Yehezkel Kaufmann and the Reinvention of Jewish Biblical Scholarship

Job Y. Jindo, Benjamin D. Sommer, Thomas Staubli (eds.)

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The symposium’s participants on June 11, 2014, from left to right, standing: Eva Tyrell, Thomas Staubli, Israel Knohl, Zivy Zevit, Adrian Schenker, Thomas Krapf; sitting: René Bloch, Othmar Keel, Nili Wazana, Job Jindo, Benjamin Sommer (photo courtesy: Christoph Knoch).
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Ziony ZEVIT

Introduction

On April 2, 1918, Charles C. Torrey delivered the presidential address before the American Oriental Society in New Haven, Connecticut. Half-way through his presentation, he shared the following ideas with those in the room:

I think it will hardly be denied, by those who investigate, that the atmosphere of oriental studies in the last two or three decades has not been favorable to a profound and sympathetic interpretation [emphasis in original] of Orientals and their work. […] A great amount of new material has come to light, and scholarly research has made very important advances in many directions; but the main tendency of the time has been to keep to the surface rather than to go deep.

It has been a singularly barren time for Biblical interpretation of the first rank, for instance. The Old Testament scholarship of Europe, on which we were wont to rely, comes very near being negligible at present. Very few commentaries or other treatises of really large caliber have appeared in the present generation, and most of the output has been of distinctly poor quality. In particular, the German exegesis, which has led the way for all the rest, has been decidedly anti-Semitic, with the result which can be imagined, though it has hardly been understood. […] There has been a remarkable lack of such books as open a new door into the past, giving us a view which we feel to be true and know to be inspiring.  

In the following pages, I suggest that had Yehezkel Kaufmann heard these remarks, he would have agreed whole-heartedly with Torrey’s criticisms and, moreover, would have considered his own work an adequate response to Torrey’s hint at what was required for the redemption of biblical scholarship. Kaufmann’s comprehension of his audience, however, would have been much different than what Torrey had in mind when using the pronoun “we.” Kaufmann’s “we” would not have been a small auditorium filled by orientalists and bibliologists, but all of the Jewish people. Kaufmann was concerned with their history in all times and places and with the content of

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their thought-world. In that context, what he felt to be true and knew to be
inspiring most likely differed significantly from what Torrey thought.

This understanding of Kaufmann informs the three somewhat related
sets of observations that I present below: 1. some sources of Kaufmann’s
central ideas in nineteenth and early twentieth century philosophy, histori-
ography, and nationalistic ideology, 2. the reception of his bibliographical
research by Jewish scholars in the twentieth and early twenty-first centu-
ries, and 3. three of Kaufmann’s ideas worth reconsidering for application
in contemporary research on Israelite belief and religion.

1. Some Sources of Kaufmann’s Major Ideas

1.1. Immanuel Kant

In the beginning was Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), who completed his
doctorate in 1755. Kant’s university studies included heavy doses of geog-
raphy, meteorology, and anthropology. Perhaps, because of his understand-
ing of natural sciences and their methodologies on the one hand, and his
anthropology derived insights into the varieties of worlds of knowledge,
Kant developed into a rationalist with a strong distaste for dogmatic beliefs.
He came to understand the cosmos in terms of Newtonian physics and, in
his dissertation, explained it without reference to God. After considering
the material world that existed outside of and aside from humans, he con-
cluded that this external world was comprehensible to people only through
a consciousness/mind that exists within them. In the course of undertaking
to present his ideas and their implications appropriately, Kant spent much
of his life restructuring philosophy from the vantage point of a reflective,
critical, rational individual. In 1781 he published his major and most fa-
mous work, *Critique of Pure Reason*, a book that presented his ideas about
how the external material world ascertained through senses was perceived
in the conscious mind. In his own words, his book was an investigation of
the “faculty of reason with reference to the cognition to which it strives to
attain without the aid of experience.”

2 Citation from I. Kant, “Preface to the First Edition” in Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure
first into perceptions and then into conceptions. Certain types of conceptions are organized in our minds and give rise to our knowledge of matter, that is, scientific concepts. Different types of concepts are then gathered and organized in a manner enabling humans to understand the outside world.3

There is, however, another world of reality about which we have knowledge whose roots are not in sensual perceptions. Kant describes how knowledge that does not come to us indirectly via our senses, and hence, in some manner, is already inherent in our minds, perceives and interprets that which is real but unconnected to the material world. Religious, ethical, and moral “truths” belong to this second category of things that people know and understand. It is this element in Kant’s philosophical inquiries that finds expression later in Kaufmann’s ideas about Israelite comprehensions of God and of monotheism.

By distinguishing between the two types of reality on what may be considered empirical grounds, Kant provided a philosophical basis for what are commonly understood as the hard sciences. This compelled metaphysicians to rethink the implications of realities known only through imagination.4

One implication of this line of thought is that religious truth-claims cannot be proven by theoretical reasoning based on experiences with or in the material world because such claims do not enter our minds through our senses. Consequently, certain religious truths cannot be overturned by philosophy and certainly not by the physical sciences that deal only with observable, measurable phenomena.

Convinced that his insight provided an Archimedean point from which certain realities could be observed objectively, Kant sounded a clarion call for intellectual emancipation in the Preface to the first edition of Critique of Pure Reason: “Our age is the age of criticism to which everything must be subjected. Religion through its sacredness and legislation through its authority are regarded by many as exempt from it. If exempted, however, they become subject to suspicion and cannot claim […] the respect that reason grants only to that which has stood the test of a free and public examination.” The call, however, was a tad muffled because it was sounded at the end of the first footnote.5

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3 Kant’s philosophical conclusion has been buttressed by biologists working the field of parasitology. See D. Parrochia and P. Neuville, Towards a General Theory of Classifications (Basel: Basel Springer, 2013). 2. Parrochia and Neuville explain concepts as units of thought that have limits in that they extend only so far as to cover all objects to which the concept applies. The content of a concept consists of all the attributes of the objects (p. 33). This semantic definition, useful for classification theory, also works for their above-mentioned description of how parasites know what is good for them.


5 Kant, Preface, 15 n. 1. I have altered Meiklejohn’s translation somewhat for the sake of clarity.
In 1797, Kant published *Metaphysics of Ethics*. He argues in this work that reason is the authority for morality. For acts to be “moral” they must flow from a sense of duty that reason dictates and from an act of will, a conscious determination, to do good or to do right. Actions that begin with adherence to the dictates of external law or social convention are not moral because they are other-directed. He contends that “good” flows only from the will of autonomous individuals, those who think and reason for themselves. A moral act derives from the “categorical imperative” of the mind to which humans respond as if their actions, were they performed universally, would enhance all human life and existence. Consequently, religious truth-claims cannot be proven by abstract notions of morality.\(^6\)

Kant was a heavy stone in the placid pool of premodern philosophy, helping to undermine the medieval synthesis of philosophy and theology that had evolved in Europe over a millennium. Ripples of his work moved through dynamically evolving western European thought, influencing it and changing the way we talk about certain ideas permanently.\(^7\) As a member of the interbellum Jewish intelligentsia and as a student of philosophy in a German speaking country, Kaufmann was familiar with Kant’s work and with the writings of those who developed certain aspects of his thought.

1.2. Disciplines in Tandem during the Nineteenth Century

Kant’s philosophy rose in popularity at the same time that other intellectual changes were occurring in the West. These changes began to define the parameters of an emerging cultural consciousness referred to today as “modernity” that claims to possess an objective understanding of reality.

Critical historiography as taught in Ranke’s Berlin seminars during the first quarter of the nineteenth century, spread from Berlin across Europe and was established in both North and South America by the 1850s. In Protestant departments of Theology, scholars combined higher criticism—a discipline that had evolved in Classical Studies—with the new historical approach in their study of Bible. A generation after Kant’s death, Biblical Criticism was seeding ideas in theological discourses that led to contentious theological disagreements in both Christian and (later) Jewish discourses,

\(^6\) In *Religion within the Limits of Pure Reason*, published in 1793 before *Metaphysics of Ethics*, Kant softened his position so as to appease state authorities and not incur the ire of church authorities who discerned some discomforting implications in *Critique*. In this book, he argued that the role of religion and of churches is not to compel morality or to judge what is or is not ethical after the fact, but rather to influence the inner-directed behavior of humans. Authentic religious organizations, he argued, are self-organized groups of people uniting to advance true morality. Consequently, scripture has value only when serving the same end. By themselves, neither scripture nor dogma can determine for people what is or is not an ethical act.

\(^7\) This sentence is overstated because selected medieval ideas and metaphors remain vital and viable in many streams of Judaism and Christianity.
many of which remain unresolved in the first decades of the twenty-first century. Kaufmann would begin his life-long engagement with biblical criticism in the early decades of the twentieth century by which time the Jewish intelligentsia had become aware of biblical criticism and its implications for challenging the historical validity of traditional narratives about the origin of biblical literature and Jewish religious thought.

Paralleling these developments, and to some extent reacting against them, was the emergence and development of Romanticism ca. 1815–1870 that gave rise to spiritualistic and mystical movements in art, literature, and religion as well as to nationalistic aspirations expressed in the rise of vernacular literatures, education focused on local, ethnic cultures, and activist political movements among suppressed ethnic groups in Eastern and Western Europe. The rediscovery of the “I” within the collective led to the rediscovery of a unique “us” by distinctive groups, including Jews, within large political units such as the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the British Empire, Greater Russia, and the Ottoman Empire. These developments enabled each group to query about and rediscover its unique Volksgeist.

