systematic study of the Jewish political tradition, the preparation of curriculum material for schools in Israel and the diaspora, and the establishment of an annual summer workshop in Jewish political studies.

The workshop first met in 1980 and then joined with the International Center for the University Teaching of Jewish Civilization

and conducted the workshop within that framework for over a decade before resuming a totally independent existence within the Jerusalem Center. In 1998 we held the seventeenth annual workshop. During this period we have hosted academic participants from some twenty different countries, each workshop focusing on a single topic to stimulate research in all the various aspects of Jewish political studies.

In 1989, JCPA launched the *Jewish Political Studies Review*, a biannual journal to serve the field. It is now completing its twelfth year of publication. We also convened a senior scholars' seminar that met biweekly for four years to study selected political issue in classic Jewish texts. JCPA continued its program and organized sessions at every World Congress of Jewish Studies, at the annual meetings of the Association for Jewish Studies, and, from time to time, at the American Political Science Association as well.

During this second period, the Bar-Ilan Political Studies Department produced two collections of essays on Jewish political studies written by members of the department. Zvi Gitelman of the University of Michigan convened a conference on the subject. Courses in the field were introduced in over twenty institutions of higher learning around the world and various scholars made it the center of their scholarly concerns.

While these developments were taking place in Jewish studies and in political science departments in Israel where Jewish and political studies intersected, important developments were taking place among political scientists in the diaspora, almost all of whom were Jewish. For one reason or another, they developed an interest in the field. Most found their interest focused on the Bible. They included the late Aaron Wildavsky,<sup>20</sup> whose analyses of Moses and Joseph are classics in the political study of the Bible and in the study of leadership generally; Stephen Brams, who applied game theory to the Bible in a series of books;<sup>21</sup> Michael Walzer, who first explored the Puritan use of the Bible for their political purposes and then was attracted by the Hartman Institute to expand his interest in Jewish sources from a political perspective;<sup>22</sup> and Seymour Martin Lipset, whose studies of the American Jewish community have been more sociological than political.<sup>23</sup> There are others who deserve to be mentioned as well. All follow in the footsteps of the great predecessors, Leo Strauss and Hans Kohn, who each in his own way opened the door to the contemporary study of Jewish political ideas, institutions, culture, and behavior.<sup>24</sup>

## **The Results of These Early Developments**

### **Theory-Building**

In the interim, this writer developed the most comprehensive theory of Jewish political life that I know of. It attempts to account for (at least in outline) the character of Jewish nationhood; the republican foundations and orientation of the Jewish people; its covenantal-federal foundations and their manifestations in Jewish political culture, institutions, and behavior, as well as Jewish political thought; the comprehensive character of the constitution of the Jewish polity with its moral, socioeconomic, and frame-of-government expressions; distribution of powers, both within each arena of governance and among them; a historical periodization based upon constitutional change in the Jewish body politic; and issues of leadership, statesmanship, and constitutional architecture.

My colleagues have added to or elaborated on various of the foregoing themes. First and foremost, Stuart Cohen developed and refined our understanding of the distribution of powers.<sup>25</sup> Ella Belfer has examined the problems of a political tradition shaped and informed by theology.<sup>26</sup> Charles S. Liebman has looked at a variety of issues including diaspora community organization, Israel-diaspora relations, dimensions of authority in contemporary Jewish life, and international Jewish political organizations.<sup>27</sup> Jonathan Woocher has looked at the ideology of American Jewish leadership as a political ideology.<sup>28</sup> Gordon Freeman has looked at the links between politics and political and religious expressions in Jewish life and liturgy.<sup>29</sup> Gerald Blidstein has studied political theory in classic rabbinic sources.<sup>30</sup> Mordechai Rotenberg has looked at the political psychological expressions of the covenantal tradition.<sup>31</sup> Eliezer Don-Yehiya has explored Jewish political thought and contemporary Israeli politics.<sup>32</sup> Alan Mittleman has studied modern Jewish institutions from a political perspective.<sup>33</sup> Rela Geffen has explored the constitutional documents and principles of contemporary Jewry.<sup>34</sup>

Other colleagues working on problems of modern and contemporary Jewish life such as Zvi Gitelman, Ezra Mendelson, and Peter Medding introduced useful theoretical ideas or built upon those of others, along with their empirical work.<sup>35</sup> The Hartman Institute has been exploring classic Jewish sources for these political ideas,<sup>36</sup> albeit not necessarily through identifying with Jewish political studies.

