

RSOC.174: Modern Jewish Philosophy: Between Athens and Jerusalem

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Instructor: Dr. Akiba Lerner

ALerner@SCU.edu

Course Description:

This is an introductory course to the history and major themes within modern Jewish thought from the Enlightenment to our contemporary era. The intention of this course is to present an overview of the major thinkers who have shaped Jewish thought as well the intellectual trends that have defined modern Jewish intellectual history. We will specifically focus on the themes of Athens verses Jerusalem, Political Theology, Universalism and Particularism, Autonomy, Subjectivity, Modern Secularism, Capitalism, the Nation State, Zionism, Mysticism, Romanticism, Marxism and Critical Theory, Post-Modernism, Feminism, Prophetic Politics and Messianic Redemption within the context of Judaism's encounter with modernity as reflected on by Jewish intellectuals within the Western philosophical tradition. Modern Jewish philosophy can only be understood within the general context of modern philosophy. Consequently, this course will also focus on the role modern Jewish intellectuals have had in both shaping – and being shaped by – the larger philosophical debates of their time. The texts and thinkers engaged in this course are additionally united by their visions of redemptive hope. In this course we explore how these intellectuals, through their struggles to redefine the essence of Judaism in relationship to both philosophy and the modern world, are united and divided by their visions of hope for human liberation.

Prerequisites: Intermediate level course (SCTR 20-99, TESP 20-99, or RSOC 20-99) or another course approved as fulfilling the intermediate level Core requirement in Religious Studies and completion of 88 quarter units. Introductory course to philosophy is also recommended.

Assigned Texts:

Leo Strauss, *Jewish Philosophy And The Crises of Modernity* [ISBN: 0-7914-2774-9]

Benedict Spinoza, *A Theologico-Political Treatise* [Dover] [ISBN: 0-486-43722-1]

Martin Buber, *I and Thou* [W. Kaufmann translation] [ISBN: 0-684-71725-5]

Martin Buber, *The Origin and Meaning of Hasidism*, [ISBN: 9781573924573]

Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God In Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism*
[ISBN; 0-374-51331-7]

All additional readings will be found on course "Angel"

Course Requirements:

a. Class participation: [19% of final grade] Class is mandatory and attendance will be noted. Missing more than three classes will automatically result in a reduction of the final grade [i.e. from A to A-]. Students are expected to demonstrate their understanding of the material and mastery of the ideas and terms provided through lecture and the readings by actively engaging in discussions, presenting on the material, asking questions, and participating in small group exercises and assignments. Students are expected to have completed the assigned reading before each class and to bring the assigned material to class ready to discuss. Further details on class participation expectations will be elaborated upon in class.

Written response and presentation on assigned readings: [6% of final grade] Students will be broken up into groups [A,B,C,D] and required three times during the quarter to write a 2 page essay, and present on the readings assigned. Questions on the assigned reading will be provided prior to each class. After presenting, students within the group are expected to help facilitate class discussion. Students are expected to coordinate their presentations with the other members of their group. Responses to the questions are an opportunity for students to demonstrate a) their understanding of the texts and ideas, b) their ability to analyze and critical reflect on the course material, c) relate the questions and ideas from the texts and lectures to their own lives and experiences. Each essay is worth 2% of final grade and will be given either a full "100" points or "0" points. Presentation performance and class discussion falls separately under the "class participation" grade.

b. Mid-term: [30% of final Grade] For the mid-term students are required to draw on the lectures and material covered in order to answer a selection of questions. Students are allowed to draw on both their notes and texts for the exam.

c. Final Research Projects: [45% of total class Grade: Presentation=10% of total class grade, Written Report=35% of total class grade]

Final Paper: Students are allowed to come up with their own topic so long as they include at least six of the texts assigned in the course. A paragraph summary of your topic is required two weeks before presentations begin.

Final Presentation: Students are expected to present and lead a short discussion on their final project to the class.

All paper assignments should be double-spaced, 12 font text, 1 inch margins. Additionally, all written assignments must be typed, stapled, and with proper title page. All paper assignments should be both submitted via email in "word" document format and a printed out paper copy placed in the religious studies office box or handed to the professor.

