The readings collected here serve as an introduction to some foundational Zionist thinkers. Each day we have asked you to read original sources by a thinker as well as some critical articles to give context to that person’s writing. Our hope is to provide a basic grounding in Zionist thought which will enable you to see how early Zionist debates continue to play out in contemporary Israeli society.

Each day’s section has a few basic questions for you to respond to in 250 words [no more than this, but also not substantially less]. We will ask you to put your response up on the schoology site for each day by 2:00 p.m. Given the relatively brief time you have, we are obviously not looking for tightly constructed arguments, we just want you to respond thoughtfully to the pieces that you have read. If we can than ask you to post a comment to one other person’s work, and respond to any comments to your own work in the evening. Minna will be monitoring the conversation and adding and responding to material. I will be meeting with the group in Newton on the first day (August 26) from 11:30-1 p.m. If you are in Israel or traveling elsewhere we’ll ask you to Skype in for that introductory conversation.

A brief course such as this inevitably leaves out large swaths of material – some of what we don’t cover will be part of the two intensives that will happen in Israel, some will be covered in the ongoing Israel seminar class, some will be covered in the Modern Jewish Thought course and some of the material you will hopefully be inspired to acquire for yourself, but it was R. Tarfon who said in Pirke Avot, “if you only have an elul zman to study Zionist thought, do what you can do.”


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1 This paragraph was stolen from David Starr’s Zionism syllabus
Session 1
Setting the Background and Context
1. Arthur Hertzberg, The Zionist Idea pp. 15-100

Question to Respond to:
- One of Hertzberg’s central frameworks to understand Zionism is to see it as secular messianism. What do you think of this claim based on his introduction to Zionist history? What are its implications?

Session 2
Political Zionism - Herzl
1. Hertzberg, pp. 200-231
3. Derek Penslar, “Historians, Herzl and the Palestinian Arabs: myth and counter-myth” in Israel in History

Questions to Respond to [respond to one or more]
- How would you evaluate Stanislawski’s claim that Herzl’s vision for Israel was based on his vision of cosmopolitan Europe? How do you think this has played out in modern Israel?
- The basis of The Jewish State is Herzl’s contention that anti-semitism is an ineradicable condition of European society. The shoah seemingly bore out this contention. In reading the Jewish State, what would you make of this claim?
- Herzl had a surprisingly practical plan for how the move to Palestine [or Argentina] would happen. What if anything was surprising to you about his plans?

Session 3
Cultural Zionism - Ahad Ha-am
1. Hertzberg, pp. 247-277
2. Ahad Ha-am, “Truth From Eretz Yisrael,” in Prophets Outcast: A Century of Dissident Writings about Zionism & Israel, pp. 32-33

Question to Respond to
- Ahad Ha-am’s name is brought up frequently today as the Zionist path not taken. Many suggest that Ahad Ha-am’s ideas should be brought back into the public discourse. He was prescient regarding Arab unwillingness to accept Zionism where Herzl was painfully naïve; he was a believer in an organic Jewish culture that was based on tradition but not religious; and he understood that a strong diaspora would be welcome and necessary for a strong Israel. Based on all of the readings, please reflect on the relevance or lack thereof for Ahad Ha-am today.
Session 4
Labor Zionism – A.D. Gordon & Ber Borochov
1. Hertzberg, pp. 352-386

Question to Respond to:
- Gordon and Borochov represent two sides of labor Zionism. Gordon, as Perlmutter says, sees the fundamental problem facing Jews as alienation from life, which can only be overcome by agricultural labor. Labor takes on a mystical-religious quality in Gordon’s work. Borochov, meanwhile, is a materialist who synthesizes a Marxist understanding of class with Zionist goals. Contemporary Israel has of course moved beyond the pure labor Zionism associated with both gordon and borochov, although remnants can still be found. Please respond though to one or both of these thinkers, reflecting on their respective Zionist visions and whether anything is “useable” for Zionism today.

Session 5
Revisionism – Vladimir Jabotinsky
1. Hertzberg, pp. 556-570
2. Gideon Shimoni, “Revisionist Zionism,” in The Zionist Ideology, pp. 236-266

Question to Respond to:
- Shimoni writes that Jabotinsky’s controversial rationale for militarism and ultra-nationalism, was:
  what one today might call a plea for ‘affirmative action.’ Because the Jewish people were underprivileged and persecuted, weak and incapacitated, its adoption of compensatory attributes was necessary and justifiable, even if these might by liberal standards and in other contexts be deemed vices...He argued that whereas other privileged nations might well allow themselves to ‘stop learning the skills of war, we are forced to begin learning these bitter skills,’ for physical weakness was itself a provocation. The capacity of the weak to defend themselves would in the end prevent violence in the world rather than increase it.” [244-245]

Please respond to this statement.

Session 6
National Religious Zionism – Rav Kook
1. Hertzberg, pp. 416-431
2. Aviezer Ravitzky, Messianism, Zionism and Jewish Religious Radicalism, pp. 79-109

Question to Respond to:
- Please respond to Ravitzky’s understanding of the way that Rav Kook attempts to synthesize secular Zionism with his own religious understanding of the messianic import of the return to Israel.