Jewish Thought Adrift
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Part One

Interpreting the Biblical Legacy

Introduction

At a Rabbinical Conference convened in Berlin at the end of 1906, Benno Jacob (1862-1945) delivered a lecture in which he bemoaned the "dismal state" of Jewish Biblical scholarship. Jacob, who was then the newly appointed rabbi of Dortmund, declared: "We should not, for dogmatic reasons, leave Biblical scholarship to Protestant theologians; we need unbiased scholarship of our own."\(^1\) It was Jacob who, at the urging of his friend Franz Rosenzweig, would later devote years of labor to a scholarly, Jewish exegesis of the Bible. "It seemed to me," he would write in the 1933 foreword to his commentary on Genesis, "that our times urgently needed a scholarly, independent Jewish commentary which would remove the disgrace from our community that, for the scholarly explanation of its own and holiest book it should be wholly dependent on Christian commentaries."\(^2\) At the Rabbinical Conference, however, Jacob’s

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\(^1\) The following incident is recounted in a memoir by Caesar Seligmann (1860-1950), a leader of the Liberal movement: Erinnerungen, ed. Erwin Seligmann (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag von Waldemar Kramer, 1975), 137ff., and also in Kurt Wilhelm, "Benno Jacob, a Militant Rabbi," LBIY 7 (1962): 86-88. Jacob’s address was part of a broader critique of Wissenschaft des Judentums and was published in the conference proceedings.

\(^2\) Benno Jacob, Das erste Buch der Tora. Genesis übersetzt und erklärt (Berlin: Schocken, 1934), 12. The foreword, written in 1933, makes mention of Rosenzweig’s role.
call for a critical approach enraged the Orthodox rabbis present. They surrounded the dais, and one Rabbi Kohn of Ansbach, flung down a slip of paper in which he declared his resignation from the Conference. A tumult ensued which did not abate until an ad hoc commission was appointed, comprising representatives of both the liberal and orthodox factions, to determine whether Jacob had violated a statute of the conference which sought to keep the peace between the two factions by barring discussion of any "religious issues which might involve a violation of the legal decisions of the prevailing authorities." The commission found Jacob’s lecture out of order, and the plenary session of the assembly confirmed the commission’s resolution by a majority vote.

The reaction to Jacob’s lecture reflects an aversion to Biblical criticism which springs from deep religious roots. Biblical, and in particular, Pentateuchal criticism was an arrow aimed at the heart of traditional Judaism. Belief in the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, shared by both Jewish and Christian tradition, is old. It is witnessed both by Josephus and by the well-known passage in the Babylonian Talmud in which the Rabbis discuss the authorship of the Biblical books. It was this belief which Spinoza, a harbinger of modern Biblical research, sought to dismantle in the year 1670 in his—then anonymous—Theological-Political Treatise, concluding that it is “clearer than the sun at noonday that the Pentateuch was not written by Moses, but by someone who lived long after...” The era of modern Biblical research was ushered in by Jean Astruc, who argued in 1753 that the Pentateuch, and, in particular, the book of Genesis, might be composed of discrete sources, each distinguished by the various names used to refer to Deity. He laid the cornerstone of the edifice later known as the “documentary hypothesis,” the focal point of both the proponents and the detractors of Biblical scholarship in the nineteenth century.

The results of modern Biblical scholarship were reluctantly received in Jewish circles. It was a field in which, as Jacob lamented, Jews deferred to Christians. The nineteenth century offers some exceptions to this general rule, a

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3Pinhas Kohn (1867-1942) was rabbi in Ansbach from 1896 to 1916, and became a prominent leader among Orthodox rabbis.

4 Flavius Josephus, Against Apion I, 8:38-42.

5b. Baba Bathra 14b-15a.

6Theological Political Treatise, trans. R.H.M. Elwes, (New York: Dover, 1951), 1:124. The author, according to Spinoza, was Ezra, who expanded on a Mosaic core.

7Jean Astruc (1684-1766), Conjectures sur les mémoires originaux dont il paroit que Moyse s’est servi pour composer le livre de la Genèse (Brussels, 1753).
handful of Jewish scholars who made their own contributions to the field. One was Leopold Zunz (1794-1886), who was the first to propose that Chronicles, and Ezra-Nehemiah were written by the same author, and whose Biblical essays show, for example, that he accepted DeWette’s dating of Deuteronomy to the Josianic reform. Another was Abraham Geiger (1810-74), whose *Urschrift* argued that no divine hand had protected the cradle in which the text of the Hebrew Bible matured. Graetz, too, takes a critical approach to some books of the Bible, but not to the Pentateuch. In general, the Jewish posture towards Biblical criticism was characterized by either hostility or indifference.

Religious scruples, however, were not the only reason for the reserve with which modern Biblical scholarship was received in Jewish circles. Protestant Biblical scholarship of the nineteenth century was perceived as tendentious, as a new philological enactment of old prejudices, and this perception cast a shadow over the enterprise as a whole. In 1879 Ludwig Philippson summed up the objections to the critical study of the Bible:

> No literature of antiquity has been seized upon by such scathing and destructive critical study as our Biblical books. For more than two centuries scholars have labored continually to refute traditional notions...to demonstrate that the canonical version of these books is incorrect, that they are composed of various fragments, that they contain glosses and additions, and to prove that the date of their composition is not at all that which has been assumed heretofore. If, in their criticism, scholars were to proceed with deliberation, thoroughly weighing all relevant factors, if they were scrupulously circumspect, dispassionate and impartial, then we would only willingly grant this kind of inquiry its rightful place. This, however, is not the case...  

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10Wiener would later discuss the attitudes of Graetz and other 19th century scholars toward modern Biblical criticism and their own use of it. See below, Part Three, p. 154.

11Ludwig Philippson, “Die Einheit der Ideen in der Heiligen Schrift,” *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums*, 1879 (= *Gesammelte Abhandlungen* [Leipzig: Gustav Fock, 1911] 2:91). Philippson’s essay was intended as a public response to the “most recent product” of modern Biblical criticism, presumably Julius Wellhausen’s *Geschichte Israels*, which appeared the year before, and which was later published under its more familiar title: *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels* (1883).
In consonance with this attitude, Biblical criticism was accorded no place in Jewish academic institutions in the nineteenth century. When Max Wiener arrived at the Breslau Jewish Theological Seminary from his hometown of Oppeln in 1902, the critical-historical study of the Bible was not part of the curriculum. Even two decades later, according to one graduate, an understanding prevailed that "Biblical criticism was not possible in Breslau...one could talk about it, but it was not taught..."12

A somewhat freer atmosphere prevailed at the Berlin Academy for the Study of Judaism, the Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums, to which, like Wiener, many Breslau students were drawn over the years. Far from banning the teaching of Biblical criticism, as the Breslau Seminary had done, the Hochschule, in spite of its ever precarious financial condition, established a chair for Semitic Philology and Bible Exegesis in 1904,13 bringing the number of full-time faculty to four. A.S. Yahuda was appointed to the chair, a follower of the comparative school who, in his inaugural lecture, felt obligated to remind the audience of the "great merits of the Dutch and Halle schools [of biblical criticism] and of the outstanding achievements of Gesenius, Ewald, Fleischer, Wetzstein, Franz Delitzsch and others."14 Wiener attended Yahuda's lectures, and pursued Biblical studies outside the Hochschule as well.15 In his first semester at the university, he attended Hermann Gunkel's lectures on "Old Testament Theology."16 He was preparing himself to engage in that kind of "unbiased" Biblical scholarship for which Benno Jacob had called.

At the Hochschule, however, Wiener encountered another figure whose thought provided the philosophical framework for his Biblical studies. In March of 1905, Hermann Cohen, then still the professor of philosophy in Marburg, began his custom of travelling to Berlin and giving courses on ethics and philosophy of religion during the long hiatus between semesters.17 Cohen's lectures during Wiener's first winter in Berlin spanned the distance between Jewish and general culture: "The Philosophy of Plato" and "On the Background of Medieval

12Alfred Jospe, interview by author, 22 April 1985, Washington, D.C. Rabbi Jospe, who was born in Berlin in 1909, entered the Breslau Seminary in 1928.
1323. BHWJ 1905, 4.
1424. BHWJ 1906, 4f.
16Information culled from Wiener's "Anmeldebuch," in AJA Max Wiener - Miscellaneous File.
1723. BHWJ, 1905, 4f. The courses were called "Ferienkurse."
Jewish Philosophy of Religion in Greek Philosophy.”18 It was Cohen’s conception of the religion of the prophets, however, which formed Wiener’s. The prophets, Cohen held, were the authors of the idea of the universal God.19 The “idea” of God is the pillar of his philosophical system. In its logical aspect, it is the unifying origin of all being. In its moral aspect, it is the idea of morality.20 Because the “idea” is taken in this technical sense as the “hypothesis” underlying all being, the idea of God is presupposed in all thought about existence. It is an “a priori” which historical experience has, perforce, to bear out.21

For Wiener’s generation of Liberal Jews, Cohen was a kind of culture hero, to whose system Wiener, the young student, was attracted. Even his choice of topic for an essay, “A Portrait of the Prophet Amos,” which won him a prize from the faculty of the Hochschule, may betray the influence of Cohen, for whom Amos was the rustic, terse prophet who proclaimed the universality of the Israelite God.22 The prize essay was the seed of the book he published three years later, The Views of the Prophets on Morality,23 a book that bears the clear stamp of his master. Indeed, in the foreword, Wiener expresses his gratitude to the man whose understanding of the “character of the prophets and their role in world-history decisively influenced” his own presentation.24

The letter in which Cohen advised the Berlin Hochschule against appointing Wiener to the chair named in his honor throws light on the making of this book. As evidence that the young Wiener was not yet a seasoned scholar, Cohen writes that the book on the prophets came into being only after the first draft had been quite thoroughly revised several times by me. The draft suffered from a very worrisome lack of maturity,

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18. BHWJ, 1912.
22. BHWJ, 1906, 34-5.
24APS, v.
in that it shared the biases of Protestant Biblical criticism. Dr. W. acknowledged this, and thus, to my delight, a different spirit entered into the book, which still has earned recognition by Protestant Bible scholars as well.  

There is a certain irony in Cohen's criticism. Cohen himself embraced the Wellhausen school of Biblical criticism, and shared its view that the prophets represent Israelite religion at the height of its development. But Cohen was aware of the now subtle, now obvious anti-Jewish tendencies of Protestant Biblical criticism, and may have admonished Wiener on that account. Whatever the reason for his criticism, Wiener's book as it now stands does have a double agenda.

It was his first interpretation of the prophetic legacy to Judaism. Cohen, by transposing Wellhausen's interpretation of the prophets in a Jewish key, provided the score for Wiener's project. Wiener carried out the Cohenian project in detail. As such, the book represents a stage in Wiener's life and thought which he later overcomes. The book also represents an episode in the Jewish absorption of and reaction to the Protestant Biblical scholarship of the nineteenth century. Whether in this, too, Wiener took his cue from Cohen, we cannot know. Wiener did not remain within the Cohenian fold for long. Indeed, Cohen's diagnosis of intellectual immaturity may well have been a symptom of a distance which had begun to separate him from his former student. The revolution in Wiener's interpretation of the prophets shows how this distance grew into a gulf sundering one generation from another. He, too, adopts the central thesis of Wellhausen's documentary hypothesis, which ruled the field of Biblical criticism. He is also careful about what he imports from Protestant Bible scholarship into the Jewish sphere and what he excludes. He contends with the anti-Jewish tendency of Wellhausen and his school. However, he finally bids Cohen and his school farewell, as the prophets are transformed in his view from heralds of universal ethical monotheism into ardent voices of a religiously inspired nationalism.

Shortly after Julius Wellhausen died in 1918, Hermann Cohen hastened to eulogize him, not, as he said, because he considered himself competent to judge his importance as a scholar of the Bible, but because, as a Jew, he regarded it as "an honor and a duty" to pay homage to the memory of a man who had "devoted his life's efforts to the investigation of the Old Testament and who made enduring contributions to the understanding of the Israelite prophets."\(^{27}\)

What was Julius Wellhausen's understanding of the prophets? What was their place in his scheme of the history of Biblical religion? There are two answers to this question: Wellhausen gives one in the *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels*,\(^{28}\) the book which marks the culmination of the "documentary hypothesis," and a variant in his later *Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte* (1894), which represents his mature conception of early Jewish history.\(^{29}\)

In the revealing autobiographical introduction to the *Prolegomena*, Wellhausen writes that in the summer of 1867 he learned that Karl Heinrich Graf (1815-69) had assigned the "Law" a date later than that of the prophets. Wellhausen was persuaded at once. Then, he wrote, "I was able to allow that Hebrew antiquity could be understood *without the book of the Torah.*"\(^{30}\)

Accordingly, Wellhausen formulated the task of the *Prolegomena*:

> The problem addressed in the present volume is the historical position of the Mosaic law...whether it is the point of departure for the history of ancient Israel or for the history of Judaism.\(^{31}\)

Early Israelite religion knew no law. It had customs, but no legal canon. The latter was produced during and after the Babylonian Exile. The establishment of law was one of the symptoms of the process of degeneration and petrification which reached its nadir in the emergence of Judaism. The task Wellhausen sets himself in the *Prolegomena* is to describe this process.

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\(^{31}\)Ibid., 1 (1).
In Wellhausen’s scheme it took place in three stages. Each stage marks an epoch in the history of “Israelite” religion, and each expresses itself in a discrete literary stratum of the Pentateuch: the Jahwist stratum portrays religious life during the period of the early monarchy; the Deuteronomist source reflects the changes brought on by the Josianic reforms at the end of the seventh century; and the Priestly Code is the document on which the Jews organized their religious community under Ezra. Wellhausen’s departure from the “documentary hypothesis” of his predecessors lies in the dating of this “Code”: he argues that it was composed in Ezra’s time, and therefore postdates the Deuteronomist source.

