

JEWISH STUDIES 338 - JEWISH PHILOSOPHY AND THOUGHT II
MODERNITY IN JEWISH THOUGHT

Igor H. de Souza
MW 1:05-2:25PM
Education Building Rm 338

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 3-4pm, and by appointment.

Description

Our point of depart in this course is the impact of modernity on Jewish thought and religion. First, the rise of the modern state led Jews to confront a crucial question: how can they belong to both the Jewish people and to their countries? Second, modernity emphasizes individual autonomy: we decide as individuals what is good for us. How can this emphasis co-exist with religious law and tradition? Third, modernity involves a strong belief in the authority of reason and progress. In this light, is religion rational or a matter of psychological experience? We will discuss these questions in the first half of our course.

In the second half, we turn to three broader historical phenomena that represent a crisis of modernity: the rise of Zionism; the Holocaust; feminism. These phenomena radically transformed Jews and Judaism in the modern world. They continue to inform Judaism in our post-modern, multicultural age.

Students of all backgrounds are welcome—the only requirement is an open mind and willingness to learn.

Course Aims

The aims of this course are:

- Knowledge of the representative thinkers and intellectual trends in Jewish thought, 17th c.-present., against broader historical and cultural contexts.
- Understanding of the perennial problems of Jewish thought in the recent era, such as the relationship between individual and community, the place of Jews and Judaism in majority-Christian and in multicultural societies.

- Establish meaningful connections between primary texts and contemporary concerns in religious communities.
- The ability to read historical, religious and philosophical sources critically.
- Crafting argumentative written pieces reflecting subjective and objective perspectives.

Assignments and Evaluation Formats:

Attendance and Participation: 20%

Weekly papers: 20%

Each Wednesday, you will be given a question relating to the texts and lecture for that week. You must answer the question in a brief paper of one to two typed pages, double-spaced. You have until the following Wednesday to deliver your paper. You must attend class to receive the assignment and to turn in your paper (please bring a printed copy; extensions will not be granted). Answer the question to the best of your ability using the texts and the discussions in lecture. This is a subjective reaction paper, not a research paper, and you are not expected to cite any sources. However, your response to the prompt must also be grounded in the texts and lectures.

There are 10 weekly papers in total. 10 papers x 2 points = 20 points.

Midterm exam: 25%

In-class typed exam. Please bring your laptop computer with you. You will be given a set of written questions. Answer the questions on any word processor and e-mail the file to your instructor before leaving the classroom. Do not consult your notes or any online sources; if you are caught doing so, it will be considered cheating.

If you do not own a laptop, McGill has laptop loan program; be sure to reserve at least two days in advance. You can find the reservation form here:

<http://webforms.mcgill.ca/lics-av/licsav.asp?article=1744&bhcp=1>. Items can also be rented on the spot if available.

Location: Equipment Loans - 688 Sherbrooke West, Room 285 (turn right before the elevators, on the 2nd floor) - Telephone: 514-398-8833

*Hours: Monday–Friday, 9:00 am–2:00 pm/By appointment: Monday–Friday, 9:00 am – 5:00 pm
Be sure notify your instructor if you have any difficulty procuring a laptop.*

Formal research paper: 35%

A formal research paper (7-9 pages, double-spaced) on the text and/or topic of your choice. You must consult with me in advance about your topic. Be prepared to give a 5-minute presentation on your final paper on the last day of class.

The research paper is due on the day scheduled by McGill for the final exam.

Note: for the purposes of this course, Wikipedia is not an acceptable source. Instead, you should consult the Encyclopaedia Judaica. Further secondary sources are listed in the readings by Batnitzky.

McGill Policy Statements:

“McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information.”

“In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.”

“Conformément à la Charte des droits de l’étudiant de l’Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l’un des objets est la maîtrise d’une langue).”

Required Texts:

All texts will be available electronically - please consult class site in MyCourses on Minerva, under the tab “Content.”

Schedule of Readings

Modernity: Is It Good for the Jews?

January 7 - Intro

January 11 - Historical background: the beginnings of Jewish modernity and emancipation.

Paul Mendes-Flohr, “The Emancipation of European Jewry. Why It Was Not Self-Evident.”

“Debate on the Eligibility of Jews for Citizenship,” The French National Assembly.

January 13 - Intellectual background: Jewish Enlightenment (*Haskalah*)

Weekly Question 1

January 18 - Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*

January 20 - Spinoza, continued

Weekly Question 1 due
Weekly Question 2

January 25 - Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem*
Leora Batnitzky, *How Judaism Became a Religion*, ch.1

January 27 - Mendelssohn, continued
Weekly Question 2 due
Weekly Question 3

Reactions to Modernity in Religious Thought: the Challenge of Reform

February 1 - Abraham Geiger, *Judaism and Its History*
Batnitzky, ch.2

Optional reading: Zechariah Frankel, "On Changes in Judaism"

February 3 - Samson Raphael Hirsch, "Seventh Letter," "Eighteenth Letter," in *19 Letters; "Religion Allied to Progress."*
Weekly Question 3 due
Weekly Question 4

February 8 - Elijah Benamozegh, *Israel and Humanity*
Norman Stillman, *Sephardi Religious Responses to Modernity*

Modernity in Jewish Ethics: Reason, Faith, Feeling

February 10 - Hermann Cohen, *Reason and Hope: Selections from the Jewish Writings of Hermann Cohen*
Batnitzky, ch. 3
Weekly Question 4 due
Weekly Question 5

February 15 - Martin Buber, *Hasidism and the Modern Man*
Batnitzky, ch. 4

February 17 - Buber, continued, *I and Thou*
Weekly Question 5 due

February 22 - Joseph Soloveitchik, "Lonely Man of Faith."

February 24 - midterm exam

February 29 - *Study break - no class*

March 2 - *Study break - no class*

Problems of Late Modernity I: Holocaust, Zionism, and the Meaning of Religious Observance

March 7 - Abraham Isaac Kook, *Essential Writings of Abraham Isaac Kook*
Tamar Ross, "What Would Rav Kook Have to Say About the State of Israel Today?"
Batnitzky, ch. 5

March 9 - Yitz Greenberg, "Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity, and Modernity After the Holocaust" 7-34.
Weekly Question 6

March 14 - Greenberg continued, 34-55.

March 16 - Yeshayahu Leibowitz, *Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State*
Weekly Question 6 due
Weekly Question 7

March 21 - Leibowitz, continued.

March 23 - Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath*
Weekly Question 7 due
Weekly Question 8

March 28 - *Easter Monday - no class*

Problems of Late Modernity II: Feminism and Sexuality

March 30 - Rachel Adler, "The Jew Who Wasn't There: Halacha and the Jewish Woman"
Blu Greenberg, *On Women and Judaism: A View from Tradition*
Weekly Question 8 due
Weekly Question 9

April 4 - Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai*

April 6 - Plaskow, continued.

Watch film for next class: *Trembling Before G-d*

Weekly Question 9 due

Weekly Question 10

April 11 - Steven Greenberg, *Wrestling with G-d and Men: Homosexuality and the Jewish Tradition* / Film discussion, *Trembling Before G-d*

April 13 - Final paper presentations

Final exam period: April 18-29. *Final paper due on exam day.*