German speaking and reading Jews began to integrate Kant’s philosophy into Jewish thought only during the waning decade of the nineteenth century, continuing into the twentieth. Simultaneously, other ideas were fermenting in the minds of Jewish intellectuals: Jewish Reform argued that Judaism was a deracinated religion with implicit creeds. It was in conflict with a slowly developing enlightened Orthodoxy that competed with an ill-defined anti-modernist traditionalist Judaism. These movements, in turn, were all in tension with the rising tide of Jewish national self-awareness among recently secularized Jews. Cultural Zionism advanced its vague vision of a Jewish cultural homeland, while Political Zionism countered this with its more concrete vision of a Jewish national homeland. Kaufmann engaged both types of Zionist movements, disparaging the former and joining the latter.

These currents of thought paralleled renewed interest in the use of Hebrew as a language for modern communication, curiosity about the history of the Hebrew language and its literatures from the Mishnaic period through the Renaissance, and concern about the “scientific” history of the Jewish people. All such intellectual movements were nurtured by the emergence of folklore, anthropology, Comparative Religion, historical linguist-

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9 I develop this topic at greater length in a work in progress on the topic of Jewish Biblical Theology.

10 These centripetal ideologies were all in conflict with centrifugal ideologies such as Cosmopolitanism and Socialism that promoted the elimination of ethnic, religious, and political borders and the homogenization of humanity (understood in terms of the enlightened, urban elites of England, France, Germany, Austria, and Switzerland).
tics, and psychology (as a branch of philosophy) as scholarly disciplines. Concurrently, knowledge about and debates concerning historical-critical biblical studies were moving out from Christian seminaries into broad public awareness and debate.

1.3. First Came Kant; Then Came Hermann Cohen

Hermann Cohen (1842–1918) rose to prominence as a Neo-Kantian philosopher and was appointed professor in philosophy at the University of Marburg in 1876. (The term “Neo-Kantian” refers to philosophers and sometimes to historians and scientists who adapted Kantian issues, themes, and terminology to topics of their choosing.) His invitation to Marburg and his subsequent career thereafter were based on his application of Kantian thought to ethics. By the time of his retirement in 1912, Cohen’s work was acclaimed by Christian philosophers and theologians.11

After leaving Marburg for Berlin in 1912, Cohen taught at the Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums until his death. It was only during his Berlin period, that he turned his full attention to Judaism and its relationship to the philosophical conclusions that he had reached in his earlier, acclaimed publications on reason and ethics.12 The major work from this last period of his life was Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums. Based on his lectures at the Hochschule, it was published posthumously in 1919. This was translated into English more than fifty years later as Religion of Reason: Out of the Sources of Judaism.13 Ideas in this book influenced Kaufmann’s thinking.

Cohen’s title was determined by Kant’s understanding of what characterized a religion of reason and by Kant’s estimation that Judaism could not be reconciled with it. As Kant had put it bluntly, “The euthanasia of Judaism is the pure moral religion freed from ancient statutory teachings…”14 Kant held that the law of Judaism created a polity, a nation, not a religion, because a religion of reason could entail only uncoerced ethical behavior, not behavior that was commanded. By Kant’s definition of morality, Jews who obeyed mitsvot, commandments, as interpreted by the Rabbis, were immoral.15

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11 While at Marburg, Cohen most likely met the distinguished historian of early Islam, Julius Wellhausen who taught there from 1885–1892 before moving on to Göttingen.
14 Cited from M. Mack, German Idealism and the Jew: The Inner Anti-Semitism of Philosophy and the Jewish Responses (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2003), 35.
15 R. Munk, “Mendelsohn and Kant on Judaism,” Jewish Studies Quarterly 13 (2006): 216–17. N. Rotenstreich presents a pithy summary of Kant on this point in his Jews and
Cohen cited broadly from classical Jewish sources to illustrate that the idea of a unique God and of an ethical humanity as understood by Kant, originates in Jewish thought. He advanced this important idea in chapter 8, “The Discovery of Man and Fellowman,” of Religion of Reason. A key verse that he used to illustrate this was Leviticus 19:18: “... you shall love rēʿaka as yourself.” Although rēʿa refers to a fellow Israelite in Leviticus 19:18, and is therefore usually translated “your fellow,” it refers to Egyptian neighbors or acquaintances in Exodus 11:2. Cohen argued from Exodus to Leviticus that this word always referred to fellow-human beings, an understanding tolerable in most of its biblical occurrences. The sentiment of Leviticus 19:18 is repeated almost verbatim in Leviticus 19:34 using the word gēr, stranger, extending the moral principle of loving others to everybody who may have been considered excluded by the first verse.16 In Cohen’s argument, Leviticus 19:18 can be considered the original articulation of Kant’s idea of the categorical imperative. From this interpretation, taught by many nowadays as a truism, much followed.17

For Cohen, the Neo-Kantian, the concept of God’s uniqueness doesn’t refer to God’s existence as perceived through sense perception or learned through revelation, rather, it is an idea whose existence establishes morality, harmony and ethics in all that exists. The anti-mystical Cohen explained that God’s revelation to man is not a revealing of himself, but of his will with respect to how humans ought to behave to each other. Three important corollaries emerge when this idea is applied to biblical sources. The first is that the Bible must be engaged philosophically and viewed as expressing a universal philosophy in its own language and its own way.18 The second is that Jewish people are the teachers through which humanity can be ethically improved universally; the third is that religion, absorbed in ethics, is the vehicle through which this improvement occurs.19

Cohen advanced a Jewish religious philosophy based on refined Kantian thought combined with Jewish ideas that distinguished itself from medieval

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16 Cohen, Religion of Reason, 127–28. Whether or not this idea is supported by contemporary philology is questionable.
philosophical theology.\textsuperscript{20} In his first chapter, “Die Einzigkeit Gottes” translated as “God’s Uniqueness,” he justified his preference for emphasizing the incomparable uniqueness of the divine rather than his oneness. For him, “Monotheism is not the thought of one man, but of the whole Jewish national spirit unfolding in the creation and development of this thought which impregnates the entire thinking of the people.”\textsuperscript{21}

In his second chapter, “Der Bilderdienst,” translated as “Image Worship,” Cohen argues that the distinction between worship of the unique God and various other deities is not limited to number alone: “[I]t becomes prominent in the distinction between an unseen idea and a perceptible image.” Cohen could not imagine that a monotheistic mind could conceive of an image of the divine: “[P]rophetic monotheism is necessarily opposed to, necessarily contradicts art.”\textsuperscript{22}

Unlike the medievalists, Cohen sought philosophical justification for beliefs and practices using reason as his intellectual touchstone, not revelation rationalized. Additionally, he connected his Jewish religion of reason with ethics understood as a universal religious phenomenon, and he focused on actual moral, not metaphysical issues.\textsuperscript{23} For Cohen, the Bible and Judaism were instantiations of Kant’s universal vision.\textsuperscript{24}

His comprehension of the role of reason (and of the rule of reason) in comprehending Judaism from its very beginnings affected the thought of many prominent Jewish thinkers who came of age in the first two decades of the twentieth century. After Cohen, came Leo Baeck, Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, Mordecai Kaplan, others, and Yehezkel Kaufmann.\textsuperscript{25}

\subsection*{1.4. Yehezkel Kaufmann}

The appropriations from Cohen made by Yehezkel Kaufmann (1889–1963) are what concern us here.\textsuperscript{26} In what follows, I focus mainly on his claims

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{21} Cohen, \textit{Religion of Reason}, 36. See also 36–44.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Cohen, \textit{Religion of Reason}, 51–53.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Goetschel, \textit{The Discipline of Philosophy}, 62.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Each of the named individuals appropriated selected ideas from Cohen for different audiences in different settings. This is addressed in the above-mentioned work in progress on Jewish Biblical Theology.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Peter Slymovics addresses what appears to be Kaufmann’s partial appropriation of Cohen’s ideas about history in: “Y. Kaufmann’s Critique of J. Wellhausen: A Philosophical-Historical Perspective” (in Hebrew), \textit{Zion} 49 (1984): 72–79.
\end{itemize}
about monotheism, a topic that can be broached through different disciplines: bibliography, history of religions, theology, and philosophy. Kaufmann, trained formally as a philosopher at the University of Bern, wrote a dissertation on Neo-Kantian philosophy in 1918, and published a short article on Husserl’s Phenomenology in *Kant-Studien* 25 (1920): 44–49. These two publications constitute the total of his formal contributions to philosophy as an academic discipline.

After 1920, Kaufmann dedicated himself to (1) exploring the defining characteristics of the habits of mind that found expression in the culture of his own people in the past and present and (2) publishing articles in various popular venues about the debated national, cultural, and political issues of the day. The best known of his “publitsistiika” publications were collected and published in 1936 under the title *Behelney Hazeman* (In the Birth-Pangs of the Time). This book cemented his status as a formidable public intellectual in Mandatory Palestine. His ability to construct tight, almost forensic, arguments buttressed by different types of data is apparent in much of his public writing. Often, the flashy rhetoric of public debate penetrated the prose of Kaufmann’s later biblical research, especially when he expressed his dismissive, salty disdain for the ideas of “Wellhausen and his school.”

Although biblicists tend to consider Kaufmann one of their own, whether or not they agree with him, his work is easier to understand when he is viewed as a social and intellectual historian with a philosophical bent. Unlike Christian biblicists of his day, Kaufmann did not come to the field through formal training in dogmatics, systematic theology, or theological exegesis. These were (and still are) all foreign to traditional Jewish education even at advanced levels. Although he had attended lectures in biblical studies while at Bern, he was essentially an autodidact who read himself into historically oriented biblical studies and other fields as well.