Wellhausen’s map of Biblical history in the Prolegomena thus shows the Babylonian Exile as a continental divide sundering “Judaism” on this side from “Israelite religion” on the other. The early period of Israelite religion, reflected in the Jahwist stratum, was a spontaneous, natural religion. The early Israelites, for example, had a multitude of sacrificial altars; there is not a trace of evidence, argues Wellhausen, that the Israelites believed that there was only one licit sacrificial altar. The sacrificial ritual itself was, in ancient times, believed to be a meal at which the worshipper is the guest of the deity. And the festivals of the ancient Israelites were oriented on the natural rhythm of agricultural life.

The reforms of King Josiah introduced the first corruption into this pristine state, bringing about a “crisis” in the history of the sacrificial cult. He legislated that it be centralized in Jerusalem, thus uprooting it from the natural conditions of life in which it had grown. If the Deuteronomic legislation only “calls for” the centralization of the sacrificial cult, the Priestly code, stemming from the period of the restoration, “presupposes” it. Wellhausen then adduces any number of Biblical passages to demonstrate that the priestly writers sought to retroject this conception of the centralized cult onto the Jahwist narratives. They even graft the later architecture of the temple onto the conveyance constructed for the tablets of the law in the desert.

In the Priestly Code, sacrifice is severed from its natural root and “refined.” Wellhausen proposes the idea that, whereas sacrifice, in its original form, was understood as a sharing of food with the deity, a communion meal, the

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32Ibid., 9 (8-9).
33Ibid., 17 (17).
34Ibid., 64 (62).
35Ibid., 84f. (83f.)
36Ibid., 78 (77).
37Ibid., 36 (36).
priestly laws on sacrifice betoken an estrangement from its original, natural meaning. Sacrifice has become an end in itself.  

The festivals undergo a similar estrangement. Originally agricultural festivals (Jahwist stage), then invested with historical meaning (Deuteronomist stage), the priests anchor them to a rigid calendar (Leviticus 23). They all suffer the same fate as the Pesach festival of the Priestly Code, in which, says Wellhausen,

nothing is free or natural, nothing is left vague or in flux, but everything is fixed and clear as daylight.  

All these examples testify to what Wellhausen terms a process of "denaturalization" which has come about because of the imposition of artificial laws on the natural customs of a pristine religion. Ancient custom, Wellhausen writes elsewhere, was like a green tree; after the "reform" of Josiah, it resembled trimmed lumber.  

"Historical development," the principle which is the moving force of Wellhausen's research, means—in the Prolegomena—historical regress and deterioration. The cause of this deterioration is law. Just as Josiah introduced the Deuteronomic code in the 7th century, Ezra introduced the Torah in the post-exilic period, and the priests codified it. The purpose of Wellhausen's arguments in the Prolegomena is to render the editorial activity of the priests transparent, thus showing how they deliberately altered the picture of ancient Israelite religion to make it -- "Jewish." Those who continue to be fooled by the literary artefact of the priests, and still cling to an early date for the priestly legislation are the target of Wellhausen's polemic:

The antiquity of the priestly legislation is demonstrated by placing it in a historical sphere created by its own legal premises, a sphere which cannot be found in actual history and must, therefore, have preceded it. The priestly legislation, then, hovers above ground, holding itself up by its own hair.  

Thus the "Law" in its codified form was artificial, a late invention of the founders of Judaism, the priests and scribes who both composed their own legislation and then sought to remake Israelite history in its image. The fixing of a

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38Ibid., 74 (72).
39Ibid., 104 (103).
40Ibid., 103 (102)
41Ibid., 83 (81).
42Ibid., 40 (39).
canon of law was the culmination of that process of "denaturalization" of the "natural," pristine Israelite faith in which—to use a phrase of Wellhausen’s—the "Jewish tendency to remove God from man" is all-pervasive. With the emergence of nomistic Judaism, the development of Israelite religion had reached its end.

In the scheme of the Prolegomena the prophets figure as spirited critics who stand apart from the institutions of Israelite religion. Wellhausen cites their attitude toward the sacrificial cult as evidence that the priestly "Torah" did not yet exist in pre-exilic times. They condemn the sacrificial cult, he argues, without any indication that they thereby seek to undermine the prevailing laws. On the contrary, they challenge the sacrificial cult by reminding its practitioners that Yahweh never demanded sacrifices of them. Amos' polemic (Amos 5) is "directed against the practices of his contemporaries, but he places it on a theoretical foundation with which his contemporaries concur: the sacrificial cult is not of Mosaic origin."

The prophets were a vital force in the religion of Israel, but their warnings were not heeded, their critique of the sacrificial cult ignored. Instead, legalistic "Judaism" prevailed over the "religion of Israel." It brought about "the death of prophecy," which was suffocated by the "Law." Because of the institution of law codes, the Israelites degenerated from a "people of the Word" to a "people of the book." Thus it is the canon, the written Torah, which sets Judaism apart from ancient Israel: "Later generations took the bubbling spring water of the past and stored it in cisterns." The living voice of the prophets was stifled.

In the last chapter of the Prolegomena, which bears the title "Theocracy as Idea and Institution," Wellhausen presents a corollary to this thesis: that the idea of a theocracy founded by Moses, like the "law," was alien to the period of the monarchy and is, likewise, of late origin. The so-called Mosaic theocracy was not the residue of some extinct polity, but a fiction invented under foreign subjugation and retrojected into Israelite beginnings.

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43In summing up his treatment of the sacrificial cult: "Wie endlich alles dies zusammenhängt mit der judaistischen Fernrückung Gottes vom Menschen, ist klar." Ibid., 81 (79).
44Ibid., 59 (56).
45See the third and final part of the Prolegomena, "Israel and Judaism." Ibid., 421 (402-3).
46Ibid., 428 (409).
47Ibid. 429 (410). "Das Wasser, das in der Vergangenheit gequollen war, faßten die Epigonen in Cisternen."
This was Wellhausen's conception of Judaism in the *Prolegomena*. Judaism was the still-born child of those who had repudiated the teachings of the prophets; the emergence of Judaism thus betokened a sharp break in the history of the Israelites. Judaism spurned its prophetic legacy.

Wellhausen revised this scheme in his *Israelite and Jewish History* (1894). In the *Prolegomena*, the prophets appear as harbingers of Pauline Christianity, opponents of the "letter that killeth," preachers of "the spirit that giveth life" (II Corinthians 3:6). In his later work, Wellhausen understood the interplay between priest and prophet to be more complex. Whereas in the *Prolegomena*, the "law" marked a dramatic change in Israelite history, Wellhausen's *Israelite and Jewish History* offers a different view:

The law did not bring about a sudden break in the preceding development [of Israelite religion]. Its stifling effect was gradual; much time elapsed before the pith beneath the surface turned to wood. Up to the time of Pharisaism the free impulses which had issued from the prophets remained alive and forceful.48

The "cult," in this revised version of Israelite history, did not enjoy a complete victory over prophecy. Prophetic teaching was not "dead." What, then, is Wellhausen's understanding of prophecy in this later work?

In his reconstruction, the prophets are responsible for the transformation of the Israelite conception of God from that of a national God into that of a universal God, who is ruler over all the world.49 This "universalism" of belief was born under the impact of the Assyrian expansion, which put an end to the numerous kingdoms of the ancient Near East, and, with them, to their belief in the efficacy of their gods. They now appear merely as tools in the hand of the one true God (cf. Isaiah 10:5). This, according to Wellhausen, explains the prophets' disdain and even revulsion at the cultic shrines and observances dedicated to the appeasement of these national deities. The faith of the prophets is a faith in a divine rule which will bring about justice. It calls for a different kind of piety: obedience to the divine will. "In this way the prophets created the foundation for legal piety."50 The law was seen as an expression of the divine will. The re-

ligion of the prophets did not, in the scheme of Wellhausen's later book, lead directly to the religion of the gospels.51

But the prophets were the initiators of the idea of individual piety. In this development Jeremiah represents a turning point. Jeremiah, painfully conscious of the failure of the people to save themselves through repentance and return, is the prophet who inaugurated the personal dialogue with God. His laments show that the individual who feels abandoned, persecuted or helpless can appeal to God.

The teaching of the prophets, however, did not suffice to cement the community of exiles; thus the law jumped into the breach, creating an organization which would insure "the endurance of the idea."52 Wellhausen views the "prophetic priest" Ezekiel as a mediator in this process, in that he, unlike his predecessors, was concerned mainly with the defilement of God's holiness and His sanctuary.53 "On the whole, Wellhausen sees the significance of Ezekiel in the fact that he was already planning, in exile, what was to be realized under Persian rule: the organization of Judaism under the 'law.'"54

While Wellhausen, in his later Israelite and Jewish History, understands the transition from prophetic to priestly religion to be less abrupt and more complex than he did in the Prolegomena, here, too, Judaism allegedly assumes its final form at the nadir of Biblical history. It is implied that Judaism was necessary, to be sure, as the matrix of the liberating message of the Gospels, as a praeparatio evangelica, but that it was a stage now overcome. Wellhausen concludes his Israelite and Jewish History with these words:

Thus Judaism came to an end: transforming itself into the written letter and preserving itself by following the letter. The extensive Jewish literature of the Middle Ages which came thereafter cannot really be considered a product of authentic origin.55

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51 Ib.  
52 Ib., 258.  
53 Ib.  
54 Ib., 259.  
55 "Mit dieser Arbeit, sich selbst im Buchstaben aufzuheben und dann nach dem Buchstaben zu conservieren, schließt das Judentum ab. Die ausgedehnte jüdische Literatur des späteren Mittelalters kann man nicht eigentlich als ein Produkt aus echter Wurzel betrachten." Wellhausen, Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte, 377. Given this view of early Judaism, it is easy to understand how the term "Late Judaism" (Spätjudentum) gained currency in Protestant theology, referring to the same period, but to the death rattle of Judaism as the star of Christianity rose.
INTERPRETING THE BIBLICAL LEGACY

Both the provenance and the motivations of Wellhausen’s historiography have evoked much discussion. Because of the neat three-stage progression, some have thought the scheme of the *Prolegomena* Hegelian. That assessment is superficial, taking a similarity in form for similarity in content. For Hegel, the progression from thesis to antithesis to synthesis always rises to a new and higher stage in the manifestation of the Spirit. Wellhausen does not operate with this Hegelian pattern. His conception of Israelite history is entirely pessimistic. Judaism is not, as for Hegel, the “religion of negativity,” which is taken up and transformed in a new synthesis. Where progress comes about with the advent of Christianity, it is not as a higher synthesis of the stages of history which have preceded it, but as a rejuvenation of the pristine spirit of prophetic faith. A romantic yearning for a pristine past determines the tenor of Wellhausen’s thought.\(^{56}\)

It is hardly astonishing that rabbis, Jewish philosophers, scholars, publicists, and others took offense at Wellhausen’s reconstruction of Biblical history. The documentary hypothesis, as it came to be known, was based upon it, and was thus more than a philological achievement; it rested on historical assumptions, or better, prejudices about the value of Judaism, and then corroborated the reconstruction in impressive detail. It offended traditional and liberal Jews alike, the former by undermining the antiquity—and sanctity—of Mosaic law, and the latter by expropriating the teachings of the prophets.

Hermann Cohen praises Wellhausen for having discovered the significance of prophetic piety, and gently chides him for failure to face the “historical problem” that Judaism does indeed survive the birth of Christianity. Later critics of Wellhausen, such as Yehezkel Kaufmann, would reject the historical frame-

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work of the documentary hypothesis "in toto," while acknowledging the composite literary make-up of the Pentateuch. It was Wellhausen's relegation of the "Priestly" stratum to the post-Exilic period which rankled Kaufmann particularly. Wiener, however, accepted both the method of the documentary hypothesis, as well as its periodization of Israelite history. He was, however, well aware of its theological and historical prejudices. In his hands the documentary hypothesis became a tool for questioning Wellhausen's history of early Judaism, for disputing the Protestant usurpation of the prophetic legacy by the Wellhausen school, and for demonstrating how it has endured in Judaism. That is the apologetic aim which guides the program of his first book, The Views of the Prophets on Morality.

The Prophets on Morality

The Views of the Prophets on Morality transports Hermann Cohen's philosophical conception of prophetic religion into the realm of Biblical scholarship. To be sure, it has been written that the book "was not so much designed as a monograph in the field of Biblical studies than as a contribution to the philosophical understanding of Judaism as a whole." All the same, the book also reflects Wiener's concern with exposing and refuting those assumptions and conclusions of modern Biblical scholarship which misrepresented Judaism and its Biblical legacy.

The preface betrays Cohen's patrimony: in any field of the history of culture, writes Wiener, philosophical ethics must provide the idea according to which phenomena can be judged and evaluated. This holds true for morality as for any other sphere of human culture. The idea of morality, therefore, must provide the standard for any attempt to evaluate the history of ethical views.

This method is what Cohen termed "idealization." All knowledge must be viewed in its relationship to the "idea." All disciplines of knowledge are

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59 APS, 1.
connected, the mathematical and scientific disciplines by principles of logic, and
the humanities by principles of morality. Wiener’s approach seems bold and
even unfounded if it is not seen against the background of Cohen’s conception of
the “unity of cultural consciousness,” a unity grounded in reason. If one as-
sumes such a rational unity of all culture, then it is legitimate to presuppose an
“idea” of morality, as Wiener does, and to proceed to seek its reflection in
phenomena.

