

## International Conference



# THE MOMENT OF CRISIS AND JEWISH THOUGHT: INTERPRETATION, HERESY, AND MESSIANISM

JUNE 1-2, 2022

Hatter Student Building  
Hall Floor 0  
University of Haifa

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**WEDNESDAY / June 1, 2022**

9:00-9:30 Welcoming Remarks

**Efraim Lev**, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities

**Cedric Cohen-Skalli**, The Bucerius Institute for Research of  
Contemporary German History and Society

**Ghilad H. Shenhav** and **Gilad Sharvit**

9:30-11:00 Morning Session I

Moderator: **Vered Lev Kenaan** (University of Haifa)

Presentations: **Shaul Magid** (Dartmouth College)

“The Theologico-Political Predicament and the Crisis of Heresy: Leo  
Strauss and Yoel Teitelbaum of Satmar”

**Ghilad H. Shenhav** (University of Potsdam)

“The ‘Messianic Today’ and the Moment of Crisis: Between the  
Talmud and Derrida”

11:00-11:30 Coffee Break

11:30-13:00 Morning Session II

Moderator: **Eyal Bassan** (University of Haifa)

Presentations: **Hagi Kenaan** (Tel Aviv University)

“The Crisis of the Book: Levinas and Derrida on the Future of  
Language”

**Annabel Herzog** (University of Haifa)

“Messianic Hospitality in Levinas and Derrida”

13:00-14:00 Lunch Break

14:00-16:00 Afternoon Session III

Moderator: **Tal Yehezkel** (Tel Aviv University)

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Presentations: **Galili Shahar** (Tel Aviv University)

“משבר/Crisis and Delivery”

**Ronny Miron** (Bar Ilan University)

“Religion, Change and Continuity in History - The Case Study of Modern Jewish History”

**Hanoch Ben Pazi** (Bar Ilan University)

“The Missed Opportunity: A Proposition for a New Alliance of Humanity in the Face of the Great Crisis?”

16:00-16:15 Coffee Break

16:15-17:45 Afternoon Session IV

Moderator: **Niklaus Largier** (UC Berkeley)

Presentations: **Vivian Liska** (University of Antwerp and Hebrew University)

“Crisis, Decision and Deferral: German-Jewish Thinkers vs. Carl Schmitt”

**Cedric Cohen-Skalli** (University of Haifa)

“The Crisis of 1930s and the Dialogical Rediscovery of Jewish political Thought”

18:30 Dinner for Conference Participants

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**THURSDAY / June 2, 2022**

9:00-9:15 Coffee and Pastries

9:15-10:45 Morning Session I

Moderator: **Marc Volovici** (Birkbeck, University of London)

Presentations: **Zachary J. Braiterman** (Syracuse University)

“Who Cleans Up the Mess? The Messianic Avant-Garde or Feminist Maintenance Art”

**Ilit Ferber** (Tel Aviv University)

“Améry and Jankélévitch on the Crisis of Jewish Identity”

10:45-11:00 Coffee Break

11:00-13:00 Morning Session II

Moderator: **Amit Levy** (Hebrew University)

Presentations **Karen Feldman** (UC Berkeley)

“On the Crisis of Jewish Law: Auerbach, Luther and Realism”

**Daniel H. Weiss** (University of Cambridge)

“Talking with Heretics and De-Catastrophizing the Moment of Crisis: Tracing a Theme in Classical Rabbinic Literature and Moses Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem*”

**Omer Michaelis** (Tel Aviv University)

“Crisis and the Structure of Tradition in Medieval Jewish philosophy”

13:00-14:00 Lunch Break

14:00-16:00 Afternoon Session III

Moderator: **Yotam Hotam** (University of Haifa)

Presentations: **Agata Bialik Robson** (University of Nottingham and the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw)

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“Between Betrayal and Innovation: Scholem on the Marrano Crisis of Tradition”

**Gilad Sharvit** (Towson University, Maryland)

“Arendt on the Modern Individual: The Pariah, the Parvenu, and the Crisis of Jewish Assimilation”