In retrospect, I remain satisfied with my own formulations but believe that we need additional theory-building based upon empirical research on matters of Jewish leadership, the relations between the Jewish polity and others, the character and contents of Jewish constitutionalism, and the relationship between *halakhic* and non-*halakhic* dimensions of the Jewish polity, and no doubt in other areas as well. We need to better understand what has changed and what has remained the same in the Jewish political experience over different epochs, particularly between the modern and premodern ones, and we need to strengthen the grounding of Jewish political theory in the realities of Jewish political life rather than following our old practice of basing our theory on our speculations or aspirations alone. Since political theory is designed to guide people in actual political life, we should neither aim too low nor too high in theoretical as well as empirical matters.

## Research

What this suggests is that, despite limitations of personnel, training, and funds, there has been an expansion of Jewish political research in the past thirty years in two ways: more political research being done by Jewish scholars who identify with several different fields in addition to Jewish political studies, and more research formally identified as political research and informed to a greater or lesser degree by the theoretical models of Jewish political studies. Most of this research has been in the realm of Jewish political thought, community studies, research on the government and politics of Israel, the political activities of Jews in modern times, and how Jews both as individuals and as a people have confronted political issues among the nations.

These are all worthy topics in and of themselves, but they omit so much. To give a few examples; we still have no proper lexicon of Jewish political terminology on historic and linguistic principles. We are far from having mined all of the empirical data which we have in our historical sources, whether on community elections or on leadership patterns or as case studies of Jewish political affairs. We have not really connected our work on Jewish political thought with the empirical realities of Jewish political life, either in general or more specifically as to time and place.

We not only suffer from a shortage of researchers and a lack of funding available for research in Jewish political studies but

from the reality that so many of those who go into Jewish political studies as such are concerned with contemporary issues, institutions, and behavior and are not comfortable handling the historic materials that form the substance of so much of Jewish political life. Very often, the people who do study those historical materials do so from the perspectives of other fields and are untrained, generally even unaware, of the light that Jewish political studies can shine upon them. In sum, the gap between modern and contemporary Jewish studies, on one hand, and classical and pre-modern Jewish studies, on the other, remains great and barely bridged.

### **One Example of What Can Be Done**

As many have commented, Jewish tradition is basically a textual tradition and Jewish studies, both traditional and critical, has been overwhelmingly based on the study of texts or matters ancillary to texts. Much of Jewish political studies grows out of modern social science which attempts to study human behavior, not even texts about human behavior. Hence, there is a methodological disjunction in a subdiscipline, one of whose primary characteristics is the fact that it does attempt to account for specific aspects of Jewish tradition, life, and behavior over the entire history of the Jewish people.

Some of us have tried to build such a bridge through the study of the constitutional or foundation documents of modern and contemporary Jewish communities. The assumption is that while, taken alone, these documents may or may not be of significant interest, when many of them are looked at comparatively over time and place, they will reveal much not only about the formal institutions of Jewish governance in various countries, communities, and settings, but also about the nuances and variants among communities within the Jewish political tradition and, with the coming of Emancipation, with the degree to which principles, practices, and terminology of the Jewish political tradition survived and the degree to which the Jews of a particular place adapted to the modern or contemporary environment.

This project, initially born at the time of the bicentennial of the United States constitution to better understand American Jewish adaptations and survivals, turned out to be very successful in combining textual and empirical studies.<sup>37</sup> We have since spread it to all parts of the Jewish world and as far back as the early sixteenth century.<sup>38</sup> These texts are far from being sacred. Still they

can be studied (and taught) as texts, and so better connect Jewish political studies with classical Jewish studies and enable those involved in our subdiscipline to cross a difficult bridge if they wish. This is but one example of previously or hitherto unexplored possibilities.