Wiener is well aware that the prophets did not produce a system of philo-
sophical ethics. The term “morality,” therefore, in this context, refers to the so-
cial conduct of human beings in a broad and “rough” sense. It was the
prophets, Cohen had stated, who made morality in this sense—as the realm of
the interpersonal—the focus of religion: “the relation of the ‘I’ to his fellow hu-
man being.”

This is the perspective which the prophet introduces into the consciousness of
man... in his eternal literary works, he seeks to accustom man to look to the
relationship of human beings to one another as the way to seek God.

Wiener also shows himself the pupil of Cohen, and thereby of Wellhausen
also, in his assessment of the prophets’ position as a turning point in the course
of Israelite history.

Because the prophets preach a God who takes more pleasure in love of one’s
neighbor than in sacrifice, a God, moreover, to whom sacrifice without justice
is an abomination, they herald the victory of ethical motives over specifically
religious ones, which is to say cultic motives in their thinking.

This victory was won by a process in which prophetic religion refined the “baser
ideas of popular faith in God” and “eliminated or transformed the admixture of
mythical elements which were present in an earlier stage.” To be sure, the
prophets address these ethical questions indirectly; their thoughts lie concealed
under a “religious mantle.” We see here, moreover, how Wiener—following
Cohen’s cue—accepts from Wellhausen the tenet that the earlier stage of
Israelite religion was more “primitive;” yet, unlike Wellhausen, Wiener main-
tains that it was not “pagan.” The seed of ethical monotheism is present in it,

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62APS, 1
64APS, 3
65APS, 3
and is concealed under a "religious mantle" which the interpreter must lift in order to expose the ethical ideas beneath. That is the method of "idealization."

The first chapter of The Views of the Prophets on Morality is entitled "Divine Revelation and Human Knowledge," and the problem which occupies Wiener here is not so much one of Biblical exegesis as of philosophical and theological ethics. Is it possible to claim that the source of ethical commandments is divine revelation without forfeiting the idea of human autonomy, that idea which—as Kant had taught—is the sine qua non of ethics? Wiener assumes that some belief in revelation is inherent in any religion, that the belief in divine revelation is as elemental to religious consciousness as the belief in a deity. The question, then, reformulated, is: can the commandments of a religion, which are the content of this revelation, coexist with the idea of moral autonomy? What is the "answer" offered by the prophets to this philosophical problem?

The answer is offered by the way in which Wiener conceives of revelation, a problem on which he later elaborates in a number of essays. To the prophets the experience of divine revelation was direct and personal. Revelation refers to the experience of revelation, and not to an historical event, the authority of which can be invoked by those who follow later. "The prophets, who are themselves filled with the divine, do not need to refer to the giving of the law on Sinai." Wiener has to distinguish, then, between "revelation" which is an awareness characterized by its immediacy, and "revelation" which is the object of reflection, an historical event from which the believer is separated both by time, and by the chasm which "reflectedness" imposes between the human being and the sense of immediacy. To be sure, there are the beginnings of such a "theological" concept of revelation within the Bible itself. The book of Deuteronomy is the oldest example of such a document, which presents its commandments and curses as a revelation once given to the prophet Moses, an historical event recalled from the hoary past. Yet, explains Wiener, there is a distinction between revelation, even if it is informed by a "consciousness of its historical origin," and the concept of revelation in post-Biblical religion, when Jews were aware that they lived in a post-classical age in which, as the Rabbis

—APS, 8.

See below on "Offenbarung" (1913) and "Vernunft und Offenbarung" (1925), Part 2, 73f.

Ibid., "Bewußtsein der Geschichtlichkeit."
put it, the "springs of prophecy" had run dry. Only in such times, writes Wiener, did the Jews, conscious of a vanishing sense of communion with God, take refuge in the notion of "historical revelation," and in the fixing of divine commandment.

Revelation which has crystallized into holy writ, the very wording of which claims origin in divine inspiration, has often enough crippled moral energy. It alone compels the human being to mistrust his own reason. It alone is susceptible to the accusation of heteronomy which has been leveled against religious ethics.

This, then, is the crux of the problem. Wiener seeks to defend revelation-based morality against the accusation that moral precepts based on the authority of revelation amount to a form of heteronomy of the will—to use Kantian language—or hold the will "captive," to use Pauline language. Wiener is arguing here with the ghost of Kant, who contended that, because of the "heteronomous" character of Jewish law, Judaism was not a religion at all. Here, too, Wiener's solution follows the master: as Cohen equates God with the source of morality, Wiener equates knowledge of God with morality itself. In characterizing the prophet, Wiener can then say that the "prophet, divinely inspired, certain of his revelation in all its immediacy, does not feel a trace of disharmony." The prophet identifies his person with his mission. "Knowledge of God and morality are entirely identical." Just as Kant had paradoxically defined freedom as a "kind of causality" which inheres in the will, Wiener arrives at a paradoxical conception of prophecy: the prophet's consciousness of revelation is his autonomy.

Accordingly, Wiener produces Biblical sources to demonstrate that, although all law and morality is revealed by Yahweh, ancient Israel saw the indi-

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70 A 1929 essay of Wiener's, "Tradition und Kritik im Judentum," for a volume edited by Paul Tillich, contains a summary history of Judaism in which his periodization of Jewish history is determined by the evolution of the concept of revelation.
71 APS, 12.
72 Romans 7:6.
75 APS, 12
76 Ibid., 13.
vidual as an autonomous moral agent. In the mentality of the ancient Israelites the consciousness of revelation “does not dull the individual’s sense of morality.” He sees evidence of a notion of autonomous moral judgment, for example, in the Bible’s assessment of the crime in Gibea as the worst crime in Israel’s history. The Israelites of the pre-prophetic period, Wiener argues, sensed the distinction between cultic and moral precepts, and held the latter in higher regard. “The ancient Covenant Code is rather free of cultic regulations.”

Of course, this style of argumentation belongs to the sphere of religious apologetics. It means little to argue that the Covenant Code (Ex. 21-23) is “rather” free of cultic concerns, when it is hardly entirely free of them. Indeed, it is striking that the cultic regulations which it does contain, such as the prohibition of sacrifices to other gods (22:20), the laws concerning sacrifices (22:29 and 23:18-19), or the duty to observe the “three festivals” (23:14-17) are interspersed among the other laws, giving the impression—quite contrary to Wiener’s argument—that the framer of this ancient law code was unperturbed by any sense of differentiation among these regulations, and that, in his mind, these “cultic” and “ethical” laws were all of a piece. The distortion of the Biblical text reveals Wiener’s apologetic intent: to argue that the idea of the moral autonomy of the individual, while refined by the prophets, was not their invention. It actually predates them, and is, in fact, contained in the Torah itself.

Wiener seems to be aware of the paradox in his conception of the prophet and seeks to resolve it. On one hand, the prophet sees himself only as a purveyor of a divine message. The prophet speaks only in the name of God, never on his own authority. For prophetic ethics this means that “the norms, to which human conduct should conform, are considered by the prophets to have been established by God.” Wiener skirts any discussion of the psychology of prophecy. What, from the subjective vantage point of the prophet, is consciousness of revelation is, from the objective point of view, the conscience of the individual.

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77Ibid., 15
78Ibid., 15
79Ibid., 16
80Ibid., 18
81Ibid., 16
82Ibid., 19 “Und hier wird dem Propheten das Offenbarungsbewußtsein völlig gleichbedeutend mit dem Gewissen; und die Berufung auf Gottes Wort wandelt sich geradezu zum sprachlichen Ausdruck dieser Tatsache.”
The moral conscience of the prophet speaks through the Torah, and to the prophets the Torah comes to mean the "moral law." This explains the prophetic "indifference" to the cult, an indifference which signified a radical transvaluation of values. Isaiah and Jeremiah are called as witnesses for this concept of Torah, Isaiah for the idea that Torah is the knowledge necessary for a righteous life, Jeremiah for the conviction that the Torah must be internalized, written upon the heart. And the poems of Second Isaiah are cited as texts which declare the universal validity of this divine instruction.

Thus, Wiener can conclude: in the prophetic understanding of the meaning of divine revelation, God is the source of moral law. However, the moral law which God teaches to humankind is nothing alien; on the contrary, man is able, using his own power of judgment, to comprehend the excellence and wisdom of the law. Thus the word of God, originating as it does—from an objective standpoint—solely from the moral genius, from the conscience of the prophet, becomes, for those who submit themselves to it, a clear, self-evident commandment.

This seems to be Wiener's solution to "the old question" of whether God determines the content of morality, or whether "His commands conform to absolute ethical norms." This question, with which he opened this chapter, is resolved when Wiener, following Hermann Cohen, defines God as "morality," and claims that this equation was valid in the prophetic consciousness as well. "God's will and the good, which, for the prophet, is the ethical, are considered to be one and the same."

For Wiener, the answer to this question determines the answer to another: the question of the "particularity" or "universality" of the Torah. If morality is grounded in the human conscience, then moral laws are not the special legacy of the Israelites, but a universal, human one. This view is reflected not only in Amos' addresses to the nations, but also in ancient lore, such as the story of the punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah, who sinned "against the Lord" (Gen. 18:20). According to Wiener, the story reflects the Israelite assumption that sin,
wherever committed, is a sin against Yahweh. Yahweh is a universal standard of morality.

Wiener cites another episode from Biblical lore, which, to Wiener, provides an important insight on Biblical ethics. When Abraham pleaded for the sinners of Sodom, he asks God, “Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen.18:25) This one question demonstrates the autonomy of the human conscience. Divine morality may be measured by a human yardstick. The narrative, Wiener emphasizes, dates from ancient times. And it betrays the same awareness of the autonomy of human moral judgment as Jeremiah’s test for false prophecy, which measures the authenticity of prophecy by the moral fruit it bears. Wiener concludes this chapter:

The mystical feeling of revelation, which guarantees validity only to one who is “inspired,” must pass the test of objective ethical norms. Such a test, however, is the prerogative neither of a prophet nor of any other human being. It is a right common to all.

The second chapter, “Israel and the Nations,” has a twofold purpose: one is to render an answer to the question whether the religion of the prophets can be characterized as “universalistic” or “particularistic.” This question stemmed from the realm not so much of Biblical exegesis as of religious apologetics. Nineteenth century theology and historiography in Germany cast Judaism as the religion of “particularism,” which Christianity unleashed to become a “universalistic” religion. In responding, Wiener again takes his cue from Cohen, in whose view the greatest achievement of ethical monotheism was its vision of a humankind united in a messianic age, of which Israel is to be the harbinger. That is the universalism of the prophets: the belief that there is One God of a united humankind.

The second, and secondary, purpose of the chapter seems, likewise, to be an apologetic one. Wellhausen had characterized the religion of the Israelites of the early monarchy as “natural” and “earthy.” It was the prophets, in his view, who transformed this pagan conception of a “natural” and “direct” relationship to God into an ethical one. They are held up as the moral geniuses who brought about the dramatic departure from the past. One Jewish apologist, writing in the year 1907, complained that, to the Protestant Bible scholars of his day, the prophets “appeared as isolated luminaries, who, independently and usually also

90Ibid., 25
91See Jer. 23:22, which Wiener cites, APS, 25
92Ibid., 25
misunderstood by their own people, arose in the difficult hours of their fate and preached new religious ideas to them."

Nothing in Israel’s past, according to this view, anticipated the teachings of the prophets, nor, by extension, did the subsequent history of Judaism preserve them. Bernhard Duhm, one of the prominent scholars whose anti-Jewish orientation evoked sharp criticism from Wiener, drew the conclusion that the prophets do not not really constitute an essential part of the history of Israelite or Jewish religion:

Thus prophecy, too, has its history, which, while it is very closely connected with the development of its people, is not identical with it, a history from which the religiously minded individual can come to know God’s ways and purposes... [I]t was not a straight path which led from the prophets to Christianity. The period which followed the two century long efflorescence of prophecy signified a decline... The river of Israelite history had reached its final waters, a placid land-locked lake. In its prophetic leaders, Israel had lost its position of spiritual leadership in world-history and isolated itself—at once hating and hated—from “the nations.” It crucified the dangerous reformer, who dared to say: “You have heard that it was said to the ancients, I however say unto you...”

Thus Wellhausen and his followers dispossess Judaism of the prophetic legacy. They present the prophets as a comet-like episode: they appeared suddenly, unanticipated, and vanished without making a lasting mark in Judaism, only to be revived in the teachings of Jesus.

Wiener seeks to demonstrate the fallaciousness of this scheme, not only by pointing to the continuities which connect the religion of the early Biblical period with that of the prophets, but also by arguing, less explicitly, that Judaism did not, as a “particularistic” group, “isolate itself—at once hating and hated—from the nations,” but envisioned, in its messianic ideal, a united hu-

93 Joseph Eschelbacher, Das Judentum im Urteil der modernen protestantischen Theologie (Leipzig: Gustav Fock, 1907), 5. Joseph Eschelbacher, born in 1848, was rabbi in Bruchsal from 1876 to 1900, and thereafter in Berlin, until his death in 1916.

94 Bernhard Duhm, Israels Propheten (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1916), 8. Duhm’s statement does postdate the book under discussion, but it is typical of the literature of the period. It was Duhm (1847-1928) who was the first to distinguish between Deutero-Isaiah (Is. 40-55) and Trito-Isaiah (Is. 56-66) in his Jesaia-Kommentar (1892).

mankind. To refute that “particularistic” stereotype is the aim of the next section.

We will take the secondary purpose first. Wiener wants to demonstrate that the period of the early monarchy was “pregnant with ‘prophetic’ ideas.” To these he reckons the sense of a special national identity, which was not, as some might have it, a chauvinistic sense of superiority to other peoples, but a religious identity which derived from the consciousness of worshipping the one God. This idea of monotheism developed in three stages: First,

a naive standpoint, at which Yahweh is recognized as Israel’s only God, but not yet as Lord of the world. At the same time as these henotheistic ideas, and in conflict with them, monotheistic faith lived a vigorous life. Under its aegis there awakened the consciousness of religious uniqueness, of election; finally messianic religion.

