

MODERN JEWISH THOUGHT

The “Jewish question” initially referred to public debates in 19th-century Europe about the protracted struggle for Jewish emancipation (equal citizenship for Jews). Later the “Jewish question” served to characterize what the historian Otto Kulka calls “modern Jewish political and social thought ... about the identity, place, and role of the Jews in the modern world.” At the start of the 19th century, there were two main answers to the Jewish question: forward toward emancipation, religious reform, and assimilation, or backward toward traditionalism. But in the late 19th century, as the paradoxes and dilemmas of cultural assimilation in the West, economic impoverishment in the East, and rising antisemitism everywhere sowed doubts about the viability of emancipation and traditionalism alike, Jewish thinkers began to propose new answers to the Jewish question. This course will introduce students to some of the major answers they debated, including revolutionary socialism, various forms of Jewish nationalism, hyphenated identities, and cultural pluralism. Because the crises that began in the late 19th century arguably culminated in the Shoah—what the Nazis called the “final solution to the Jewish question”—we will also consider the responses of selected Jewish thinkers to this catastrophic event.

In sum, the course focuses on social and political thought by Jews about the Jewish question from the late 19th century until the mid-20th century. The course omits earlier Jewish thinkers like Baruch Spinoza or Moses Mendelssohn, as well as Jewish religious or theological thought. The course begins with the crises of the late 19th century, which marked a new phase in Jewish social and political thought, and it ends with the mid-20th century because the Shoah and the creation of the modern State of Israel were watershed events that established a fundamentally different context for subsequent Jewish thought.

Undergraduate Requirements

Reading assignments: Please complete all required reading assignments before the class meeting for which they are assigned.

Attendance and participation: Class time will be devoted to a mix of lecturing and discussion. Regular attendance and participation in class discussions are obligatory. You are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the day’s reading assignments. Good participation includes listening (taking notes, engaging with or building on the contributions of others), asking questions and/or suggesting answers (you may email questions to the instructor ahead of time if you prefer), and the quality of your contributions (the degree to which your remarks are relevant, constructive, informed, and well supported). Meeting with me outside of class, though not required, counts as participation.

Midterm and final exams: A two-question midterm essay exam covering weeks 1–7 is due March 6 at 2:30 pm. A three-question final essay exam covering weeks 8–14 is due May 2 at 11:59 pm. Please submit each exam via Canvas. All written work must be in 12-point font, double-spaced, and paginated. Do not exceed the word limits indicated in Canvas for each essay; I will stop reading beyond these limits. All essays will be graded on the basis of how well you support your position, not the position you take.

Your overall grade for the semester will be calculated on a 100-point scale as follows:

Attendance	10%
Participation	10%
Midterm exam (two essays, due March 6)	32% (16% for each essay)
Final exam (three essays, due May 2)	48% (16% for each essay)

A = 93-100, AB = 88-92, B = 83-87, BC = 78-82, C = 70-77, D = 60-69, F = 59 or below.

Late policy: Unless you have received an extension in writing before the due date, grades will be reduced by 10% for each day an exam is submitted late, and exams more than three days late will not be accepted.

If you are taking the course for **honors credit**, please see the instructor about additional requirements.

Graduate-Level Requirements

Reading assignments: same as above.

Attendance and participation: same as above.

Class presentation: Each graduate student is required to make a presentation on the required readings for one class meeting. The presentation should be about 10–15 minutes. The purpose of the presentation is not to provide a summary of the reading—you should assume that everyone has carefully read the material in advance—but to open the discussion by (a) relating the assigned readings to each other and to texts we have previously discussed, e.g., by noting similarities and differences in the positions of different authors; (b) identifying what you see as the key issues raised by the assigned readings; and (c) raising questions/lines of discussion. Among the types of questions you might raise are *exploratory* questions that probe evidence; *challenge* questions that examine assumptions and conclusions; *relational* questions that ask for comparisons of themes, ideas, or issues; *interpretive* questions that probe motives or meanings of social action; *cause-and-effect* questions that ask about causal relationships among ideas, actions, and events; *counterfactual* questions that pose a hypothetical change in the facts; *priority* questions that seek to identify the most important issue; and *summary* questions that elicit syntheses. After the presentation, you will be expected to facilitate the discussion together with the instructor.

