

MODERN JEWISH THOUGHT

“For three years, the House of Hillel and the House of Shammai argued. One said, ‘The halakha [Jewish law] is like us,’ and the other said, ‘The halakha is like us.’ A heavenly voice spoke: ‘These and these are the words of the living God, and the halakha is like the House of Hillel.’”

— Talmud, Eruvin 13b:10-14

Overview

How do Jews fit into the modern world? This question was first raised by Jewish emancipation, the extended struggle for equal citizenship and social integration that began with the great democratic revolutions of the 18th century. While the “Jewish Question” initially referred to public debates about Jewish emancipation, it later served to characterize what historian Otto Kulka calls “modern Jewish political and social thought ... about the identity, place, and role of the Jews in the modern world.” In the late 19th century, as cultural assimilation, economic impoverishment, and rising antisemitism sowed doubts about the viability of traditionalism and emancipation alike, Jewish social and political 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 universalistic utopias (socialism and Communism), various forms of Jewish nationalism, hyphenated identities, cultural pluralism, and cosmopolitanism. Because the crises that began in the late nineteenth century arguably culminated in the Shoah—what the Nazis called the “final solution to the Jewish Question”—we will also consider the responses of some selected Jewish thinkers to this catastrophic event.

The course focuses on social and political thought by Jews about the “Jewish Question” from the 1870s until the mid-20th century. Accordingly, it omits earlier Jewish thinkers like Spinoza or Mendelssohn, as well as Jewish thought that is mainly concerned with Jewish religion and theology. The course begins with the late 19th century for the reasons indicated above; 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.

Requirements for undergraduate students:

Regular assigned readings: You are expected to complete all required reading assignments before the class meeting in which we discuss them.

Attendance and participation: Regular attendance and participation in class discussions are obligatory. You are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the day’s reading. Both regular attendance and active (speaking) participation are necessary to receive full credit for this portion of your grade. Meeting with me outside of class also counts as participation.

Written work: You are expected to submit two papers, between five and seven pages each, which address a particular topic or problem that was discussed in class. The due dates are March 21 and May 8. I will suggest paper topics, but you are also free to come up with your own. I strongly encourage you to meet with me to discuss your ideas before submitting your paper, especially if you wish to come up with your own topic. You have the option of satisfying the two-paper requirement by treating the first paper as a short draft of what will eventually become a 15-page final paper. All written work must be typed in 12-point font, double-spaced, and submitted online through Canvas.

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

Attendance and participation:	30%
Midterm paper:	35%
Final paper:	35%

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

Requirements for graduate students:

Regular assigned readings: You are expected to complete all required reading assignments before the class meeting in which we discuss them.

Attendance and participation: Regular attendance and participation in class discussions are obligatory. You are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the day's reading. Both regular attendance and active (speaking) participation are necessary to receive full credit for this portion of your grade.

Class presentations. Each graduate student is required to make a presentation on the required readings for one week of the semester. The presentation should be about 10 to 15 minutes and follow a brief (one-page) outline that you share (via Canvas) with class members before the class meeting. 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. The presenter for each week will help the instructor to facilitate the class discussion that follows.

A 1-2 page **prospectus** for a term paper is due no later than April 18 at 2:30 pm. The paper should take on a particular issue, question, or controversy covered during the semester. It should build on the assigned readings and discussion while moving beyond what was covered in class, either by addressing the issue in more depth, broadening the focus to related concerns, or examining the implications of the issue for your own research project or agenda. The prospectus should indicate the question your paper will address, the thesis of your paper (your answer to the question), the sources of textual evidence you will likely use, and how you plan to organize your paper.

A **term paper**, following the plan of an approved prospectus, is due no later than May 8 at 9:00 am. Your paper should not exceed 10,000 words maximum, including references and endnotes.

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

Attendance and participation:	30%
Presentation:	20%
Prospectus:	15%
Written seminar paper:	35%

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

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 the university's [web page](#) for details.

Academic honesty: You are expected to follow the university's rules pertaining to academic honesty and integrity. The standards are outlined by the [Office of the Dean of Students](#). For a description of misconduct as well as disciplinary penalties and procedures, please see the Dean of Students [website](#). 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: The only required text for the course is Hannah Arendt, *Antisemitism: Part One of The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1968). All other required reading assignments will be available online through Canvas. If you experience difficulty accessing any of the readings, please inform the instructor as soon as possible. NB: Ideas can only be understood in relation to their historical context. If you are unfamiliar with modern Jewish history or want to brush up, I recommend Lloyd P. Gartner, *History of the Jews in Modern Times* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), especially chapters 8 and 9 (available [online](#)).