Such nascent monotheism Wiener sees, for example, in that cryptic verse in Genesis, which proclaims that in Abraham all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves. But above all, he sees it in the task which God envisions for Abraham:

... that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice...

The moral task which chosenness imposes on those chosen is made as explicit by the Torah, Wiener argues, as it is by Amos centuries later. Thus

even the most ancient notions of Israel’s unique relationship to the One God contained a powerful antidote against the pitfall of arrogance: they contained the belief that Israel’s special position imposes special duties on the nation.

Wiener is therefore seeking to refute the view of the Wellhausen school of Biblical scholarship: that the religion of the Israelites before the prophetic era was a religion barren of ethical concerns, but infused with nationalistic conceit.

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96APS, 31
97See Wiener’s comment on Alfred Bertholet, a follower of Wellhausen, in APS, 30. Bertholet’s monograph on the attitudes of the Israelites towards foreigners, Die Stellung der Israeliten und der Juden zu den Fremden (Freiburg i.Br. and Leipzig: [J.C.B. Mohr] Paul Siebeck, 1896) sets itself the tendentious goal of explaining why “the Jews were incapable, in spite of all the universalistic tendencies which have developed now and then, to break with this physically limited conception” of ethnic parochialism (p. vii.).
98APS, 28.
99Genesis 18:19.
100APS, 35.
and lacking, finally, in the universalistic spirit which was the advance achieved by the prophets.\(^\text{101}\)

Wiener's rejection of the accepted understanding of the development of Biblical religion stems from a distinct conception of religion itself. The character of a religion, Wiener wrote in the opening words of the book, can be discerned from the nature of its commandments.\(^\text{102}\) Religion is, in its essence, **ethical**. The relationship between God and man requires, at all levels of religious development, obedience.\(^\text{103}\) "In this sense, the relationship is always ethical, never natural."\(^\text{104}\)

By adopting this conception of religion, Wiener accepts the Wellhausen principle of development in Biblical religion, but he rejects the manner in which the Wellhausen school applied it. Wellhausen's schematic division of Israelite history into a "natural," or pagan and a "prophetic," or ethical period blinded him to the continuities which connect the two. The prophets did not create *ex nihilo*; they built on what preceded them; the so-called "pagan" period was also "ethical" in character. There is no sharp line of demarcation. Wiener's presentation of the religion of the literary prophets will serve to buttress this claim.

The prophets act as politicians, and their political stances are cosmopolitan, but only because of the prophet's belief in a *divine* plan in history, of which he is the messenger. "In no way were they politicians of the usual stripe. Otherwise they would not have been able to function as God's deputies, even to the extreme of denying their own people's right to exist."\(^\text{105}\) The very character of the prophets' political activity bespeaks—and it seems to be Wiener's motive in this argument to demonstrate this—a conception of God not as a national deity, but as the God whose sovereignty extends over all the world, who is "universal."

Consonant with his contention that the religion of the prophets does not mark a break with the past, Wiener argues that their accomplishment was not to have invented the idea of the universal God, but to have refined and elaborated
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it. Their significance lies less in their having produced fundamentally new religious ideas, as in the moral elaboration of inherited ones.106

The clearest spokesman for this conception of God as the God of universal morality is Amos. Once again, Wiener contests the "critical" scheme of Biblical history, which asserts that the Israelite religion was first "henotheistic," that is, that the Israelites acknowledged the existence of other gods, yet worshipped their own God as superior.107 Amos' well-known saying:

You alone have I known among all the families of the earth...108

shows that Amos could assume a common view of the people’s past in which God was understood to be the sole God, of all the earth. Amos' oracle in chapter 3 shows, in a word, that the Israelites he was addressing were monotheists.

In Wiener's view, Amos contributed to the development of the Israelite conception of God in another way as well. He promulgated the idea of world justice, of which God is the arbiter. In the speeches to the nations (Amos 1-2) Amos announces to all of Israel's neighbors the divine judgment that awaits them. Nor does Amos shy away from drawing the direst consequences for his own people. Not only may they claim no immunity from divine judgment, they are to be judged all the more severely on account of being chosen:

...therefore I shall punish you for all your iniquities.109

Amos' significance thus lies in having moved the ideal of divine justice to the forefront of religious consciousness. In this, Wiener is in agreement with Wellhausen, for whom the seers of earlier times differed from Amos inasmuch as they saw "the working of universal moral laws in the course of world history..."110 Wiener's argument with Wellhausen and his followers has to do with the place which they assign to Amos in the scheme of Biblical history. In Wellhausen's version, the Torah was alien to the prophets and he was therefore

106Ibid., 43.
107The term "henotheism" seems to have been coined by Max Müller to connote the worship of a single deity by an ethnic group, without denying the existence of other gods, and was therefore taken by him to be a preliminary stage of monotheism. See Müller's Vorlesung über den Ursprung und der Entwicklung der Religion (1880), 158f. This definition is given by Wiener as well in his encyclopedia entry in JL 2:1544, s.v. Henotheismus.
108Amos 3:2a.
109Amos 3:2b.
able to understand the prophets "without it." In Wiener’s version, the Torah reflects the very matrix from which the prophets grew. None of Amos’ ideas were novel. Thus, his significance for the history of the idea of election lies not in having discovered the idea of universal divine justice, but in having emphasized the moral duty which it imposes on Israel.

Wiener argues that Hosea differs from Amos only in personality and in the historical situation out of which he wrote, and not in his conception of God. Hosea, in Wiener’s words, is the most fervent patriot, who has created a personification of Israel in verse, at once as God’s bride, at once as his child. And yet, as with Amos, he derives from Israel’s special status only the meaning that “its measure of duties has been made fuller, and that it will not be spared punishment.” God’s love is a gift, which can be withdrawn if Israel does not prove itself morally worthy. Only because of Amos’ emphasis on divine justice is the equality of all humankind clearer in his teachings than in his younger contemporary Hosea.

Isaiah brings the idea of universalism to its culmination. Wiener stresses two ideas in Isaiah’s teachings: his notion of the “remnant” of Israel and his messianic vision of a united humankind. The idea of the remnant which “will return” marks the end of the people of Israel as a national or political concept. "The remnant, the future congregation of Israel has hardly national or political meaning any longer." The remnant is defined not by birthright or citizenship, but by religious loyalty, and therefore acquires an ethical meaning which was not present in Amos. One has the sense that, for Wiener, the denationalization of the nation of Israel prepared the ground for Isaiah’s messianic ideal, which is the summation of prophetic teaching. For Isaiah’s messianic vision of united humankind is telelogical. Here is the idea of the purposefulness of world-history. Just as the survival of a “remnant” of Israel has its purpose, so do all events have a purpose, even if it be concealed from human understanding. The

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111 See above, p. 21.
112 APS, 49.
113 Ibid., 50.
114 Ibid., 55.
115 Isaiah 10:21
116 APS, 59.
very strangeness of God’s deeds, Wiener sensitively points out, is, to Isaiah, a confirmation of God’s sublimity.\textsuperscript{117}

God’s final goal, however, is known to all: universal justice, and that is the ideal which Isaiah sees realized in his vision of the end of days. The significance of the messianic prophecies for the development of the idea of universalism lies in the fact that this vision of the realization of a united humankind assumes the \textit{idea} of one humanity. And the unification of all humankind in the end of time means the acknowledgment, by all, of one God.\textsuperscript{118} Thus, Wiener confirms Cohen’s argument, that the meaning of Israelite monotheism has, from the very beginning, lain in messianism, and the unity of God means—and has meant from the beginning—nothing other than the unity of humankind.\textsuperscript{119}

Deutero-Isaiah, according to Wiener, only draws the consequences from First Isaiah.\textsuperscript{120} Again, Wiener’s interest in rebutting tendentious contemporary views is apparent. An extensive note is given over to the apologetical task of disarming Alfred Bertholet’s assertion that Deutero-Isaiah develops “strangely lofty notions on the uniqueness of Israel,” so much so that “it seems that foreigners exist solely for the sake of Israel.”\textsuperscript{121} What, to Bertholet, is chauvinistic nationalism, is, to Wiener, an understandable compensation for the exiles’ unhappy plight.

Wiener’s very brief discussion of the prophets of the period of the restoration likewise betrays an apologetical aim. He does not deny the stark contrast between post- and pre-exilic prophets, but argues—with some justification—that the post-exilic perpetuate one element in particular from the rich legacy of their predecessors: the idea of universalism. That holds true, in any event, for Zechariah,\textsuperscript{122} and the welcome extended to non-Israelites by Trito-Isaiah bespeaks “not national-religious arrogance, but a concern about contamination of one religion with another...”\textsuperscript{123}

In retrospect, Wiener’s \textit{apologia} for Jewish universalism may seem dubious. Wiener has only given thorough expression to a position which was adum-
brated in broad strokes by Cohen: that the Israelite—and thus the Jewish—religion is, at its core, monotheistic, and that the history of Biblical religion is the history of the unfolding of this idea. Indeed, this conception of Judaism was challenged in Wiener’s time. On a concrete level, one might ask whether the continuity Wiener establishes between the Early Monarchy and prophets of the eighth century is made possible only by the method of “idealization.” Furthermore, one might ask how the indisputably nationalistic and ethnic zeal reflected in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah can be accommodated in his conception of the development of messianic universalism. There are points of friction, and Wiener himself will have to reckon with them. However, the apologist passes over them in silence.

The next question which Wiener addresses, the prophets’ notion of the moral agent, of the “moral person,” must also be viewed against its background in the realm of religious apologetics. Wiener seems to be fighting here on two fronts: to show that the Israelite religion, while preserving some relics of ancient beliefs and practices, had advanced beyond the stage of “primitive culture” in its understanding of the relationship between the individual and the group; and to show that this advance is evidenced in Israelite religion—and thus in early Judaism—by its well-developed conception of the moral personality. The first argument seems to be directed against those Biblical scholars who applied the new methods of anthropological research to the study of Biblical religion. The second argument is directed, in particular, against Duhm, whose interpretation of Ezekiel Wiener vigorously opposes as an archaizing and misbegotten application of Pauline polemic to prophetic teachings. Wiener’s concern with exposing the flaws in Duhm’s view, and by extension, of dominant Protestant scholarship, leads him into an extended discussion of the nature of sin.

In the latter part of the 19th century the new discipline of anthropology inaugurated the study of “primitive culture,” and it was natural that the insights and methods of the new science be applied to Biblical studies. The “ancient Hebrews” were thought of as primitives, and some Biblical scholars sought answers about the nature of “primitive” Israelite society in the customs and mores of contemporary “primitive” peoples. Here, too, Wiener sensed that the clas-

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125 J.W. Rogerson, in his worthwhile study of the connections between anthropology and scholarship on the Hebrew Bible, points out that Biblical scholars utilized an anthropological assumption of the second half of the 19th century—usually unwittingly—that the culture of a locale is “preserved” over millennia. The assumption, Rogerson remarks, was false, but dominated Biblical scholarship for years. A remarkable, and early example of such thinking at
sification of the religion of the Israelites as “primitive” implied a degradation of the Judaism which arose out of it, and he was diligent in exposing the defects in the interpretation of Biblical sources on which this classification was based. Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), for example, writes in his first major work, *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893):

> in primitive societies the bonds of cohesion are formed by global, undifferentiated norms of the ‘common conscience’. In such a society law is repressive; it operates through sanctions designed to obliterate the offenses to the common conscience and to heal its wounds.\(^{126}\)

The more primitive the society, the more homogeneous its members, in Durkheim’s words, the “more resemblances there are among the individuals who compose them.” “Repressive” law functions to maintain this homogeneous mentality, or, in Durkheim’s term, the “common conscience.” Thus the “state of the law in very inferior societies...appears to be entirely repressive.” As an illustration of such a society, Durkheim proposes none other than ancient Israel, in which the savage—*i.e* the Israelite—is “in no part free.” Durkheim—the descendant of rabbis—claims that in the “four or five thousand verses” of the last four books of the Pentateuch, “there is a relatively small number wherein laws which can rigorously be called other than repressive are set down.”\(^{127}\) Durkheim held that in societies where such repressive law predominates, and the “common conscience” constitutes a kind of corporate personality, little if any importance is attached to the individual.

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These views migrated to the realm of Biblical studies. Wiener comments that, because the study of primitive cultures values the individual only as a part of the collective, and not as an individual of inherent worth,

the belief is common that one should find, in the religious and ethical doctrines of the Old Testament only indifference towards the individual. 128

Wiener demonstrates that although, in the Biblical view, world history is acted out by “peoples,” the individual is hardly a matter of indifference to the Israelite mind, and thus to the prophets. The sins which Amos condemns are the sins of individuals. 129 For Hosea, the metaphor of Israel as a wayward wife does not belie some kind of conception of Israel as a corporate personality; this is borne out all the more by Hosea’s exhortations to moral betterment, which are addressed to the individual. 130 Isaiah, as well, while developing the idea of peoples as “world-historical personalities,” certainly does not conceive of “his own people” as a “homogeneous mass.” He is the prophet who produced the idea of the messiah, and of a “remnant which returns.” 131

Wiener’s first argument, which, it must be granted, is somewhat oblique, seeks to establish the sophistication of ancient Israelite conceptions of the individual and his or her relationship to the group, thus exploding any misconception that the books of the Bible, although they may contain literary fossils, are documents of a “primitive society.” His second, and primary argument on the “the moral person,” however, takes as its point of departure the concept of sin.

