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**Bucerius
Institute**
for Research of Contemporary German
History and Society



חוג לתולדות ישראל ומקרא
Department of Jewish History



IS A JEWISH PHILOSOPHY AGAIN POSSIBLE?



- Research Seminar -

Is a Jewish philosophy again Possible? The 20th century rediscovery and invention of Jewish philosophy and mysticism in Europe, the Middle East, and America

Course number: 116.4239 Second Semester.

6 Thursdays: from 10 Am to 2PM.

This seminar adopts a new format. It proposes 6 half-day sessions of 4 hours. Each time, a different scholar (from Israel or abroad) will lead the seminar and shed new light on a different aspect of the modern rediscovery of Jewish medieval philosophy and mysticism in the 19th and 20th century in Europe, the Middle East, and America. Focusing on high-profile scholars and philosophers from the late 19th century or 20th century (Leo Strauss, Julius Guttmann, Hermann Cohen, Ytzhag Baer, Gershom Scholem and Shmuel Bergman), the seminar will study the historical and individual process which led Jewish medieval philosophy and mysticism from being an object of historical inquiry to become a model for a modern Jewish philosophy. A modern Jewish philosophy capable to add new perspectives in post-Enlightenment philosophy which would face the challenges of Jewish existence in the 20th century (two world wars, the destruction of European Jewry, mass emigration to Israel and the US).



Leo Strauss and Julius Guttman

Dr. Philipp von Wussow (Goethe University Frankfurt)

The seminar explores the argument between Leo Strauss and Julius Guttman, two eminent figures of Jewish philosophy in the 20th century. Based on close readings of key sections of the respective texts – Guttman’s *Philosophie des Judentums* (1933), Strauss’s criticism in the first chapter of his *Philosophie und Gesetz* (1935), Guttman’s reply to Strauss that was posthumously published in 1973, and a number of documents – the seminar will trace a conversation that brings to the light the historical and systematic presuppositions of Jewish philosophy.

Bio

Philipp von Wussow has published widely on German-Jewish philosophy in the 20th century. He obtained his Ph.D. in philosophy from Düsseldorf University (2006) and his *Habilitation* from Goethe University Frankfurt am Main (2017). He was a visiting research fellow at the Hebrew University (2004/2005) and at the Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies in Philadelphia (2016/2017). His book *Leo Strauss and the Theopolitics of Culture* is forthcoming from SUNY Press. He teaches philosophy and Jewish thought at Goethe University and the University of Hamburg.





Yitzhak Baer and Leo Strauss: The Rediscovery of Isaac Abravanel's Political Thought in the late 1930s

Dr. Cedric Cohen Skalli (University of Haifa)

This seminar will focus on the intellectual background of a major breakthrough in the modern study of Abravanel's work and life: the rediscovery of his political thought, especially of his republicanism, by German Jewish Scholars after the fall the Weimar Republic. This rediscovery during the first years of the Nazi Regime can be attributed to the commemoration of the 500 anniversary of Abravanel's birth in 1937. The articles of Yitzhak Baer and Leo Strauss are the best known contributions, and reflect opposing views on the subject. Divergence also featured in the path out of Germany these two intellectuals took: Baer immigrated to Palestine in 1930 and joined the Hebrew University while Strauss left Germany in 1932 for France and England and later immigrated to the US in 1937 and joined the New School. This seminar will reconstruct the Baer-Strauss debate on Abravanel's "republicanism" and its larger intellectual context. For Baer, the novel Jewish-Christian cultural type of Abravanel is the expression of his social position as a Court Jew and also the backdrop for the elaboration of his new social, historical and political conceptions, which unfortunately proved unfruitful in a time of absolutism, expulsions and persecutions. For Strauss, Abravanel's Jewish-Christian ambiguity destroyed the authentic philosophical understanding of Jewish Law. Abravanel's "Christian" misunderstanding of the political essence of Jewish philosophy hastened the decline of Jewish philosophy. Whereas Baer discloses in Abravanel the first Jewish republican thinker, Strauss sees but "the last of the Jewish philosophers of Middle Ages."

Bio

Dr. Cedric Cohen Skalli teaches early modern and modern Jewish Philosophy at the University of Haifa. He is the newly appointed director of the *Bucerius Institute for the research of contemporary German History and Society*. His research focuses on the relationship of Jewish thinkers to two main philosophical shifts: the shift from Medieval philosophy to early modern thought (14th-17th century), and the shift from early modern to modern thought (18th-20th century). He published three books and many articles on diverse aspects of Jewish thought and literature in the Renaissance and several essays on German 20th century philosophy. He is also translator of many works of Freud, Benjamin, Scholem, Idel and Abravanel.



***The forgotten Eastern European tradition of 20th century Jewish philosophy*****Prof. Lukas Muehlethaler (Freie Universität Berlin)**

Abstract: In the nineteenth and twentieth century, Hebrew texts in Jewish philosophy and on its history are written by thinkers who remain outside the "Wissenschaft des Judentums" even though they inspire some of its proponents. Many of these thinkers stand in the Eastern European rabbinical tradition and attempt to relate traditional texts with both Jewish philosophy of the Middle Ages and modern Western philosophy. Their writings were published mostly in separate journals and collective volumes and for various reasons, themselves of great interest, failed to have an impact on the emerging Hebrew academic environment. In a twist of irony, the Hebrew language of their writings meant that they remained unknown to proponents and scholars of what is generally considered Modern Jewish philosophy. The seminar gives a brief overview of this tradition of Hebrew philosophy and looks at how its proponents integrated Jewish medieval philosophy and mysticism into their thinking.

