

JDST/RLGN 350/450
Jewish Ethics

This course will be conducted as an advanced seminar. The material to be covered all relates to issues of life-and-death. Students will be encouraged not only to engage intellectually with each topic as it is discussed in class, but to build on previous material so as to establish in their own minds the interconnections among topics. By the end of the semester, the students should be able to identify and articulate common assumptions and positions that cut across the specific topics. Students should also be able to identify trends in approach that align with various “movements” in modern Judaism – Hasidic, Orthodox, Liberal, secular, etc.

In general, Monday will be spent looking at and analyzing the primary texts on which the rabbinic and modern positions rest. This will include the most commonly cited periscopes from Tanakh, Mishnah, Gemara, the Mishneh Torah and the Shulchan Aruch, as appropriate. Wednesday will be devoted to an analysis, discussion and critique of the assigned reading and how the reading uses the primary source in the light of the author’s historical situation.

Because this is an advanced seminar setting, students are expected to do the assigned readings before class and to come prepared to discuss them. Grades will be based on class attendance and participation in seminar discussions/ (50%) and on the final “responsum” that each student will write which will be based on a question which draws widely on the material covered. (50%).

Schedule of Topics

Week 1 (Jan 10-12) – Fundamentals of Jewish Ethics

READING: "The Question of Jewish Ethics Today", Steven S. Schwarzschild (Sh'ma 7/124, December 24, 1976)

Week 2 (Jan 17-19) – no class

Week 3 (Jan 24-26) -- Jewish Moral Literature

Week 4 (Jan.31-Feb 2) – Procreation

Reading: "The Use of Cryopreserved Sperm and pre-Embryos in Contemporary Jewish Law and Ethics", Richard Grazi and Joel Wolowelsky (JLaw)

Week 5 (Feb. 7-9) – Birth Control

Reading: Rabbinic Conception of Conception, Edwin Reichman (Tradition 31:1)

Week 6 (Feb 14-16) – Abortion

Reading: "Abortion: A Challenge to Halakhah" Blu Greenberg

Week 7 (Feb 21-23) – Death and Dying

Reading: "Jewish Tradition in Death and Dying", Heather Ross (BNET)

Week 8 (Feb 28 – Mar2) -- Euthanasia

Reading: "Physician-Assisted suicide Under Jewish Law", Steven Resnicoff (JLaw)

SPRING BREAK (Mar 7-9)

Week 9 (Mar 14-16) -- Suicide

Reading: "Death and Burial: What is the Jewish Poision on Suicide", Steven Resnicoff (www.faqs.org/faqs/Judaism)

Week 10 (Mar 21-23) – Capital Punishment (JLaw; Bryan V Moore

Week 11 (Mar 28-30) -- War , Michael Broyde (JLaw)

Week 12 (April 4-6) – Musar Movement; visit by Rabbi Denker

Week 13 (April 11-13)-- The Moral Personality -- discuss Chaim Potok, The Chosen

Week 14 (April 20) [no class April 18] – Repentance and Forgiveness --
Discuss Simon Wiesenthal, The Sunflower

Week 15 (April 25) – Final Project