Wiener’s discussion is based on the juxtaposition between myth and ethics which is the crux of Hermann Cohen’s comparison of Judaism and Christianity. Myth, according to Cohen, is the matrix out of which all religion originated. It represents the infancy of natural science, in which all of nature is seen as besouled, and these souls are “gods.” Mythical religion senses no distance between the human and the godly, “for man is himself a god, just as god is only a kind of man.” 132 Thus, the life of the gods makes up the content of mythology—and, significantly for Cohen, the life of the “gods” is likened to nature, and to

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128 APS, 71.
129 Here Wiener disregards the addresses against the nations (Chs. 1-2), so significant in his argument for Israelite “universalism.”
130 For Amos, APS, 72; for Hosea, 73.
131 APS, 75
132 Cohen, “Religion und Sittlichkeit,” JS 3:120. Wiener knew this treatise, which was first published in 1907, and cited it elsewhere in APS (2).
human nature itself. Myth, polytheism and pantheism, therefore, are linked in one nexus.

Consequently, in Cohen's scheme, the mythical consciousness leaves no room for ethics.¹³³ Cohen's rationale for this conclusion is a formal, philosophical—and Kantian one: where no discrepancy is possible between nature and human will, the necessary condition for an ethical system is wanting. It was the achievement of the prophets, however, that they established—in Cohen's terminology—not only the unity, but also the uniqueness of God. The uniqueness of God sets Him apart from nature, and thus elevates the idea of God above "henotheism" as well.¹³⁴ For the prophets, "to know God does not mean to fathom his nature and essence;" it means to acknowledge one's ethical task as a human being.¹³⁵

Wiener's concern is with the emergence of the conception of the "moral agent" in Israelite religion, and his emphasis is therefore somewhat different. He shows that Cohen's conception of mythology implies a certain understanding of sin. In the "mythological" world view, men are to the gods as "flies to wanton boys;" actions are entirely subject to external forces beyond human influence, fated by the gods. Wiener—with Cohen—holds that the mythological world-view lames the moral will, and jeopardizes the ethical life.¹³⁶

In the mythological world-view, sin does not really exist; for sin assumes a man as the author and agent of his deeds. Myth knows of man only as the object of fate.¹³⁷

The pendant to sin in the mythological world-view is "guilt."

The contours of the argument become clear: Wiener's polemic is directed against the doctrine of "original sin," which, however, he does not mention by name. Like Cohen and, like his mentor Baeck, Wiener seeks to demonstrate that the doctrine of original sin is a mythological relic and that, like the ancient, polytheistic belief in fate, it lames the moral vigor of the believer.¹³⁸

¹³³ "Religion und Sittlichkeit," 121.
¹³⁴ Ibid., 123.
¹³⁶ APS, 80.
¹³⁷ APS, 82.
Wiener acknowledges that there is a strong mythological strain in Israelite religion. He sees the struggle between the "ethical" and the "mythical" reflected in the Biblical writings:

...in the moral as in the religious realm, two old tendencies run parallel to one another. One, of obscure, mythical origin, devours the individual and his autonomy...burdens him with the deeds of others, and requires that the family or community be punished for the misdeeds of one individual. The other tendency, rather rare, to be sure, in ancient times, develops into the doctrine of Ezekiel: only the soul which sins must die.139

Wiener portrays the prophets as the moral teachers who labored, on the one hand, to purge Israelite religion of those mythological notions and factors which hinder the self-determination of the moral agent and, on the other hand, to educate the will to freedom. He argues that Israelite religion, beginning in the seventh century with Deuteronomy and Jeremiah, evolves a conception of the moral personality which can be educated and refined, a conception which reaches maturity in Ezekiel.140

Much turns, then, on Wiener’s interpretation of Ezekiel. To Wiener, Ezekiel’s radical doctrine of individual responsibility (Ezekiel 18) was not an original idea, but the maturation of one which predates the prophets.141 Here, too, Wiener is intent on revealing the continuities between early Israelite and prophetic religion. The prophets, however, move the principle of individual responsibility from the periphery to the center. This is also the motivation for the prophets’ opposition to the sacrificial cult. Wherever its origins may have lain, the institution of sacrifice functioned as a mechanism of vicarious atonement which could, in a mysterious manner, remove guilt from the supplicant. It is therefore grounded on mythological assumptions and is, accordingly, to be rejected.142

139APS, 93.
140Ibid., 88. Wiener’s subtle and instructive analysis of the ethical ideas of Jeremiah casts the latter as the precursor of Ezekiel (APS, 95-100).
141Ibid., 94, where Wiener cites the story of King Amaziah’s leniency towards his father’s murderers, where the author of 2 Kings (in 14:5-6) invokes a Mosaic doctrine of individual culpability (Deut. 24:16). Wiener argues that Deuteronomy must have merely fixed a long-standing legal practice in writing.
142Ibid., 94.
Ezekiel refines the doctrine of individual responsibility further by teaching the possibility of repentance and return; he brings "liberation to the individual." He proclaims that the individual is capable of reform, hindered neither by fate from without, nor by an irrevocably evil nature from within. Through the idea of the "freedom of return," Ezekiel finds the true conception of moral action: deeds done by an individual, who is a morally responsible agent precisely because the possibility of the good deed is always open to him. Conversely, only a misdeed committed by such a free individual can be called "sin." In this interpretation, too, Wiener is following Cohen's cue, who wrote, in his characteristic laconic style: "In sin the [concept of] person was discovered."

Wiener thus takes the position that Ezekiel is important for his ethical message, for his rejection of the notion of collective guilt, tainted as it was with traces of archaic mythological notions, and for his doctrine of repentance, his proclamation that the sinner may always reform by—doing good. Wiener's position brings him into direct conflict with Wellhausen and his school, notably Duhm and Bertholet. To Wellhausen, Ezekiel was the "prophetic priest" who, in his concern with holiness and to the sanctuary, prepared the way for legalistic Judaism. Duhm adds to this the complaint that Ezekiel teaches an "atomism of the individual," that the human being thus becomes nothing more than a "bundle of unconnected" deeds, with no enduring disposition lending any continuity to his character. Duhm makes Ezekiel out to be a proponent of a religion of "works," more concerned with the "externalities" of the cult and worship, than with morals, and, in particular, with the inner moral character of the individual.

While Wiener has to concede that Ezekiel takes a more sympathetic view of the cult and priestly matters than did the prophets before him, he perceives the influence here of the Pauline-Lutheran polemic against the efficacy of "good works." To claim that, for instance, chapter 18 of Ezekiel "externalizes" ethics and subordinates ethical to cultic matters, Wiener retorts,
Wiener’s interpretation of Ezekiel is thus more than an interpretation; it is an *apologia* for Judaism, directed at its Protestant detractors, among whom Duhm is most certainly to be counted. To be sure, throughout his discussion, Wiener has assumed a definition of sin which diverges significantly from that assumed by his Protestant interlocutors: sin is a sin committed, not a state of “sinfulness.” It is therefore the sin of the individual, which can be atoned only by that individual’s return and reform, and not vicariously, by means of the sacrifice or atonement of another.

Ironically, Wiener is so firmly convinced that this doctrine is both the heart of Ezekiel’s teaching and the culmination of prophetic ethics altogether, that he, by an exegetical sleight-of-hand, concurs with Duhm in denying the authenticity of the Servant Songs, on the grounds that the idea of the vicarious atonement which occurs there cannot possibly be of prophetic origin. Thus, Wiener, in accord with some Protestant Bible critics, dismisses as a mythical accretion the very poems of Deutero-Isaiah which Christianity claims as the “Old Testament” prefiguration of the messiah of the New. He dismisses as non-Israelite the conception of humankind as irrevocably sinful. Indeed, the crux of prophetic teaching assures the human being that he or she is always capable of return. Wiener argues, and rightly, that Duhm’s view of Ezekiel—and by implication, Wellhausen’s—is based on Protestant concepts of sin and redemption, and is therefore flawed from the start.

Wiener closes his book with a discussion of questions which, once again, intermingle Biblical exegesis and religious apologetic: in what sense can prophetic ethics be called messianic? and do prophetic ethics allow for a concept of human autonomy, in other words, do prophetic ethics qualify—in Kantian terms—as ethics?

The first question is of importance to Wiener because he—following Cohen—wishes to demonstrate that the social ideal of the prophets is not some utopia, which can only be sought in a “new creation,” but is to be sought in the perfection of this world. Wiener treats of this question in a chapter entitled “The Realization of Morality,” with two goals in mind: he demythologizes the

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149 Ibid., 107.
150 Ibid.
151 APS, 109.
152 Ibid., 112.
“messiah,” and replaces him with the abstract idea of a “messianic age”; and, in a Jewish response to the Christian scholarship, he uses the new methods of the religio-historical school to demonstrate the continuity between the messianic beliefs of the “Old” Testament and the Messiah of the New. Wiener had studied Hugo Gressmann’s *Ursprung der israelitisch-jüdischen Eschatologie* (1905)\(^{153}\) in which Gressmann demonstrates that the eschatological notions of the Bible had their origins in ancient Mesopotamian myth. Wiener accepts this point. In Israelite eschatology, ancient eschatological visions become connected with the image of the idealized king, celebrated in the style of the ancient near eastern royal court. After the Exile, however, a “prophetic Messiah,” whom Gressmann sees personified in the Servant of the Lord of Deutero-Isaiah, supersedes this vision of a “political messiah.” Gressmann, seeking a line of historical development, discerns a chain of development which leads to the vision of the “Son of Man” (Daniel 7) and finally to the “Son of Man” of the New Testament. To summarize: in his historical scheme, the vision of the eschaton begins as a myth, is “politicized” in Ancient Israel, depoliticized during the Babylonian Exile, and universalized in Christianity.\(^{154}\) Wiener musters the Biblical evidence to set Cohen’s conception of messianism against this scholarly, Christian view.

In Gressmann’s version, the belief in the messiah would have remained stunted without its completion in the “universalistic” Christian belief in the “Son of Man.” For Wiener—who again follows Cohen’s lead—the idea of the messiah had already reached the pinnacle of its development in the prophets. Even in the early days of prophecy, Cohen had maintained, the notion of an ideal historical age was evolving, replacing, in its function, the belief in a personal messiah!\(^{155}\) Thus, Wiener accepts Gressmann’s thesis that eschatology has its origins in folk beliefs about the catastrophic end of time, but argues that the prophets transformed this myth into a vision of world-judgment.\(^{156}\) Hence, the prophets hardly render this myth apolitical, for the arena of world judgment is world politics.

In Wiener’s presentation of the issue, as in that of his model Cohen, one can detect that apologetic tone of nineteenth century liberal Judaism, which reinterprets—and mollifies—the national focus of the messianic hope. In the

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\(^{154}\)Kraus, *op. cit.*, 338, 339.


\(^{156}\)APS, 115.
stirring conclusion of a lecture which is a paradigmatic expression of this tendency, and which, characteristically, is entitled "The Idea of the Messiah." Cohen constructs the messianic yearning for Jerusalem as a yearning for the kingdom of God:

Our Jerusalem is this world renewed, not some limited territory, to which a modern movement would once again like to confine us. The error of this movement consists, in a word, in this: it would forfeit our religious mission in world history for a political debacle or opportunity. Israel’s vocation is to establish a religious diaspora based on faith in the Jerusalem of all humanity.157

Wiener echoes this view when he writes: "Inherent in the messianic idea is the extension of the kingdom of God over all peoples.” Thus, even though the imagery of the ideal king may make the messianic age appear Israel-centered, it is, in truth, a universalistic vision, of “a peace embracing humankind and animals alike.” Wiener, then, following Cohen, transforms the person of the messiah into the idea of the messiah, and the idea of the messiah into the idea of a messianic age, which is not “the end of this world, but the realization of the ideals of morality.”158

Wiener then takes up the question of human autonomy with more thoroughness than in the opening chapter of the book, this time involving the issue of the motivation for duty again, in its relation to the issue of “universalism” as well as to the Biblical conception of virtue. The discussion leads to the much debated question of the distinction between “moral” and “religious” duties and of the prophets’ attitude towards the “cult”.

It is, again, a confrontation with the ghost of Kant. Kant—and his followers—hold that the ethical must be self-evident, and that moral law commands the respect, the esteem of the individual159 in its own right and without recourse to any other authority. How can this idea be reconciled with the “principle of religious morality,” which is “divine will, or better, obedience to it,” and which, for the religious individual, is “self-evident?”160 Does not such obedience amount to what Kant would have called “heteronomy,” to the absence of freedom, the very characteristic of the Jewish religion which prompted Kant himself

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157Cohen, “Die Messiasidee,” JS 1:124. The lecture was probably given in February 1892, and remained unpublished during Cohen’s lifetime. See Bruno Strauss’ notes on the text, JS 1:338.
158APS, 122.
159Kant’s term was “Achtung.”
160APS, 123.
to dismiss Judaism as nothing but a conglomeration of laws, denying that it is a religion at all?  

Wiener’s answer is an attempt to place the principles of Kantian ethics on the lips of the prophets, and it is a modern case of the kind of philosophical Bible exegesis which—disingenuously to be sure—“discovers” the concepts of its times in the pages of the Bible. This purpose is visible through all the twists and turns of Wiener’s argument.

Wiener’s first task is to confute the erroneous conception that the ethics of the prophets is premised on the principle of reward and punishment. This is no easy task, for the threat of punishment is a tool used often by the prophets to goad a recalcitrant, backsliding people. Wiener argues that while, for the prophets, the prospect of reward or punishment was of pedagogical value, this does not justify the conclusion “that in prophetic ethics moral action follows from eudaimonistic motives.” Wiener, of course, is at a loss to cite a passage from the prophets which declares that “the ethical is self-evident.” However, he argues that, in particular, Jeremiah and the book of Deuteronomy reflect a belief that the ethical nature of the divine commandments is self-evident, that they “may command respect on account of their content” alone. These are the commandments of “love, pity, mercy and friendship.” It is the specific nature of these commandments, though they be given as a covenant with one specific people, which makes them universal. “Moral obligation is everywhere one and the same.”

