Modern Jewish Thought in Historical Context
RB-JTHT-538
2 graduate credits
Thursdays, 2:30-4:30
Spring 2014-2015

Instructor: Daniel Lehmann
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Course description:
Students will explore the writings of major Jewish thinkers living in the modern era and place them in the context of their historical setting. The course of study will focus on the various ways these thinkers – from Mendelssohn to Kook – understood the dynamic relationship between inherited tradition and modern conceptions of religious life.

Required Books:

Robert Seltzer, Jewish People, Jewish Thought, Prentice Hall, 1980
(Out of print, but used copies are available on Amazon and in the HC library)


Additional readings will also be posted on Schoology.

Class expectations:
Regular class attendance and participation. This class will be conducted as a seminar with pairs of students leading on-line and in-class discussions. There will be weekly reading assignments and required discussion postings on Schoology.
Final Paper: (10-15 pages) develop an analysis of the theological orientation of a particular thinker we studied and explore the way that particular approach to Judaism as a religion intersects modern ideas of Jewish religious life.

Week 1: Introduction
Transitions from medieval to modern Jewish thought and the question of Spinoza
Seltzer, Jewish People, Jewish Thought, pp. 454-482, 496-505, 547-557;
Batnitzky, pp. 1-7; Levenson, chapter 1; excerpts from Spinoza’s The Theological-Political Treatise on Schoology

Week 2: The Beginnings of Modern Jewish Thought: Moses Mendelssohn
Readings: Batnitzky, pp. 13-28; Seltzer, 557-566; Levenson, chapter 2;
excerpts from on Schoology
Week 3: The Emancipation, the Reform Movement and Emergence of Orthodoxy: A. Geiger and S.R. Hirsch
Seltzer, Chapter 13; Batnitzky, pp. 32-49; Levenson chapters 3 and 4; excerpts on Schoology

Week 4: The Historical School: L. Zunz, H. Graetz, Z. Frankel,
Further discussions of readings from week 3; excerpts on Schoology

Week 5: Tradition integrated with Western thought: S. D. Luzzato and N.
Krochmal Readings: Seltzer, 566-579 and excerpts from Gershon
Greenberg, Modern Jewish Thinkers on Schoology

Week 6: Lithuanian Orthodoxy: Vilna Gaon and Hayyim of Volozhin; The Mussar
movement: Israel Salanter and Slobodka Yeshiva
Seltzer, 482-485; Levenson, chapter 10, excerpts on Schoology

Hakohen of Lublin
Seltzer, 485-496; Batnitzky, 112-115; excerpts on Schoology

Week 8: Zionism: Hess, Pinsker, Herzl,
Seltzer 684-696; Levenson, chapter 7; Batnitzky 147-155; excerpts on Schoology

Week 9: Cultural Autonomy: S. Dubnow and Ahad ha’am
Seltzer, 696-704; Batnitzky, 155-162, Levenson, chapter 8, excerpts on Schoology

Week 10: Zionist Mysticism: A. I. Kook
Seltzer, 720-725; Batnitzky, 91-100; Levenson, chapter 11; excerpts on Schoology

Week 11: Ethical Monotheism: Hermann Cohen
Seltzer, 728-736, Batnitzky 52-59; excerpts on Schoology
American Reform; David Einhorn and Kaufmann Kohler
Seltzer, 725-726 Excerpts on Schoology

Week 12: Conservative Judaism: Solomon Schechter
American Modern Orthodoxy: Bernard Revel
Seltzer, 726-728; Batnitzky, chapter 9; excerpts on Schoology

Week 13: Jewish Existentialism: Rosenzweig and Buber
Seltzer, 736-748; Batnitzky, chapter 4; Levenson chapters 5-6; excerpts on Schoology

Week 14: Summation/presentations
Batnitzky, Conclusion