Extra Credit: Students are allowed to write a 4-5 page essay on the assigned readings (other than sections already assigned) for extra credit. Essays will be either assigned "100" points or "0" points. Each essay is worth 0.5 of final grade. Extra credit essays are an opportunity for students to improve their final grades [example: two extra credit essays that have both received "100" points can move a final grade from 89 (B+) to 90 (A-)]. Additionally, extra credit essays are a way to make up having received "0" points on an assigned essay. Students must get approval for their topic from the professor, however, before writing an extra credit essay.

Campus Events/Lectures: Students will also be given an opportunity to earn extra credit points by attending and reporting on select events/lectures during the quarter. Details announced in class.

Additional requirements and expectations will be elaborated on in class.

Grading Structure: A=100-95, A-=94-90, B+=89-87, B=86-83, B-=82-80, C+=79-77, C=76-73, C-=72-70, D=69-60, F=below 60

Academic Integrity, Technology, Mindfulness, and Classroom Decorum:

We will collectively create a safe and dynamic space in which each student will be expected to share his/her insights into the texts, ideas, and traditions covered, while retaining a respectful openness to the opinions and identity commitments of the other students in the class. Respect for the classroom should be demonstrated by not engaging electronic devices other than those used for taking notes. It is important to demonstrate your respect for both the professor

and your fellow peers by reframing from using technological devices. It is also important to develop greater concentration and appreciation by engaging in a learning process that is not solely dependent on external technological stimulation. In order to foster this greater state of “mindfulness,” students are expected to demonstrate their “presence” during class by reframing from distracting activities such as having un-authorized side conversations, engaging technological devices such as “texting,” answering phones, and/or engaging in other disruptive behavior. Students are allowed to have computers in class for the purposes of taking notes, however, if you are caught using your computer, or any other form of technology, for purposes unrelated to this course you will be assigned 1000 word essay on a topic selected by the professor. The paper is due seven days after assigned. Additionally, students should reframe from leaving in the middle of class, even for the bathroom, unless absolutely necessary. All integrity and policy standards already laid out in the University bulletin apply. (For further see www.scu.edu/studentlife/resources/academicintegrity)

Disability Accommodations:

Students are expected to notify me at the beginning of the course if they need any special accommodations. Please note, to receive academic accommodations for a disability, students must contact Disability Resources located in Benson 216. The phone number is 408-554-4109 or inquiries can be emailed to Robin Cole, Administrative Associate, rcole@scu.edu. Students must register with Disabilities Resources and provide documentation of a disability to Disabilities Resources prior to receiving academic accommodations. For further information on policy and procedures please consult www.scu.edu/advising/learning/disabilities/index.cfm.

Office Hours and E-mails:

I encourage all students to visit me during my office hours. E-mails should be thoughtful and concise. I would rather meet during office hours to discuss topics or issues of more length. Students should feel free to contact me to set up an alternative appointment if they have a serious conflict with my offices hours.

1. [1/5] Introduction To Modern Jewish Philosophy:

2. [1/7] Jewish Thought: Between Athens and Jerusalem

Assigned Readings: Leo **Strauss**, essay “Progress or Return?” [1952]
[Reader: located in *Jewish Philosophy And The Crises of Modernity* pg.87-133]

Recommended: Leo **Strauss**, essay “Jerusalem and Athens” [1967]
[Reader: located in *Jewish Philosophy And The Crises of Modernity* pg.377-405]

Hermann **Cohen**, “The Social Ideal as Seen by Plato and by the Prophets,”
[located in *Reason and Hope*, pg.66-77]

3. [1/12] Spinoza’s Challenge To Religion

Assigned Readings: **Spinoza**, *A Theological-Political Treatise*
[Selections: Preface, p.3-11, Chap. I, pg.13-26, Chap.II, pg.27-30, 39, Chap. III,
pg.43-49 55-6, Chap.IV, pg.57-64, Chap.V. pg.69-77 Chap.VI. pg.81-83, 86-87]

[Group A]

4. [1/14] Spinoza’s Challenge To Judaism

Assigned Readings: **Spinoza**, *A Theological-Political Treatise*
[Selections: Chap.VII. pg.98-103, 117-119 Chap. XIV, pg.182-189, Chap.XV,
pg.190, 194-195, Chap.XVI, pg.200-213 Chap.XIX, pg.245-249 Chap.XX, pg.257-
266]

[Group B]

Recommended: Spinoza, *Political Treatise*, Chap. XI “Of Democracy”