Wiener seems to want to accomplish two aims: one is to argue that the prophets are, so to speak, Kantians before Kant. They insist that moral duties are binding not because they flow from a divine source, but because the universal human virtues they prescribe are self-evident. This seems to be his argument even when he cites the sense of “gratitude” to God as the author of the commandments as a motivation for moral action. His argument carries with it the implication that prophetic ethics, since it is concerned with the universal, is immune to the “scandal of particularity.”

His strongest authority for this view of the ethical is the book of Deuteronomy, which Wiener—like Zunz and Cohen—dates to the lifetime of

161]see above, 31.
162APS, 124f.
163Ibid., 125.
164Ibid., 126.
165Ibid., 127f.
Jeremiah and on which he adopts the view of Protestant Biblical scholarship, taking the ethics of Deuteronomy as a kind of codification of prophetic teaching. Deuteronomy, Wiener argues, is permeated with the spirit of the brotherhood of all mankind, with concern for the poor, the slave, the widow, the daylaborer, the debtor. Mercy is to know no national boundaries. Wiener stresses this feature of Deuteronomic ethics because his purpose here is also an apologetical one: to exonerate Biblical and Jewish ethics of the charge of parochialism. The legislation concerning the sojourner—the *ger*—which affords special rights and protection to those who are not, by lineage, a part of the nation, are characteristic of Deuteronomic spirit. Wiener sums up:

The awareness that human beings have ethical duties which are everywhere analogous amounts to a recognition of their ethical dignity. The book of Deuteronomy maintains this position even when it appears to fall into nationalistic parochialism; it always presupposes the feeling of duty; and this obligation may indeed be assumed all the more readily, since Deuteronomy concedes such a large role to that natural ethics which need not first be divinely revealed.

Whoever argues from the universality of Biblical law must also account for those provisions which are clearly not universal in their application, the specific duties which Israelite religion demands of its adherents, and Wiener also concludes by doing so. He formulates the problem as the relationship between those duties which are “purely ethical,” and those which are “specifically religious.”

This distinction, in various permutations, has a long and complex history. Even the Sages of the Talmud intimated an awareness of the self-evidential nature of the “strictly ethical” laws, when they spoke of laws which “would be *fit* to be written in the Torah even if they were not *written* there,” implying that there are other laws the binding character of which is derived solely from being “written,” that is, divinely revealed. Since the Enlightenment era, the endeavor to “rationalize the commandments”—to give *ta’amei ha-mitzvot* as the Middle Ages called them—had taken on added significance. Practices pre-

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167 *Ibid.*, 130-131. Wiener’s target is, specifically, an offending passage in Alfred Bertholet, *Die Stellung der Israeliten und der Juden zu den Fremden* (Freiburg i.Br. and Leipzig: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1896), which revived the age-old misconception that Biblical law allows, and even encourages usury, as long as the injured party is not Israelite.

168 *APS*, 133.


170 For the Talmudic source: *B. Yoma* 67b. (Emphasis my own.)
scribed by the "ceremonial" laws\textsuperscript{171} often presented an obstacle to the Jew aspiring to normal civil and social status in the nation-states of modern Europe, and heated debates over traditional practice often amount to debates over whether the rhythm of Jewish life should step in time with the Christian majority. Thus there is a real connection, still in Wiener's time, between the debate over "ceremonial law" and what was called "the national question."

Wiener's portrayal of the prophets' position on the "cult" must therefore be seen as more than an exercise in Biblical studies. Cohen's position was schematic: the great achievement of the prophets was to have made the relationship of person to person, rather than the relationship of man to God, the focus of religion. By so doing, the prophets established the unity of God, derived from the unity of the good. From the one Good to the one God: this is the nexus which, for Cohen, connects religion and morality. The essence of the idea of God is morality. Cohen, by means of this construction of the Jewish idea of God, defended Judaism—quite deliberately—against the charge of "particularism."\textsuperscript{172}

Wiener used this Cohenian framework for his presentation. However, he seems to be both too committed to Cohen's framework to alter it, and too rooted in Biblical religion to ignore those texts which present a more complex picture than Cohen's framework can accommodate. It is precisely in the prophets' attitude towards sacrifice that one can discern this ambivalence.

Wiener writes: "...for no prophet does the realization of moral duties constitute the whole of religion."\textsuperscript{173} The prophets do not categorically repudiate the sacrificial cult; they do, however, "rob it of its central position in religious practice."\textsuperscript{174} It is an overstatement—which, in Wiener's view, has some justification—to assert that the "prophetic spirit" signifies the "reaction of the moral consciousness" against cultic and ceremonial interests.\textsuperscript{175} Wiener supports his contention by means of a survey of the prophetic attitudes on sacrifice: Amos is,

\textsuperscript{171}It seems that the term "ceremonial law" was used in this context first by Spinoza, who regarded these laws as relics of the now defunct polity of the Second Commonwealth which serve only to isolate the Jews from the rest of humanity. He contends that the survival of the Jews and Judaism is due only to their having separated themselves from the rest of humanity, thereby bringing down upon themselves the hatred of other peoples - "nationum odium." Spinoza, \textit{op. cit.}, 55.

\textsuperscript{172}Cohen, "Religion und Sittlichkeit," \textit{JS} 3:123-6, 134.

\textsuperscript{173}\textit{APS}, 138.

\textsuperscript{174}\textit{Ibid.}, 135.

\textsuperscript{175}\textit{Ibid.}, 154.
among the prophets, "the most determined moralist," but he was not opposed, in principle, to religious ritual.\textsuperscript{176} He only means that rite and ritual will be of no avail to an unrepentant Israel. Hosea, Wiener observes, also did not oppose the sacrificial cult on principle, but on the grounds that it was of foreign, Canaanite origin. He longs for the unalloyed, pristine piety of the desert.\textsuperscript{177} Similarly, Isaiah condemns the cult as a foreign import. The dominant tendency of these pre-Exilic prophets is to see the sacrificial cult as a corruption of original, venerable Israelite custom.\textsuperscript{178}

Conversely, in his treatment of the post-Exilic prophets, who, as Wiener notes, clearly had far more sympathy for the "cult" than their pre-Exilic forbears, and to whom, in stark contrast to the latter, the Temple was of great importance, Wiener is careful to note that even they never lose sight of the inseverable connection between "religion" and "morality."\textsuperscript{179} Wiener thus seeks to paint a picture in which the contours are not as sharp as the Wellhausen school would have it. Neither were the pre-Exilic prophets so repelled by the cult that they excluded it from the sphere of "religion," nor were the post-Exilic prophets so enamored of the cult that their religion was devoid of ethics. Wiener concludes his discussion with the last of the prophets, Malachi:

There is an air of weariness in the faith of his comrades and disappointment; doubt and religious exhaustion have to be fought off. This fatigue gradually becomes noticeable in the prophets themselves. To be sure, the spirit of their great predecessors has not abandoned them entirely, but the sharp, incisive one-sidedness in the juxtaposition of cultic and ethical demands has been lost in the historical upheavals.\textsuperscript{180}

The standards of morality which the prophets demand of the individual find their public expression in social justice. The prophets, Wiener observes, were not opponents of worldly institutions and worldly goods as such. It would be erroneous to interpret them as the rustic representatives of the simple life confronting the evils of urbanized civilization.\textsuperscript{181} They are "the critics of public life," not proponents of a return to the nomadic life.\textsuperscript{182} They are advocates of a just

\textsuperscript{176}Ibid., 134, 136.
\textsuperscript{177}Ibid., 140.
\textsuperscript{178}Ibid., 141. Cf. Is. 2:6.
\textsuperscript{179}Ibid., 152-154.
\textsuperscript{180}Ibid., 154.
\textsuperscript{181}As Ernst Troeltsch was to do; see below, 57.
\textsuperscript{182}APS, 157-159. Wiener concedes that Hosea’s opposition to the institution of kingship is an exception.
“state.” That is the utterly non-eschatological, concrete ethical message of the prophets.

Farewell to Cohen

When Hermann Cohen eulogized Julius Wellhausen in 1918, he challenged the “recent aberrations” of some scholars in their understanding of the prophets, who fail, in his view, to recognize the inherent connection between prophecy and morality, and are ignorant of its religious aspect:

What position do you take, gentlemen, in your minds and in your hearts, on the God of the prophets, who created the world to rule over it; for whom there is no beginning and no end, who, being eternal, guarantees the future of humankind and its moral development?

Franz Rosenzweig—using the fencing jargon of a student—called this attack a “thrust which does not abide by the rules,” but which, nonetheless, seals the victory.

The jousting partner was Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923), who, in 1916, delivered a lecture, later published in the Neo-Kantian journal Logos, entitled “The Ethos of the Hebrew Prophets.” Cohen’s controversy with Troeltsch provoked response and counter-response. By the time Wiener articulates his

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183See above, 21.
184JS 2:465.
own position in 1919, a decade after his book on the prophets, he has clearly broken away from the circle around Hermann Cohen.

In the 1916 essay Troeltsch argues that the two methodologies then dominating the study of religion are inadequate. According to one, which he terms “positivistic-empirical,” religion is to be understood as a form of magic which serves primitive peoples as a surrogate for science and technology. The history of religion is the history of the shedding of these magical, cultic elements; religious revivals are caused when they undergo a resurgence. Troeltsch probably had the emerging anthropological study of religion in mind.\[188\]

According to the second, which he terms “idealistic-transcendental,” religion, as everything else, is derived from an idea. Here Cohen, with his method of “idealization,” is certainly among the accused. The world of ideas, including the “religious idea,” is a production\[189\] of the human mind. The task of religion is to distill this pure religious idea and promote it to the status of a world religion.\[190\]

Troeltsch’s critique takes these methods to task on their commonality: they both subscribe to the assumption of historical development and its explicable. Whether by means of “positive-empirical” derivation or “idealistic-transcendental” deduction, religion, it is argued, can be “explained.”

The actual life of religion, however, nowhere shows such explicability, neither out of primitive causal thinking...nor out of the articulation of an ideal necessity... Here [in the realm of religion] everything is to be understood and sensed by empathy; there is little to explain and derive.\[191\]

This is the heart of Troeltsch’s critique of historicism—in whatever version—as a tool for the understanding of religion. The religious phenomenon is spontaneous; it has no historical moorings. The matrix of religion is the feeling of the uniqueness of the moment, and a spontaneous, unique event is, by definition, not derived. As something unique, it can only be “lived,” and then “understood” by the researcher.\[192\]

\[188\] Troeltsch, Ethos, 34.
\[189\] Erzeugung-Cohen’s technical term.
\[190\] Ibid., 35.
\[191\] Ibid., 36. "Understand" and "sense by empathy" render the German verstehen and nachfühlen respectively. See the next note.
\[192\] Ibid., 37. Verstehen—"understanding," and "Erleben" or "Erlebnis" are technical terms, the former having been mediated to Troeltsch’s generation from the philosophy of Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911). For Dilthey, the "Erlebnis"—"lived-experience"—is the awareness of an irreducible “unit of life” (Lebenseinheit). One can approach this lived-experience
Troeltsch’s aim is to illustrate this method in the example of Hebrew prophecy, demonstrating the “connection of prophecy with an ethic which is highly active and vital, and yet indifferent, even hostile towards civilization.”193 Troeltsch juxtaposes this view to what he terms the dominant view: ancient Israelite prophecy was a reaction to the disintegration of national life.194 As a remedy, the prophets offered the idea of a universal, creator-God to a forlorn people who were then able to understand their fate as the working of divine justice. In this way a national deity was “transformed into the spiritual God of ethical monotheism.”195 The prophets develop into a kind of intermediary between the “church and the people.”196 Troeltsch’s version of late Biblical history, on the other hand, has themes in common with the later Wellhausen; it speaks of the “narrowing” of Judaism into a nationalistic, legalistic, cultic religion, while the universalistic prophetic spirit found renewed expression and life in Christianity.

This view of Israelite history is compatible, according to Troeltsch, with both of the methods mentioned, for the history of Israelite religion is understood both as an advance from primitive, mythical religion to the belief in a moral world order, and as the gradual self-assertion of an idea, of the universal religious idea. It is thus the product of both the positive-empirical as well as the idealistic-transcendental method.

Hence, Troeltsch outlines a modified Wellhausen view—and rejects it, because it disregards the concrete, historical circumstances in which prophecy flourished. That is the heart of Troeltsch’s critique of the “transcendental-idealistic” method. In a polemic, in which the obvious but unnamed opponent is Cohen, he writes:

Prophecy has, in truth, nothing to do with speculation, abstraction, a rational tendency towards unity or any kind of philosophy... The prophets are not fanatics of monotheism...but representatives of the unadulterated and pure Israelite

(Erlebnis) only through understanding (Verstehen), which seeks not to reduce the lived-experience to its derivative parts, but “to become aware of it as a whole.” Max Weber (1864–1920) elevated the philosophical concept of Verstehen to a methodological principle of the sociologist attempting to understand the meaning which social beings themselves attribute to their actions. It is in this sense in which Troeltsch is probably making use of the term here. See The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 1967, s.v. “Weber, Max,” by Peter Winch.