Kaufmann was very much interested in and wrote about the practical political thought of Marxists, Socialists, Democrats, and Anti-Semites as they related directly or tangentially to Jews and the Zionist project as he interpreted it. For him, these ideas were not theoretical. Kaufmann saw them determining the shape of Europe after World War I and understood

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27 See pp. 51–53 in this volume.
28 Y. Kaufmann, *In the Pangs of the Time: A Collection of Researches, and Articles About Questions of the Present* (in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1936).
29 This may have been purposeful in that it personified a host of interrelated ideas and made it easier to caricature them on the one hand and to invest them with a negative valence on the other. On this topic, see G. Cappelli, “Modulating Attitudes via Adverbs: A Cognitive-Pragmatic Approach to the Lexicalisation of Epistemological Evaluation,” in: *Studies in the Semantics of Lexical Combinatory Patterns* (ed. M. Bertuccelli Papi; Pisa: Plus Pisa University Press, 2005), 214–20. See p. 118 below.
that they could influence the future of the emerging Jewish polity in Palestine. He understood also that very different sets of ideas had dynamically forged the history and thought of ancient Israelite polities in the Levant three millennia earlier.

Job Jindo writes that Kaufmann was interested primarily in philosophy as a means to establish firm theoretical and analytical foundations for his lifework, namely, a critical investigation into the history and essence of Jewish existence. Joseph Turner emphasizes that Kaufmann’s overlying interest was in understanding the nature of Jewish ethnicity and in tracing its sources back to their origin. Both are correct. I understand Kaufmann’s history of Israel’s belief—’emunah, not dat, religion—as an eight book footnote to key chapters, particularly chapter 3, 5, 6, in his first major book: Golah ve-nekhar (Exile and Alienation: An Historical-Sociological Study Concerning the Fate of the Jewish People from Antiquity to the Modern Period; in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1929–1930; henceforth Golah).

Golah was intended to unravel and describe the secret of the perpetual “Jewishness” of the Jewish people throughout their history. He argued that their secret was an uncompromising “monotheism” conceived as an inherently ethical, moral system of beliefs, that is, ideas and intuitions, put into practice. This book established his reputation as a philosophical historian in Mandatory Palestine alongside his reputation as a public intellectual. In Toledot ha-emunah ha-yisre’elit miymey qedem ’ad sof bayit sheniy (The History of Israelite Belief from Early Antiquity to the End of the Second Temple [8 books in 4 volumes; 1937–57]; henceforth Toledot) he undertook to provide a rock-solid foundation for the conclusions of Golah by tracing monotheism back to the very beginning of Jewish history.

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35 My English translation of the title differs from the more common one. Hebrew emunah in his title refers to faith/belief/Glaube. Kaufmann’s project is about describing the contents, explicit and implicit, of this belief and defending his descriptions. This is a somewhat narrower field of investigation than “religion.” I recently proposed the following definition for Israelite religion: “Israelite religion consists of the varied, symbolic expressions and appropriate responses, by families, unrelated groups, and individuals, to each other and to the deities and powers known to be of major and minor practical rele-
When writing *Toledot*, Kaufmann undertook to collect and collate all relevant data that supported his argument; and, what is more important, he had to explain away all contradictory data and major contradictory arguments of which he was aware. He had to organize his facts into useful categories that could demonstrate the uniqueness of Israel’s core beliefs from the very beginning of Israel’s self-awareness as a people and explain how these beliefs came to expression in the daily life of Israelites as described in the Hebrew bible. *Toledot* is the fruit of Kaufmann’s dedication to this encyclopedic undertaking.

Moshe Greenberg, in the first paragraph of his 1960 article, “Postulates of Biblical Criminal Law,” wrote the following: “Among the chief merits of Professor Kaufmann’s work must be counted the tremendous impetus it has given to the study of the postulates of biblical thought.” I agree with Greenberg’s description of Kaufmann’s contribution but only when applied to *Golah*. My reason is that by the time that Kaufmann came to apply the postulate that monotheism lies at the beginning of Israelite history, the postulate had become an *axiom*. In *Toledot*, he no longer suggested that Israelite monotheism must have existed as a matter of logical deduction from texts or of reasonable inference from the implications of texts and historical experiences. Kaufman came to consider it an *a priori*, so powerful that it sufficed to explain away contradictory evidence, particularly all that is implied from narratives about idolatry and polytheism. He no longer constructed arguments leading to a conclusion that monotheism lies at the beginning of Israelite religion, but explained why such an assumption must be correct. Chapter 6 of *Golah*, “Israelite Belief and Polytheism,” became the foundation stone on which Kaufmann constructed *Toledot*.

In advancing the assertion of “monotheism *ex nihilo*,” Kaufmann rejected “the principle of sufficient reason.” This principle holds that everything that exists has a cause and every true statement has a cause. The principle underlies almost all scientific thinking and is fundamental to historiosophy and all manners of evolutionary thought. Kaufmann’s dissertation—which I have not seen—addressed problems with this principle. In ignoring it, Kaufmann implies that “monotheism” just happened, randomly, for no particular reason, to ancient Israel. It emerged as a product of the communal mind.

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Zalman Shazar, former president of Israel, criticized Kaufmann’s conceptualization of the absolutely non-evolutionary origin of Israelite monotheism by comparing it to the way that naive Jews understand “In the beginning God created.” Something new came into existence where nothing had existed before. Possibly Kaufmann decided on this ambiguous tactic in order to avoid addressing biblical claims concerning revelation per se. By not treating the topic in any detail, he blunted criticism of his ideas from a theological perspective.

He clearly was not bothered by the problem raised by his idea of monotheism ex nihilo. Emanuel Green suggests that Kaufmann believed that certain great individuals, or social-political forces, or ideas are sui generis. They can be viewed within a context of a big picture of developments and movements, but they themselves are beyond historical explanation. They lack causative precedents in human affairs, but once present, they become causative precedents for ensuing developments.

Kaufmann’s insightful notion that the unique national/ethnic character and culture of ancient Israel and of Judaism through the ages until the modern period was typified by an uncompromising monotheistic worldview unable to comprehend polytheism or any form of compromised monotheism may have a second source, even earlier than Cohen, in the writings of Moses Hess (1812–1875).

Hess, a popular Jewish philosopher and historian, is considered one of the founders of Socialist Labor Zionism. In his Rome and Jerusalem (1862), a classical Zionist text, Hess argued that the commitment of the Jewish people to their unique religion had preserved them in their diasporas, and that Judaism has both national and universal significance. Although neither a systematic thinker nor a theologian, Hess also argued that biblical ideas about God who revealed himself in the human heart were identical with then current scientific thought about the common nature of humanity. This notion is linked also to ideas of Abraham Geiger about the

39 Here, the ideas of Cohen in his chapter on “Revelation” would not have helped him since Cohen referred to biblical notions of myth, a category of literature (and thought) whose presence in the Bible Kaufmann denied. See Religion of Reason, 79–84. Kaufmann’s acceptance of historical literary criticism implicitly read the different versions of Sinai stories as being narratives about rather than descriptions of revelation. Consequently, he may have considered “revelation” a literary theme or motif rather than a historical event. This is not clear, however, since the topic is avoided in Toledot Ha’emuna.
rise of unique monotheism among Israelites. Geiger, a biblical scholar, was also the founder of the Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums where Hermann Cohen taught.42

Unlike Hess and Geiger, Kaufmann provided a thick description for the context of this notion. He linked it, inter alia, to the sociology of Max Weber (1854–1920), who had advanced a compelling view of religion as lying at the core of a civilization and from whose writings the concept of “religious civilizations” became widespread.43 For Kaufmann, the monotheistic belief lay at the core of Israelite and Jewish civilization and sufficed to explain why Judaism and, thereby, Jews maintained their national identity.

It is sometimes hard to discover who influenced Kaufmann. Job Jindo observes that Kaufmann did not footnote the sources with which he agreed, at least not thoroughly.44 Possibly, he may have absorbed and assimilated the ideas of others into his own thinking without being completely aware of their origin. Some of his critics, a few of whom are mentioned below, thought less benignly about this tendency in his writings than do I. Those nail sketches of the best known Zionist theoreticians and their thoughts about the history of Jews in their exile and on their future return to the Land of Israel. An anthology of key sections from their major writings that address themes similar to those on which Kaufmann wrote is that of A. Hertzberg, The Zionist Idea (New York: Miridian Press, 1960).


43 Y. Kaufmann, Golah ve-nekhar (4 vols.; Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1929–1932), vol. 1, 30, 110–11, 152, 168–69. This is the first book in which Kaufmann articulated this idea. The notion of the monotheistic core was then carried over, more or less intact, to his studies of Israelite religion. On this, see Z. Zevit, Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Paralactic Approaches (London: Continuum, 2001), 44–45 and literature cited there. For the connection with Cohen (that strikes me as rather obvious), see H. Cohen, Religion of Reason, 20–23; 35–58 for his understanding of God, monotheism, and prophetic comprehensions of idolatry; and 361–66 in his chapter “The Law” which combines philosophy, history, sociology, and political theory. (Kaufmann obviously must be considered in opposition to Cohen’s characterization of nascent Zionism as a “mistake.”) This is developed further by E. Schweid, “Between a Scholar and a Philosophical Exegete” (in Hebrew), in: Massu’ot: Studies in Kabbalistic Literature and Jewish Philosophy in Memory of Prof. Ephraim Gottlieb (eds. M. Oron and A. Goldreich; Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1994), 414–28. See also Jindo, “Revisiting Kaufmann,” 45, 68 n. 1, 69 n. 2, 75 n. 61; and “Concepts of Scripture,” 233, where he refers to Wilhelm Dilthey’s influence on Kaufmann’s conception of the Bible as lived experience expressed in literature. Shemaryahu Talmon compares Weber’s approach to that of Kaufmann and implies clearly that a much closer connection exists than what is suggested by Kaufmann’s references. See S. Talmon, “The Teachings of Yehezkel Kaufmann in Biblical Research” (in Hebrew), in: An Evening of Conversation about the Teachings of Prof. Y. Kaufmann Concerning Biblical Research (eds. A. Biran, B. Uffenheimer, and S. Talmon; Haifa: University Institute of Haifa/Municipal Department of Education and Culture, 1964), 19–20.

44 J. Jindo, “Recontextualizing Kaufmann,” 109, notes 44, 46; see also 104, n. 27.
with whom he disagreed, however, were cited until their ideas were finally dismissed.