A 1-2 page **prospectus** for a term paper, emailed to the instructor no later than April 22 at 2:30 pm. The term paper is a textual analysis paper, not an empirical research paper. It should engage relevant assigned readings to address a particular question, issue, or controversy covered during the semester. The prospectus must indicate the question your paper will address, your thesis (i.e., your answer to the question), sources of textual evidence you will likely use, and how you plan to organize the paper.

A **term paper**, following the plan of an approved prospectus, emailed to the instructor no later than 11:59 pm on May 2. Your paper may not exceed 8,000 words maximum, including references and endnotes. I will stop reading beyond 8,000 words.

All written work must be typed in 12-point font, double-spaced, and paginated.

Your overall grade for the semester will be calculated on a 100-point scale as follows:

Attendance and participation	30%	Prospectus (due April 22)	15%
Presentation (date TBD)	20%	Term paper (due May 2)	35%

A = 93-100, AB = 88-92, B = 83-87, BC = 78-82, C = 70-77, D = 60-69, F = 59 or below.

Late policy: Unless you have received an extension in writing before the due date, grades for the prospectus and term paper will be reduced by 10% for each day the assignment is submitted late, and assignments more than three days late will not be accepted.

Academic Policies

Accommodations: Accommodations are provided for students who qualify for disability services through the [McBurney Center](#). Campus policy requires that religious observances be accommodated if you make a timely request early in the term; see [here](#) for details.

Academic honesty: You are expected to follow the university's rules pertaining to academic honesty and integrity, which are outlined by the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards. For a description of misconduct as well as disciplinary penalties and procedures, please see [here](#). If you have questions about the university's rules pertaining to academic honesty and integrity, please ask the

instructor. You are expected to be familiar with these rules before you submit any written work. Lack of familiarity with these rules does not constitute an excuse for acts of misconduct.

Reading assignments: All required reading assignments are available online through UW-Madison libraries (use hyperlinks below) or on Canvas. If you experience difficulty accessing any of the readings, please inform the instructor as soon as possible.

Ideas can only be understood in relation to their historical context. To brush up on modern Jewish history, I recommend Lloyd P. Gartner, [*History of the Jews in Modern Times*](#) (Oxford University Press, 2001), especially chapters 8 and 9.

INTRODUCTION

Jan. 21 – Introduction to the course

Jan. 23 – The challenge of modernity

Norbert M. Samuelson, “Emancipation and Its Consequences,” in [*An Introduction to Modern Jewish Philosophy*](#) (SUNY Press, 1989), 20–27.

Leora Batnitzky, [*How Judaism Became a Religion*](#) (Princeton University Press, 2011), 1–7.

Victor Karady, [*The Jews of Europe in the Modern Era*](#) (Central European University Press, 2004), 197–201.

Gershom G. Scholem, “Sabbatianism and Mystical Heresy,” in *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (Schocken, 1941). Read 287–88, 299–304, 310–320. The rest is recommended.

Recommended:

Lloyd P. Gartner, “The Heritage of Medieval Judaism” and “Messianic Explosion,” in [*History of the Jews in Modern Times*](#), 2–10, 47–52.

Otto D. Kulka, “Introduction,” in *The “Jewish Question” in German-Speaking Countries, 1848–1914: A Bibliography*, ed. Rena R. Auerbach (Garland, 1994), ix–xi.

I. ASSIMILATION AND ITS CRISES

Jan. 28 – Paradoxes of assimilation

Heinrich Heine, “A Ticket of Admission to European Culture” (1823, c. 1854), *The Jew in the Modern World*, 806.

