

Princetonian 'Guerre de Plume'

An Encounter in Two Stages

I. The Thrust

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† THE PROLIFIC writings of Walter Kaufmann on religion and philosophy are undoubtedly finding many readers. He has a fertile mind, and he writes well and persuasively on matters of interest to an intelligent audience. He says forcefully many things which need to be said, even though some of his views are not as novel as he seems to think. He is not afraid to speak his mind; indeed, he takes special delight in pulling the tails of sacred cows, and he is a master of eloquent invective. Though he is a professional philosopher, his writing is never forbiddingly technical or abstract; it is suffused less by the cold light of reason than by the warmth of human emotion. All this adds up to agreeable reading for those who share his marked antipathy to Christianity, or who are ready at least to listen to the worst that can be said about it.

However, in his latest work, *The Faith of a Heretic*, Mr. Kaufmann carries his personal vendetta to such lengths that even some who initially are sympathetic may begin to suspect him of unfairness and exaggeration.

Slurs, Sneers and Sweeping Assertions

Probably it is too much to expect philosophic detachment of a person of Mr. Kaufmann's background, as he describes it, and of his volcanic feelings, as he expresses them. But these do not acquit him of responsibility for the slurs, sneers and misrepresentations which abound in his new book; of the malice which he disclaims but (unconsciously?) acknowledges in Bruno's final word, "One really has to be nasty in self-defense" (page 409); of his pose as an authority on the Bible, which he (unlike Aquinas, he points out) reads in the original languages; of his exhibiting many of the very defects which he criticizes so drastically in others; and of his failure to recognize the effect upon his thinking of a heritage of resentment. He would be a very naive reader indeed who would conclude that Mr. Kaufmann's view of Christianity has been arrived at solely by the application of reason to facts. Such anti-Semitism-in-reverse is just as reprehensible and unlovely as the original article.

In *The Faith of a Heretic* Mr. Kaufmann ranges confidently over wide areas of literature, religion and philosophy. In the course of doing so he makes many sweeping assertions and incidental remarks which sound plausible, indeed authoritative. The general reader is in no position to check these, but some of them bring the professional reader up short. Of these a few are important; others are trivial in themselves but indicative of superficiality or carelessness about

exact statement. Since the author is professing to speak as a scholar to the public on important matters in philosophy, ethics, religion, theology and biblical criticism, it is pertinent to ask what are his standards of judgment and accuracy, particularly outside his own field of philosophy. In the area of biblical literature, at any rate, they are not high. (In fairness it must be added that Mr. Kaufmann's instinctive enthusiasm for the Old Testament has given him greater insight in dealing with it than his prejudice has permitted him in dealing with the New Testament.)

This estimate can be documented, beginning with matters small in importance except as indications that the writer is not on his home ground. He remarks (page 126) that it is "unfortunate that Paul referred to the Torah, the Five Books of Moses, as 'the Law,' seeing how much there is in those five books which is not 'law'"—as if Paul had originated a usage which had been a commonplace for centuries (cf. Deuteronomy 1:5; Nehemiah 8:1-2; Sirach, Prologue and 24:23, where *tōrāh* is translated *nomos*, "law," in the Old Greek version of Jewish origin). "Paul of Tarsus" becomes in Mr. Kaufmann's version "Paul from Tarshish" (page 237), a curious confusion of two independently famous names; if the identification was deliberate he should have said so and thus made his contribution to the solution of a long-standing puzzle.

Again, Mr. Kaufmann tells us (pages 184-85) that "Mernephta, who was probably the Pharaoh of the Exodus, boasts of having destroyed Israel forever. In the next generation the Hebrews began their conquest of the promised land . . ." He has failed to notice that in the inscription referred to, Mer-ne-Ptah was claiming victory over Israel *in Palestine*, in the *fifth year of his reign* (c. 1223-11 B.C.)—so he cannot also have been the pharaoh of the Exodus *in a previous generation*. Small points, perhaps, but symptomatic.

