

# About Mordecai Menahem Kaplan: A Selective Bibliography in Process

By Mel Scult

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[Section 1: Introduction](#)

Mordecai Menahem Kaplan (1881-1983) was a leading liberal rabbi on the American scene throughout the twentieth century. The founder of the Reconstructionist movement, he is also well known for instituting the first Bat Mitzvah with his daughter Judith in 1922. His radical religious thought led to his excommunication by a group of ultra-Orthodox rabbis in 1945; the ritual *herem* [excommunication] performed shortly after V-E day, was accompanied by the burning of his prayer book at the McAlpin Hotel opposite Macy's department store. The ultra-Orthodox also vehemently opposed Kaplan's *New Haggadah* (1941) with its many departures from the traditional text. Kaplan was born in Sventzian, Lithuania, the son of Rabbi Israel Kaplan, a prominent Talmudic scholar, and Anna Nehama Kaplan. At the age of eight he emigrated to America with his family, lived in New York City, attended City College of New York (B.A. 1900), as well as Columbia University, and received rabbinical ordination (1902) from the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS). In 1909, Solomon Schechter, the head of JTS, invited him to be principal of the newly created Teachers Institute. He remained in that position until 1945 training many of the major figures in Jewish education in America. His training of rabbis at JTS through his courses in midrash and religious philosophy

became justly famous. He retired from the rabbinical school at JTS in 1963. Kaplan had a primary role in the establishment of a number of institutions including the Jewish Center, the Society for the Advancement of Judaism, Camp Ramah, and the University of Judaism.

His own graduate studies, where he had concentrated on sociology, led him to formulate a religious ideology that emphasized the link between religion and experience. Because experience changes, religion must change, and it is important, Kaplan believed, to find ways in which beliefs and rituals could function in the modern era as they did in the past. To do this might mean changing a ritual, dropping it completely, or substituting something new – in other words reconstructing it. Hence Reconstructionism as the name of his thought and the movement.

Kaplan dismissed the concept of God as a supernatural being, and accordingly maintained that Jewish civilization flows not from “the will of God” but rather is the product of the centuries-long search for meaning by the Jewish people. At times he was willing to go beyond naturalism to a level he called supra-naturalism or naturalism pushed to its utmost.

Although the perfection of the individual might be the aim of religion and the meaning and goal of Judaism, Kaplan believed that this goal could only be achieved within the context of a community. Throughout the ages, Judaism bound the Jewish people into a vital organic entity; hence the title of his major work *Judaism as a Civilization: Toward the Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life*. Kaplan’s emphasis on group life also led him to be an active life long Zionist. He also believed that the goal of religion or salvation as he called it to be located in the fulfillment of the individual. For Jews, the mitzvot or Jewish customs should be employed as the means toward the self-actualization of each person.

Kaplan’s commitment to the Jewish people existed together with a profound concern for the salvation of all individuals everywhere.

## *Section 2: Scholarly Collections*

Some of the most important discussions of the thought of Mordecai Kaplan were included in collections of articles. In the earliest case, the collection was issued by supporters. In the 1980s another evaluation was issued, this time primarily by scholars who were acquainted with Kaplan’s thought through their teaching and research. Most importantly, this volume contains a complete bibliography of Kaplan’s works. The

bibliography contains over four hundred items and is the most complete bibliography in existence. The final collection of articles in this section is based on a conference held at Stanford University in 2004 and organized by Professor Arnold Eisen and Professor Steven Zipperstein.

**Eisenstein Ira, and Eugene Kohn. eds. *Mordecai M. Kaplan: An Evaluation*. New York, NY: The Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation, Inc. 1952.**

An early collection of essays celebrating his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday includes a biographical essay by Kaplan which is significant. Later collections are more scholarly but these essays may be valuable as historical documents themselves. Particularly noteworthy is the essay by Henry Nelson Wieman, himself a well-known Protestant theologian and a thinker whom Kaplan admired. The titles of the essays are listed below:

- Mortimer J. Cohen. *As Teacher*, 3-15.
- Ira Eisenstein. *His Teachers*, 15-27.
- Jack J. Cohen. *Peoplehood*, 27- 45.
- Samuel Dinin. *Organic Jewish Community*, 45-65.
- Samuel H. Kohs. *Jewish Social Work*, 65-85.
- Israel S. Chipkin. *Jewish Education*, 85-119. 137.
- Louis Kraft. *The Jewish Center Movement*, 119-137.
- Eugene Kohn. *As Exegete*, 137-155.
- Harold C. Weisberg. *Theory of Religion*, 155-193.
- Henry Nelson Wieman. *Idea of God*, 193-211.
- David Polish. *Jewish Liturgy*, 211-223.
- Alexander J. Bernstein. *Conservative Judaism*, 223-233.
- Roland B Gittelsohn, *Reform Judaism*, 233-243.
- Joseph L. Blau. *Philosopher of Democracy*, 243-263.
- Harold Schulweis. *Theory of Soterics*, 263-283.
- Mordecai M. Kaplan. *The Way I Have Come*, 283-323.

