

Abstract template for the conference on “Grey Areas: Two Centuries of Wissenschaft des Judentums”

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“Writing About God in an Age of Science: Kaufmann Kohler’s *Grundriss einer systematischen Theologie des Judentums*”

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Kaufmann Kohler’s *Grundriss einer systematischen Theologie des Judentums auf geschichtlicher Grundlage* (1910, revised and published in English as *Jewish Theology: Systematically and Historically Considered* in 1918) was an attempt to structure and classify the entire range and evolution of Jewish theological ideas. The volume sought to balance two competing claims: first, that Jewish theology was an historically developing set of understandings about the relationship between God and humanity; second, that no account of Jewish belief could be true to the sources if it sought to prejudice faith over reason. For Kohler, any attempt to narrate the history of Jewish theological ideas had to come in the form of a scientific treatise that utilized the full range of up-to-date methodologies and discoveries.

When *Grundriss* appeared in 1910, there were barely a handful of attempts to describe the vast corpus of Jewish theological materials, and almost none that narrated a grand historical synthesis using systematic methods. Kohler’s was the first to attempt to structure Jewish ideas about God into distinct categories and analyze them according to *Wissenschaft* methodologies.

This paper is an analytical reading of the specific philosophical and intellectual mechanisms that molded Kohler’s theology. Kohler believed in the inherent reconcilability of Jewish religion and modern thought. This paper therefore asks the question: What does it mean for a text of Jewish theological history to take seriously the methodologies and discoveries of modern science? Examining key chapters, arguments, rhetorical structures, and methodological choices in both *Grundriss* and *Jewish Theology*, the paper will be the first detailed analysis of one of one of the founding texts in modern scholarship on Jewish theology, bringing it into conversation with the culture of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and the history of theology in the German and Anglophone worlds.