**Ori Rotlevy** (Tel Aviv University)

“The Crisis of Democracy and the Medium of Tradition: Habermas and Benjamin”

16:00-16:15 Coffee Break

16:15-17:45 Afternoon Session IV

Moderator: **Julija Levin** (Tel Aviv University)

Presentations: **Yotam Yzraely** (Tel Aviv University)

“Prophetic Politics: From Phenomenology to Theology”

**Orr Scharf** (University of Haifa)

“Catastrophe or Salvation? Zionist Intellectuals’ Responses to 1948”

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## **Abstracts and Bios**

**Hanoch Ben Pazi**, Bar Ilan University

### **The Missed Opportunity: A Proposition for a New Alliance of Humanity in the Face of the Great Crisis?**

In this lecture I will suggest a re-thinking of the models of "a covenant of fate" and "a covenant of destiny". These Jewish philosophical concepts are often applied in the phenomena of natural disasters in general, and *especially* in the face of the crisis of the plague of Covid19.

Throughout this pandemic, the vast majority of religious traditions and faith communities faced unprecedented challenges, difficulties, conceived of as no short of disastrous on countless and at multiple levels. The question of Theodicy on the one hand, and the question of human responsibility on the other. Religious philosophy and theological thought, accompany humanity in religious responses and ways in which to deal with disease and disaster. However, this has been remiss/close to absent/ not clear enough? thus far, in responses to the Covid19 pandemic. I would like to argue that this is an opportunity that has been missed.

My argument will rest upon challenges of the twentieth century, which received substantial responses. Few Jewish philosophers of the twentieth century lived to witness this challenge as the end of theodicy. However, both R. Joseph Dov Soloveitchik who propounded the idea of for religious destiny, and Emmanuel Levinas who called for an ethical response, in their different ways, offer opportunities for a contemporary response to the pandemic. My argument is that this period of the pandemic – that continues to ravage humanity on many levels, In recent years could potentially form a significant basis for a new all-human covenant based on Ethics and Responsibility.

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**Hanoch Ben-Pazi** is the chair of the Dept. of Jewish Philosophy at Bar Ilan



University. His research is dedicated to contemporary philosophy and modern Jewish Thought, especially to the philosophical writings and Jewish thought of Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida. Among his many publications are the following books:

*Interpretation as Ethical Act: The Hermeneutics Of Emmanuel Levinas* (Resling, 2012), and *Emmanuel Levinas: Educational Contract: Responsibility, Hopefulness, Alliance* (Ha-Kibbutz ha-Meuchad, 2016).

**Agata Bialik Robson**, University of Nottingham, and Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw.

### **Between Betrayal and Innovation: Scholem on the Marrano Crisis of Tradition**

In my presentation, I will sketch a portrait of Gershom Scholem as a secret Marrano, deeply interested in the Marrano theology as a still living formula of Jewish revelation, which he, in the famous letter to Benjamin from 1935, described as *Geltung ohne Bedeutung*: a ‘validity without content.’ I will attempt to show that the Marrano crisis of tradition constitutes a *thema regium* of Scholem’s whole intellectual career, from his earliest diaries (*Lamentations of Youth*), through his own theological declarations (*Ten Unhistorical Aphorisms on Kabbalah*), up to his latest essays and interviews (*Jews and Judaism in Crisis*). In my interpretation, Scholem the Marrano hides behind a mask of the Jewish historian, but the secret kernel of his doctrine is not historical: his continuous insistence on the ongoing vitality of the ‘hidden