Another factor influencing his thinking may have been the popularity of race theory among Jewish scholars in the early twentieth century, including Zionist theoreticians, in that it combined genealogy, ethnology, ideology, the study of oral traditions, as well as history and sociology.45 (Take note, however, that the term “race” in nineteenth- and twentieth-century anthropological parlance referred not only to biological connectedness, but also to cultural practices and habits of mind. People could and did speak about the French race, British race, and so on. So races could be characterized as intelligent, inquisitive, generous, kind, peaceful, compromising, spiritual, and open, or stupid, close-minded, greedy, militaristic, aggressive, and mean-spirited. Terminology based on the word “ethnos” began to replace that based on “race” after World War II through the 1960s as “politically correct” terminology became de rigueur in American academic institutions.)46

1.5. Kaufmann’s Major and Minor General Ideas about Biblical Belief

(1) Kaufmann’s argument for a pristine monotheism taught by Moses at the very beginning of Israelite religion is influenced by Cohen’s demonstration that Kant’s categorical imperative is already found in the Bible. The conception of divinity that provided this imperative is unattested by any ancient civilization or ancient philosophical system. The deity is 100% self-sufficient and independent of all natural forces and substance. He is the source of all and creator of all (vol. I, book 2, pp. 447–48). Kaufmann contends that the idea of monotheism in Israel cannot be explained by evolution. Under the rubric “The Essential Idea of Israelite Monotheism,” Kaufmann writes: “That idea was born out of a new religious feeling, a spark of belief in God that gave rise the idea of a divine will, superior and controlling.” He refers to the idea as “voluntaristic,” that is, autonomous, emerging from the rational thought of an individual, thinking human, and denies that it is inherent in ideas about divinity” (vol. I, book 1, p. 244 bottom). Moreover, Kaufmann writes that it was Moses “who first thought through and conceptualized the idea of monotheism” and spread it among the tribes (vol. II, book 1, pp. 41–42).


46 Traces of this still exist in the genres Polish Jokes, Italian Jokes, Jewish Jokes, etc., and in all manner of ethnic humor not delimited by the unstated rules of political correctness operative in contemporary Western culture. Certainly since the 1960s words such as “race, racist, racism” have an extremely negative valence.
Both Benjamin Uffenheimer, a scholar known primarily for the philosophical bent of his work on prophecy and the history of exegesis, and Menahem Haran, a scholar known primarily for his work on the history of Israelite cult and religion, observe that Kaufmann’s ideas about monotheistic belief are similar to those of Cohen. Haran writes: “In his definition of monotheism, Kaufmann comes close to the neo-Kantian philosopher from Marburg, Hermann Cohen, in the first chapters of...Religion der Vernunft aus der Quellen des Judentums...one can find somewhat similar statements (some seeds of Kaufmann’s system of comprehending Judaism are already recognizable in one of his publications from 1914).” Here, Haran implies that the relationship between the two is more typological than genetic.47 Uffenheimer writes more bluntly: “The influence of Hermann Cohen on Kaufmann’s project is absolute. However, among the many researchers and thinkers with which Kaufmann debates, there is no mention of Cohen.” Uffenheimer goes on to argue that it was Cohen’s thinking that influenced the young Kaufmann’s general worldview vis-à-vis Judaism and that it provides the background for Kaufmann’s distinctions between polytheism and monotheism.48

Uffenheimer’s position is supported by Eliezer Schweid’s short study, “Between a Scholar and a Philosophical Exegete of the Bible.” Through a presentation of case studies, Schweid illustrates how Kaufmann regularly developed and expanded themes or key ideas addressed philosophically by Cohen who provided but limited discussions of the biblical texts that he used to support his analyses. Kaufmann, using collections of interpreted texts, treated the philosophically analyzed themes as implicitly underlying the texts. Thereby, he presented a very strong case that the themes were dynamically inherent in the belief system of ancient Israel.49

47 Haran, Temples and Temple Worship, 7 n. 8. See similar remarks in Haran’s article in this volume. Haran’s tone in the citation seems apologetic. He refers to “somewhat similar statements” in 1914. Cohen’s book, completed in 1918, was published in 1919, a year after his death; but the contents of the book were subjects of public lectures in 1913–1914. In addition, Cohen published on some of the topics that later appeared in his lectures even before his move to Berlin. See, Eva Jospe, “Introduction” in Reason and Hope: Selections from the Jewish Writings of Hermann Cohen (ed. E. Jospe; Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1993), 17–18 and a very partial list of Cohen’s bibliography on pp. 227–29.
(2) No mythology surrounds God. He is not born; he does not die; he is not
sexed; he is not part of the natural world. (This is very different from many
known ancient Near Eastern stories about gods.)

(3) Israelite Religion was exoteric. The bible reflects common, public,
shared knowledge. Moreover, all teaching is official and authoritative.
Priests are the public educators.

(4) Israelite monotheism could not comprehend idolatry or magic. At best,
idols and various forms of polytheistic worship were treated as fetishes,
things used in rituals that were not associated with any meaningful mythol-
ogy or theology.

(5) P is pre-exilic. Kaufmann argues this on the grounds that P's legislation
in Num 18: 21–32 assigns tithe collection and management to the Levites, a
group with no political power or theoretical authority during the exilic and
post-exilic periods.

(6) P predates D. Kaufmann's position vis-à-vis Pentateuchal documents is
pre-Grafian. He argues this on the grounds that nowhere does P imply cen-
tralization. This idea was current by the end of the nineteenth century
among conservative, Protestant biblicists who did accept some form of a
documentary hypothesis, but not that of Wellhausen. Among these were
Franz Delitzsch and August Dillman.

(7) P's movable Tabernacle that could be set up anywhere convenient is
symbolic of the bamot set up throughout the country. P's torah describes
ritual practices at these shrines that existed before Josiah's reform based on
D.

(8) All of the Pentateuch is pre-exilic as is most of the historiography in
Joshua–2 Kings. There was no thorough reworking of this material in the
post-exilic period.

Kaufmann's first and second points that monotheism is a unique intuition
that passes from Moses to the people imply that there is no revelation per
se, and no divine will. Although not developed anywhere in his writings,
Kaufmann’s Moses, the first of the prophet-teachers, is a Neo-Kantian in the manner of Hermann Cohen; sometimes, he is even Kantian.

2. Kaufmann’s Reception by Jewish Scholars

2.1. First Appreciations of Toledot, Volume I

Kaufmann’s work was reviewed as it came out piecemeal. First, I present below some appreciations of Volume 1:

A review by Shelomo Dov Goitein, “Yehezkel Koifman as a Researcher of Tanakh,” published in Davar on September 1, 1938, pp. 5–6, describes Kaufmann as well known to readers of newspapers and an important public intellectual. In his book he “destroys one by one the commonly accepted lies found among the preconceptions of mada’ hamiqra’, Bibelwissenschaft.” The review goes on to note that Kaufmann is able to bring to his research all relevant wisdom and insights found in the traditional Jewish texts.

Ya’aqov David Avramaski, reviewed vol. 1 in Haaretz, September 27, 1938, and characterized Kaufmann’s work as philosophically relevant. He wrote that the book “attracts, is filled with information and is presented properly because he is not only a researcher, but also a writer able to present facts and opinions.” Avramaski observed that in the book “not all ar-

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54 In composing the following sections, I drew on statements, references, and the like in sources available in the Kaufmann archives at the National Library of Israel, from books where I thought or recalled references to Kaufmann should be found, and from some serendipitous discoveries made while working on other projects. For the time being, I think that what I have found is representative of attitudes toward Kaufmann’s ideas since no evidence to the contrary was presented in the discussion that followed my oral presentation. My list may be supplemented by working back through the bibliographies in Job Jindo’s publications accessible via the Academia website: https://nyu.academia.edu/JobJindo (viewed July 7, 2017).

55 Goitein is best known for his research on early Islam, the Jews in Yemen, and the Genizah documents. He also authored, in modern Hebrew, one book on biblical literature qua literature and a second on how to teach biblical texts to children of various ages. These reflect his recognition of the importance of teaching the Bible as literature and as a vehicle for inculcating values. The books reflect his interests in these topics from the time that he taught secondary school and then, years later, when he served as a senior inspector of educational institutions in Mandatory Palestine. When Goitein first arrived in Palestine, he taught at the Reali School in Haifa during the years 1923–28. His last year there, was Kaufmann’s first year. Goitein’s last sentiment in his review was echoed in a full-page obituary, published years later in Yedioth, October 18, 1963, p. 8, by Menahem Brosh. Brosh referred to Toledot as a work that “shook the foundations of biblical critics from the school of Wellhausen and established the teachings of Judaism, its thought, and comprehension of divine unity on solid, scientific foundations.”
Arguments are complete and some are forced but the author is only in the middle of his work and the second volume will undoubtedly resolve such matters.”

People familiar with historical-critical scholarship were less kind. The most trenchant and critical reviews of books 1–3 of Toledot that I have seen were published by Reuven Zeligman in Bustnai 9:26 (October 20, 1937): 22–25; 10:6 (June 1, 1938): 24–27; 10:24 (October 6, 1938): 23–26. The first two of Zeligman’s three reviews begins with praise for Kaufmann as a creative thinker, the originality and importance of Kaufmann’s project, and the depth and intensity of his research. In his review of book 1, Zeligman praises Kaufmann’s arguments for a pre-exilic P. He goes on, however, to reject Kaufmann’s claim that Israelite religion lacked myth, an argument that he attributes to Hermann Cohen. He goes on to write “Just as I cannot understand Hermann Cohen, I cannot understand the author who follows in his footsteps.” Zeligman’s critique focuses on the fact that Cohen portrayed Israelite religion as “a type of ethical social system. […] The prophets he turned into liberal rabbis educated in the teachings of Kant, and the deity YHWH, the zealous one, into a god who was fair, polite, and a vegetarian.”