## **Teaching**

By the end of the second phase, courses in Jewish political studies aside from courses on Israel government and politics were being offered at over twenty universities around the world. However, all of those courses represented the interests of specific professors and none were integral to any curriculum. Although I have not surveyed the field in recent years, my sense is that by now the number of traditional university courses has declined as various professors have retired or moved on to other interests. One has to conclude that the effort to make the straight teaching of Jewish political studies part of the university curriculum either in political science or Jewish studies or both has not met with much success and will continue to exist according to the whims of individual faculty rather than as a subject with planned coverage as is the case now with Israel politics or the American Jewish community, at least in major institutions.

The situation is somewhat better with regard to specialized courses for professional development. In most of the nine schools and programs training Jewish communal service professionals in the United States (there are no other university-connected programs in the world) there is a growing recognition of Jewish political studies as the best Jewish disciplinary base for communal service professionals in the Jewish field. This recognition was stimulated by a four-year program conducted by the schools and the JCPA, funded by the Wexner Foundation, to introduce or improve the teaching of Jewish political studies in that way in those programs. The program involved all of those teaching in the field in those schools working together to find ways and means to do so.

Here, too, however, there is a problem. As in the case with others trained in social science and related fields, few of the instructors feel comfortable with classic or historical materials and hence turn Jewish political studies courses toward contemporary Jewish public policy issues or the study of the institutions of the American and other Jewish communities. At most there are some courses on Israel and Zionism. Even in the program to strengthen



the Jewish political studies component of the curriculum, we found little response to the effort to include pre-twentieth century material, much less pre-eighteenth century. Still, those nine schools and program represent a serious concentration of interest in the field and the only places where teaching this material is an integral part of the curriculum and not merely a matter of instructor preference.<sup>39</sup>

In Israel there has been a very different but somewhat parallel development. The Israeli universities, because of the depth that they have in the study and teaching of Jewish civilization and the much wider audience available to them both inside the university and among the general public, offer many opportunities for teaching Jewish political studies through the various departments with differing subject matter. One finds scholars in Bible, rabbinics, Jewish thought, Jewish history, as well as the social sciences who have notable reputations in subjects related to Jewish political studies and who can and have been drawn upon by those who consider themselves more mainstream in the field to enhance our work. Some have even begun to identify with it in one way or another. Still, interest in Jewish political studies per se has been limited.

While straight Jewish political studies has been considered to be off the map by most Israelis, there is widespread interest today in "Judaism and democracy," an issue very much on the contemporary Israeli agenda. Chairs and programs have been set up at various Israeli universities to deal with the issue of Judaism and democracy. It can hardly be said that as of today those chairs have begun serious teaching or research into the issue including the perspective of Jewish political studies. Quite to the contrary, they seem to have ignored the work dealing precisely with that topic that has gone before and has been so much a part of the rise of the field.

For the most part, the programs associated with those chairs have involved seminars and conferences for the expression of different opinions, in the best case by scholars who have studied Jewish sources which they can then relate to the topic, but most of those discussions not only miss the point with regard to Judaism but also with regard to democracy, maintaining a very narrow and unsophisticated understanding of both. Nevertheless, these chairs offer opportunities that have never before existed to introduce Jewish political studies into the curriculum if they can be properly constructed or in some cases reconstructed.

Parallel to the issue of Judaism and democracy in university studies is the great increase in interest in the question in primary

and secondary education. University schools of education in Israel and the Ministry of Education have been providing funds and human resources for curriculum and program development in the field, but if the situation in university teaching of the subject is bad, what is being done for primary and secondary education is academically atrocious. More often than not it is motivated by one ideology or another so that Jewish-Arab or Israeli-Palestinian relations is often the only component of such programs. In other cases it is ideas of religious pluralism within the Jewish people or relations between ultra-Orthodox and secular that is at the center of attention rather than larger questions of democratic citizenship and self-government and what is needed for them to flourish.

