

REL 384: Modern Jewish Thought
Fall 2015, MW 3:35-5:15, Kenan Pavilion 101

Instructor: Geoffrey Claussen
Office: Spence Pavilion 214
Office Hours: M 10:00-11:00, W/F 1:30-2:30, and by appointment
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This course offers a historical and philosophical investigation of modern Jewish thought, considering influential Jewish thinkers from a range of movements and approaches. We will focus on what's often called "modern Jewish *theology*"—modern Jewish ideas about God, God's relationship with the Jewish people and with the rest of the world, and the overall meaning of the Jewish tradition. This means that we'll be focusing on big-picture questions of Jewish thought rather than on more specific questions regarding Jewish practice, which are covered in other courses at Elon. Our focus on theology means that we will also give particular attention to what is often called "religious" Jewish thought, though we will give attention to some "secular" Jewish thinkers as well.

We will give particular attention to modern Jewish debates about the nature of God, chosenness, revelation, redemption, evil, law, spirituality, virtue, sacred space, religion and politics, and authority. Key questions that we will see debated throughout the course will include:

1. Who or what is "God," and who or what is God not?
2. What (if anything) is God's role in history, and how should one explain unjustified suffering in the world?
3. How should Jews respond to the classical idea that Jews are "the chosen people"?
4. What is the status of traditional Jewish law, and is it significant or obligatory for Jews?
5. What could it mean to "repair the world," and what would a "repaired" or "redeemed" world look like?
6. What is the significance of the land of Israel and the State of Israel?
7. Should Judaism be thought of as a religion, or a culture, or a national/political tradition?

Giving particular attention to the legacy of 18th, 19th, and 20th century European Jewish thought, which has had tremendous influence on the construction of modern Judaism throughout the world, we will explore the diverse ways that these questions have been answered. Rather than exploring broad sociological trends, though, we will focus on the individual theologians and other intellectuals who have sought—sometimes very successfully—to influence the ways that modern Jews *should* answer these questions. In our discussions, we will consider how these thinkers have gone about developing their arguments, and how cogent their arguments have been. We will also pay attention to the ways that their perspectives have been shaped by their cultural and political contexts, and we will consider how they in turn have sought to create new models of Jewish identity and to further certain social/political agendas.

This class is a small, discussion-based seminar that will offer us the opportunity to think together about these questions. Together, we will think critically about these questions and, as best we can, use our imaginations to “get inside the heads” of a diverse group of Jewish thinkers. This may not be easy to do, especially because some of the writings that we will consider are written in a manner which may be difficult to understand, and because some of the writings will no doubt be offensive. In this course, we will seek to read such texts with the sort of care, honesty, and thoughtfulness demanded by the field of Religious Studies.

VIRTUES TO BRING TO CLASS

The academic study of religion requires students to approach religious traditions with certain kinds of moral and intellectual qualities, and this course will ask you to work on those virtues: to be **careful** in your reading and listening; to be **open-minded**, aware of your own prejudices, and **honest** about the complexity of the traditions that we are studying; and to be **tolerant** of difference while also being **critically-minded**.

Throughout this course, we will think critically about other people’s ideas; engaging in dialogue with them may also help you to think critically about your own assumptions and biases. Whatever your background, this course may challenge some of your ideas about the Jewish tradition, about religion, and about how to live, and I hope that you will be enriched by the serious reflection that the course will encourage.

As in all other Elon classes, you are also required to adhere to the following values, which stand at the center of Elon’s honor code:

- **HONESTY:** Be truthful in your academic work and in your relationships.
- **INTEGRITY:** Be trustworthy, fair and ethical.
- **RESPONSIBILITY:** Be accountable for your actions and your learning.
- **RESPECT:** Be civil. Value the dignity of each person. Honor the physical and intellectual property of others.



I urge you to read more about Elon’s honor code at <http://www.elon.edu/honor>.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course you should be able to:

- analyze many of the ideas and questions that have been central for thinkers who have influenced (or sought to influence) the character of modern Judaism
- recognize the diversity of Jewish intellectual traditions (and, certainly, refrain from making statements that take the form, “Judaism says X”)
- recognize the ways in which Jewish intellectual traditions have been shaped by diverse cultural and political contexts
- analyze how Jewish thinkers have sought to construct diverse Jewish identities and further diverse political agendas.
- articulate how the modern idea that Judaism is a “religion” has influenced modern Jewish thought
- explain the many other ways in which classical Jewish thought has been challenged by modernity

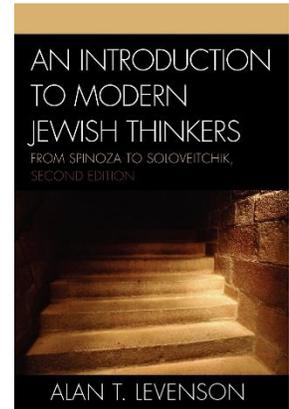
READINGS FOR THE COURSE

All of our readings for the course will be available as PDF files on our course Moodle site.