Zeligman considers Kaufmann’s description of polytheism clear but finds his description of Israelite belief less so. He does not reject Kaufmann’s ideas about monotheism entirely but argues that his claim about how monotheism came to be in Israel does not amount to proof. To drive this point home, he argues that if Kaufmann’s claim about the origin of the idea of monotheism is true, then it must follow that the idea of polytheism must have originated similarly. Zeligman’s point in advancing his reductio ad absurdum is that since the second proposition is commonly held to be false, the first one must be false also. Zeligman also objects to Kaufmann’s frequent recourse to terms or concepts such as “primal intuition, folk religion,” and “fetishes” that he left vague and undefined.

In his second and third reviews of books 2 and 3 respectively, Zeligman takes issue with Kaufmann’s repeated argument that “the Bible does not know the worship of symbolic idols” by drawing attention to Exod 20:3-5.

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56 Bustnai was a magazine focused on general culture as well as practical aspects of and new developments in farming. Since its target audience consisted of independent farmers and members of collectives, I doubt that Zeligman’s reviews were widely circulated. Reuben Zeligman (1875–1943) was a public intellectual in pre-state Israel who wrote on literary, philosophical, and political themes for a number of newspapers and magazines. Zeligman studied at the universities of Bern and Geneva around 1900, earning a doctorate at the latter institution. See D. Tidhar, ed., Encyclopedia of the Yishuv and Its Builders (in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Rishonim, 1957), 8:3087–88. I thank Prof. Joseph Heller of the Hebrew University for directing me to this publication.

57 Zeligman’s complaint about Cohen’s lack of clarity, a feature recognized by others, is addressed in Weiss, Paradox and the Prophets, 6–11.
and to the expression *pesiley eloheyhem* in Deut 4:16, 7:25, and 12:3 that distinguish clearly between *elohim*, deities, and *pesel*, sculpted image that are symbolic representations.

Zeligman characterizes book 3, in his third review, as a summary of Kaufmann’s research and as “a type of philosophy of history,” but one that fails every time the author “tries to generalize his conclusions and establish them on a philosophical foundation.” Zeligman appears to have lost patience with Kaufmann for not correcting errors of the earlier volumes and ignoring criticisms raised in reviews. He cites examples of internal contradictions where Kaufmann cites evidence in one place that contradicts his general statements elsewhere. Near the beginning of this review Zeligman writes that “the book before us […] is filled with sophistries that will attract the average Jew […] but will distance every person who is responsible philosophically and scientifically.” He closes the review writing that “the book before us attests like a thousand witnesses to the measure of misrepresented facts and internal contradictions that even a thoughtful, scientific researcher such as Yehezkel Kaufmann can present when he constructs ‘a city and a tower’ [an allusion to the Tower of Babel story—ZZ] on *a priori* judgments and assumptions with no grounding in practical reality or healthy logic.”

Raphael Patai, an ethnographer and anthropologist, reviewed books 1–3 in *Haolam* 11 (1940): 625-27; and vol. 2 book 1 in *Haolam* 40 (1942): 7–8. Pattai attacks Kaufmann on details of fact, on counter-historical assumptions about the mythologies of others, and on his idea that monotheism is taken for granted in all literary creations of Israel from the beginning. More significant, however, is his critique that Kaufmann cherry picked the verses that he used as proof-texts while ignoring the fact that the verses were often composed in different times so that their literary and historical contexts differ.

Similar faults were pointed out more than a decade later by Shmuel Avramski, a historian of ancient Israel, in his review of Kaufmann’s monograph on the conquest of the land in *Davar* on July 1, 1955. Avramski mentions that in order to support a twelfth-century BCE date for the composition of the books of Joshua and Judges and a thirteenth-century date for the events that they portray, Kaufmann ignored the Merneptah stele as well as the results of archaeology in Israel that, in the 1950s, was thought to support a twelfth-eleventh century BCE conquest. Avramski remarks that in order to support a very early date for these two books, Kaufmann brushed aside evidence for Deuteronomy’s influence on their phraseology.

\[58\]  Kaufmann responded to one point in Zeligman’s third review briefly in an essay published in 1941, reprinted as the “Introduction” to the Dvir edition of *Toledot* that I cite in this article. See vol. 1, “Introduction,” xxxv and the footnote reference 2.
2.2. Gauging Receptivity Through Contemporary Torah Commentaries

The significance of Kaufmann to recent Jewish thought in general may be gauged by surveying how his ideas are accepted and used in relatively recent Torah translation-commentaries directed to different audiences: (1) non-denominational commentaries directed to the Jewish community in general; (2) commentaries directed specifically to the perceived needs of Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform Jews respectively during synagogue services, and (3) in the *Jewish Study Bible* published by Oxford University Press that is directed to sophisticated Jewish and Christian readers and to the academy in general.

There are three reasons for conducting this survey: (1) The Torah is the most read and studied of all biblical books among Jews. It is generally considered the most important book of the Bible and the constitutional basis of Judaism. Consequently, I assume that individual commentators would include the best and most relevant information in a form accessible to laymen. (2) The translation-commentaries examined were all marketed heavily either to general Jewish audiences or to congregations by denomination. Therefore, they are barometers reflecting the types of knowledge that congregants (or their rabbis and representatives on synagogue boards) wanted to have and felt should be included in such a volume. Finally, (3) the commentaries differ significantly in their handling of information and insights drawn from relevant traditional Jewish sources and from general biblical studies and in the amount of space given to each. In view of this, these commentaries provide a way of determining the presence and significance of such research in contemporary Jewish thought as it is filtered in the scholar’s study and distilled for the pew, or in the case of the *Jewish Study Bible*, for the classroom.

2.3. Jewish Publication Society, Nondenominational Commentaries

The Jewish Publication Society published five full-length commentaries, one on each part of the Torah. All were authored by scholars of note who, although closely associated with the Jewish Theological Seminary of America where Kaufmann was lionized, taught at major secular universities. The authors wrote introductions, used footnotes sparingly in their commentaries, and composed excurses appended to the book in which they

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treated topics of their choice concisely, but in detail. How does Kaufmann fare in these commentaries?

*Genesis*, 1989: Nahum Sarna lists Kaufmann’s *Toledot* in the general bibliography for Gen 34 (p. 367), refers to Greenberg’s translation of Kaufmann in the bibliography for excursus 10 on “Angelology” (p. 412), and to Kaufmann’s monograph *The Biblical Account of the Conquest of Palestine* in the bibliography for excursus 15 on “The Land of the Philistines” (p. 413). Nowhere does Sarna refer to Kaufmann’s central ideas.

*Exodus*, 1991: Sarna does not refer to Kaufmann in this commentary.

*Leviticus*, 1989: In this commentary, Baruch Levine refers only to Kaufmann’s argument that Ezekiel quotes P and not that P quotes Ezekiel (p. xxix of the Introduction). Levine leaves Kaufmann out because he, Levine, did not accept any of Kaufmann’s major ideas, something apparent from his other writings about the phenomenology of cult in Israelite religion.

*Numbers*, 1990: Jacob Milgrom refers to Kaufmann a few times in his commentary, something to be expected because throughout his work on the cultic ritual, Milgrom assumed the general correctness of Kaufmann’s ideas about Israelite monotheism. In this commentary, Kaufmann’s ideas are integral to some of the excurses: ancient polytheists feared impurity as demonic or as derived from a meta-divine realm that could affect their gods (Excursus 49, p. 447); in all polytheistic systems gods are not sovereign but emerge from a metadivine realm (Excursus 50, p. 452); Israelite priests performed rituals in silence so as to avoid the appearance of magic that

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60 It is possible that Sarna minimized mention of Kaufmann consciously in these books just as he had in his *Understanding Genesis* (1967), and *Exploring Exodus: The Heritage of Biblical Israel* (1986). Sarna wanted his books to be read by religious liberals and conservatives of all stripes; he may have left out anything and anybody that his imagined conservative readers might find offensive, particularly if they added nothing substantive to what Sarna wished to convey. Given the strong link between the JPS and Jewish Theological Seminary, it may have been more difficult for him to leave Kaufmann out completely from his two JPS commentaries.

61 B. Levine, *In Pursuit of Meaning: Collected Studies of Baruch A. Levine, Volume 1: Religion* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 215–384. In his JPS commentary, Levine refuted Kaufmann’s notions about the relationship between P and Ezekiel and that P preceded D (pp. xxviii–xxx) by citing H. L. Ginsberg, who was a major supporter of Kaufmann’s general conclusions. Ginsberg’s enthusiasm at that time is revealed in the following statement: “I am convinced that Kaufmann is absolutely right in all of his major theses about the [ideas and dating of the—ZZ] Pentateuch and earlier prophets. […] I also believe Kaufmann to be right in most of his original interpretations of the genesis and pre-exilic history of Israel (including his early dating of Psalms, Proverbs, Ruth, and, probably, Job)”; Ginsberg, “New Trends in Biblical Criticism: The Broader Historical Criticism,” *Commentary* (September, 1950): 283. Ginsberg also predicted that “the regnant hypotheses of the year 1970 [twenty years after his article’s publication] will surely stand incomparably closer to those of Kaufmann than to those which he combats” (p. 284). Time has proven that Ginsberg was a great scholar but a poor prophet.
combined words with gestures (Excursus 50, p. 454); Israelite prophets were not averse to citing non-Israelite compositions (Excursus 54, p. 462). Milgrom also makes a casual reference to a remark by Kaufmann in his Joshua commentary bearing on the history of Reuben in Transjordan (Excursus 70, p. 495).

*Deuteronomy*, 1996: Jeffrey Tigay mentions Kaufmann’s idea about the Tabernacle as a symbol of the *hamat* (Intro, p. xx, note 57). He refers to Kaufmann’s observations on God’s hardening Pharaoh’s heart (p. 32, note 50), on the status of licit and illicit images (p. 49, note 56), on fetishistic images (p. 53 note 86), on loving the *ger* (p. 108, note 59), on a problem in historical geography (p. 117, note 47), on the endowments of clergy (p. 169, note 2), on prophecy (p. 172, note 21), on asylum cities (p. 179, note 21), and on the exclusion of Moabites (p. 211 note 33 and in Excursus 21, notes 1, 9).