Zygmunt Bauman, “Exit Visas and Entry Tickets: Paradoxes of Jewish Assimilation,” *Telos* 77 (Fall 1988): 45–77.

Jan. 30 – The Jewish question in Europe

Jeffrey C. Alexander, “The Jewish Question,” in [*The Civil Sphere*](#) (Oxford University Press, 2006), 459–488. The rest (pp. 488–502) is recommended.

Feb. 4 – Assimilation, double consciousness, self-denial

Victor Karady, [*The Jews of Europe in the Modern Era*](#) (Central European University Press, 2004), 205–208, 234–243.

Judah Leib Gordon, “Awake My People!” (1866), *The Jew in the Modern World*, 360–361.

Otto Weininger, “The Jew Must Free Himself from Jewishness” (1903), *The Jew in the Modern World*, 817–820.

Theodor Lessing, “Jewish Self-Hatred” (1930), *The Jew in the Modern World*, 820–822.

II. REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALISM AND THE “NON-JEWISH JEW”

Feb. 6 – Two views on the Jews and revolutionary socialism

Isaac Deutscher, “The Non-Jewish Jew” (1958), *The Jew in the Modern World*, 813–814.
Robert S. Wistrich, “The Jews and Socialism,” in *Revolutionary Jews from Marx to Trotsky* (Harrap, 1976), 1–22.

Feb. 11 – The resolution of the “Jewish question” into the “general question of the age”

Bruno Bauer, “The Jewish Problem” (1843), *The Jew in the Modern World*, 297–299.
Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question” (1844), in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (Norton, 1978), 26–52. (Skim pp. 40–46 but read the last three paragraphs on p. 46.)

Recommended: Chad Alan Goldberg, “The Two Marxes: From Jewish Domination to Supersession of the Jews,” *Journal of Classical Sociology* 15, no. 4 (Nov. 2015): 415–434.

Feb. 13 – From Marx to the German and Austrian Marxists

Enzo Traverso, *The Marxists and the Jewish Question*, trans. Bernard Gibbons (Humanities Press, 1994), 58–69, 76–87.

Feb. 18 – The Russian and Polish Marxists

Traverso, *Marxists and the Jewish Question*, 129–146 (focus on Luxemburg and Trotsky).
Rosa Luxemburg, selection from *The National Question and Autonomy* (1908–1909).
Rosa Luxemburg, “No Room in My Heart for Jewish Suffering” (1916), *The Jew in the Modern World*, 809.
Leon Trotsky, “[On the Jewish Question](#)” (1934) and “[On the Jewish Problem](#)” (1940).

Recommended: Robert S. Wistrich, “Rosa Luxemburg: The Polish-German-Jewish Identities of a Revolutionary Internationalist,” *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 57, no. 1 (2012): 239–266.

Feb. 20 – Hodl’s Choice: Jews and the Russian Revolution of 1917

Traverso, *Marxists and the Jewish Question*, 151–157.
Instructor’s preface to *The Jewish Century* (available on Canvas).
Yuri Slezkine, [The Jewish Century](#) (Princeton University Press, 2004), 1–3, 204–216.

III. DIASPORA NATIONALISM

Feb. 25 – The [Bundist](#) answer: socialism and national cultural autonomy

Lloyd P. Gartner, “The Parting of Ways, 1881–1914,” in [History of the Jews in Modern Times](#), 243–248.
Victor Karady, “The crisis of assimilation and the nationalist responses,” in [The Jews of Europe in the Modern Era](#), 243–250.
Jewish Labor Bund (General Union of Jewish Workers in Lithuania, Poland, and Russia), “Decisions on the Nationality Question” (1899–1910), *The Jew in the Modern World*, 399–402.
Roni Gechtman, “National-Cultural Autonomy and ‘Neutralism’: Vladimir Medem’s Marxist Analysis of the National Question, 1903–1920,” *Socialist Studies/Études Socialistes* 3, no. 1 (Dec. 2008): 69–92.