Defender of Discontinuity

The author likes to call himself a heretic, a title with a long and honorable history. A heretic is one who deviates from an established orthodoxy under the conviction that he more truly represents the faith than do its orthodox adherents. Under this rubric Mr. Kaufmann does not qualify. He both vilifies Christianity and rejects the basic tenet of Judaism that "the Lord our God is one Lord, and thou shalt love the Lord thy God . . ."

What, then, does Mr. Kaufmann do with the Bible? As might be expected he is almost uniformly hostile to the New Testament, and anyone who has read it

without Christian presuppositions but with an open mind can see that he distorts its teaching beyond recognition. To the Old Testament his attitude is curiously ambivalent, showing to traditional Jewish orthodoxy a marked deference which sits uneasily with his rationalism. The Old Testament is presented always in the most favorable light, the New Testament as unattractively as possible. He contrasts them as if they were the Jewish and the Christian Scriptures respectively, forgetting that the Old Testament was at first the *only* Bible of Christians and has always been an essential part of the Christian Bible. The New Testament presupposes the Old Testament because it was written by men to whom the Old Testament was sacred Scripture. Judaism and Christianity interpret the Hebrew Bible differently, but they treasure it as a common possession. It is not the Old Testament but the Talmud which is the Jewish counterpart of the Christians' New Testament.

Mr. Kaufmann deliberately obscures this fact, and is determined at all costs to sever the link between the two testaments. "It is essential to recognize the discontinuity between the prophets and Jesus" (page 256). "Jesus does *not* stand in the prophetic tradition: in the Gospels this ancient appeal to selflessness is no longer encountered; it is presupposed that every soul is concerned with how *he* may enter the kingdom of heaven; and prudence has come to mean enlightened selfishness" (page 167). What about the parable of the Good Samaritan? "One may doubt the authenticity of this parable. If Jesus had really told it, why should three of the evangelists have omitted it entirely?" (page 221). That is *one* way of disposing of unwelcome data. It is like asking why Chronicles overlooks David's adultery, and why the contemporary prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel ignore each other. On Mr. Kaufmann's critical principles, presumably David has been slandered, and one or other of these prophets never existed.

A Plain Meaning Perverted

The author has little or nothing to say about the basic and far-reaching agreements between the Gospels. He quotes only what appears to support his contentions, and then often most unfairly. An example is the tirade (pages 220-24) against the Sermon on the Mount's idea of reward for ethical obedience. Quite apart from the fact that blessing and curse are the sanctions also of the Deuteronomic law, and that doom or deliverance depending on behavior is the constant theme of the Old Testament prophets, it is simply not so that "in the Gospels, one is to lose oneself only to find *oneself* . . . we are taught to give up what is of no account. In what truly matters, we are expected to see to our own interest." If ever the plain meaning of a great saying was perverted by underlining the wrong word, this is such a case, and the perversion is willful. Beside it, the explanation of "Render to Caesar what is Caesar's" as meaning "oppression is unimportant" is less inexcusable.

One of the author's chief accusations against Christian theologians is that of "gerrymandering one's own

religion" (pages 118 ff., 134 ff.), because "they set themselves an impossible task that cannot be solved by sound methods" (page 123). Let it be admitted that there is uncomfortable truth in some of his strictures. But his wholesale and rhetorical condemnation of theologians in general is preposterous. Theology, he says (page 118), "involves a deliberate blindness to most points of view other than one's own, a refusal to see others as they see themselves and to see oneself as one appears to others—a radical insistence on applying different standards to oneself and others. . . . Theology is founded on a comprehensive, rigorous, and systematic refusal to as much as attempt to be fair . . . theology is based on a devout commitment to a double standard." It is a little difficult to recognize in this picture the lineaments of Temple or Buber, Tillich or Niebuhr, not to mention Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin and others of the giant intellects of the past.