Of these five scholars, Tigay appears to be the one who read Kaufmann most closely and integrated him constructively into his thinking about both major and minor points in his Deuteronomy commentary.

2.4. Jewish Denominational Commentaries

**Orthodox:** The most popular and de rigueur translation-commentary used in American Orthodox congregations today is commonly referred to as the *ArtScroll Chumash*. Its editor, Nosson Scherman writes that “The new translation in this volume attempts to render the text as our Sages understood it. Where there are differing interpretations, we follow Rashi, the ‘Father of Commentators,’ because the study of Chumash has been synonymous with Chumash-Rashi for nine centuries.”62 Needless to say, Kaufmann is not mentioned.

**Conservative:** Congregations associated with the Conservative Movement in American Judaism have adopted the *Etz Hayyim Torah and Commentary*, 2001. Its main, *peshat* commentary on each book is actually abridged from the five full, book-length, commentaries published as *The Jewish Publication Society Torah Commentary* between 1989 and 1996 discussed above. *Etz Hayyim*’s approach to the Torah is characterized by David Lieber, editor of the volume, as “reverential” but “not apologetic.” It does not attempt to justify all of the statements in the Torah or demonstrate that they conform to our view of scientific truth.” Lieber emphasizes that the commentary uses archaeology, philology and anthropology because “we

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62 N. Scherman, ed., *The Torah: Haftaros and Five Megillos With A Commentary Anthology From the Rabbinic Writings* (New York: Mesorah Publications, 1999). In addition to being called the “ArtScroll Chumash” after the series in which it is published, it is known also as the “Stone Chumash” after the benefactor who supported the project. The citations are from pp. xiv and xv.
see our people in the flow of time, in history, participating with the civilizations around them, yet with their very own perspective.”

To the extent that theological principles are discussed, Lieber describes the volume as representative of Conservative Judaism that is based on Rabbinic Judaism but differs from the latter in recognizing the Torah as “the product of generations of inspired prophets, priests, and teachers, beginning with the Time of Moses but not reaching its present form until the postexilic age, in the 6th or 5th centuries B.C.E.” Furthermore, Lieber writes that “the Torah is viewed by us, in the words of Harold Kushner, as ‘God’s first word, not God’s last.’”

A comparison of the original commentaries in the JPS series and their abridged form in Etz Hayyim indicates that none of the historical-critical insights of the original commentaries made it into Etz Hayyim, consequently, neither did Kaufmann.

Of the forty-one essays by different authors appended to Etz Hayyim, very few are concerned with issues that might have warranted mention of Kaufmann. I identify only three discussions where authors may have considered his ideas relevant and mentioned him by name: one each on Noah v. Gilgamesh, on the idea of evolving revelation, and on the development of monotheism.

Reform: In sharp contrast to the aforementioned commentaries, The Torah: A Modern Commentary, used in synagogues associated with the Reform Movement, presents the historical-critical approach and its theological implications in the “General Introduction to the Torah,” written by W. Gunther Plaut, the volume’s editor. Plaut writes: “[T]his commentary proceeds from the assumption that the Torah is a book which had its origin in the hearts and minds of the Jewish people.” He acknowledges that many deny what he calls “this basic assumption,” and provides a fair, thumbnail description, without polemizing, of the notion “that the Torah is the ‘word of God’ given (by direct inspiration or in some other way) by God to Moses.” He, however, states that his commentary proceeds on the premise that humans authored the text.


64 Lieber, Etz Hayyim, xxi.

65 Lieber, Etz Hayyim, 1346–47, 1393. When I drew the attention of David Leiber to the absence of historical-critical information in the "critical" part of this commentary, he expressed surprise. He was even more surprised by the lack of attention to historical-critical matters and to the thought of Kaufmann in the many essays that form a substantial part of Etz Hayyim. Lieber held Kaufmann’s work in high regard and considered it a major contribution to critical scholarship. See his warm appreciation in D. Lieber, “Yehezkel Kaufmann’s Contribution to Biblical Scholarship,” Journal of Jewish Education 34 (1964): 254–61.

Plaut assumes the general validity of the Graf-Wellhausen hypothesis but tempers its conclusions about the post-exilic dating of Ṣ with insights from Kaufmann. Plaut concludes that the composition and redaction of the Torah extended from 950 through 450 BCE. 

Greenberg’s translation-abridgement of Kaufmann is cited with reference to Abraham’s intuition of monotheism in a homiletic discussion of Gen 12 (p. 103, note 44), on the name Beth El, Gen 28:19 (p. 196 note 2), and finally in a homiletic comment that the Patriarchs had glimpses of God’s essence but Moses brings it into full view when he reveals the name YHWH (p. 394, note 16 [a footnote reference within footnote 2]).

2.5. A Nondenominational Academic Commentary

The Jewish Study Bible, 2003, is unlike the aforementioned commentaries in that it is intended for use in higher education and in homes, not synagogues. As such, it owes its allegiance to the academy and its standards, not to any particular branch of Judaism. Additionally, commentators were directed to write academically responsible and appropriate short commentaries on the book that they were assigned that would be useful to all students of the Bible. Perforce, this necessitated including the historical-critical approach to the Torah with its implications for understanding and interpreting other books. 

The “Jewishness” of this volume is reflected in that commentators, following editorial instructions, emphasized the Hebrew (and not a reconstructed form of the) text, paid extra attention to passages that have influenced post-biblical and modern Jewish practices, and drew attention to passages or stories relevant to public discourse in contemporary Jewish communities. Its major expression, however, lies in the fact that commentators took cognizance of and drew from traditional Jewish interpreters, particularly those who were philologically sophisticated and literarily alert, “thereby placing themselves in the larger context of Jewish exegesis.”

Where is Kaufmann to be found in The Jewish Study Bible?

In his “Introduction to Leviticus,” Baruch Schwartz considers P “the product of learned scribes of the Jerusalemite priesthood of the last centu-

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67 Plaut, The Torah, xl–xlii.
68 I include this volume because The Jewish Study Bible (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) has become popular among some Jews as their preferred translation-commentary for the weekly Torah portion when they study it at home. Those that brought this information to my attention, for the first time in 2008–9, were both college students and adults who attend services regularly at Orthodox and Conservative synagogues, and almost all were introduced to the volume in college or continuing education courses.
69 A. Berlin and M. Z. Brettler, “Introduction: What is “The Jewish Study Bible”?” in Jewish Study Bible, x. In the spirit of full disclosure, I mention that I contributed the critical notes bearing on 1 and 2 Kings to this volume.
ries of the Judean kingdom.” By implication, he sees H as having originated during the same period since both were combined before the exile of 586.70 This particular dating reflects Kaufmann’s positions about pre-exilic P combined with Schwartz’ own research over many years. Kaufmann, however, is not mentioned by name.

He is mentioned by name in S. David Sperling’s essay, “Modern Jewish Interpretation,” at the end of the bible. Sperling provides a thumbnail sketch of Kaufmann’s views about Wellhausen’s conclusions, of Kaufmann’s own documentary hypothesis, and his ideas about monotheism. Sperling mentions him again when describing Menahem Haran’s work on cult and the dating of P.71

In an essay, “The Bible in Israeli Life,” Uri Simon, a major proponent of reading the Bible as fine literature, comments with some disdain on the Hebrew Encyclopaedia Miqrait, one of the best such scholarly undertakings of this genre. He complains: “[T]he editors’ understanding of peshat was so one-sided that the ancient authors would probably have been amazed at the extraordinary emphasis on realia, archaeology, and the world of the ancient Near East, and the utter neglect of theological, ideological, and literary aspects (as evident, for example, in the almost complete disregard for the writing of the Israeli scholars Yehezkel Kaufmann and Martin Buber).”72

In a fine essay on “The Religion of the Bible,” Stephen Geller mentions Kaufmann alongside Albright as one of many scholars who argued that archaeology was continuous with the textual portrayal of the contents of Israelite religion.73 As the essay unfolds, it is clear that Geller does not accept Kaufmann’s positions on monotheism, fetishism, mythology, or his ideas about the lack of change in the content of Israelite religion.

On the basis of this admittedly brief and incomplete survey, I extrapolate—with only a small amount of trepidation—that the miniscule number of references and allusions to Kaufmann’s publications or ideas in the works that I examined indicates that most contemporary Jewish scholars consider much of his work irrelevant to their own, even when they write on topics that he addressed.74 There is, perhaps, one field in bibliology where his ideas remain potent.

70 Jewish Study Bible, 205.
71 Jewish Study Bible, 1913–14, 1916.
72 Jewish Study Bible, 1994.
73 Jewish Study Bible, 2027.
74 In the animated discussion that followed my oral presentation at the University of Bern on June 10, 2014, my interlocutors, who believe that Kaufmann’s influence and importance is much broader and pervasive than I concluded, faulted the narrowness of my survey and, more significantly, observed that I was drawing a large conclusion based on silence. They were and are correct with regard to the narrowness of my survey. At that time, however, they were unable to suggest the name of a major scholar or a publication that was a strong proponent of Kaufmann’s work or theorizing that I had not mentioned.
2.6. Kaufmann in Jewish Theological Scholarship

The discussions involving Kaufmann that I have found may be divided into two: those in which Kaufmann’s ideas are addressed seriously and presented as relevant to the topic under investigation; and those in which his ideas are mentioned succinctly or alluded to, and then dismissed. The three scholars in whose work I find Kaufmann engaged as a discussion partner are Yohanan Muffs, Jon Levenson, and Benjamin Sommer. All write on theologically focused topics.

