



Modern Jewish Thought

Spring 2021 | GERM2160 THEO2260

Instructor Dr. Nick Block
Time M W 3-4:15 pm
Room Lyons Hall 207

Contact Information

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Office Lyons Hall 201A
Office Hours: M 11-12, W 2-3
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Course description

This course investigates the impact of modernity on Jewish thought and religion. First, the rise of the modern state led Jews to confront a crucial question: how can they belong to both the Jewish people and to their countries? Second, how can modernity's emphasis on individual autonomy coexist with religious law and tradition? Third, modernity involves a strong belief in the authority of reason and progress. In this light, is religion rational or a matter of psychological experience? We will turn to three broader historical phenomena that represent a crisis of modernity: the rise of Zionism, the Holocaust, feminism. These phenomena continue to radically transform Jews and Judaism in our postmodern age. Key terms to be traced through the semester are "community" and "Law" as Jews defined themselves and were defined along religious, racial, and national lines. Readings include Benedict Spinoza, Moses Mendelssohn, Martin Buber, and Rachel Adler.

Required Materials

- Simon Noveck, ed., *Contemporary Jewish Thought: A Reader*, 2007. First Ben Yehuda Press Edition. ISBN 9780978998066
- Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, ISBN 9780684717258
- Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State*, ISBN 9780486258492
- Other readings at Canvas to be printed and brought to class

Links

Canvas for readings, GoogleSlides, grading rubrics: <https://bc.edu/lms>

Grade

Participation	10%
In-Class Comprehension Quizzes	15%
Critical response papers (1-2 pages)	30%
Essays (3-4 pages)	45%

✓ Learning Objectives

The learning objectives for this course are goals for humanities courses more broadly speaking. Students will:

1. Gain an historical frame of reference for modern Jewish events.
2. Compare Jewish theology and worldview to other theological systems you might be familiar with.
3. Read complex texts actively: recognize key passages; raise questions; appreciate complexity and ambiguity; comprehend the literal and figurative uses of language.
4. Practice writing as a process of motivated inquiry, engaging other writers' ideas through the use of quotations, paraphrase, allusions and summary. Use sources well and cite them correctly.

Using the Carnegie national standardization guidelines for homework vs. credit hours (see <http://www.bc.edu/offices/avp/Credit-HourCompliance.html>), homework for this 3-credit class = avg. 6 hours a week. Students can expect to read 75-100 pages per week: 40-60 pages between classes.

Pass/Fail

Students needing to fulfill a requirement with the course cannot take it pass/fail. Other students only needing the course for credit hours toward graduation can take this course pass/fail and only need a 59.5% (D-) to pass.

Participation

Readings brought to class: PDFs should be brought to class on paper or electronically.

Assigned books: **4 Points will be deducted** from the participation grade for each time a student does not bring the reading to class printed on paper. An electronic version of the reading is not a substitute for the book.

Email

The preferred way to address me in an email is "Dear Prof. Block,". I will try to answer all emails within 24 hours of receipt during the workweek (Monday 9am – Friday 5pm). Students may utilize laptops, tablets, smartphones in class during discussion, in the hope that students are using such a device to inquire about pertinent information regarding an author or term, for example. Obviously, checking email or social media will negatively affect your participation grade.

Attendance

There is no penalty for absences or tardies. Stay safe and stay home if you are feeling under the weather. Keep your instructor informed if you miss any classes or assignments.

Academic Integrity

The pursuit of knowledge can proceed only when scholars take responsibility and receive credit for their work. Presentation of others' work as one's own is not only intellectual dishonesty, but it also undermines the educational process. Please read [Boston College's policy on academic integrity](#), cheating, plagiarism, and collusion.