### **Professional Activities**

As a new field, professional activities have been of major importance to recruit and train teachers and researchers for it. Many of those activities have been discussed above. In essence, there have been three centers around which such activities have been concentrated: One is the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs and its diaspora affiliates in Philadelphia, Montreal, Paris, and Buenos Aires, and the Center for Judaic Studies at York University in Toronto, which has a formal link with the JCPA. These have been avowedly oriented towards Jewish political studies as such.

The second is the Institute for Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University which in its broader concern with twentieth century Jewish life has developed a small concentration of scholars in the field of modern Jewish politics. The third is the Bar-Ilan University Department of Political Studies, undoubtedly the largest concentration under one roof of scholars interested in the subject, but increasingly less active in the subject per se and more concerned with some of the subsidiary questions such as Israel-diaspora relations and Judaism and democracy.

There has been no great interest in continuing the early efforts of the JCPA to introduce relevant programs and panels at professional meetings. Consequently, today, with perhaps one exception, where the JCPA does not take the lead, things are not done. The one exception is that at the annual meetings of the Israel Political Science Association there always seems to be one panel that can be associated with Jewish political studies organized by Bar-Ilan faculty.

## Publications

Much the same can be said in the realm of publications. The JCPA has published or sponsored a substantial number of basic books in the field, community studies, and academic studies advancing it, including the *Jewish Political Studies Review*. The Institute for Contemporary Jewry and the Bar-Ilan Department of Political Studies have done so to a much lesser but still significant degree, and sporadically articles that can be said to be related to Jewish political studies appear in other Jewish scholarly journals. Publication of books in the field has become somewhat more difficult — in Israel there is not much interest in the subject except where a specific topic fits some point of wider interest as with regard to Israel and Zionism and Israeli politics which are both integral and peripheral to Jewish political studies. In the United States the presses previously more open to publishing Jewish political materials now find that their market is more oriented toward spiritual and personal growth books. Still, over the past thirty years quite a substantial literature has been developed explicitly for the field aside from the many works written by scholars in other disciplines that contribute to it.<sup>40</sup>

In addition to what might be described as the “mainstream” publications in the field, a number of other scholars have avowedly associated themselves with the field in their research and publications. These include pulpit rabbis such as Sol Berman, David Polish, and Mordechai Waxman; part-time academics such as Martin Sicker; and scholars well-established in other fields such as Seymour Martin Lipset, Michael Walzer, and the late Aaron Wildavsky.

It seems that the only gathering of representatives of all these groups was very near the beginning, at the Kotler Institute conference that led to the publication of *Kinship and Consent*. At that time, key people who later developed these various concentrations were still feeling their way and could be brought together relatively easily for intense discussion. There seems to be little question but that it would be useful periodically to have a venue where representatives of the various schools and approaches already present in the field could come together. The potential venues exist, whether at the World Congress of Jewish Studies or through conferences organized at Bar-Ilan University, but they have not developed in this manner.

## **The Spread and Concentration of Interest**

While at first glance Jewish political studies may seem to be limited in interest to those who are at the intersection between political science and Jewish studies, in fact more interest has been shown beyond that intersection than might have been supposed. In part this is connected to the increasing influence of Leo Strauss and his students in the field of political thought along with the increasing recognition of Strauss as a leading Jewish political thinker. Strauss's great contribution to Jewish political studies was precisely in this intersection. He successfully introduced Maimonides into the general political thought curriculum as a major figure and has brought other medieval and modern Jewish political thinkers to the attention of the general scholarly world. His emphasis on taking premodern, especially medieval, political thought seriously provides a broader intellectual foundation for Jewish political studies, and his own work on Maimonides, Judah Halevi, and Abarbanel is of particular importance to Jewish political studies.<sup>41</sup>

Strauss's influence on the field today can also be seen in the concentration of scholars of Jewish thought who come out of a political philosophy base and who are concerned with Jewish political thought, particularly at the Hebrew University. People such as Zev Harvey and Jeffrey Macy are names that come to mind. Nor can we neglect people who more exclusively define themselves in Jewish political thought but who are drawn to political topics such as Eliezer Schweid and Aviezer Ravitsky.