Yohanan Muffs embraces some of Kaufmann’s insights but combines them artfully with insights from Abraham Joshua Heschel and traditional homiletic midrash in a poetic book: The Personhood of God, 2005. For example, he concludes a brief discussion, “Law and Ritual in Mesopotamia and in Israel,” as follows: “[T]o paraphrase Kaufmann, sacrifice is not needed by God but is given to man as a gift, a way for him to enjoy a modicum of divine intimacy. To overstate the case: in Mesopotamia, ritual is a divine need, law a human one. In Israel, law is a divine need, ritual a human one.”

Elsewhere, Muffs, in a discussion of “Power, Love and Justice: The Positive Expressions of the Divine Will,” refers to Kaufmann as “the metaphysician of divine power,” observing that Kaufmann illustrated that in Israelite conception there is no metadivine realm; hence, God cannot be restrained by it in any way. Nothing in the cosmos restrains God so that he has absolute power. Muffs observes that Kaufmann did not ask why the biblical God was just or why he loved humanity; but, Muffs argues, extending Kaufmann’s ideas, that without power there could be no love or no justice.

His book includes a small chapter, “Family and Nation: Two Versions of National Formation,” in which he compares JE and P stories about the emergence of Israel as a unique ethnos and the revelation of the name YHWH. In this chapter, Muffs reconciles differences between the two narratives on the basis of Kaufmann’s ideas about the formation of the Israelite people in the pre-conquest period so that he can derive normative theological insights. The result is characteristically up-beat Muffssian theology. But for Muffs to write such theology, it was necessary to draw Kaufmann’s

I countered with a query: Why would scholars who believe Kaufmann irrelevant bother to refer to him, if only to refute him? Their response was that to some extent Kaufmann’s ideas have become so embedded in the DNA of scholarship that they are taken for granted. The veracity of this response remains to be demonstrated.

76 Muffs, Personhood, pp. 83–85, and 89–94. In this particular chapter, he combines insights from A. J. Heschel, Y. Kaufmann, and E. A. Speiser, but the dominant flavor of the chapter is Heschel.
77 Muffs, Personhood, 45–51.
writings into theological discussions of the type that Kaufmann studiously avoided.

Jon D. Levenson, in *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, 1988, refers to Kaufmann as “one of the greatest of Jewish biblical scholars of modern times” and explains that what he, Levenson, refers to as the “mastery” of YHWH over the cosmos is what Kaufmann referred to as the “basic idea of Israelite religion.” At the beginning of his book, he disagrees with Kaufmann over the interpretation of Ps 82 and contends against Kaufmann that God’s absolute sovereignty is not an absolute given in the Hebrew Bible: “[I]t lacks the solidity and fixity that Kaufmann tried to assign to it.”

Throughout this book, Levenson engages Kaufmann, now agreeing and now disagreeing with him. Levenson argues that Kaufmann’s ideas emerge fully only in those parts of the Bible that are expressions of the covenantal relationship, in P from the sixth century BCE and in second and third Isaiah.

Benjamin D. Sommer refers to Kaufmann over twenty times in his *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel*, 2009. In chapter 1 of this book, Sommer writes: “[Y]ehezkel Kaufman, the greatest and most influential Jewish biblical scholar of modern times, describes the Hebrew Bible’s conception of God as at once spiritual and anthropomorphic: the Biblical God, Kaufman maintains, has a form but not material substance.” Sommer then goes on to qualify Kaufman’s claim and illustrate that it is only partially correct. In an Appendix, “Monotheism and Polytheism in Ancient Israel,” he places Kaufmann’s core ideas, corrected, modified, but still recognizable, at the center of his own evolving ideas. This appendix functions as an efficient introduction to Kaufmann’s idea of Israelite monotheism, his rejection of “henotheism” as a descriptor of Israelite religion, and to Kaufmann’s understanding of Israel’s conception of God. Sommer, like Muffs and Levenson, assumes that some of Kaufmann’s views remain an important part of the contemporary discourse about biblical thought.

Other scholars made less use of Kaufmann though they mentioned him. H. L. Ginsberg refers to Kaufmann as one whose work anticipated many of the conclusions reached by European and American scholars in the 1960s: disillusionment with Wellhausen and a methodology that kept discovering redactors; and an interest in ancient Near Eastern mythology and its influence, or lack thereof, on Israelite religion. Ginsberg also suggested that the

trend in new scholarship was moving in a direction that would eventually intersect with Kaufmann’s positions on the early date of P and of JE, as well as on his notion that Deuteronomy was not written under the influence of prophets. He writes that Kaufmann cannot be considered a Jewish conservative, but a competent biblicist who, using scientific methods independently, removed the intellectual shame from historical biblical studies by correcting what had gone wrong in the nineteenth century.82

Moshe Greenberg, in the “Acknowledgments” section of the first volume of his incomplete commentary to Ezekiel, 1983, thanks Kaufmann who “embodied a passionate commitment to grand ideas, combining the philosopher’s power of analysis and generalization with the attention to detail of the philological exegete.” Greenberg acknowledges that Kaufmann’s remarks on Ezekiel in Toledot (vol. III, 483-526 or Religion, 426-46) fill his commentary.83 And indeed, that is the case.

Menahem Haran, a student of Kaufmann, presupposes the pre-exilic dating of P because data from P accord best with other data bearing on the history of priests, Levites, and the development of the history of Israelite religion. In his Temples and Temple Service in Ancient Israel, he argues, however, contra Kaufmann, that P in the Pentateuch was the inspiration or catalyst for the cultic reform of Hezekiah, a reform that did not last. He dismisses Kaufmann’s comprehension of P’s tabernacle as symbolic of the bamot. In fact, I cannot find any mention of Kaufmann or his work on such key issues when Haran treats them other than in a note in the Prologue. He writes: “[K]aufmann argues that P preceded D, but his reasoning here, for the most part is unconvincing. […] In dating P, I am prepared […] to concur with Kaufmann’s view not more than in some degree, and not exactly for his own reasons.”84

Israel Knohl, a student of Greenberg, writes in The Sanctuary of Silence, 1995, that Kaufmann was the first to point to the unique phenomenon of the silence of the Priestly cult, which he adeptly entitled “the Sanctuary of Silence” (in Toledot, vol. II, 476–77). Knohl, however, rejects Kaufmann’s

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82  “Yehezkel Kaufmann as a Biblical Scholar” (in Hebrew), Bitzaron 49 (1963): 88–93, see pp. 91–93. In a similar vein, Shemarya Talmon sees Kaufmann’s main contributions in his opposition to the excesses of German scholarship, in his pre-exilic dating of P, and with many question marks, his axiom of an unchanging, ever-present, Israelite monotheism. His criticisms reject Kaufmann’s a priori rejection of foreign influences on Israelite religious thought and behavior, his avoidance of any methodology that incorporated change and adaptation to new situations, and his mocking dismissals of ideas with which he did not agree. “The Teachings of Yehezkel Kaufmann in Biblical Research” (in Hebrew), Ha-universitat, 1966, 26–30.


explanation that the silence expresses a rejection of polytheistic magical functions and mythological explanations for cult. He writes politely, “I believe that this explanation is not sustained by criticism.” Knohl then goes on to qualify the “silence” in the sanctuary, distinguishing between what priests did and what others did. According to P, priests performed in silence—as Ps 65:2 states, leka dummiyah tehilla—with your benefit, silence is praise—while others might pray, recite psalms, and sing.\footnote{Knohl, The Sanctuary of Silence: The Priestly Torah and the Holiness School (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1995), 148–49.}

In his discussion of Priestly Torah’s attitude to popular religion and its institutions, Knohl again begins with Kaufmann’s idea about the image of God in popular worship, and then qualifies Kaufmann’s idea about the homogeneity of ideas in ancient Israel, by pointing to conflicting notions in Priestly Torah and popular conceptions.\footnote{Knohl, Sanctuary of Silence, 157–74.} Essentially, Knohl argues that Kaufmann overstated his case and that the textual evidence is best explained by the historical development of ideas.\footnote{Knohl presents his own, contra-Kaufmannian understanding of Israelite faith in Biblical Belief: The Borders of Biblical Revolution (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2007).}

Richard Elliot Friedman writes extensively on the documentary hypothesis. In Who Wrote the Bible? Friedman mentions Kaufmann in one footnote on a trivial matter of whether or not passages in Numbers containing the expression “babies will become prey” (Num 14:3, 31) that occurs in Deut 1:39 also should be assigned to P.\footnote{Friedman, Who Wrote the Bible? (New York: Harper & Row, 1987) 273 n. 7.} In an earlier book, however, Friedman summarized Kaufmann’s views on pre-exilic P and its relationship to D, supplementing them with supporting data from more recent research.\footnote{R. E. Friedman, The Exile and Biblical Narrative (HSM 22; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981), 45, and see pp. 68–69 for a more extensive discussion of the “babies will become prey” passages mentioned in the preceding note.}

I conclude this survey with comments made about Kaufmann in his presence before he died and with comments from an obituary. Both writers knew him well professionally.

Isaac Leo Seeligmann, wrote a “Preface” for the Yehezkel Kaufmann Jubilee Volume, 1960.\footnote{“Preface” in Yehezkel Kaufmann Jubilee Volume: Studies in Bible and Jewish Religion Dedicated to Yehezkel Kaufmann on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday (ed. M. Haran; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1960).} In it, Seeligmann observes that even before writing Golah, Kaufmann had worked out and published his critique against the hypotheses of Wellhausen and Kuenen (p. x). After listing the major ideas of Toledot and pointing out that Kaufmann went to great pains to prove every point that he made in detail, Seeligmann muses: “And still, there is place to ask, will all of Kaufmann’s conclusions withstand criticism?”