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truth' of the tradition (*das Wahre*) as opposed to the overt articulation of the traditional religious form of life (*Tradierbarkeit*) reveals a strong theological agenda that governs the works of Scholem the Historian from within. In result of Scholem's not purely historical approach to the Marrano theology, the Marrano crisis of tradition – seemingly an affair of the past – comes to the fore as a still actual phenomenon and raises the issue of the 'hidden faith' as the sole 'authentic' form of Judaic religiosity, which not only does not betray Jewish tradition, but paradoxically touches its very core. According to Abraham Miguel Cardoso, the Marrano theologian of the Sabbatian movement (in David Biale's opinion, young Scholem begins working on Sabbatianism in 1927, when he finds in the Oxford library a manuscript of Cardoso's authorship), the true faith can only be hidden – and Scholem repeats this esoteric truth few centuries later in *Ten Unhistorical Theses on Kabbalah* with the same powerful conviction: "The authentic tradition remains hidden; the falling tradition [...] shows its greatness only in the fact that it falls." It would thus seem that, for Scholem the Marrano, crisis is inscribed in the very essence of the Judaic tradition as always already 'falling,' i.e. failing to live up as the 'chain of transmission' to the 'hidden truth' of revelation. This crisis cannot – and should not – be overcome: it can only be recognised and acknowledged as what gives the Jewish tradition its aporetic intensity. Judaism, therefore, can never reach a harmonious integrity of a religious life-form. If Judaism is to be a living tradition, open to innovation and renewal, it must constantly go through and survive the crisis caused by the clash between the two aporetic elements that constitute it: the 'hidden truth,' on the one hand – and the 'chain of transmission,' on the other.

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**Agata Bielik-Robson** is a Professor of Jewish Studies at the University of



Nottingham and a Professor of Philosophy at the Polish Academy of Sciences. She published articles in Polish, English, German, French and Russian on philosophical aspects of psychoanalysis, romantic subjectivity, and the philosophy of religion (especially Judaism and its crossings with modern philosophical thought). Her publications include: *The Saving Lie: Harold Bloom and Deconstruction* (Northwestern University Press, 2011),

*Judaism in Contemporary Thought. Traces and Influence* (coedited with Adam Lipszyc, Routledge 2014), *Philosophical Marranos. Jewish Cryptotheologies of Late Modernity* (Routledge 2014) and *Another Finitude: Messianic Vitalism and Philosophy* (Bloomsbury, 2019).

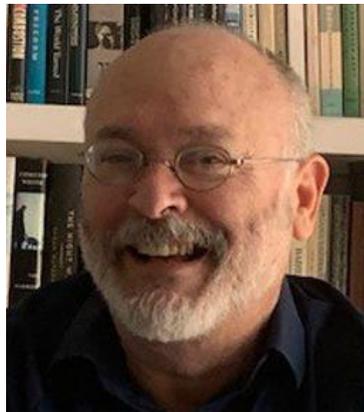
**Zachary J. Braiterman**, Syracuse University

### **Who Cleans Up the Mess? The Messianic Avant-Garde or Feminist Maintenance Art**

In my paper, I will touch upon two types of response to crisis. One is the messianic gesturalism represented in this paper by Walter Benjamin. I will argue that the messianic gesture is violent and “pathetic.” By this I mean that the modernist messianic idea is steeped in violent pathos and in the drawing close to the very powers of destruction and death that threaten the world and before which the messianic idea, itself a theory of catastrophe, remains overwhelmed. Having once established Benjamin’s messianic gesturalism in the avant-garde of his time, especially in the macho shock aesthetics of Surrealism and also Expressionism, I turn to the feminist Mierle Laderman Ukeles, a postwar artist working under the rubrics of

Conceptualism and Performance Art. I look especially to her *Maintenance Art Manifesto 1969!*. Against the avant-garde of radical rupture and death, maintenance art represents an alternative to the messianic idea. As a paradigm for contemporary Jewish philosophy and thought, maintenance art recommends itself as practice enmeshed in the kinds of quotidian work associated with women, working people, and ritual that sustains life.