The Matter of Methods

Since Mr. Kaufmann has raised the issue of "sound methods" it is relevant to examine his own methods in the area of the Hebrew Bible, regarding which he claims to speak with some authority. I share his enthusiasm for the Old Testament, especially that for the Hebrew prophets, and among the prophetic books that for the Book of Jonah. Many of the things he says in his chapter on "The Old Testament" are well said and deserve the emphasis he gives them, in particular the place he gives to Moses as the real founder of the faith of Israel. Unfortunately, he does not fulfill his promise to consider the prophets in detail, and his broad generalizations sometimes need qualification. The Book of Jonah to which he returns again and again is not typical of Hebrew prophecy; as a prophetic parable about a prophet it is unique in the collection. What the *Midrash* said long ago is true—it is "a book by itself" among the works of the 12 minor prophets.

To say, as Mr. Kaufmann does (page 141), that in the prophets "love, justice and humility appear to be all that is asked of man, and questions of belief [are] entirely peripheral" is absurd, in the light of Amos 9, Hosea 11, Isaiah 7, 31, 40, Jeremiah 2 and a host of similar passages. The prophets were not merely "solitary individuals who criticized the inconsistencies, hypocrisies and . . . the organized religion of the time" (page 263). To assert this is to ignore the prophets' own overwhelming sense of a divine will which compelled them to speak as they had no wish to speak, as was the case notably with Isaiah and Jeremiah. This is of the essence of Hebrew prophecy as the Bible describes it, but it does not fit Mr. Kaufmann's line of interpretation—so he leaves it out. Again, he is much more positive than the evidence warrants about the prophets' rejection of ritual (pages 213 ff., 226, 277). The evidence is at best ambiguous, and scholars who have studied the matter more carefully than Mr. Kaufmann are by no means unanimous in adopting his conclusion.

Others of his assertions are similarly dubious. The view that "polygamy is wrong . . . has no basis in Scripture" (page 296): perhaps so, as a specific com-

mandment; but the ideal of monogamy is the plain intent of the creation stories in Genesis 2 and 3, of the prophets in Hosea 2 and Malachi 2, and of the Wisdom teacher in Proverbs 5. Idolatry, we are informed, was "never a rival creed," though "some of the people sometimes . . . thoughtlessly [sic!] adopted" the practices of the nations among whom they lived (page 200). Mr. Kaufmann should look up the 23rd chapter of II Kings and the 44th chapter of Jeremiah. Again, on page 200: "In Israel, no man was ever . . . accorded even semi-divine status." Has the author never taken a look at the second Psalm or the ninth chapter of Isaiah?

Mr. Kaufmann not only makes a selection of what pleases him in the prophets; he does so with the Old Testament as a whole. He is "against theology," so he chooses to ignore the theology of the covenant articulated in Deuteronomy, the priestly theology of Genesis 1, the eschatological theology of Second Isaiah, and the dynastic theology of the Davidic house. These are not formulated in creedal definitions, but they are structural theologies none the less. We are told, further, that "the supra-nationalistic, cosmopolitan, humanistic motif runs through the Hebrew Bible" (page 207). True, but the opposite motif also appears in Isaiah 34 and 63, in Obadiah, Nahum, Esther 9, and in the dreadful conclusion of Psalm 137. Again (page 188), the author's interpretation of the creation story in Genesis turns on the resemblance of the Hebrew word for sun, *shemesh*, to "the word for servant, *shamash*." The author either does not know or neglects to point out that the latter word does not occur in Genesis, or, for that matter, anywhere in the Hebrew Bible. It is postbiblical Hebrew. Still, Mr. Kaufmann will not "plead guilty to a charge of gerrymandering the Bible" (page 256). To him, defiance is a virtue. He will be convicted none the less by any informed and observant reader.