**Goldsmith, S. Emanuel, Mel Scult, and Robert Seltzer, eds. *The American Judaism of Mordecai M. Kaplan*, New York NY: New York University, 1990.** A diverse collection of articles by well-informed scholars on all aspects of Kaplan's life and work. The articles by Eleazar Schweid and Harold Schulweis are particularly noteworthy. Articles in this work:

## **Part 1. Contexts**

- Emanuel S. Goldsmith. "Kaplan and the Retrieval of the Haskalah," 19-35.
- Eliezer Schweid. "The Reconstruction of Jewish Religion out of Secular Culture," 35-53.

## **Part 2. Stages in Life**

- Mel Scult. "Becoming Centered: Community and Spirituality in the Early Kaplan," 53-94
- Baila Round Shargel. "Kaplan and Israel Friedlaender: Expectation and Failure," 94-122
- Richard Libowitz. "Kaplan and Felix Adler," 122-140.
- Simon Noveck, "Kaplan and Milton Steinberg: Disciple's Agreements and Disagreements," 140-173.

## **Part 3. Intellectual Contemporaries**

- Allen Lazaroff. "Kaplan and Dewey," 173-197.
- Emanuel S. Goldsmith. "Kaplan and Henry Nelson Wieman," 197-221.
- Meir Ben-Horin. "Ahad Ha-Am in Kaplan: Roads Crossing and Parting," 221-234.
- S. Daniel Breslauer. "Kaplan, Abraham Joshua Heschel, and Martin Buber: Three Approaches to Jewish Survival," 234-257.

## **Part 4. Reinterpreting Judaism**

- Harold M. Schulweis. "A Critical Assessment of Kaplan's Ideas of Salvation," 257-271.
- William E. Kaufman. "Kaplan's Approach to Metaphysics," 271-283.
- Jacob Staub. "Kaplan and Process Theology," 283-294.
- Mel Scult. "Kaplan's Reinterpretation of the Bible," 294-319.
- Ira Eisenstein. "Kaplan as Liturgist," 319-395.

## **Part 5. The Ideologist**

- Carol S. Kessner. "Kaplan and the Role of Women in Judaism," 335-357.
- Harriet A. Finer. "Kaplan's Influence on Social work," 357-370.
- William Cutter. "Kaplan and Jewish Education: Reflections on his Influence," 370-385.
- Rebecca Trachtenberg Alpert. "The Quest for Economic Justice: Kaplan's Response to the Challenge of Communism, 1929-1940," 385-401.

- Jack J. Cohen. "Reflections on Kaplan's Zionism," 401-415.
- Complete Bibliography of the Writings of Mordecai M. Kaplan [400 items ], 415-453.
- Eisen, Arnold and Noam Pianko, eds. "Mordecai Kaplan's '*Judaism as a Civilization*': The Legacy of an Idea." *Jewish Social Studies* 12.2 (Winter 2006).

**2004 Stanford University Conference, organized by Dr. Arnie Eisen, who served at that time in the Religion Dept. at Stanford University.**

Presenters were asked to focus their papers on Kaplan's magnum opus. The conference sessions were recorded as audio files. Copies of the audio files may be available from the Taube Center of Judaic Studies at Stanford University. The following papers from the conference are published in *Jewish Social Studies*, 12 (Winter, 2006).

- Arnold Eisen. "Mordecai Kaplan's *Judaism as a Civilization* at 70 Setting the stage for Reappraisal," 1-17.
- Jon Butler. "Three Books, Three Years: Reinhold Niebuhr, Perry Miller, and Mordecai Kaplan on Religion," 17-30.
- Steven J. Zipperstein. "On Reading *Ahad Ha-Am* as Mordecai Kaplan Read Him" 30-39.
- Noam Pianko "Reconstructing Judaism, Reconstructing America: The Sources and Functions of Mordecai Kaplan's Civilization," 39-56.
- Beth S. Wenger. "Making American Civilization Jewish: Kaplan's Civil Religion," 56-64.
- Pierre Birnbaum. "The Missing Link: The State in Mordecai Kaplan's Vision of Jewish History," 64-73.
- Sheila Greeve Devaney. "Beyond Supernaturalism: Mordecai Kaplan and the Turn to Religious Naturalism," 73-88.
- Leora Batnitzky. "Mordecai Kaplan as Hermeneut: History, Memory and His God – Idea," 88-99.
- Mel Scult. "Mordecai Kaplan and Ralph Waldo Emerson: A Theology of the Individual." 99-115.

- Steven Katz. "Mordecai Kaplan's Theology and the Problem of Evil," 115- 127.
- Nancy Fuchs-Kreimer. "Seventy Years After *Judaism as a Civilization*: Mordecai Kaplan's Theology and the Reconstructionist Movement," 127- 143.
- Benjamin D. Sommer. "Functional Interpretation and Biblical Theology: Reflections on *Judaism as a Civilization* in Relation to Scriptural Hermeneutics," 143-158.
- Riv-Ellen Prell. "America Mordecai Kaplan and the Postwar Jewish Youth Revolt," 158-172.
- Deborah Dash Moore. *Judaism as a Gendered Civilization: The Legacy of Mordecai Kaplan's Magnum Opus*," 172-187.

### *Section 3: Biographical and General Works on Kaplan*

The works in this section deal generally with Kaplan's system of thought. As will be clear from the annotations, some of these works are biographical in nature.