INTRODUCTION

Jan. 24 – Introduction to the course

Jan. 26 – The challenge of modernity

Norbert M. Samuelson, "Emancipation and Its Consequences," in *An Introduction to Modern Jewish Philosophy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), 20-27.

Leora Batnitzky, *How Judaism Became a Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 1-7.

Victor Karady, *The Jews of Europe in the Modern Era* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004), 197-205.

Gershom G. Scholem, "Sabbatianism and Mystical Heresy," in *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: 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* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 2–10, 47–52. Available [online](#).

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

ASSIMILATION AND ITS CRISES

Jan. 31 – 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.

Feb. 2 – Dilemmas of assimilation

Jeffrey C. Alexander, "The Jewish Question," in *The Civil Sphere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 459-488. Recommended: 488-502.

Feb. 7 – Assimilation, double consciousness, self-denial

Victor Karady, *The Jews of Europe in the Modern Era* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004), 205-215, 225-243.

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.

Recommended: W. E. B. Du Bois, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" and "The Negro and the Warsaw Ghetto," in *The Social Theory of W. E. B. Du Bois*, ed. Phil Zuckerman (Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge, 2004), 23-26, 45-46.

REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALISM AND THE "NON-JEWISH JEW"

Feb. 9 – 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* (London: Harrap, 1976), 1-22.

Feb. 14 – 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*, 297-99.

Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question" (1844), in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978), 26-52. (You may 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. 16 – From Marx to the German and Austrian Marxists

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

Feb. 21 – The Russian and Polish Marxists

Traverso, *Marxists and the Jewish Question*, 129-146.

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).

Feb. 23 – Hodl's Choice: Jews and the Russian Revolution

Traverso, *Marxists and the Jewish Question*, 151-157.

Instructor's preface to *The Jewish Century*.

Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 1-3, 204-216.

DIASPORA NATIONALISM

Feb. 28 – Jews, socialism, and the nationality question in eastern Europe

Victor Karady, *The Jews of Europe in the Modern Era*, 243-255.

David Vital, "Auto-emancipation?" in *A People Apart* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 415-437.

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.

Simon Dubnow, "Slavery in the Midst of Revolution" (1905), in *Nationalism and History* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1958), 205-209.

Mar. 2 – The Bund and cultural autonomy

Vladimir Davidovich Medem, "The Worldwide Jewish Nation" (1911), in *Jews and Diaspora Nationalism*, ed. Simon Rabinovitch (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2012), 105-124.

Simon Dubnow, "Jews as a Spiritual (Cultural-Historical) Nation among Political Nations" (1907), in *Jews and Diaspora Nationalism*, 23-44.

Recommended:

Simon Dubnow, "Cultural Autonomy" (1901), *The Jew in the Modern World*, 397-399.

Simon Dubnow, "The Sociological View of Jewish History" (1925-1929), in *Modern Jewish Thought*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken, 1977), 91-100.

ZIONISM

Mar. 7 – From emancipation to auto-emancipation

Leon Pinsker, "Auto-Emancipation" (1882), in *The Zionist Idea*, ed. Arthur Hertzberg (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1997), 181-198. Also available [online](#).

Shlomo Avineri, "Pinsker: From Emancipation to Autoemancipation," in *The Making of Modern Zionism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 73-82.

Lloyd Gartner, "Towards Zion," in *History of the Jews in Modern Times* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 248-258.

Mar. 9 – 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. (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 111-116. Available [online](#) in full.

Ahad Ha-Am, from "Flesh and Spirit" (1904), in *Introduction to Modern Jewish Thinkers*, 124-131.

Recommended:

Ahad Ha-Am, "[The Wrong Way](#)" (or "This is Not the Way") (1889). His argument for privileging cultural and educational work over "practical Zionism" (settlement and colonization).

Ahad Ha-Am, "[An Open Letter to My Brethren in the Spirit](#)" (1891). Distinguishing the "Jewish question" from the "question of Judaism," he calls for the creation in Palestine of "a 'national, spiritual center,' a 'safe retreat,' not for the Jews, but for Judaism, for the spirit of our people."

Ahad Ha-Am, "[The Jewish State and Jewish Problem](#)" (1897). Criticizing Herzl's "political Zionism," he calls for "a State which will be a Jewish State, and not merely a State of Jews."

Shlomo Avineri, *Making of Modern Zionism*, 88-100, 112-124.

***** SPRING RECESS MARCH 11–19, 2023 *****

Mar. 21 – The transvaluation of Jewish values?

