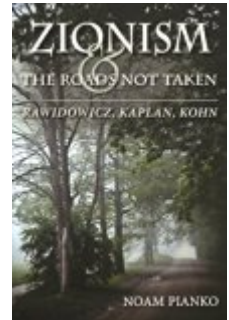


Noam Pianko. *Zionism and the Roads Not Taken: Rawidowicz, Kaplan, Kohn.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010. x + 277 pp. \$25.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-253-22184-1.



Reviewed by Eran Kaplan

Published on H-Judaic (July, 2011)

Commissioned by Jason Kalman (Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion)

The roads not taken in the first part of the title of Noam Pianko's book are various formulations and ideas about Zionism and Jewish nationalism that were outlined by the three thinkers who make the latter part of the book's title: the historian and Hebraist scholar Simon Rawidowicz, the religious thinker Mordecai Kaplan, and the political theorist Hans Kohn. And while their respective thoughts about Jewish nationalism derived from different intellectual sources and backgrounds and sought to address different ideological, religious, and philosophical questions, Pianko argues that Rawidowicz's notion of global Hebraism, Kaplan's idea of national civilization, and Kohn's formulation of cultural humanism were all expressions of interwar counterstate Zionism. More than six decades after the Zionist movement succeeded in establishing a Jewish State in Palestine, we tend to associate Zionism almost exclusively with the idea of establishing a sovereign Jewish state, but as Pianko shows, in the decades leading up to the establishment of the State, there was a vibrant debate both inside and outside the

Jewish world about the meaning, scope, and ultimate goals of Jewish nationalism. And as counter-intuitive as it may seem from our current vantage point, some important intellectual voices during that period argued for a kind of Jewish nationalism that was not limited by the idea of a single state in a specific territory, but rather envisioned forms of Jewish nationalism that were not bound by a nation-state.

The book begins with a fascinating overview of the arguments made by different intellectuals in the early part of the twentieth century that questioned the necessity of drawing a direct link between nationalism and statehood (not necessarily with regard to Jewish nationalism). The book then proceeds to discuss how Rawidowicz, Kaplan, and Kohn came to conceive their own notions of Jewish nationalism. The analysis of Rawidowicz's brand of Zionism provides the English reader with yet another opportunity to explore the fascinating intellectual world of this still obscure yet highly original thinker. Following David Myers's *Between Jew and Arab: The Lost Voice of*

Simon Rawidowicz (2008), we can again appreciate the novelty of Rawidowicz's thought, and the way he placed the Hebrew language at the center of his national view. Pianko shows how Rawidowicz made a case for a Judaism that defies a single territorial, political center. As the name of Rawidowicz's magnum opus *Babylon and Jerusalem* (1957) suggests, the Hebraist scholar argued that Judaism should have multiple centers, both in the Jews' ancestral homeland but also in the Diaspora and that one should not supersede the other. Today, Mordecai Kaplan is known primarily as a religious thinker and as a supporter of mainstream Zionism. However, Pianko convincingly shows that a close examination of Kaplan's notion of civilization and his various writings on Jewish nationalism reveal that Kaplan's Zionism was not confined to the idea of a Jewish state but rather to his general perception of Judaism as a civilization that exists beyond fixed political boundaries. Pianko's analysis of Kohn's contribution to the counterstate Zionist camp is, in mind, the least convincing. Kohn began his public career as a Zionist activist in Palestine, who while earning his living from the Zionist movement formulated ideas about Arab-Jewish relations (binationalism) that placed him on the margins of the Zionist world. Pianko shows how Kohn's early writings on Jewish nationalism were informed by German cultural nationalism. Yet after Kohn moved to the United States he shifted his intellectual focus to broader theoretical questions on nationalism, and he championed Western, individualistic liberal nationalism—which he contrasted with collective, folkish Eastern forms of nationalism. Pianko attempts to show that, in fact, there is a certain continuity between Kohn's earlier writings and his later critique of Eastern (including German) nationalism—and that this continuity, which is based on the idea of cultural humanism, expands the intellectual horizons of counterstate Jewish nationalism. It seems that a discussion of Kohn's early criticism of Zionism, which influenced Kaplan's views on Jewish nationalism, would have been

enough in the context of the present study. Kohn's voluminous later writings on nationalism deserve a more detailed analysis that is not necessarily related to the main theme of this book.