**Alpert T. Rebecca, and Staub Jacob J. *Exploring Judaism: A Reconstructionist Approach*. Elkins Park, PA: The Reconstructionist Press, 2000.**

An extremely useful introduction to Kaplan's thought and Reconstructionism. Thoughtful comments on contemporary issues such as gay and lesbian life, inclusiveness and the contemporary of Reconstructionist movement. There is an extensive bibliography which includes many articles from the Reconstructionist.

This magazine over the years has published an enormous number of insightful articles on all aspects of Kaplan's thought and on Reconstructionism generally. One might say that at mid-century, it was one of the most important intellectual periodicals on the Jewish scene.

**Ben-Horin, Meir. *Transnature's God- Studies in Mordecai M. Kaplan's Theology*, ed. by Ethan M. Merlin, Wilton, CT: Adar Nisan Books, 2004.**

A largely intellectual history of the central ideas of Mordecai Kaplan. Kaplan told me that he thought Ben-Horin understood him better than anyone else. This work was published posthumously. Part of its value is that it is prodigiously footnoted and so may be useful for tracing Kaplan sources.

***Common Faith Uncommon People: Essays in Reconstructionist Judaism*, New York: Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation, 1970.**

A popular work dealing with Kaplan's philosophy with a special emphasis on education.

**Berman, Nadav. *20th Century Jewish Thought and Classical American Pragmatism: New Perspectives on Hayyim Hirschensohn, Mordecai M. Kaplan and Eliezer Berkovits*". Unpublished PhD thesis from Hebrew University, Jerusalem.**

In classical American pragmatism, fallibilism refers to the conception of truth as an ongoing process of improving human knowledge that is nevertheless susceptible to error. This work traces appearances of fallibilism in Jewish thought in general, and particularly in the halakhic thought of Eliezer Berkovits, Mordecai Kaplan, and Hayim Hirschensohn.

**Caplan, Eric. *From Ideology to Liturgy: Reconstructionist Worship and American Liberal Judaism* (Hebrew Union College Press, 2002 and 2022).**

An examination of Reconstructionist Judaism's interpretation and adaptation of the traditional Jewish liturgy and creation of new prayer texts to reflect its changing ideology. The book presents Mordecai Kaplan's motivation for making changes to the siddur and provides a thorough analysis of all the liturgies that he co-edited, placing particular emphasis on how Kaplan used these liturgies—including their many supplementary readings—to impart his vision of what Judaism should be in the twentieth century. Further insight into Kaplan's work is provided through comparing these prayerbooks to the contemporaneous liturgies of both Reform and Conservative Judaism. Caplan's discussion of the latest series of Reconstructionist prayerbooks, *Kol Haneshamah* (1989-2000), shows that the movement has both embraced and departed from the Jewish ideology of its founder. The 2022 edition of *From Ideology to Liturgy* includes a substantial new Preface that analyzes excerpts from Kaplan's diaries that enrich our understanding of the formation of the first Reconstructionist siddurim and of Kaplan's personal approach to prayer and liturgy.

**Cohen, Jack J. *Guides for an Age of Confusion: Studies in the Thinking of Avraham Y. Kook and Mordecai M. Kaplan*, New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 1999.**

In this ground-breaking study Jack Cohen, a life-long disciple of Mordecai Kaplan, lays out the similarities and differences between Kaplan's approach to Judaism and that of the well-known Orthodox Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook. Although there are differences of

course, the similarities are quite striking. This work was originally written in Hebrew as *Morim Le'Zman Navoch*. The title is much more eloquent in Hebrew than in English. I was proud to bring this work to the attention of Fordham press.

***Judaism in a Post-Halakhic Age*, Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2010.**

Although this late work by Jack Cohen does not deal directly with Kaplan, it flows from Kaplan's dismissal of traditional Jewish law; there is an attempt here to deal with the matter of obligation within a liberal framework.

**Gurock S. Jeffrey, and Jacob J. Schacter. *A Modern Heretic and a Traditional Community: Mordecai Kaplan, Orthodoxy, and American Judaism.*" New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1997.**

A first-rate study of Kaplan's "Orthodoxy" as a young man and his relationship to the Orthodox community; why he left Orthodoxy behind and why Orthodox leaders continue to use his ideas. The authors are a well-known scholar of American Orthodoxy [Gurock] and the former Rabbi of the Jewish Center and a leader in Modern Orthodox circles. [Schacter ]

**Libowitz, Richard. *Mordecai Kaplan and the Development of Reconstructionism*, New York, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1982.**

This work concentrates mainly on the early period in Kaplan's life and draws mainly from Kaplan's diary for that period.

**Miller, Alan. *The God of Daniel S.: in Search of the American Jew* . New York, NY: The Macmillan Company, 1969.**

An unusual presentation of Kaplan's philosophy through the medium of Daniel S., a fictional archetype. Miller writes well and was a strong supporter of Kaplan. Miller was an English Jew who became the rabbi of the SAJ in the 1960s and 70s. and there are interesting comments on American Jewry in general.