Recommended:

David Vital, “Auto-emancipation?” in *A People Apart* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 415–437.
Vladimir Davidovich Medem, “The Worldwide Jewish Nation” (1911), in *Jews and Diaspora Nationalism*, ed. Simon Rabinovitch (Brandeis University Press, 2012), 105–124.

Feb. 27 – The Folkist answer: cultural autonomy and national minority rights

Victor Karady, “Main socio-historical dimensions of Jewish nationalism,” in [*The Jews of Europe in the Modern Era*](#), 250–255.

Simon Dubnow, “Cultural Autonomy” (1901), *The Jew in the Modern World*, 397–399.

Simon Dubnow, “Slavery in the Midst of Revolution” (1905), in *Nationalism and History* (Jewish Publication Society of America, 1958), 205–209.

Simon Dubnow, “Jews as a Spiritual (Cultural-Historical) Nation among Political Nations” (1907), in [*Jews and Diaspora Nationalism*](#), 23–44.

Mar. 4 – No class meeting. Please use class time to work on your midterm essay exam.

IV. ZIONISM

Mar. 6 – From emancipation to auto-emancipation

Midterm exam due 2:30 pm

Lloyd Gartner, “Towards Zion,” in [*History of the Jews in Modern Times*](#), 238–242, 248–258.

Leon Pinsker, “Auto-Emancipation” (1882), in *The Zionist Idea*, ed. Arthur Hertzberg (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1997), 181–198.

Recommended: Shomo Avineri, *The Making of Modern Zionism*, 2nd ed. (Basic Books, 1981), “Zionism as a Revolution” (1–12), “From Emancipation to Autoemancipation” (73–82).

Mar. 11 – Political vs. cultural Zionism

Leora Batnitzky, “The Rejection of Jewish Religion and the Birth of Jewish Nationalism,” in [*How Judaism Became a Religion*](#), 147–162.

Theodor Herzl, from *The Jewish State* (1896), in *An Introduction to Modern Jewish Thinkers*, ed. Alan T. Levenson, 2nd ed. (Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 111–116.

Aḥad Ha-Am (אחאד הא-אם), “The Jewish State and the Jewish Problem” (1897), *The Zionist Idea*, 262–269.

Recommended: Aḥad Ha-Am, “[The Wrong Way](#)” (1889) and “[An Open Letter to My Brethren in the Spirit](#)” (1891).

Mar. 13 – The transvaluation of Jewish values?

Friedrich Nietzsche, “The Anti-Christ: Curse on Christianity” (1888), in *The Nietzsche Reader* (Blackwell, 2006), 486–492. Read sections 1–24. The rest (pp. 492–499) is recommended.

Micah Joseph Berdichevski, selections in *The Zionist Idea*, 291–302.

Aḥad Ha-Am, “The Transvaluation of Values” (1898), in *Selected Essays*, trans. Leon Simon (Jewish Publication Society of America, 1912), 217–241.

Mar. 18 – Socialist Zionism on the left

Nachman Syrkin, “The Jewish Problem and the Socialist-Jewish State” (1898), *The Zionist Idea*, 333–350.

Ber Borochoy, “The National Question and the Class Struggle” (1905), *The Zionist Idea*, 355–360.

Mar. 20 – Revisionist Zionism on the right

Shlomo Avineri, “Jabotinsky,” *Making of Modern Zionism*, 159–186.

Vladimir Jabotinsky, “The Iron Wall” (1923).

Vladimir Jabotinsky, “What the Zionist-Revisionists Want” (1926), *The Jew in the Modern World*, 671–674.

Recommended: Vladimir Jabotinsky, “Evidence Submitted to the Palestine Royal Commission” (1937), *The Zionist Idea*, 559–570.

*** SPRING RECESS, MARCH 22–30, 2025 ***

V. THE VIEW FROM AMERICA

Apr. 1 – Escaping the ghetto?