A very different thrust has come from the Center for the Study of Federalism and the academic circles in North America and elsewhere who have gathered around it. By making the connection between covenant and federalism they have brought some of the subjects of major concern in Jewish political studies to the attention of these wider federalist circles. Particularly successful in this regard has been the Center's Workshop in Covenant and Politics and its Liberty Fund conferences on Freedom and Responsibility. Protestant theologians, particularly from the Reformed tradition, have shown a strong interest in these covenantal federalist ideas.<sup>42</sup>

Finally, some of the publications produced by the various centers of activity in Jewish political studies have been widely purchased for scholarly and classroom use in non-Jewish settings ranging from mainstream universities to Protestant fundamentalist colleges.

### **Where We Stand and Where We Wobble**

Thirty years after its beginning as a systematic field, Jewish political studies has succeeded in drawing attention to its subject matter and in bringing a small but highly competent group of scholars to consider that subject matter. We have established courses in over 25 institutions of higher learning, we have produced a quality list of publications — books, monographs, and articles, and a journal for the field. We have developed institutionalized venues for coming together and we have gained recognition by our colleagues. At the same time we have not succeeded in building the kind of academic institutional base as such that can be sure to guarantee Jewish political studies a continuing place on the academic scene as a separate field. We need to attract more researchers, teachers, and students, and to make our subject matter an essential part of the Jewish studies curriculum as Jewish political studies. To do this we need to capitalize on the interest shown in certain topics by the wider Jewish public such as the interest in Judaism and democracy, Israel-diaspora relations, or the government and politics of the State of Israel and to use them as “hooks” or springboards for the larger issues and concerns of the field. Our failure to do so to date is a sign of weakness, a sign of the inability of those who know the field to make those who occupy critical positions with regard to those issues aware of the possibilities and usefulness of the links.

Aside from these strengths and weaknesses, we have a continuing agenda of studies. I can only mention a few of the items which I see on the immediate agenda of Jewish political studies research and in no particular order.

1. More historical studies by scholars in Jewish political studies, either working alone or in partnership with historians to provide a new or increase our old understanding of Jewish history enriched by the political dimension.
2. More contemporary Jewish studies scholars with a Jewish political studies background or training so that research into contemporary Jewish studies will contain an appropriate concern with the political dimensions of contemporary Jewish life which often are easy to overlook in the post-Emancipation Jewish world but where choosing to be Jewish is becoming more essential and part of that choice has to be political.

3. The introduction of more courses and teaching of Jewish political studies and an exploration of ways in which they can become an organic or institutionalized part of the Jewish studies curriculum.
4. Greater integration of historical and contemporary studies including the development of the empirical and behavioral study of historical materials.
5. Greater integration of textual and empirical studies so that Jewish political studies will have a textual basis appropriate to classic Jewish studies and an empirical basis appropriate to a social scientific study of the Jews.
6. More distinction in our studies between what is Jewish political theory and Jewish political practice, an area which in historical studies has been very confused in the past, with pronouncements by Jewish speculative thinkers or Jewish classic texts treated as if they were descriptions of actual Jewish practice and counter attacks by other scholars that treat historic Jewish political experiences as legends, projections, or, at best, as derivative from others.
7. More studies of Jewish political behavior rather than Jewish political thought and the formal institutions of the Jewish community and polity.
8. Developing constitutional and public law studies from a political science perspective in addition to the work that has been done from legal and *halakhic* perspectives. This could be a most useful exercise given the needs of the Jewish people in our times.
9. Exploration of classic Jewish works and personalities from a political studies perspective.
10. Completing an authoritative lexicon of Jewish political terminology in Hebrew and other basic reference works.

We are entering a new phase in the building of Jewish political studies as a field of inquiry involving scholars with various degrees of academic commitment to it in the common endeavor. That is undoubtedly the way it is and the way it will be for the foreseeable future. Let us hope that we make the best of it.

## Notes

- \* This article was originally prepared for the Conference on “Jewish Politics and Political Leadership in Historical Perspective,” held at Bar-Ilan University, January 4-6, 1999.
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