You are required to print out the readings from Moodle and bring hard copies to class on the day for which they are assigned.

I apologize that this will make for a lot of paper in your life. If you’d like to reduce the quantity of paper in your life and add one more book to your bookshelf: please note that there is one book that we’re reading a fair amount from. It’s not required for the course, but I encourage you to purchase this volume:

- *An Introduction to Modern Jewish Thinkers: From Spinoza to Soloveitchik*, 2nd edition, ed. Alan T. Levenson (Rowman & Littlefield, 2006)



ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

25% **Engagement/Participation:** As this class is a small seminar, your preparation and attendance is even more important than it is in other sorts of courses. The quality of the class will depend on the degree to which you take responsibility for participating in and engaging with the course.

You are required to attend every class, to arrive on time with your reading completed (and printed out), to listen attentively to your instructor and fellow classmates, to take notes during class sessions, to contribute thoughtfully to class discussions, and to make a good effort on in-class activities. Your presence in the room during our entire class

discussion is essential, and so you should not get up and leave our classroom in the middle of discussion. (We'll try to take a short break in the middle of every class; if you need a break and we haven't taken one yet, please go ahead and suggest that we take a break as a class!) Please also keep computers, cell phones, and other devices off (and stored away) during our class sessions.

If you do miss class for whatever reason, you'll need to (1) download any in-class materials (slides, handouts) which will be posted on Moodle after the class, (2) get notes from a classmate, (3) type up your own notes based on the in-class materials and your classmate's notes, and (4) submit those notes on Moodle.

While your grade will be affected by any unexcused absences, your grade will begin to suffer in particularly dramatic ways if you miss more than two classes without official documentation (e.g. notes from Health Services, athletic teams, or [Religious Observance Notification Forms](#)). Each undocumented absence after 2 will result in your final *course* grade being reduced by five points (e.g., if your final course grade is an 84 and you have three undocumented absences, you'll end up with a 79 for the course).

15% **Participation on our Class Blog:** before each class, beginning with the readings due on 8/31, you should post a minimum-175-word reflection in response to the reading due that day. You can take one "pass" during the semester and skip posting with no penalty. Beyond that, to receive full credit, your post is due by 2:30 pm on the day that the reading is due.

5% **Two quizzes**, 9/9 and 9/30

15% **Paper** comparing two Jewish thinkers, due 10/28

35% **Final exam:** take-home exam due 12/10, 1 pm; we'll do an in-class activity based on those exams at 1 pm

A brief, ungraded reflection will also be due on the second day of class.

Details about each of these assignments will be distributed separately.

A	=	93 – 100
A-	=	90 – 92
B+	=	87 – 89
B	=	83 – 86
B-	=	80 – 82
C+	=	77 – 79
C	=	73 – 76
C-	=	70 – 72
D+	=	67 – 69
D	=	63 – 66
D-	=	60 – 62
F	=	below 60

If you are a student with a documented disability who will require accommodations in this course, please register with Disabilities Services in the Duke Building, Room 108 (278-6500), for assistance in developing a plan to address your academic needs.

COMMUNICATION BEYOND CLASS TIME

Please know that I am happy to meet with you privately to discuss your work in the course and any issues that the course may raise for you. I am available to meet during office hours and at other times. I am also happy to be in touch by email, and I will respond to emails as promptly as I can. Do note, though, that I will be offline during some weekdays due to Jewish holidays: 9/14-9/15, 9/23, 9/28-9/29, and 10/5-10/6.

COURSE SCHEDULE

8/26 (Wed.), class #1: Pre-Modern Judaism and Modern Judaism

- Leora Batnitzky, *How Judaism Became a Religion*, pp. 1-4



8/28 (Fri.), class #2: Pre-Modern Jewish Thought and Practice

- Louis Newman, *An Introduction to Jewish Ethics*, pp. 30-39
- Milton Steinberg, *Basic Judaism*, pp. 122-134
- **Ungraded Reflection Due**



8/31 (Mon.), class #3: Baruch (Benedict) Spinoza and the Birth of Modern Judaism

- Alan Levenson, *An Introduction to Modern Jewish Thinkers*, pp. 5-10
- Baruch Spinoza (1677), *Ethics*, I.14-15 (proofs and corollaries)
- Baruch Spinoza (1670), *Theological-Political Treatise*, selections
- **Blogging option begins**: your first opportunity is to post by 2:30 pm on 8/31