**Reuben, Steven Carr. *A Year with Mordecai Kaplan; Wisdom on the Weekly Torah Portion*. Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society, 2019.**

This book by a West Coast Reform rabbi gives Kaplan's thoughts on all the portions of the Torah. Kaplan served as a congregational rabbi most of his life and so he spoke continually about the portion of the week. As a source for Kaplan's thoughts the author uses primarily Kaplan epigrammatic statements in his *Not So Random Thoughts*. For each week, Reuben notes his own experiences related to the portion. Much yet needs

to be done on Kaplan and the Torah. Among Kaplan's papers and in the diary there is material on the Torah which is not used here.

**Scult, Mel. *Judaism Faces the Twentieth Century- A Biography of Mordecai M. Kaplan*, Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1993.**

This work is a full-scale biography of Kaplan although emphasis is on the first half of his life including the publication of his magnum opus *Judaism as a Civilization*. This biography is based on a mass of unpublished material including Kaplan's twenty- seven volume diary, his letters, his sermons, his teaching notes, and his speeches as well as the papers of those who knew Kaplan and also a variety of published sources. This work attempts to give an intimate look at the man, his mind and his work. Kaplan appears here as far more complex and multi-dimensional than previously imagined.

**Scult, Mel. *The Radical American Judaism of Mordecai M. Kaplan*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014.**

The many influences on Kaplan are explained and detailed. Particular attention is given to the American influences on his thought e.g. Ralph Waldo Emerson, Felix Adler, William James, John Dewey, Josiah Royce, and William E. Hocking. His concept of salvation, his concept of God, his Zionism, and his attitude toward Jewish law and tradition are all explained and analyzed. There is a separate chapter on the relationship of Kaplan to his colleague Abraham Joshua Heschel.

#### *Section 4: Works by Kaplan Disciples*

This section includes works by Kaplan's disciples which were attempts to present his total philosophy. These works are often not critical but they form a useful introduction to Kaplan's thinking. These works are an easier read than Kaplan's major works.

**Cohen, Jack. *Democratizing Judaism*, Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2010.** Jack Cohen's mature understanding of his teacher Mordecai Kaplan. Half the

book deals with Kaplan's philosophy and in particular Cohen's attempts to answer Kaplan's primary critics. The second half of the book deals with the Reconstructionist movement focusing especially on its relation to Israel and how a Kaplan disciple treats the problems of democracy in Israel.

**Eisenstein, Ira. *What We Mean by Religion*. New York, NY: The Reconstructionist Press, 1958.**

An engaging work which attempts to rewrite Kaplan's work *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion*. It follows the original Kaplan text closely and was geared to adult education groups who might find Kaplan's work difficult. It is very well done and is a useful introduction to Kaplan's thinking.

**Eisenstein, Ira. *Creative Judaism*. New York, NY: The Reconstructionist Press, 1937.**

Another attempt, also quite successful, in this case to rewrite Kaplan's major work, *Judaism as a Civilization*. Again, Eisenstein follows Kaplan's work rather closely.

Kaplan's magnum opus is a hefty book and those who want something more accessible would do well to try this work.

**Eisenstein, Ira. *Reconstructing Judaism: Autobiography*. New York, NY: The Reconstructionist Press, 1986.**

Ira Eisenstein was Kaplan's closest collaborator, his confidante and organizer. As Kaplan's most devoted disciple and son-in-law, he shaped the central institutions of the Reconstructionist movement. In this autobiography, he recounts his struggles, dilemmas, failures and successes that marked the emergence of the Reconstructionist movement. Unfortunately, there is little here on the private relationship between Eisenstein and his wife Judith who was also Kaplan's daughter. Perhaps we shall never know the details of this intriguing relationship.

**Kohn, Eugene. *Religion and Humanity*. New York, NY: The Reconstructionist Press, 1953.**

Eugene Kohn [1887-1987] was ordained at JTS and became one of Kaplan's most dedicated disciples. He collaborated on the Kaplan prayer books, and wrote regularly for "The Reconstructionist" magazine. Eisenstein liked to quip that Kaplan, Eisenstein, and Kohn were the "Father, the son-in-law, and the holy ghost writer." In this well-written, clearly formulated work, Kohn presents the Kaplanian system with a strong emphasis on democratic values. His presentation of Kaplan's theology is particularly well done.

## *Section 5: Critical Essays on Kaplan*

By any definition, Kaplan must be considered a radical thinker. He dismissed many of the tenets of traditional Judaism including the belief in a supernatural God who speaks, who gives laws, and who directs history. Kaplan also introduced changes in the liturgy which he felt reflect a more modern attitude toward religion and its place. As a consequence, the articles listed here are critical.

**Arzt, Max. "Dr. Kaplan's Philosophy of Judaism." *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly of America 1933-38 (1938): 195-219.***

Arzt was a Conservative rabbi who served as provost of The Jewish Theological Seminary. An early supporter of Kaplan, this essay presents a more critical evaluation of Kaplan from the standpoint of Conservative Judaism .

**Drachman, Bernard. "An Examination of Mordecai Kaplan's Views on Judaism," *Jewish Forum 4 (February 1921) 724-731.***

Drachman, an orthodox rabbi, taught Kaplan at the old seminary and here criticizes Kaplan from a traditional point of view. Drachman wrote an autobiography which gives much information on late 19<sup>th</sup> century Jewish life in NYC.