FIRST PAPER DUE (2:30 PM)

Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Anti-Christ: Curse on Christianity" (1888), in *The Nietzsche Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 486-492. Please read sections 1-24. The rest (pp. 492-499) is recommended.
Micah Joseph Berdichevski, selections in *The Zionist Idea*, 291-302.
Ahad Ha-Am, "The Transvaluation of Values" (1898), in *Selected Essays*, trans. Leon Simon (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1912), 217-241.

Mar. 23 – Socialist Zionism on the left

Nachman Syrkin, "The Jewish Problem and the Socialist-Jewish State" (1898), *The Zionist Idea*, 333-350.
Ber Borochov, "[The National Question and the Class Struggle](#)" (1905).

Recommended: Shlomo Avineri, *Making of Modern Zionism*, 125-150.

Mar. 28 – Revisionist Zionism on the right

Shlomo Avineri, "Jabotinsky: Integralist Nationalism and the Illusion of Power," *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.

THE VIEW FROM AMERICA

Mar. 30 – Melting pot or pluralism?

Israel Zangwill, from *The Melting-Pot* (1908).

Theodore Roosevelt, "Hyphenated Americans" (1915).

Judah L. Magnes, "A Republic of Nationalities" (1909), *The Jew in the Modern World*, 553-555.

Louis D. Brandeis, "The Jewish Problem: How to Solve It" (1915), *The Zionist Idea*, 517–23.

Horace M. Kallen, "Democracy Versus the Melting-Pot" (1915), *Jews and Diaspora Nationalism*, 155-168.

Allan Arkush, "In the Melting Pot," *Jewish Review of Books* 9, no. 2 (Summer 2018): 5-8.

Recommended: Chad Alan Goldberg, "Horace Kallen's Expanding Vision of Cultural Pluralism: Nationality, Race, and Democracy on the World Stage, 1918–1939."

Apr. 4 – The ghetto (Election Day. Go vote! <https://www.cityofmadison.com/clerk/elections-voting>)

David Philipson, "American Judaism Will Not Be Ghettoized" (1908), *The Jew in the Modern World*, 550.

Louis Wirth, "Introduction" and "The Return to the Ghetto," in *The Ghetto* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1928), 1-10, 263-281.

Apr. 6 – Answering the Jewish Question in America

Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Answering the Jewish Question in America," in *The Civil Sphere*, 503-547.

Recommended: Chad Alan Goldberg, "From Multiculturalism to Antisemitism? Revisiting the Jewish Question in America," *American Journal of Cultural Sociology* (forthcoming).

IN THE SHADOW OF "THE FINAL SOLUTION TO THE JEWISH QUESTION"

Apr. 11 – Freud on Judaism and antisemitism

Instructor's preface to *Moses and Monotheism*.

Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, trans. Katherine Jones (New York: Random House, 1939), 72-117.

Recommended: Lawrence J. Kaplan, "[Moses, Murder, and the Jewish Psyche](#)," *Jewish Review of Books* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 39-41.

Apr. 13 – Arendt on the Jews, the nation-state, and antisemitism

Hannah Arendt, *Antisemitism: Part One of The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1968), 3-53.

Apr. 18 – Arendt on the Jews and society

Hannah Arendt, *Antisemitism*, 54-88.

Apr. 20 – Arendt on the Dreyfus Affair

Hannah Arendt, *Antisemitism*, 89-120.

Apr. 25 – Enlightenment and antisemitism

Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, "Elements of Anti-Semitism," in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, [1944] 1972), 168-208.

Recommended: Max Horkheimer, "Sociological Background of the Psychoanalytic Approach," and T. W. Adorno, "Anti-Semitism and Fascist Propaganda," in *Anti-Semitism: A Social Disease*, ed. Ernst Simmel (New York: International Universities Press, 1946), 1-10, 125-37.

Apr. 27 – Modernity and the Holocaust

Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 1-30.

May 2 – Modernity and the Holocaust (continued)

Zygmunt Bauman, "'Antisemitism' Reassessed," in *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 206-222.

May 4 – Concluding reflections

Robert D. Fine, "Cosmopolitanism and the Critique of Antisemitism: Two Faces of Universality," *European Review of History* 23 (2016): 769-783.

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

Recommended: Yaacov Ro'i, "[Anticosmopolitan Campaign](#)," *YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* (25 July 2017).

SECOND PAPER DUE MONDAY, MAY 8, 2023, AT 9:00 AM

Deadline for instructors to submit final grades is Monday, May 15, 2023 (11:59 pm)