David Philipson, “American Judaism Will Not Be Ghettoized” (1908), *The Jew in the Modern World*, 550.
Louis Wirth, “The Ghetto,” *American Journal of Sociology* 33, no. 1 (July 1927): 57–71.

Recommended: Mitchell Duneier, *Ghetto: The Invention of a Place, the History of an Idea* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016), 3–25.

Apr. 3 – America as melting pot

Israel Zangwill, Act IV of *The Melting-Pot* (1909), in *From the Ghetto to the Melting Pot: Israel Zangwill’s Jewish Plays*, ed. Edna Nahshon (Wayne State University Press, 2006), 351–363.
Meri-Jane Rochelson, “The Melting-Pot and Its Legacies,” *European Judaism* 57, no. 2 (Autumn 2024): 68–84.

Recommended:

Edna Nahshon, “Introductory Essay,” in *From the Ghetto to the Melting Pot*, 211–263.
Israel Zangwill, *The Melting-Pot*, ed. Meri-Jane Rochelson (Broadview Press, 2017), Appendix A: Contemporary Reviews, 183–199.

Apr. 8 – Cultural pluralism

Horace M. Kallen, “Democracy vs. the Melting-Pot” (1915), *Jews and Diaspora Nationalism*, 155–168.
Chad Alan Goldberg, “Horace Kallen’s Expanding Vision of Cultural Pluralism: Nationality, Race, and Democracy on the World Stage, 1918–1939,” *American Jewish History* (forthcoming), 25–50.
Allan Arkush, “In the Melting Pot,” *Jewish Review of Books* 9, no. 2 (Summer 2018): 5–8.

Recommended:

Chad Alan Goldberg, “[Kultur Klux Klan and Cultural Pluralism at One Hundred](#),” Society for US Intellectual History website, June 27, 2024.
Jakob Egholm Feldt, “Amalgamation and Regeneration: Visions of Future Jewish Inclusion,” *European Judaism* 57, no. 2 (Autumn 2024): 85–100.

Apr. 10 – Answering the Jewish Question in America

Jeffrey C. Alexander, “Answering the Jewish Question in America,” in [The Civil Sphere](#), 503–547.

Recommended: Franklin Foer, “The Golden Age of American Jews is Ending,” *The Atlantic* (April 2024), 22–35.

VI. IN THE SHADOW OF “THE FINAL SOLUTION TO THE JEWISH QUESTION”

Apr. 15 – Freud on Judaism and antisemitism

Instructor’s preface to *Moses and Monotheism* (available on Canvas).
Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, trans. K. Jones (Random House, 1939), 72–117.

Apr. 17 – Arendt on the origins of modern antisemitism

Hannah Arendt, [The Origins of Totalitarianism](#) (Meridian, 1958), 3–53. The rest of Part One: Antisemitism (pp. 54–120) is recommended.

Apr. 22 – Enlightenment and antisemitism

Prospectus (for graduate students) due at 2:30 pm

Max Horkheimer & Theodor W. Adorno, “Elements of Anti-Semitism,” in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford University Press, [1947] 2020), 137–172.

Apr. 24 (Yom HaShoah) – Modernity and the Holocaust

Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cornell University Press, 1989), 1–18, 31–46, 52–56.

Apr. 29 – Epilogue: From postwar consensus to the re-emergence of the Jewish question

Shalom Lappin, “The Re-Emergence of the Jewish Question,” *Journal of Contemporary Antisemitism* 2, no. 1 (July 2019): 29–46.

Recommended: Shalom Lappin, *The New Antisemitism: The Resurgence of an Ancient Hatred in the Modern World* (Polity, 2024).

May. 1 – No class meeting. Please use class time to work on your final exam.

Final exam (undergraduates) or term paper (graduate students) due May 2 at 11:59 pm.

Grading deadline for instructors is May 12, 2025.