**Jung, Leo. "Orthodoxy, Reform and Kaplanism," *Jewish Forum 4 (April 1921): 778-83.***

Jung was a well-known orthodox rabbi who replaced Kaplan as head of the Jewish Center. Jung was quite critical of Kaplan's approach to Judaism. This article is typical of early attitudes to Kaplan within the Orthodox community.

**Kohanski, Alexander S. "Hermann Cohen and Mordecai M. Kaplan," *Jewish Social Studies 29 (July 1967) 155-170.***

Kaplan wrote a book dealing with the philosophy of Hermann Cohen entitled *The Purpose and Meaning of Jewish Existence*. Kaplan was critical of Cohen though he did have a certain affinity to Cohen's philosophy. This important article examines Kaplan's book quite closely and points out particular places where the author maintains that Kaplan misunderstood Cohen. Kohanski (1902-1987) served as an instructor in philosophy at the Graduate School of Jewish Social Work.

## Section 6: Scholarly Essays on Kaplan

Over the years many interesting studies have appeared dealing with Kaplan's thought. In this section we find a selection. It is surprising and significant that some of the best essays are written by Israeli scholars.

**Ackerman, Ari. "Individualism, Nationalism, and Universalism: The Educational Ideals of Mordecai M. Kaplan's Philosophy of Jewish Education," *Journal of Jewish Education* 74 (2008), 201-226.**

The author of this article is an American who lives in Israel and teaches at *Machon Schechter* in Jerusalem. The article examines the educational philosophy of Mordecai Kaplan and offers Kaplan's conception of the symbiotic relationship between individualism, nationalism and universalism as a central theme of his educational vision. Ackerman has written critically of Kaplan in his articles on Kaplan and Heschel. This article however is not critical and shows much insight into Kaplan's thought.

**Berkowitz, Eliezer. "Judaism – A Civilization," In *Judaism*, 1. (Summer 1981) 53-38.**

Well known orthodox rabbi-scholar offers a critical evaluation of Kaplan's main ideas.

**Crosby, Donald A. and Charley D. Hardwick, eds. "Mordecai Kaplan, Religious Naturalism, and Evolving Jewish Thought, Religion in a Pluralistic Age." *Proceedings of the Third International Conference on Philosophical Theology*, edited by. 37-45, New York, NY: P. Lang, 2001.**

Mordecai Kaplan's philosophy of pluralism and its context within modern period. Particular emphasis on the Haskalah. .

**"Salvational Zionism and Religious Naturalism in the Thought of Mordecai M. Kaplan," *Process Studies* 22 (1993), 204-210.**

Kaplan's non-state Zionism is discussed here with relationship to his general theology.

**Eisen, Arnold. "Kaplan and Chosenness: A Historical View," *The Reconstructionist* 50:1 (September 1984): 11-14.**

Kaplan needed to fully repudiate the idea of Chosenness, rather than reconstruct it, because it went against the core of his agenda, to make Jews a part of larger society.

This article is essential reading. Eisen's book "The Chosen People: A Study in Jewish Religious Ideology" should be also consulted.

**"Review of 'The Modern Impulse of Traditional Judaism' and 'Mordecai M. Kaplan and the Development of Reconstructionism'," *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, vol. 4 (1988): 363-366.**

Despite the main elements of Kaplan's thought being internally crystallized before World War I, Kaplan considered himself to be an ungifted scholar. This article deals with the issue of modernity in Kaplan.

**"Kaplan's Judaism at Sixty: A Reappraisal," in Mordecai M. Kaplan, *Judaism as a Civilization*, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1994, xi-xxiv.**

Following a brief biography of Kaplan and history of the publication of *Judaism as a Civilization*, the article delineates Kaplan's program's successes and defeats in 1990s American Judaism.

**"Mordecai Kaplan's *Judaism as a Civilization* at 70: Setting the Stage for Reappraisal," *Jewish Social Studies* 12:2, Winter 2006, 1-16.**

Following a summary of the major findings and research from the 2004 conference "Mordecai Kaplan's *Judaism as a Civilization*: The Legacy of an American Idea, the article claims that, even while needing to read the book with a generous eye, *Judaism as a Civilization* still has staying power in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Erlewine, Robert. "Beyond Transcendence and Immanence: The Moral Theology of Mordecai Kaplan and Hermann Cohen," *Journal of Religion*, 102, No. 2, April, 2022.**

An in-depth complex study of the concepts of transcendence and immanence in Kaplan and Cohen. The author sees significant disagreements and yet they do share elements in common. The exploration of Kaplan on transcendence is particularly instructive.

**Goldsmith, Emanuel S. "Religious Naturalism in Defense of Democracy" in *Religious Experience and Ecological Responsibility*, ed. Donald A. Crosby and Charley Hardwick, 317- 335, New York, NY: Peter Lang, 1996, 317-35.**

Kaplan's democratic commitment is emphasized here with a special concentration on his belief in ecology as central to the religious thought. Goldsmith has been a dedicated Kaplan supporter throughout his life.