Critique as Caricature

One of Mr. Kaufmann's pet aversions is "higher criticism." This he affects to have disposed of in a previous book, *Critique of Religion and Philosophy*, to which he refers the reader of the present volume. There (pages 377-390) he follows his favorite technique of caricaturing something which he instinctively dislikes and of which his knowledge is superficial. He persistently confuses two different matters—the evolutionary theory of the development of Israelite religion associated with the name of Wellhausen ("one of the myriad forms of popular Darwinism") and the documentary analysis of the Pentateuch, in which Wellhausen followed others. The idea of that great scholar as a credulous victim of popular Darwinism is a quaint conceit. Yet it is surpassed by Mr. Kaufmann's highly original explanation of the extensive differences in literary style, vocabulary and religious assumptions which have led to the analysis of the Pentateuch into distinct documents; with superb naiveté he suggests that these might result from the "slightly different ways" in which a child heard a story from his two grandmothers!

Taking as an example the flood story in Genesis 6-9, Mr. Kaufmann first refers the reader to Budde and Driver for statements of the critical view—a risky suggestion if there were any likelihood of its being followed by the general reader! He then disposes of the matter by adducing the support of a work "unfortunately little known," a massive commentary on Genesis by Benno Jacob, an orthodox defender of the traditional position. Jacob, he holds, has shown the "inadequacy" of the higher criticism. Yet a few pages later (page 387) Mr. Kaufmann himself unblushingly accepts the conclusions of higher criticism that Moses did not write the Pentateuch, and that Isaiah 40 ff. comes from a prophet who wrote during the exile! "These as well as many other findings of a similar sort enhance our understanding of the texts."

This is bewildering. One begins to suspect that the author does not know what this higher criticism, which he denounces so vigorously, is. The suspicion turns into certainty when he quotes the Scandinavian scholar Nyberg on "the unsound methods of the Higher Criticism." The fact is that Nyberg in the work quoted is not speaking of "higher criticism" at all, but of "lower" or "textual" criticism, and in particular of the excesses of arbitrary text emendation. The allegation of the support of Nyberg is either sheer misrepresentation or proof that Mr. Kaufmann is not aware of one of the most elementary distinctions in biblical studies.

Concerning Canon and Chronology

One final example of Mr. Kaufmann's flagrant distortion of facts, distortion dictated by bitter prejudice: In *The Faith of a Heretic* (pages 206-07) he blandly asserts that "the original structure of the Hebrew Bible has been deliberately changed in the Christian version of it" because "Christianity had no use for its conclusion" (i.e., the last words of II Chronicles, which say that the Lord had commanded Cyrus to build him a house at Jerusalem). Why Christianity had no use for this in one place but had use for it in another, he does not explain. He goes on: "So they defied chronology and put the prophets at the end of the Old Testament. In this manner, the prophets ceased to appear as the central portion of the Hebrew Scriptures."

Mr. Kaufmann's contention is nonsense. The order of the books in the Hebrew Bible itself defies chronology; many of the Psalms, for example, are older than the exilic and postexilic prophets. The Talmud and the Masorah differ as to the order of the major prophetic books. We know from the Talmud and from the Qumran texts that the contents of the Hebrew Scriptures were not finally settled until after the rise of Christianity and its separation from Judaism. The order of the books was not settled even then. Chronicles appears last in the printed editions, following German and French manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible. But in many Hebrew manuscripts of Spanish origin, Chronicles appears *first* instead of last among the "Writings," apparently reflecting the Palestinian as against the Babylonian tradition.

The foregoing facts alone refute Mr. Kaufmann's claim of Christian "manipulation" of the order of the

Old Testament writings. But the Greek manuscript tradition is equally fatal to his claim. Two of the three great uncial manuscripts which preserve the major portion of the Greek Bible in its Christian form, *Codex Sinaiticus* of the fourth century A.D. and *Codex Alexandrinus* of the fifth century, do not place the prophetic writings at the end of the Old Testament, as Mr. Kaufmann alleges was done deliberately "when it [Christianity] put together its canon." Moreover, the Christians did not make their own Greek version of the Old Testament; they took over the existing Greek version of the Alexandrian Jews. There is no evidence that they deliberately changed the order of the books in this version, and what evidence exists points the other way.