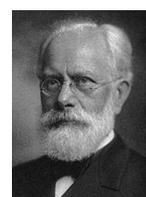
9/2 (Wed.), class #4: Moses Mendelssohn and the Haskalah Movement

- Leora Batnitzky, *How Judaism Became a Religion*, pp. 13-22
- Moses Mendelssohn (1783), *Jerusalem*, pp. 70-73, 90-103



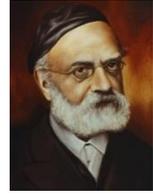
9/7 (Mon.), class #5: The Reform Movement and the Conservative Movement

- Alan Levenson, *An Introduction to Modern Jewish Thinkers*, pp. 53-58
- Abraham Geiger (1830s-1860s), selections from his writings (including an exchange with the more ‘conservative’ scholar Leopold Zunz)
- Zacharias Frankel (1845), “On Changes in Judaism”
- Kaufmann Kohler and the Conference of Reform Rabbis (1885), “The Pittsburgh Platform”
- Kaufmann Kohler (1915), “Israel's Mission in the World”



9/9 (Wed.), class #6: The Orthodox Movement in Western/Central Europe

- Samson Raphael Hirsch (1836), “The Sixteenth Letter,” along with an introduction to Hirsch by Alan Levenson—from Levenson, *An Introduction to Modern Jewish Thinkers*, 41-52
- Samson Raphael Hirsch (1854), “Religion Allied to Progress”
- **In-Class Quiz #1 Today**



9/11 (Fri.), class #7: Eastern European Orthodoxy I: The (Haredi) Lithuanian Yeshiva Movement and the Musar Movement

- Hayyim of Volozhin (d. 1821)—founder of the Lithuanian Yeshiva movement—selections from his writings
- Simhah Zissel Ziv (d. 1898)—from the Musar movement—selections from his writings (from Geoffrey Claussen, *Sharing the Burden: Rabbi Simḥah Zissel Ziv and the Path of Musar*)

9/14 (Mon.) – NO CLASS (Rosh Hashanah)

9/16 (Wed.), class #8: Eastern European Orthodoxy II: The Hasidic Movement

- Rachel Elior, *The Mystical Origins of Hasidism*, pp. 1-3
- Hasidic Texts on God, Philosophy, and the Tzaddik
- Shneur Zalman of Liadi (1797), *The Tanya*, selections



9/21 (Mon.), class #9: The Zionist Movement

- Theodor Herzl (1896), “The Jewish State,” along with an introduction to Hirsch by Alan Levenson—from Levenson, *An Introduction to Modern Jewish Thinkers*, pp. 103-116
- Ahad Ha-Am (1904), “Flesh and Spirit,” along with an introduction to Hirsch by Alan Levenson—from Levenson, *An Introduction to Modern Jewish Thinkers*, pp. 117-132
- Micha Joseph Berdyczewski (d. 1921)—as quoted in Anita Shapira, *Land and Power: The Zionist Resort to Force, 1881-1948*
- Joseph Klausner (1927), “The Jewish Character of Spinoza's Teaching”

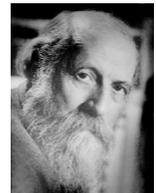


9/23 (Wed.) - NO CLASS (Yom Kippur)

9/28 (Mon.) - NO CLASS (Sukkot)

**9/30 (Wed.), class #10: Hermann Cohen: Jewish Neo-Kantianism
(and a response from Martin Buber)**

- Hermann Cohen (1914), “The Transcendent God: Archetype of Morality”
- Hermann Cohen (1910), “Judaism’s Significance for the Religious Progress of Mankind”
- Hermann Cohen (1908), “I and Thou: Selfhood Through Ethical Action”
- Hermann Cohen (1916), “Religion and Zionism”
- Martin Buber and Hermann Cohen (1916), “A Debate on Zionism and Messianism”
- **In-Class Quiz #2 Today**



10/5 (Mon.) - NO CLASS (Shemini Atzeret)

**10/7 (Wed.), class #11: Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig:
Jewish Existentialism**

- Alan Levenson, *An Introduction to Modern Jewish Thinkers*, pp. 73-80, 89-94
- Martin Buber (1903), “On the [Jewish] Renaissance”
- Martin Buber (1923), selections from *I and Thou*
- Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber (1922-1925), letters on revelation and law



10/12 (Mon.) - FALL BREAK

10/14 (Wed.), class #12: Modern/Centrist Orthodoxy / “Religious Zionism”