Bio

Lukas Muehlethaler is Professor for Jewish philosophy and aesthetics at the Freie Universität Berlin. He studied Jewish intellectual history at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and in 2010 received a PhD in Arabic and Islamic studies at Yale University with a dissertation on the Jewish philosopher Ibn Kammūna. Prior to his appointment he was part of the Research Unit Intellectual History of the Islamic World at the Freie Universität Berlin. He works on Jewish science and philosophy in both Arabic and Hebrew with a focus on the interaction between different intellectual and cultural traditions.



***Mysticism in Modern German-Jewish Thought*****Prof. Dr. Christoph Schulte, Universität Potsdam**

The presentation *Mysticism in Modern German-Jewish Thought* shall describe and analyze the genesis of the notion of “Mysticism” as applied almost simultaneously to Kabbalah, Sufism and the Christian tradition in German Late Romanticism. There, “Mysticism” is considered to be the innermost core and experience of religion and it is regarded as an opposition to the rationalism of Theology, Philosophy and modern Science, but also of bourgeois “Weltanschauung” alike. Mysticism was understood as an authentic and personal religious experience, and thus opposed to liberal and universal ethical monotheism. The antagonism of esoteric “Mysticism” vs. exoteric scientific Rationalism replaces the enlightened 18th century dichotomy of Philosophy vs. “Schwärmerei”.

The presentation shall follow the historical development and the traces of this discourse on “Mysticism” in modern German-Jewish Thought from early Wissenschaft des Judentums to modern Jewish Studies. “Mysticism” becomes a seminal term in modern German-Jewish writing which leads to new interpretations and theoretical implications in the fields of philosophy, religious studies, literature and Jewish thought and Kabbalah research.

“Mysticism”, especially Kabbalah, is one of the most vital research fields of Jewish Studies in Europe and Israel since the Second World War. The leading figure and founder of contemporary Kabbalah research, the Zionist Gershom Scholem, came from Berlin and left a strong imprint in Israeli as well as German intellectual history. Thus, Kabbalah is a central field not only in Jewish Studies in Israel and Germany, but also one of the intellectual foci of German-Jewish History.

Bio

Professor Dr. Christoph Schulte has published three books on Kabbalah and German intellectual history: “Kabbala und Romantik” (1994), “Kabbala und die romantische Literatur” (1999), and “Zimzum. Gott und Weltursprung” (2014). Moreover, he has edited not only Hebrew-German editions of classic kabbalistic texts like “Sefer Jezira” (1993) and Rav Kook’s “Orot haTora” (1995), but also classics of German-Jewish philosophy like Moses Mendelssohn (2 vol., 2009) and Hermann Cohen (1997; 2002), and a monograph on the Haskalah (Die jüdische Aufklärung, 2002).





Hugo Bergmann's readings of Franz Rosenzweig and the re-invention of Modern Jewish thought in Israel

Dr. Enrico Lucca (Leibniz Institute for Jewish History and Culture - Simon Dubnow, Leipzig)

Hugo Bergmann has been one of the protagonists of the transfer of European philosophy to Palestine. At the same time, in particular in the aftermath of the Second World War, Bergmann has been responsible for the creation of a canon of modern (European) Jewish thought. As a case study, I would like to dedicate my seminar to Bergmann's different readings of the work of Franz Rosenzweig. Covering more than 40 publications and a time span of 65 years, an analysis of Bergmann's different interpretations of Rosenzweig can be very instructive, helping to understand the process accompanying the shaping of the canon of Modern Jewish thought in its historical, political, and cultural context.

Bio

Enrico Lucca works at the Leibniz Institute for Jewish History and Culture - Simon Dubnow in Leipzig as a Research Associate since January 2018. He studied Philosophy and History at the University of Milan (Phd 2012). Post-graduate Specialization in Cultural Studies at the Scuola Alti Studi in Modena (2009). Between 2012 and 2017 he has been Research Associate at the Franz Rosenzweig Minerva Research Center for German-Jewish Literature and Cultural History at the Hebrew University. Between 2016 and 2017 he has been Postdoctoral Fellow within the project »German-Jewish Knowledge and Cultural Transfer 1918–1948: The Historical Archive of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem«. He has published a monograph on Edmond Jabès and he is currently writing on a biography of Hugo Bergmann.



Sources

1. Bergmann, Talk on the Spiritual Legacy of Rosenzweig in Palestine (Schocken Library, Jerusalem, December 1936).
2. Bergmann, Franz Rosenzweig and his book "The Star of Redemption" (1934).



Singularity in the Work of Hermann Cohen
Prof. Hartwig Wiedebach (ETH Zurich)

Hermann Cohen thought in terms of correlations after his great works on the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (since 1871). Always central is the correlation between a fundamental singularity and the diversity of phenomena: in the knowledge of Nature, in political-ethical desire, in artistic feeling.

Cohen's Jewish philosophy is a translation of this thinking into religiosity: into a theory, for example, of the uniqueness of God or also a theory of liturgy in religious services. -- We will read together short passages from Cohen's systematic philosophy and from the "Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism."

Bio

Hartwig Wiedebach teaches philosophy at the ETH Zurich and was director of the Hermann Cohen Archives.

Sources

1. Hermann Cohen: *Religion of Reason Out of the Sources of Judaism*. (New York: Ungar) 1972, (2nd ed., Oxford University Press, 1995), chapter 1: "God's Uniqueness", pp. 35-49.
2. Hermann Cohen: *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung*, 1871.