The first century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus

describes the Jewish Bible as he knew it; in his list the historical and prophetic books (including Chronicles) precede the books "containing hymns to God and precepts" (*Contra Apion*, I, 8). The reference must be to the Jewish Greek version before Christians could have tampered with it. After all, what Christian machinations can be detected in the attachment of Ruth to Judges and of Lamentations to Jeremiah? In the placing of Esther with the historical books? Or, for that matter, in the displacement of Chronicles? The explanation given by the author that the last was done out of antipathy to its conclusion is as childish as it is baseless.

Mr. Kaufmann might profitably meditate on the biblical proverb, "He who digs a pit [for others] will fall into it himself" (Proverbs 26:27).

II. The Parry

WALTER KAUFMANN

† MR. SCOTT gives the impression that the central claims, whatever they may be, of such a writer as myself need not be taken seriously. Instead of discussing these claims Mr. Scott argues (1) *ad hominem* and (2) that in *The Faith of a Heretic* I have erred on many specific points. Most of those points are admittedly irrelevant to the major arguments in my book.

The *ad hominem* attack I shall document without attempting any detailed defense: "Probably it is too much to expect philosophic detachment of a person of Mr. Kaufmann's background." "[But this does] not acquit him of . . . failure to recognize the effect upon his thinking of a heritage of resentment." "Such anti-Semitism-in-reverse is just as reprehensible and unlovely as the original article." Some of this I fail to understand. I am accused of something as reprehensible as anti-Semitism, but I don't know of what. Anti-Semitism does not mean the belief that some of the teachings of the Jewish religion are untenable; it means rather agitation to discriminate against individuals because they are Jews. What is "anti-Semitism-in-reverse"? Surely I have never proposed discrimination against anybody!

Unsupported accusations like this are to be found throughout Mr. Scott's essay. Another example: "It is not the Old Testament but the Talmud which is the Jewish counterpart of the Christians' New Testament. Mr. Kaufmann deliberately obscures this fact . . ." This sounds like a charge of mendaciousness.

Coming now to my alleged errors, I certainly consider Mr. Scott's claim about the Talmud false, and I believe that most Jews as well as the majority of detached Christian scholars would agree with me. Traditional Christianity considers the New Testament to be God's revelation in a way in which traditional Judaism does not consider the Talmud to be God's revelation; indeed, Liberal and Reform Judaism make little of the Talmud—often nothing at all.

I am charged with "forgetting that the Old Testament was at first the *only* Bible of Christians and has always been an essential part of the Christian Bible." Actually I make quite a point of this in my book, e.g., on page 240 and in section 70.

In the case of the pharaoh, Mr. Scott says that I have "failed to notice" something that—according to *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, edited by James B. Pritchard (second revised edition, 1955, page 378, note 18)—I was amply justified in not noticing because it is probably false.

Many of Mr. Scott's points depend on interpretations of my text which are strange indeed—especially when found in an article denouncing misrepresentation. When I remark that it is "unfortunate that Paul referred to the Torah . . . as 'the Law,'" Mr. Scott imputes to me ignorance of the fact that Paul did not originate this usage.

Mr. Scott accuses me of "disposing of unwelcome data" and suggests—quite falsely—that this is what I have done with the parable of the Good Samaritan. Any reader who looks up my pages 220 ff., instead of taking my critic's word, will find how wrong he is. He points out that "Chronicles overlooks David's adultery," and adds: "On Mr. Kaufmann's critical principles presumably David has been slandered." According to my critical principles—and those of most scholars—it is much more probable that Chronicles omits what seems offensive to the pious author. That this is my approach to Chronicles is explicitly stated on page 158. Unless we use one approach for the Old Testament and another for the New, we might well ask, as I did in passing, why three of the four evangelists omitted the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Following his charge that I have offered unsupported data, Mr. Scott opens the next paragraph with a sentence that is clearly false: "The author has little or nothing to say about the basic and far-reaching