- Alan Levenson, *An Introduction to Modern Jewish Thinkers*, pp. 183-201
- Abraham Isaac Kook (1910’s-1920’s), selections from *Orot*
- Tzevi Yehuda Kook (1950’s-1970’s), selections from his writings
- Joseph Soloveitchik (1944), *Halakhic Man*, selections
- Joseph Soloveitchik (1971), “The World is Not Forsaken”



10/19 (Mon.), class #13: The Chabad and Satmar Hasidic Movements

- Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1950's-1970's), selections from his writings
- Menachem Friedman and Samuel Heilman, *The Rebbe: The Life and Afterlife of Menachem Mendel Schneerson*, pp. 183-207
- Joel (Yoel) Teitelbaum (1959/1967), selections from his writings
- Leora Batnitzky, *How Judaism Became a Religion*, pp. 183-191
- Shaul Magid, "Is there an American Jewish fundamentalism?"



**10/21 (Wed.), class #14: Mordecai Kaplan
(Conservative and Reconstructionist Judaisms)**

- Alan Levenson, *An Introduction to Modern Jewish Thinkers*, pp. 133-139
- Mordecai Kaplan (1937), *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion*, pp. 14-31
- Mordecai Kaplan (1956), *Questions Jews Ask: Reconstructionist Answers*, selections
- Rebecca Alpert and Jacob Staub (2000), *Exploring Judaism: A Reconstructionist Approach*, pp. 25-38



**10/26 (Mon.), class #15: Abraham Joshua Heschel—and another pole of
Conservative Judaism**

- Alan Levenson, *An Introduction to Modern Jewish Thinkers*, pp. 209-216
- Abraham Joshua Heschel (1955), *God in Search of Man*, selections
- Abraham Joshua Heschel (1967), "What We Might Do Together"
- Abraham Joshua Heschel (1951), *The Sabbath*, pp. 3-10, 27-29, 79-80



**10/28 (Wed.), class #16: Religious-Secular Dialogue and Jewish-Christian
Dialogue after the Holocaust**

- Chaim Grade (1951), "My Quarrel with Hersh Rasseynier"
- Irving Greenberg (1977), selections from "Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire: Judaism, Christianity, and Modernity after the Holocaust"
- **Comparative Paper Due**



**11/2 (Mon.), class #17: God and Ethics after the Holocaust:
Emmanuel Levinas and the Other**

- Emmanuel Levinas (1957), “A Religion for Adults”
- Emmanuel Levinas (1955), “Loving Torah More Than God”
- Emmanuel Levinas (1969), “Judaism and Revolution,” pp. 98-99
- Ira Stone (2006), *A Responsible Life: The Spiritual Path of Mussar*, selections

11/4 (Wed.), class #18: Liberal Religious Zionism and Anti-Zionism

- David Hartman (1985), *A Living Covenant: The Innovative Spirit in Traditional Judaism*, pp. 278-299
- Marc Ellis (2009), *Judaism Does Not Equal Israel: The Rebirth of the Jewish Prophetic*, excerpts

**11/4 (Wed.), 7:00 pm: Special Evening Program with
Dr. Shuly Schwartz on American Jewish Feminism**

11/9 (Mon.), class #19: The Jewish Feminist Movement

- Judith Plaskow (1990), *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective*, excerpts

**11/10 (Tues.), 5:30 pm: Special Evening Program
with Michael W. Twitty on Kosher/Soul:
African-American Jewish Culinary Identity**

11/11 (Wed.), class #20: The Goddess Movement

- Jill Hammer (2009), “To Her We Shall Return: Jews Turning to the Goddess, the Goddess Turning to Jews”
- Julia Watts Belser (2010), “Transing God/dess: Notes from the Borderlands”



11/16 (Mon.), class #21: Reform Judaism Revisited

- Jakob Petuchowski (1970), “Some Criteria for Modern Jewish Observance”
- Eugene Borowitz (1991), *Renewing the Covenant*, pp. 288-299
- Rachel Sabath Beit-Halachmi (2010), “Radically Free and Radically Claimed”

11/18 (Wed.), class #22: The Jewish Renewal Movement

- Zalman Schachter-Shalomi (2005), *Jewish With Feeling*, selections

11/23-11/27 - THANKSGIVING BREAK

11/30 (Mon.), class #23: Militant Jewish Supremacist Movements

- Meir Kahane (1990), excerpts from *The Jewish Idea*
- Yitzhak Ginsburgh (2002), excerpts from *Rectifying the State of Israel*
- Geoffrey Claussen, “Pinhas, the Quest for Purity, and the Dangers of Tikkun Olam”

12/2 (Wed.), class #24: Secular Judaism Revisited

- Amos Oz and Fania Oz-Salzberger (2012), *Jews and Words*, excerpt

12/10 (Thurs.), 1:00 pm: Final Exam