**“Mordecai M. Kaplan and Henry Nelson Wieman,” *Journal of Reform Judaism*, 14, Spring 1989, 27-48.**

Kaplan admired Protestant thinker Henry N. Wieman who had a naturalist theology very much like Kaplan’s. Kaplan and Wieman compared.

**“Mordecai M. Kaplan’s Synthesis of Judaism and American Religious Naturalism” *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy*, 11.1, Spring 1991, 5-23.**

A presentation of Kaplan’s naturalist theology with particular emphasis on its relationship to Jewish ritual.

**“Pluralism Out of the Sources of Judaism: The Quest for Religious Pluralism without Relativism,” Alon Goshen-Gottstein and Eugene Korn, eds., in *Jewish Theology and World Religions*, Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilizations, 2012, 87-122.**

Kaplan’s shift from substantive to functional nouns and God in terms of process reflects Maimonides’ emphasis on attributes of action and accords with the focus in

Heisenberg’s quantum mechanics on process and relation of particles as energy rather than as substance. Jospe is an American born scholar who lives in Jerusalem, who was on the faculty at Bar Ilan University and is a strong Kaplan supporter.

**Guzi, Bar. "A Greater Zionism: What Can Contemporary Zionism Learn from Mordecai M. Kaplan?" *CCAR Journal: The Reform Jewish Quarterly* 65, no. 2. 2018,88-101.**

This article was written by a young Israeli scholar who is working for his doctorate at Brandeis University and is writing on Kaplan. The paper explores Mordecai Kaplan's critique of political or pragmatic Zionism and argues that Kaplan's Zionism offers a relevant alternative to contemporary Zionism as it struggles with the definition of

the State of Israel as simultaneously Jewish and democratic, copes with a rise of strident Jewish nationalism, and grapples with issues of religious freedom and pluralism.

**Hartman, David. “Of Breakdown of Tradition and the Quest for Renewal: Reflections on Three Responses to Modernity. Part II Mordecai Kaplan.” *Forum* 38, Summer 1980,43-64.**

Critical but positive evaluation of Kaplan by a well-known modern orthodox rabbi, teacher and scholar. Hartman appreciated Kaplan's devotion to the Jewish people and his ability to ask the right questions although Hartman does not always agree with the answers.

**Hirsh, Richard. "Mordecai Kaplan's Understanding of Religion and the Issue of Cosmology," in *Jewish Civilization: Essays and Studies*, R.A. Brauner, 2: 205-219 Philadelphia, 1981.**

Kaplan's theology and naturalistic "metaphysics" outlined in this summary article. This essay by a Reconstructionist rabbi and Kaplan scholar who was head of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association. Kaplan's naturalism is discussed alongside a comparison with the theology of Milton Steinberg, a very well-known devoted follower of Kaplan though sometimes also a critic.

**Jospe, Raphael**

**"Hillel's Rule," in *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, vol. LXXXI, Nos. 1-2, July-**

**October, 1990, pp. 45-57. (Republished in Raphael Jospe, *Jewish Philosophy: Foundations and Extensions*, vol. I (Lanham: University Press of America, 2008), pp. 191-201.**

Kaplan suggested that the phrase *al regel ahat* in the Talmudic story of Hillel and Shammai (Shabbat 31a), usually understood to mean teaching the Torah while standing "on one foot" can mean in one "regula" (rule).

**"Jewish Particularity from Judah Halevi to Mordecai Kaplan: Implications for Defining Jewish Philosophy" in *Go and Study: Essays and Studies in Honor of Alfred Jospe*, ed. Raphael Jospe and Samuel Fishman (New York/Hoboken: Ktav, 1980), 307-325, and in *Forum on the Jewish People, Zionism and Israel* (Fall-Winter, Nos. 46-47, 1982, 77-90). Republished in Raphael Jospe, *Jewish Philosophy: Foundations and Extensions*, vol. II, Lanham: University Press of America, 2008, 19-33.**

According to Kaplan, the common denominator in Jewish civilization lies not in the content of beliefs and practices, but in the continuous life of the Jewish people.

**Kaufman, David E. "Jewish Education as a Civilization: A History of the Teachers Institute," in *Tradition Renewed: A History of the Jewish Theological Seminary of***

***America*, ed. Jack Wertheimer. New York NY: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1997.**

Mordecai M. Kaplan was the founding principal and guiding spirit of the Teachers Institute, the leading school of Jewish education in the United States. This article concentrates on its history highlights the seminal influence of Kaplan on the Institute, and hence, on Jewish education in the modern world. Kaufman is a scholar of American Jewish history and a strong Kaplan supporter.

**Kaufman, William. "Mordecai M. Kaplan's Theory: A Re-evaluation" – *Conservative Judaism*, 25: 4 (Summer 1971). 33-40.**

This article suggests that Kaplan's concept of God be interpreted as the organic totality of the forces of creativity conquering chaos in the universe.

**"The Transnatural Theology of Mordecai M. Kaplan" – *Judaism* 30; 1. (Winter 1981) 45-52.**

Kaplan's effort to steer a middle course between supernaturalism and naturalism results in a transnatural theology emphasizing the domain where mind, purpose, ideals, values and meanings dwell.