While Pianko shows that there were some biographical and intellectual connections among the three protagonists of his book (Kaplan's and Rawidowicz's fathers were both followers of Rabbi Jacob Reines; Kaplan attended a talk by Kohn), he does not make a compelling case as to how these three very different thinkers, who did not collaborate intellectually, politically, or institutionally, made an intellectual or ideological school. Nor does he explain why he does not include other thinkers who also questioned traditional Zionism while calling for broader notions of Jewish nationalism (for example, Hannah Arendt, who is mentioned several times in the book). More problematic yet, is Pianko's rather simplistic distinction between statist (or mainstream) Zionists and counterstate Jewish nationalists. While most Zionists strove for the creation of an independent, sovereign state (one of the founding texts of the Zionist movement was Theodor Herzl's *The Jewish State* [1896], and after the creation of Israel, the country's first prime minister, David Ben Gurion, championed the idea of *mamlachtiyut*, which can be translated as statism), in the decades leading to Israeli independence there was a vibrant and at times heated debate among those who called for the immediate creation of a Jewish state in Palestine (mainly right-wing Revisionist Zionists) and those (mainly Labor Zionists, the dominant Zionist camp at the time) who claimed that in the present Zionists should concentrate on building social and communal institutions, while the final aims of Zionism (the creation of the state) was something that should only be discussed in the future.

As Pianko shows, one of the factors that led the counterstatist Zionists to their position was their fear that the creation of a state by the Jews, who were a national minority in Palestine, would

lead to violent clashes with the Arab majority. However, it is interesting in this context to note that in the post-Israeli independence era, some of the more original critics of Israeli Zionism and Israel's relations with the Arab world advocated a radical statist position. For example, both Hillel Kook (better known in America as Peter Bergson, his *nom de guerre* as the Irgun's representative in the United States) and Uri Avineri (one of the leaders of the Israeli peace camp) argued that what haunted Israel (and ultimately would doom it) was the insistence of its leaders on continuing to link the state of Israel to a national movement that sought to represent Jews everywhere. They argued that once Israel achieved independence, it should cultivate Israeli nationalism that would include all residents of the state, Jews and Arabs. Jews outside Israel from that perspective would continue to identify themselves as Jews religiously or culturally but their nationality would be that of the countries in which they reside. To Kook and Avineri, the root cause of Arab-Jewish tensions in Palestine and what prevented Israel from becoming truly liberal and democratic was not Jewish statism, but rather the inability of Zionists to decide whether they were committed to the creation of a national movement that is limited to a single state in Palestine or to a national movement that represents Jews in many countries and nations. Maybe the problem with mainstream Zionists (from a liberal perspective, which is what Pianko brings into the discussion) was not their statism, but rather their inability to reconcile Zionism's desire both to create a Jewish state in a specific territory and to represent all Jews everywhere.

In the final chapter of his book, Pianko attempts to assess the relevancy of the counterstate argument, which was formulated in the interwar period, today. He makes a strong case that we should continue to question our categories regarding nationalism, Diaspora, and the state of Israel in the manner that Rawidowicz, Kaplan, and Kohn did more than half a century ago. However, he does not provide the reader with a thorough

understanding of how those questions have changed over the years nor does he attempt to formulate a counterstate argument for the twenty-first century. This is not necessarily the task of the historian; and what Pianko does do is offer us a fine addition to the scholarly debate about the history of Jewish nationalism, one that helps the reader understand the rich potential that nationalism has held for Jews beyond simply supporting the idea of a Jewish state.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at
<https://networks.h-net.org/h-judaic>

Citation: Eran Kaplan. Review of Pianko, Noam. *Zionism and the Roads Not Taken: Rawidowicz, Kaplan, Kohn*. H-Judaic, H-Net Reviews. July, 2011.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=30924>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.