\footnote{Knohl, Sanctuary of Silence, 157–74.}

\footnote{Knohl presents his own, contra-Kaufmannian understanding of Israelite faith in Biblical Belief: The Borders of Biblical Revolution (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2007).}

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\footnote{R. E. Friedman, The Exile and Biblical Narrative (HSM 22; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981), 45, and see pp. 68–69 for a more extensive discussion of the “babies will become prey” passages mentioned in the preceding note.}

Seeligmann observes that Kaufmann expressed great confidence in the objective correctness of his conclusions; but then he comments that even one who does not share all of Kaufmann’s certainties will appreciate the majesty of his undertaking, will accept many of his ideas, and will be influenced by him (p. xi).

A close reading of Seeligmann’s “Preface” reveals that Seeligmann praises the man more than the work, and the effort more than the achievement.

Benjamin Mazar published an obituary in Haaretz on January 17, 1964 (p. 11): “It should be said that even one not willing to accept the teachings of Kaufmann as a whole, or one who rejects in some measure his fundamental assumption, or one who distances himself from his various other assumptions such as the antiquity of Leviticus, his views about the patriarchs, his description of the conquest of the land, and even his evaluation of the prophets, will find in his monumental book a full treasure of brilliant ideas.”

Reading what is writ large between the lines, Mazar declares that Kaufmann’s conclusions, in Mazar’s terminology “assumptions,” concerning topics about which Mazar, a leading archaeologist and historian of ancient Israel knows something, were incorrect. He leaves little of importance to be evaluated positively among the remaining “brilliant ideas.”

The generally poor reception of Kaufmann’s work among Jewish biblicalists since the 1960s despite Greenberg’s translation-abridgement undertaken to “spread the word” is understandable. Kaufmann’s project, consisting of Golah and Toledot, was conceived in the 1920s, and executed piecemeal over many decades beginning in the twenties. It began by fighting Wellhausen—a stand-in for all who employed higher-critical methods to reach conclusions which Kaufmann intuited were incorrect—passionately when such a fight was still of interest to some; but it continued long after mainstream biblical scholarship had reached a consensus that higher critical methodology was valid even when different scholars reached different conclusions about the revealed sources. Kaufmann remained uninterested in and largely uninformed by developments in the bibliography after World War II in both Europe and the United States. As a result, Toledot did not engage in any meaningful manner with new developments in archeology, history, and historiography regularly reported in the Bulletin of the American Schools for Oriental Research, The Biblical Archaeologist, and The Journal of Biblical Literature, as well as in Hebrew publications including newspapers.91 Simply put, Kaufmann’s work, besides various faults that its

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91 The fact that it was written in Hebrew and, thereby, directed primarily, if not exclusively, to a Jewish audience, suggests to me that Kaufmann intended his work to be accessible to a sophisticated, popular audience. He did not intend to direct it to critical scholars in and out of the university, nor did he write regularly for professional journals in Euro-
early critics mentioned in reviews, appeared to be, and was indeed, old fashioned. It is not, however, irrelevant.

3. Three Ideas Worth Reconsidering

Despite their convoluted origins and despite problems inherent in the way they were presented originally, some of Kaufmann’s ideas are worth reconsidering in the light of recent developments in biblical studies and other fields and of ongoing discussions in ancient Near Eastern religion.92

3.1. Pre-exilic P

Kaufmann’s major argument for pre-exilic P is his rhetorical question: who in the powerful priesthood of the Second Temple period would have assigned control over the major tithe, ten per-cent of gross national produce to powerless Levites and why would he have done so? Since the common-sense answer to his question is that nobody would have done so, the implication of the answer is that P must have come into existence when Levites were a powerful class politically and economically, during the First Temple period. This common-sense answer has never been refuted by researchers who date P to the post-exilic period. But, Kaufmann’s question, answer, and its implication do not constitute a proof that his claim about the dating of P’s composition is correct.

In recent decades, however, linguistic evidence evaluated with the standard methodologies employed in Historical Linguistics has established the veracity of Kaufmann’s position.93 In so far as the linguistic arguments are absolutely unrelated to the literary, ideological, and historical arguments advanced by Kaufmann, they can be said to provide external, independent, objective corroboration for his dating. This raises the intriguing question bearing on how and why P evolved in its pre-exilic context and what it meant.94

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93 See essays in C. Miller-Naudé and Z. Zevit, eds., Diachrony in Biblical Hebrew (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2012) and the rich bibliography that they provide.
3.2. The rapid dissemination of the idea of ex nihilo monotheism

Kaufmann’s *ex-nihilo* monotheism argument can be supported, not proven, employing a concept from evolutionary biology: punctuated equilibrium. Historians prefer gradualist explanations and are most comfortable talking about the slow evolution and incubation of ideas; occasionally, however, new, innovative ideas do occasionally come, as if in a flash, to the mind of a single individual and spread widely through his efforts within that person’s lifetime. History provides many examples in the areas of religion, politics, science, and even the humanities: Islam, Protestantism (in its Lutheran, Zwinglian, and Calvinist formulations), Hasidism, National Socialism, Einstein’s theory of special relativity, and even Wellhausen’s formulation of the documentary hypothesis.

In so far as Kaufmann’s judgment about the spread of monotheism in Israel within a single generation and its deep-rootedness in the Israelite psyche thereafter is paralleled, his general contention cannot be deemed impossible on the grounds that it is unparalleled. The question is only whether his claim can be demonstrated to be true, or in more Popperian formulation, whether it can be falsified.

Such a demonstration, however, must first contend with a significant semantic problem. In contemporary History of Religions and Bibliology, “monotheism” is problematic in that there is no consensus as to what exactly it refers. Historians of religion apply it to different religions and to a variety of elements within them. In biblical research it has become a type of buzz-word with a fuzzy range of meanings pertaining to singleness, unity, uniqueness, YHWH-aloneness, and authoritative dominance. Researchers define it using some mix of these semantic elements in *ad hoc* ways so that monotheism can mean whatever a particular author wants it to mean.\(^95\) Kaufmann used “monotheism” with a sense that had become popular in the late eighteenth-early nineteenth century, to refer to what was considered the most evolved, progressive form of religious belief, in contrast to what was considered the lowest form, fetishism. Some better definition and demarcation of the nature of monotheism is desirable before the implications of Kaufmann’s position in some recast formulation can be proposed for twenty-first century applications.

3.3. Wide-spread monotheism

Kaufmann’s contention that all of Israel was monotheistic, in the sense that all Israel worshipped a single deity, is contradicted by many biblical texts and is not supported by historical and archaeological research.\(^96\) It is preferable to argue, following Christine Hayes in lecture 2 of her online Yale

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96 Zevit, *Religions of Ancient Israel*, chapters 3, 5, 6, 7.
course, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, that what Kaufmann posited for all of Israel throughout the Iron Age was true only for some of Israel. 97 She suggests that in biblical texts, it is discernable primarily in the writings of those who framed, presented, and issued qualitative judgments about Israel’s cultic behavior during the Iron Age. 98 This allows that Kaufmann was partially correct but overly aggressive when generalizing from the limited data that he used, when dismissing contradictory texts, and when ignoring contradictory conclusions of scholars who worked with different types of data.

Hayes’ thoughtful insight combined with new ideas about the importance of ancient scribalism in the production of literature now in the Bible suggests that Kaufmann’s ideas, corrected and refined—tweaked, if you will—have an important role to play in twenty-first century studies of Israelite religion in general, not only Israelite belief. 99 And, if contemporary scholars choose to reject his ideas on grounds that they consider solid, they are obligated to refute them vigorously and robustly.

Reconsidered in the light of new developments in bibliology, some key ideas in Kaufmann’s *Toledot*, completed more than fifty years ago, may still have the power to—here I paraphrase Charles C. Torrey whom I cited in the first page of this study—open a new door into the past by providing insights that, if not true, then at least, are helpful for new research. The ideas, however, require an investment of thought-equity and reworking by new scholars freed from old orthodoxies.

97 Cf. the article of Israel Knohl in this volume.
Summary

The biblical scholar, historian, and Jewish thinker Yehezkel Kaufmann (1889–1963) is best known for two magisterial works: a two-volume interpretation of Jewish history, Golah ve-nekhar (Exile and Alienation, 1928–1932), and a four-volume study of biblical religion, Toledot ha-emunah ha-yisre‘elit (A History of the Israelite Faith, 1937–1956). Toledot in particular is the most monumental achievement of modern Jewish biblical scholarship. No other figure, not even Martin Buber, has had such a profound influence on the work of Jewish scholars of the Bible. Whether by supporting his ideas with new evidence, modifying them in light of new discoveries or methods, or attacking them, and whether addressing his work explicitly or implicitly, a substantial amount of modern Jewish biblical criticism builds upon the foundation set by Kaufmann. The latter’s phenomenological analysis of biblical monotheism as well as his critique of theoretical and methodological assumptions that are still dominant in historical studies in general, and biblical scholarship in particular, are an invaluable asset for those who engage in biblical scholarship, historical studies, and comparative religion.

The idea of this volume was conceived at an international symposium held in Switzerland, from June 10–11, 2014, “Yehezkel Kaufmann and the Reinvention of Jewish Exegesis of the Bible in Bern.” This gathering was held at the Universities of Bern and of Fribourg in order to commemorate the centenary of Yehezkel Kaufmann’s matriculation at the University of Bern on May 5, 1914, and to document and reassess the significance of his legacy and its reception. The symposium had three foci, corresponding with sections I-III of this volume: Kaufmann’s biography and intellectual background, his impact on Jewish studies, and his contribution to modern biblical scholarship.

The volume provides a comprehensive and multi-faceted account of Kaufmann’s work, through which Anglophone readers, students and scholars alike, can explore the hitherto unrecognized significance and profundity of Kaufmann’s legacy. It includes not only the symposium papers but also other essays, including two testimonies by two of his students, Menahem Haran and Moshe Greenberg and some of Kaufmann’s own writings—all heretofore unavailable in English—that are crucial for a fuller appreciation of his life project.

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Zu diesem Buch