**"The Contemporary Relevance of Mordecai M. Kaplan's Philosophy" – *Conservative Judaism*, 34: 4, March/April 1981,11-16.**

Kaplan's contemporary relevance is to be located in his attempt to develop a system of thought that transcends the reductive naturalism of scientific materialism but at the same time does not overstep the limits of natural law.

**"Between Naturalism and Supernaturalism: Arthur A. Cohen's Critique of Mordecai M. Kaplan's Theology". *CCAR Journal: The Reform Jewish Quarterly*, 35: 2, Winter 2014, 30-38.**

In this article, two opposing camps are delineated: on the one hand Kaplan's naturalism and God as creative process; on the other hand, Cohen, supernaturalism and a personal God.

**"Kaplan's approach to Metaphysics" in *The American Judaism of Mordecai M. Kaplan* edited by Emmanuel S. Goldsmith, Mel Scult and Robert N. Seltzer, 271-282 New York, NY: New York University Press, 1990.**

Although Kaplan advocates a pragmatic or functional approach to the idea of God, he does develop a distinctively modern metaphysics, utilizing categories such as "force" and "process".

**“Mordecai M. Kaplan: The Natural and the Transnatural in *Contemporary Jewish Philosophies* 175-216. Detroit: MI: Wayne State University Press, 1992).**

A basic statement of the development of Kaplan’s thought.

**“God as Process”: Mordecai M. Kaplan’s Process Theology”, William E. Kaufman, *The Evolving God in Jewish Process Theology* 79-93. Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1997).**

This chapter articulates how Kaplan’s religious naturalism differs from strict philosophical naturalism.

**“Mordecai M. Kaplan’s Transnaturalism” in *A Jewish Philosophical Response to the New Atheists – Dawkins, Dennett, Harris and Hitchens* 116- 127. Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, Chapter 8, pp. 116-127.**

Against the equations by the new atheists of the idea of God with supernaturalism, this chapter demonstrates that transnaturalism can constitute a concept of God.

**Magid, Shaul. “The Spinozistic Spirit in Mordecai Kaplan’s Re-Valuation of Judaism” *Modern Judaism* 20:2 (May 2000): 159-180.**

Although Kaplan appreciated the naturalistic thrust of Spinoza’s thinking there were significant differences between them. An in-depth article here by a leading Judaica scholar.

**Moore, Deborah Dash. “Democracy and *The New Haggadah*,” *American Jewish History* 95:4 (December 2009), pp. 323-348.**

Published in 1941 before the United States entered World War II, Kaplan’s *The New Haggadah* radically reinterpreted the Passover holiday, transforming it into a political and religious celebration of human liberation struggles aligned with the American belief in the sanctity of life, liberty and equality. A significant study by a leading scholar and Kaplan supporter.

**“Judaism as a Gendered Civilization: The Legacy of Mordecai Kaplan’s Magnum Opus,” *Jewish Social Studies (the new series)*, 12:2 (Winter 2006), pp. 172-186.**

A discussion of Kaplan’s concept of civilization and folkways (instead of mitzvot) which allowed him to reinterpret Judaism freed from its gendered constraints.

**Deborah Dash Moore and Andrew Bush, “Mitzvah, Gender, and Reconstructionist Judaism,” in *Women Remaking American Judaism*, ed. Riv-Ellen Prell. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2007: 135-152.**

In choosing to reinterpret mitzvah as folkways, Kaplan sought to speak in an American idiom that allowed him to create rituals, like Bat Mitzvah, that aimed to undo the gender discrimination inherent in Judaism.

**“Kaplan’s Key: A Dynamo ‘in de middle’ of the Neighborhood,” in *Key Texts in American Jewish Culture*, ed. Jack Kugelmass. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003: 244-257.**

Kaplan envisioned *Judaism as a Civilization* as a key text positioned to reconcile forces dividing the Jewish community and to mediate between the Jewish community and its American environment.

**Norris, Henry. Mordecai Kaplan’s Criticisms of Maimonides Reinterpretations. In *Shiv’m: Essays and Studies in Honor of Ira Eisenstein*. Ed. by Ronald A. Brauner, 269-76 New York NY: Ktav Publishing House, 1977.**

Norris, a Reconstructionist rabbi considers Kaplan’s comments on Maimonides and the way Kaplan applies his concepts of transvaluation and revaluation. A brief consideration of Kaplan on Philo is also included.

**Pianko, Noam. “Making American Democracy Safe for Judaism: Mordecai Kaplan, National Civilization, and the Morality of Zionism.” In *Zionism and the Roads not Taken: (Simon) Rawidowicz, (Mordecai) Kaplan and (Hans) Kohn*. 95-135. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010.**

A thorough study of these three thinkers all of whom were committed Zionists but for whom a Jewish state was not paramount in their thinking. A Creative consideration of Kaplan’s Zionism. Best available treatment of Kaplan’s Zionism by a leading scholar of Zionism.

salvation in the light of current debates on religious realism and pluralism. The work of John Hick is primary in this article. A depth significant study.

**Samuelson, Norbert. “Can Democracy and Capitalism be Jewish Values? Mordecai Kaplan’s Political Philosophy.” In *Modern Judaism* 3, NO.2. (May 1983) 189-215.**

Thoughtful essay by well-known rabbi scholar analyzing Kaplan's commitment to democratic values and how they fit into his conception of Jewish civilization. Samuelson maintains that Kaplan's system might be entitled the democratization of Judaism. Part of a larger work which was never published and may be at American Jewish Archives.