193Troeltsch, Ethos, 38. “Civilization” renders the German Kultur.
194Ibid., 39-42, summarizes this view.
195Ibid., 40.
196Ibid., 41.
character, in which old ancestral customs were still closely connected with the Yahweh cult.\textsuperscript{197}

Troeltsch’s formal objection to the method of “idealization,” to use Cohen’s term, is that it ignores historical fact. The fact ignored here is the rural provenance of the prophetic ethic. Its teachings bespeak the confrontation of rural, peasant mores, mingled with a residue of the nomadic way of life, with the bureaucracy, the pomp, the wealth of the royal courts, the corruption and the decadence of city life. Troeltsch argues that the values articulated in prophetic ethics—and he lists them—can all be explained from the societal matrix, “out of the social and political history of the country and the Israelite settlement.”\textsuperscript{198}

There is, then, nothing “universal” about prophetic ethics. It is a national ethic, the product of the meeting of two cultures, the peasant culture of the highlands, which the Hebrew immigrants brought with them, and the developed urban civilization of the Canaanite lowlanders.\textsuperscript{199} Whatever is novel about prophetic ethics can be explained on the basis of these origins: the reliance not on military prowess but on repentance and divine salvation, the distaste for the war ethic, the hope for revenge in the form of divine judgment, not in the heroic deeds of men. This prophetic ethic, Troeltsch continues, could never stand the test of application to real political situations. This is why the ruling powers, unable to enact the teachings of the prophets, appointed court prophets of their own.\textsuperscript{200} The prophets themselves preached a utopia.\textsuperscript{201}

It is not difficult to understand why Hermann Cohen would denounce this essay as an “aberration.” In a study of Cohen and Troeltsch, Wendell Dietrich has correctly noted that in Cohen’s eyes the essay represented a sociological reduction which “radically relativizes” the prophetic faith and ethos:

Troeltsch compromises the universal character of prophetic monotheism, calling into question its freedom from the narrow limits of tribe and nation.

\textsuperscript{197}\textit{Ibid.}, 43, 51.
\textsuperscript{198}\textit{Ibid.}, 51-2.
\textsuperscript{199}\textit{Ibid.}, 53.
\textsuperscript{200}\textit{Ibid.}, 58.
\textsuperscript{201}\textit{Ibid.}, 59. Dietrich, \textit{Cohen and Troeltsch}, 38, notes that this characterization of prophetic teaching as utopian, though usually attributed to Weber, actually stems from Troeltsch. However, Wiener’s polemic against this view in his 1909 book suggests that it is even older. See above, p. 47.
Troeltsch thus throws doubt on the validity of the prophetic breakthrough to ethical monotheism as an unsurpassable ethical and religious moment.\textsuperscript{202}

If the ethics of the prophets is "demoted to a peasant ethic," as Cohen put it,\textsuperscript{203} and the connection between the prophets and universal, ethical monotheism is denied, then Cohen's interpretation of Judaism as the bearer of the idea of the One God forfeits its biblical foundation and collapses. Beyond this fundamental difference, however, there was another factor.

Dietrich astutely observes:

Cohen, it would appear, senses that Troeltsch's reinterpretation of the prophetic ethos, if it were injected into the intra-Jewish Zionist debate, would give aid and comfort to his Zionist foes.\textsuperscript{204}

Indeed, while Troeltsch's sociological interpretation of the prophets construes Judaism as a national phenomenon, Cohen had resisted Jewish nationalism throughout his life. Troeltsch's interpretation did indeed aid Cohen's Zionist foes, and the possibilities for a Zionist appropriation of Troeltsch's views became apparent only a short time later in an article by Gustav Witkowski written from "the front," which was published in 1918 in \textit{Der jüdische Wille}, the organ of a union of Zionist student organizations.\textsuperscript{205} Cohen himself did not live to see the subsequent issue of the journal, in which Max Wiener endorsed Witkowski's essay and denounced the very standpoint he had held a decade before—with one significant reservation.

However, Cohen did deputize a loyal pupil, Benzion Kellermann, to carry out a counter-attack on Troeltsch's lecture. Kellermann had attended the lecture and raised objections to it in the discussion which followed. He was later asked by the "Commission on Apologetics" of the Association of German Jews to expand his objections into a monograph, which Cohen then recommended for publication in \textit{Logos}, the same journal in which Troeltsch had published his lecture.

\textsuperscript{202}Dietrich, \textit{Cohen and Troeltsch}, 31.

\textsuperscript{203}Cohen, "Der Prophetismus und die Soziologie," \textit{JS} 2:399.

\textsuperscript{204}Dietrich, \textit{Cohen and Troeltsch}, 36.

\textsuperscript{205}The union was the \textit{Kartell jüdischer Verbindungen} in Berlin. Gustav Witkowski, "Der Prophetismus als kulturgeschichtliches Problem," \textit{Der jüdische Wille} 1(1918): 87-107. Dietrich anticipated this Zionist response to Troeltsch. Liebeschütz overlooked the essays in \textit{Der Jüdische Wille}, which explains why he did not recognize that Wiener broke with Cohen during the latter's lifetime. Liebeschütz, \textit{Von Georg Simmel zu Franz Rosenzweig}, 200.
After much delay, the editor rejected Kellermann's essay, and it was published independently.²⁰⁶

In his lecture, Troeltsch had ridiculed the claim that the religion of the prophets is

a kind of Kantian philosophy of religion before Kant, and before the Stoics, still bound to a nation and caught up in anthropomorphic imagery and objects, but which need only shed this covering, in order to reveal the pure religion of humanity beneath.²⁰⁷

In his monograph, Kellermann sought to sustain that very claim. He argued that Biblical scholarship had already demonstrated that, in Hebrew prophecy, the ideas of God and of humanity had attained—on an intuitive plane—a level which philosophy only reached in the transcendental philosophy of Kant.²⁰⁸ He discerned in Troeltsch's method of "empathy"²⁰⁹ a dangerous principle which would substitute a chaotic subjectivism for a logic grounded in the uniformity of reason:

...if ethical perfection is supplanted by the theory of "empathy," now endorsed by Troeltsch, then not only German humanism, but humanism altogether will lose the unity and the force which make it a system, and will disintegrate into as many atoms and particles as there are subjects and feelings.²¹⁰

Yet it is precisely the universality of ethics itself, "intuited" by the prophets, which Kellermann adduces as the main argument on "Nationalism and Universalism." It is only the "transcendental character of the ethical" which offers a remedy to a "skepticism which undermines all culture."²¹¹ As Cohen put it, in Kellermann's book "it is stated as clearly as can be that the sole difference between prophetic religion and Kantian ethics consists in their respective logical foundation, in no way, however, in the content of their moral doctrines."²¹²

²⁰⁶Benzion Kellermann: Der ethische Monotheismus der Propheten und seine soziologische Würdigung (Berlin: C.A. Schwetschke & Sohn, 1917). Kellermann (1869-1923), appointed rabbi in Berlin in 1917, was a follower of Marburg Neo-Kantianism. For a bibliography of his works, see EJ 10:900. Cohen, indignant about the events preceding the publication of Kellermann's book, recounts them in JS 2:481. (It is also mentioned in Dietrich, Cohen and Troeltsch, 30, and in Liebeschütz, Von Georg Simmel zu Franz Rosenzweig, 52.)

²⁰⁷Troeltsch, Ethis, 50.

²⁰⁸Kellermann, 10.

²⁰⁹See above, p. 80.

²¹⁰Kellermann, 70.

²¹¹Ubid., Ch. 5, esp. 30.

²¹²Cohen, "Der Prophetismus und die Soziologie," JS 2:400.
Kellermann presents the position of the Cohen school on Jewish nationalism and on the Jewish belief in the messiah. For Kellermann, as for Wiener the young rabbi, the concept of the "people" of Israel is a moral concept, not a "biological" or ethnic one. The people of Israel evolves into a morally refined "remnant." It is "denationalized," just as in Wiener's book of 1909. The national foci of "Jerusalem, the Jewish people, the Jewish king" Kellermann interprets—interprets away?—as types of an ideal and idealized world-view. The prophetic state of the future is a paradigm of the "world-state, borne by love of man." Kellermann offers a remarkable comparison with German nationalism:

Is not this the same standpoint which Fichte represents in his *Addresses to the German Nation*? One can hardly assume that Troeltsch would label someone as a nationalistic and morally inferior chauvinist if he were to say: "The day will come when emissaries of all the nations of the world will come to Germany, to pay tribute to the German spirit as it has manifested itself in science and art, in trade and industry, in moral simplicity and purity."

Witkowsky's response, which was written "at the front," is given here because it appears to be typical of the Zionist reaction to Cohen's followers, and because it—now—finds Wiener's approval. Witkowsky argues that Kellermann's transcendental method assumes an idea as the telos of events, which are then interpreted to be stages of development in its anticipation. In this way, the ethical teachings of the prophets anticipate Kantian ethics, but this interpretation is only possible because one places the idea before the empirical evidence. The objection of "subjectivity" which Kellermann levels at Troeltsch thus redounds to his own disadvantage, holding true for him as well. In fact, writes Witkowsky—striking the tone so discordant to Cohen's ear—Troeltsch has provided the tool for an "objectivity" of sorts: by severing the study of religion from the idea of development. Every religious phenomenon is unique, and a feeling for its unique character, which excludes any subjection to laws of development, is the key to understanding.

What entices Witkowsky in Troeltsch's method is, of course, his conclusion that the "unique character" of the Israelite religion consists in its passionate national faith, and in the belief in an incorruptible bond between the Israelite

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213Kellermann, 31ff.
214Ibid., 32.
215Ibid., 33. The appropriation of German nationalist ideology of the Wilhelminian era by Zionist thinkers has been noted by George Mosse and is discussed below. Its appropriation in liberal Judaism is a variation on the same theme, and the two phenomena merit a joint study.
216"Gefühlfür die Eigenart," Witkowsky, 91.
people and their God. When, writes Witkowsky, one is free to assess each religious phenomenon in its own right, then, in the case of Israelite religion, one can observe how the sense of communion between a national God and his people evolves into ardent, personal faith, which, however, is still rooted in the national consciousness.\textsuperscript{217} Witkowsky’s prooftexts are the emotional oracles of Hosea and Jeremiah on the love between Israel and God. The prophets, thus interpreted, become witnesses, not of a transition, as the Neo-Kantian version would have it, from the belief in a tribal or national Deity to the belief in the universal God, but of an increased national fervor.

Witkowsky, then, sees the prophetic visions of the future in this nationalistic light. It is impossible to ignore, he writes,

\begin{quote}
that Yahweh’s special relationship to his people is like a thread connecting all the [prophetic] books, and that the world and humanity appear, in the context of this relationship, to be matters of astonishing indifference.\textsuperscript{218}
\end{quote}

Verses from the visions of Isaiah and from Trito-Isaiah—falsely ascribed to Deutero-Isaiah—are cited to buttress this view, portraying the future subordination of the “nations” to Israel.

Witkowsky disputes the Cohenian idea—reiterated by Kellermann and Wiener—of the identity of “God” and “morality.”\textsuperscript{219} In its place, he argues that the Israelite conception of God is conditioned through and through by the fact of its national character and agricultural origins. From the welcome which Solomon extends to foreigners in his temple speech, from which Kellermann had derived the universality of the Israelite conception of God, Witkowsky derives its ethnocentricity, pointing out that foreigners, as a pre-condition, are expected to pray to Yahweh.\textsuperscript{220}

It is not my purpose to evaluate these positions critically, positions staked out in the heyday of religious apologetics and inner-Jewish debate. Witkowsky’s and Kellermann’s portrayals of the “prophets” are one-sided, each in its own way. Kellermann’s essay is a document of the Cohen School, Witkowsky’s of German Zionism, absorbing Troeltsch’s disavowal of historicism and adapting it to its own purposes.

\textsuperscript{217}Witkowsky, 93.

\textsuperscript{218}Ibid., 94.

\textsuperscript{219}See above, p. 24.

\textsuperscript{220}1 Kgs 8:41. See Witkowsky, 95.
And Witkowsky must modify Troeltsch's method in order to adapt it to his purposes. Troeltsch, having made the case for the infathomability of religious phenomena, then sets himself an "arbitrary boundary," failing to probe beyond the prophetic faith in the inviolability of Israel, to identify the spiritual quality from which it springs. Witkowsky writes:

It is the character, the spirit, the unique genius [Eigenart] of a people which is that absolutely undefinable element, enigmatic like all organic being, in that it cannot be classified in a higher category... \(^221\)

That indefinable element is the "nation," the "Volk," and it is source of the Jewish ethic. This is the appropriation of Troeltsch which Cohen had feared.

Witkowsky's productive critique of Troeltsch goes one step further. He perceives the influence of Nietzsche in Troeltsch's failure to distinguish between the Christian doctrine of humility and the prophetic spirit, which, he claims, far from being a precursor of the meek humility which Nietzsche bewails, never sought to impede the nation's spirit or even military vigor! (Here one would have to ask Witkowsky how, for example, Jeremiah can be accommodated in this scheme.) This accounts, according to Witkowsky, for Troeltsch's oversimplified characterization of Jewish history as the history of the difficult relationship between Western culture and a pure ghetto Judaism.

Troeltsch apparently fully misunderstands the character of Zionism. For it does not seek a reconciliation of contrasts, but a decision. Zionism thus involves nothing problematic, for it demands abandoning the West at any price. The question posed by Zionism lies deeper. Should ghetto Judaism, the character of the pariah...be transported to our new home and perpetuated there? Or should a new humanity arise with those natural instincts of power and might which are not, as some naive minds fancy, the exclusive legacy of the German race, but inhere in all the active and struggling nations of the globe? That is the fateful question of the Jewish people, which its will has to answer.\(^222\)

Wiener entered the debate on Troeltsch in Der jüdische Wille with an essay entitled "Nationalism and Universalism in the Jewish Prophets."\(^223\) When held up against the 1909 book on the prophets, this essay betokens nothing less than an intellectual upheaval. Even in 1912, when Wiener published an abridged, popular version of that earlier book, he changed nothing of sub-

\(^{221}\)Witkowsky, 100.