5. [1/19] Enlightenment Universalism, Emancipation, the Liberal State, and the "Jewish Question"

Assigned Readings: Karl **Marx**, "On the Jewish Question," [located in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, Tucker pg.26-52]

[Group C]

6. [1/21] Fragments of Redemption: Socialism and Zionism

Assigned Readings: Moses **Hess**, *Rome and Jerusalem* [selections; pg.35-91]

Recommended: Rome and Jerusalem pg. 179-186

[Group D]

7. [1/26] Erotic Mysticism, Redemption, and Philosophy

Assigned Readings: Martin **Buber**, essays "The Foundation Stone," "Spinoza, Sabbatai Zvi, and the Baal-Shem," and "Redemption" [located in *The Origin and Meaning of Hasidism*, pg. 60-89, 90-112, 202-218]

[Group A]

8. [1/28] The Turn to Dialogic Subjectivity

Assigned Readings: **Buber**, *I and Thou* [First Part]

[Group B]

9. [2/2] The Turn to Dialogic Subjectivity

Assigned Readings: **Buber**, *I and Thou* [Second Part]

[Group C]

10. [2/4] *Inter-subjective Encounter and Redemption*

Assigned Readings: **Buber**, *I and Thou* [Third Part]

11. [2/9] **Mid-Term:**

12. [2/11] *The Jew as "Other": Anti-Semitism and Modern Society*

Movie: "Sunshine" – [Directed and written by Istvan Szabo]

Assigned Readings: Hannah **Arendt**, "Between Pariah and Parvenu"
[located in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, pg.56-68]

13. [2/16] *Spiritual Zionism and Romantic Nationalism*

Assigned Readings: Martin **Buber**, essay "The Silent Question" [located in *On Judaism*]

Essays, "Nationalism," "Hebrew Humanism" [located in *Israel and the World*]
Chapter, "The Redemption" [located in *On Zion*] [All found on "Angel"]

[Group D]

14. [2/18] *The Frankfurt School, Critical Theory and Prophetic Hope*

Assigned Readings: W. **Benjamin**, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" [located in *Illuminations* pg.253-264]

Ernst **Bloch**, "Hunger, 'Something in a Dream,' 'God of Hope,' Things-for-us"
[located in *The Frankfurt School on Religion*, pg.49-51]

[Group A]

Recommended: Eric **Fromm**, chapter "The Concept of God"
[located in *You Shall Be As Gods: A Radical Interpretation Of The Old Testament And Its Tradition*, p.17-62]

[Paragraph description of final project due]

15. [2/23] *Hope After The Holocaust*

Mordecai **Kaplan**, "Hope" in *The Future of the American Jew* (New York: Macmillan, 1948), 266-274. [Reader]

Emil **Fackenheim**, "The Commandment To Hope: A Response to Contemporary Jewish Experience," in *The Future of Hope: Essays by Bloch, Fackenheim, Moltman, Metz, Capps*. Edited by Walter Capps, 68-91 [Course Reader]

[Group B]

Recommended:

"Hope – After Auschwitz And Hiroshima?"

Panel Discussion: Emil Fackenheim, Johannes Metz, Jurgen Moltmann, Walter Capps [located in *The Future of Hope: Essays by Bloch, Fackenheim, Moltman, Metz, Capps*. Edited by Walter Capps, 92-101] [Course Reader]

16 . [2/25] *Prophetic Spirituality and Philosophy*

Assigned Readings: Abraham Joshua **Heschel**, *God In Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism* [Selections, pg; 3-23, 167-191, 257-265]

[Group C]

17. [3/2] Assigned Readings: Abraham Joshua **Heschel**, *God In Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism* [Selections, pg; 376-381, 409-413]

[Group D]

18. [3/4] *Post-Modernism, Jewish Feminism, and the Future of the Jewish Thought*

Assigned Readings: Judith **Plaskow**, essay “*Standing Again at Sinai: Jewish Memory from a Feminist Perspective*” [located in *Tikkun Magazine*, Vo.1, Num.2]-[Reader]

Edith **Wyschogrod**, “Trends in Postmodern Jewish Philosophy: Contexts of a Conversation,” [located in *Reasoning After Revelation: Dialogues in Postmodern Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Steven Kepnes, Peter Ochs, and Robert Gibbs, pg.123-136]

19. [3/9] Student Presentations

20. [3/11] Student Presentations/Conclusion