**Sakal, Vered. "Realism, Pluralism, and Salvation: Reading Mordecai Kaplan through John Hick." *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 23.1 (2015): 60-74.**

The article by a young Israeli scholar surveys Kaplan's ideas about God and

**Schachter, Jacob J. "Mordecai M. Kaplan's Orthodox Ordination" *American Jewish Archives*, 46:1 (Spring–Summer, 1994) 34-44.**

Details of Kaplan's traditional ordination from Isaac Reines in 1908. Reines a well-known Orthodox figure who helped found Mizrachi, was the rabbi in Kaplan's town Svenzian where Kaplan lived as a boy.

**Scult, Mel. "The Sociologist as Theologian- The Fundamental Assumptions of Kaplan's Thought." In *Judaism* 25 , No. 3 (Summer 1976). 345-352.**

Kaplan was a pragmatic thinker much influenced by James and Dewey but perhaps not as much as people think. In this essay the author attempts to show how Kaplan's pragmatic frame of mind influenced his theology.

**"Mordecai Kaplan, The Earliest Influences," *Sh'ma A Journal of Jewish responsibility*, 4/79 October 18, 1974. pp. 145-147.**

This article deals with the influence of Matthew Arnold on Kaplan. The phrase "power not ourselves that makes for salvation" as a way of referring to the divine comes from Arnold.

**"Kaplan's Interpretation of Torah," *Conservative Judaism*, Vol xxxiii, Number 1 Fall 1979, pp.63-68.**

Kaplan's concept of the Torah as a whole and selections from some of his sermon notes on selected Torah portions.

**"Becoming Centered: Community and Spirituality in the Early Kaplan" in *The American Judaism of Mordecai Kaplan*, eds. Emanuel Goldsmith, Mel Scult, Robert Seltzer, (New York: New York University Press, 1990) pp. 53-94.**

**“The Pool with a Shul and a School.” Kaplan’s life and thought at the Jewish Center. For a full-length study of the Center, see work by David E. Kaufman above.**

**“The Sovereignty of God- Fragments from Kaplan’s Notes,” *The Reconstructionist*, Volume 59, no,1, Spring 1994, pp. 27-30.**

Kaplan is always presented as the pure naturalist in terms of his theology but there are transcendent elements in his thought which are briefly presented in this article.

**“Kaplan’s Heschel: A View from the Kaplan Diary,” *Conservative Judaism*, Vol 54. No.4. Summer 2002, pp. 3-15.**

Kaplan and Heschel are usually presented as theological opposites – the mystical and the pragmatic. This article reviews their relationship and indicates similarities and differences. A more complete version is presented in Scult’s *The Radical American Judaism of Mordecai Kaplan.*”

**Honor of Neil Gillman, ed. William Plevan, (Brighton Mass: Academic Studies Press, 2013) pp. 170-182.**

Kaplan taught Midrash to rabbinical students at the Jewish Theological Seminary for many years. Louis Finkelstein declared that Kaplan was a “Master of Midrash,” This essay gives an indication of Kaplan’s approach and a few examples from his class notes which are at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College archive of Kaplan’s papers.

**“Kaplan and Personality” in *Reappraisals and New Studies of the Modern Jewish Experience – Essays in Honor of Robert M. Seltzer*. Ed. Brian Smollett and Christian Wiese, (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2015) pp. 162-180.**

Kaplan read very widely in non-Jewish sources of theology and religion. Rather early on he discovered a trend in Christian theological thought called personalism. In this way of thinking, the perfected self is viewed as the center of religion and all reality. Obviously Jesus was intended here but Kaplan uses this approach and in a sense dechristianizes it and applies it to the Jewish approach to the religious life. Kaplan read some of these Christian authors with his rabbinical students.

**“Mordecai M. Kaplan and His Concept of God – From Pragmatism to Piety,”**  
*Judaica Petropolitana*, 10 (2018) St. Petersburg State University and the Hebrew University. pp. 1-13.

Kaplan’s theology is provocative and complex. As we would expect, it partakes of the naturalistic and one might say the pragmatic. But counter to our expectations, he moves beyond the natural to what he terms the *supra*-natural. Though Kaplan’s pragmatism is often opposed to Heschel’s mystical tendencies there are numerous instances where he comes very close to Heschel. Heschel lived in the realm of the ineffable, a level which Kaplan only visited occasionally. More often Kaplan dwells in the realm of the thinkable. Both Kaplan and Heschel should be characterized as rabbis rather than systematic philosophers and both were more intent on strengthening the Jewish commitment of their disciples rather than upon creating philosophical systems.

**“A Theology of the Personal” In *CCAR Journal*. (Spring 2022) pp.154-165.**

A study of the centrality of the individual in Kaplan’s thought with special emphasis on the humanist American thinkers of mid-century. This article concentrates on the thought of Abraham Maslow and Erich Fromm. The theme of this study is to relate these figures and their thought to Mordecai Kaplan and his emphasis on the individual.