\(^{222}\)Ibid., 107.

stance. Yet now, with seemingly detached circumspection—and clear disapproval—he surveys the motives and arguments of liberal Jewish apologetics, of which he, seven years before, had been such a vigorous spokesman.

What, asks Wiener, is at stake in the question of the “universalism” or “particularism” of the prophets? Why universalism?

Particular circumstances have willed it that, because of the general fate of the history of religions, the discussion of this problem in contemporary Judaism has been diverted from a productive path. Liberal Protestant theology, in its efforts to dissolve the traditional church dogma of the divine nature of the Christ into [the ideal of] a perfect humanity, had to demonstrate that the ethics of the gospels is an advance beyond the ethics of the Old Testament. As the main achievement of this new stage they lauded the overcoming of national particularism, and the breakthrough to a pure, world-encompassing idea of humanity. That drew the opposition of liberal Judaism into the arena. Its goal, in turn, was the total denationalization of the Jewish character...and it welcomed the prophets as confederates in this battle against the ethnic elements of custom, cult and ritual. Their mightiest representatives, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Michah, Jeremiah and even Jonah appeared in this light as the protagonists of the ideas of internationalism and humanity, as the surmounters of ethnic religion and tribal cult, as the harbingers of a purely “spiritual” religion of world humanity. In this view, however...truth and error are intertwined.

In any case, such a “spiritualizing” view, which goes hand in hand with denationalization, signifies...first of all a deconcretization of Judaism over the whole spectrum, encompassing Jewish life and doctrine: out of the messiah, the king from David’s line, who is to gather the dispersed members of the Jewish people back to Zion, is made the idea of the messianic age... Wherever possible, the idea of the election of Israel is purged of its tribal and ethnic aspect. Any feeling for the corporeal reality of Jewish human existence with its distinctive character, and perhaps distinctive goals...pales before this idealizing and rationalizing method. The latter regards Israel only as the instrument of a world mission, of pure monotheism, as a vessel of divine truth. The “spirit” of Judaism, or what is taken as such, thus overshadows the living soul of Jewry; abstract truth girds itself to march over red-blooded reality, and the consequences of a doctrine seem to prevail over the inalienable demands of life.

The charm of the Cohenian circle has been broken. Wiener has now arrived at the insight that the liberal Jewish concept of the world mission of Judaism, of its role as the champion of the universal ethical ideal, was an apologetical response

\(^{224}\text{Die Religion der Propheten, Volksschriften über die jüdische Religion, 1,1 (Frankfurt a.M.: Kauffmann, 1912).}\)

\(^{225}\text{“volkische Elemente.”}\)

\(^{226}\text{Wiener, “Nationalismus und Universalismus,” 190-91.}\)
to an apologetical position of liberal Christianity.\(^{227}\) It denuded Judaism of its "national" elements, which Wiener now—unlike in 1909—clearly reckons to its essential nature. The tribal, the folkloristic, the ethnic—everything signified by that untranslatable and later so fateful German word "völkisch" has migrated from the periphery to the center of Wiener’s conception of Judaism.

These paragraphs are significant for an understanding of Wiener’s philosophical shift, as well. In decrying the “deconcretization” of Judaism, which has forfeited “living Jewry” in deference to an arid “spiritualization,” Wiener has abandoned the method of the Cohen school. No longer would he posit the idea “a priori,” as he did the idea of “ethics” in the *Views of the Prophets on Morality*, and then seek to show how historical events lead to it. In place of the method of “idealization,” Wiener seeks “concretization.”

The rationalistic exegesis which finds the norms and values of transcendental philosophy contained in the ethical monotheism of the Jewish prophets is no more objective than empathy, which takes the object of religious inquiry as detached from any developmental chain, not in relation to values extraneous to it, but in its own being.\(^{228}\)

Wiener has now joined in the call for a new method in the study of religion which seeks, “by means of ‘empathy’ to relive experience in its uniqueness and incomparability.”\(^{229}\) He thus gives his approval to Troeltsch’s method, and declares himself in agreement with Witkowsky’s rebuttal of Kellermann, the disciple of Wiener’s former philosophical patron.

Nonetheless, he criticizes Troeltsch on one point, his understanding of the “particularism” of the prophets. Wiener’s criticism, preceded by a review of the prophetic understanding of “nation,” illustrates the change in his orientation. He begins his exposition with the Early Monarchy and its sense of nationhood, describing King David’s naive nationalism in a paragraph cribbed nearly verbatim from his 1909 book.\(^{230}\) The similarity, however, ends there. In Wiener’s earlier work, this “naive” nationalism represented the stage of henotheism, a way-station on the path of development which leads through the religious idea of elec-

\(^{227}\) The trend in Christology to which Wiener refers is prepared in Kant, who views the question of the historicity of Christ with indifference and conceives of him as the “personified idea of the good.” Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. T.M. Greene and H.H. Hudson (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1960), 54ff. Its foremost spokesmen in the 19th century were Ritschl and Harnack.

\(^{228}\) Wiener, “Nationalismus und Universalismus,” 192.


tion to the goal of messianic religion. As would now be expected, in the later essay the idea of development is absent. Theoretically, Wiener writes, as if in a concession to his earlier views, rational thought could have it that the God who is creator of all the world, must also be God of all humanity. "In reality, however, in the immediacy with which God is felt and with which the human being feels touched by him, he remains God for Israel alone." Throughout the prophetic period of Israelite religion this feeling does not abate. Quite the contrary, Wiener now writes, it deepens and strengthens. For the prophets, their own nation always remains the focus of their vision. It is the nation which is the concern of the prophets and of the prophetic God. Here, religion and patriotism are one and the same. It is impossible to conceive of monotheism as a kind of universalism, in which the one God corresponds to a unity of humankind. Israel, and only Israel is this God’s realm.

Here Wiener’s renunciation of his Cohenian youth is explicit. In 1909 Wiener wrote that the prophet is “first and foremost a cosmopolitan.” The very verses—Amos 9:7 and 3:2—which, in 1909, were prooftexts for universal divine concern and impartial divine justice are now merely a reflection of Israel’s anxiety over the punishment which its disloyalty may incur. The “novelty of prophetic piety” Wiener now sees in the prophets’ boundless loyalty to Yahweh and in their belief in the profound “existential communion between God and his tribe.”

To be sure, one can speak of a monotheism. But it is directed less towards without...than inward, filling the soul of the faithful with the certainty that Yahweh alone, nothing and no one else, is sovereign over them.

Furthermore, in Wiener’s revised view, Ezekiel is no longer the prophet whose doctrine of the individual moral agent indicates a waning of the collective, national consciousness. That common view, he now writes, is a paradigmatic example of the failure of an overly theoretical and rationalizing method to

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231See above, pp. 56ff.
233Ibid., 194. Emphasis added.
234APS, 40.
237Ibid., 195.
recognize facts which are as clear as day. "If one wants to distill one single doctrine from the words of the prophets, then nothing is more certain than this: the subject of their religion is the ethnic community; all divine concern, his providence and his rule are limited to it." The drama of the prophetic call, for example, the anguish and personal agony with which the prophet finally acquiesces to the power of divine, are evidence, not of a doctrine of individualism, but of "strong personalities." 

However, Wiener cannot accept Troeltsch's portrayal of the prophetic ethos without reservation. Here we see the same Wiener who took umbrage at every disparagement of Judaism he encountered in the Wellhausen school. He allows that it is true that the prophetic ethos represents the national ethic of an agricultural people. But it is more than that. Troeltsch has not recognized—as would be possible using his method of "empathy"—that the Israelite ethos does transcend national boundaries, and that this can be sensed in its "unmediated moral feeling." Wiener argues that, according to Troeltsch, the central concern of the prophets was to protect the Israelite nation from adulteration with foreign peoples and worship, hence their energetic polemic against the Canaanite sacrificial cult. This polemic, Wiener counters, is addressed not only at the Canaanite Baal worship, but at all sacrifices. And although, Wiener writes—echoing his 1909 book—that the prophets do not categorically condemn the sacrificial cult, they juxtapose the hollow ritual which they criticize with the moral conduct they commend: "For I desire love and not sacrifice." "The devotion of the heart," which Wiener now believes to have derived, not by the superseded method of "idealization," but by an empathetic probing of the prophetic ethos, "corresponds precisely to what we call morality." This is the ethic which is required by unshakeable loyalty to Yahweh, and which the prophets want to impress on their countrymen. It is an ethic distinct—because of its moral position—from that of the Israelites' neighbors, and it constitutes the substance of the prophetic ethos.

Despite his declaration of loyalty to the national character of faith in Yahweh, Wiener still proposes that this idea of a morality which transcends na-
tional boundaries gives the prophetic conception of God a universal dimension. And with that, after all, we have arrived at the position which, in its ethical content, resembles the Cohenian messianic ideal. However, Wiener would argue, the path which led to this position was different. The "idea" of a unified humanity was not presupposed; it was derived by means of an empathetic encounter with the Biblical sources, which were allowed to speak for themselves.

Wiener is aware that he is still caught between "two opposing tendencies." There is the profundity of the relationship between God and Israel, as felt by the prophets. And yet this relationship, just because of its intimacy, contains the germ of universalism, since the moral demands which God makes are universally human. Nonetheless, he has clearly abandoned the classical doctrine of liberal Judaism on the mission of Israel. Wiener proclaims that even in Second Isaiah, the textual pillar on which liberal Judaism bases its doctrine of Israel's mission as a "light to nations," the "ethnic self-consciousness" finds expression in the personification of Israel as the servant of the Lord. Its mission, Wiener now proclaims, is not to the world, but to itself.244

Retrospect and Prospect

Wiener is eclectic. Ideas of disparate origin converge in his thinking, creating tensions which await resolution. In the heady days following the Balfour Declaration, he developed a sense of the uniqueness of Jewish "ethnicity," to use a modern term, which, upon reflection, compelled him to renounce the affinity for Cohen which informed his youth. He arrives at the insight that Cohen's vision of the messianic mission of the Jewish religion is made possible only by a myopic vision of Judaism itself, in which its national element is eclipsed. He came to regard this version of Jewish history as a happy fiction. In the debate over the nature of the prophetic ethos, it is clear that he has become an advocate of Jewish nationalism, and he thus became a maverick among the Liberal rabbis of his generation. At the same time, he was also unable to abandon Cohen's universalistic vision entirely.

Cohen's 1912 letter to the Hochschule foreshadowed the philosophical parting of ways. For him the decision on the Cohen Chair in Philosophy of Religion was fraught with significance; its incumbent would be heir to the task

244Ibid., 200.
for which Cohen felt responsible: of defining Judaism for the world of German
academe and high culture. “For this chair,” he wrote, “we bear the greatest
responsibility in the eyes of the civilized world, more than for any other.”245 With
proprietary earnestness Cohen declared: “I cannot...entrust our philosophy of
religion to anyone who has not achieved perfect clarity about the relationship of
philosophy of religion to ethics.”

Cohen wrote that an essay of Wiener’s “On the Logic of Religious
Metaphysics,” which had appeared in a journal the previous week, displayed to
him a “lack of maturity” on just this question. The question is so crucial because
the “proper” resolution of it demonstrates that Judaism is a historical instantia-
tion of the idea of morality, that its ethos is therefore essentially attuned to the
Protestant ethos, that its moral teachings coincide with the universal good, that
Judaism is a “religion of reason.” Cohen doubted that Wiener would carry on
his work. He was cognizant of new philosophical trends, but wanted to stay
their advance. Indeed, in the objectionable essay, Wiener begins with a discus-
sion of the development of religion out of mythology, and of the relation of re-
ligion to philosophy, which is Cohenian through and through. Religion and phi-
losophy, though diverse in method, are akin inasmuch as they both seek a form
of knowledge.246 But later in the essay he argues that religion originates in
“feeling,” in a particular ethos, in the immediate experience of the pious, an ex-
perience which in itself is fluid and “elastic,” and becomes rigid only when ap-
propriated as the foundation of a revealed religion.247 Here the reverberations of
Schleiermacher are unmistakable. Although Wiener will later dismiss
Schleiermacher’s conception of religion as the feeling of absolute dependence on
God as a peculiarly Christian conception, he absorbs something of
Schleiermacher’s “ethos” from his Protestant environs nonetheless. “What the
Bible contains,” Wiener writes, “is religion...What later periods have made out
of it is theology.”248

Cohen was right in his sense that Wiener was not a committed member of
the Marburg Neo-Kantian School. He was right, too, in his assessment that
Wiener’s thinking was not yet fully formed. Maturity, however, brought not a

245Hermann Cohen, “Zum Vorschlag des Lehrerkollegiums für Dr. Wiener...”, see Appendix.
246Max Wiener, “Zur Logik der religiösen Metaphysik,” Religion und Geisteskultur:
Zeitschrift zur Förderung der Religionsphilosophie und Religionspsychologie, 6, no. 1
247Ibid., 12.
248Ibid., 13. On Wiener’s dismissal of Schleiermacher, see below, Part Two, p. 00.
rapprochement with the Kantianism of his youth, but greater distance. In the 1912 essay he is clumsily straining at the anchor. By the time World War I had passed, and Wiener's attention shifted from the interpretation of Biblical theology to the construction of his own theological framework, he had cast off from the security of the Cohenian mooring and struck out on his own.
Faculty and students at the Berlin Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums. Wiener is standing at the front center. Leo Baeck is seated at the far right; standing next to him is Ismar Elbogen. (Courtesy of the Leo Baeck Institute New York)