**Zachary Braiterman** is Professor in the Department of Religion at Syracuse



University. He is the author *The Shape of Revelation: Aesthetics and Modern Jewish Thought* (Stanford University Press, 2007), *(God) After Auschwitz: Tradition and Change in Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought* (Princeton University Press 1998), and is co-editor of *The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy: The Modern Era* (Cambridge UP, 2012). He is currently at work finishing a new project, *In the*

*Image: Virtual Jewish Thought and Philosophical Talmud.*

**Cedric Cohen Skalli**, University of Haifa

### **The Crisis of 1930s and the dialogical Rediscovery of Jewish political Thought**

After having published *Die Religionskritik Spinozas* in Berlin in 1930, Leo Strauss left Germany for Paris in 1932. There he soon found himself definitively exiled from Germany, and forced to search both for a land of refuge and for a new philosophical orientation. During his short stay in Paris (1932-1934), Strauss interacted with a series of intellectual émigrés such as Alexandre Koyré, Alexandre Kojève, Shlomo Pines, and Paul Kraus. In Paris,

Strauss perfected also his knowledge in Jewish, Islamic and Christian medieval philosophy. For this purpose, he entered in contact with two leading French scholars: Etienne Gilson (1884-1978), who at that time, was renewing entirely the study of Christian medieval philosophy, and Louis Massignon (1883-1963), who was doing the same for the Islamic philosophical and mystical studies. During these years and later during his subsequent stay in London (1935-1937), Strauss developed the ideas expressed in *Philosophie und Gesetz* (1935) concerning the necessity of a new appreciation of the medieval political and philosophical model developed by the great Arabic and Jewish philosophers. This model should even be elevated to the rank of a counter-model in view of the failure of the *Aufklärung* and Jewish emancipation. Different philosophical endeavors to meet the challenge posed by the collapse of the *Aufklärung* were developed in the same years in Paris by Emmanuel Levinas and Hannah Arendt. In this paper, I intend to shed new light on the dialogical process which brought Leo Strauss and his intellectual entourage to reconsider the Islamic-Arabic medieval contribution to political philosophy, and to a possible answer to the rise of totalitarian ideologies and terror.

**Cedric Cohen Skalli** teaches early modern and modern Jewish Philosophy at



the University of Haifa. He is the 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 (14<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> century), and the shift from early modern to modern thought (18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century).

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He published several books and many articles on diverse aspects of Jewish thought and literature in the Renaissance as well as in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century German speaking world and diasporas. His intellectual biography of Isaac Abravanel was published in the prestigious “the great men of the Jewish people” series of the Zalman Shazar Center and recently translated and augmented for *The Tauber Institute Series For Study of European Jewry* (Brandeis University Press). He is also translator of many works of Freud, Benjamin, Scholem, Idel and Abravanel.

**Karen Feldman**, University of California, Berkeley

**On the Crisis of Jewish Law: Auerbach, Luther and Realism**

Erich Auerbach’s monumental work *Mimesis*, famously written after he fled National Socialist Germany for Istanbul, contains his well-known account of biblical realism in the story of the Akedah. Literary critics have frequently taken Auerbach’s understanding of the Hebrew Bible and figuration to reflect a Protestant approach, in line with a long tradition of typological reading. This paper will argue that the heretic Martin Luther’s brief reflection on realistic style in his “Preface to the Old Testament” reflects a surprising Jewish antecedent of Auerbach’s understanding of biblical “realism.” To be sure, Luther’s anti-Semitism is virulent and patent. Nonetheless Luther’s “Prefaces to the Old Testament” are full of praise for Moses, characterizing him as the perfect lawgiver in maximizing the conditions for producing crisis among Jewish believers. In Luther’s interpretation, the point of Jewish law is to evoke a crisis, a crisis regarding the inability to obey the laws of faith and love and the detailed laws of ritual practice. The crisis and failure of the Israelites to fully accept and follow the law constitutes, for Luther, the paradoxical proof of its success, insofar as it supposedly, in Luther’s view,

should cause Jews to convert to Christianity *en masse*. This paper will examine Luther's praise for the "realism" of Jewish scriptural style as a surprising literary and aesthetic assessment of Hebrew Scripture that dovetails with Luther's theological glorification of Moses as the perfect lawgiver.

**Karen S. Feldman** is professor and chair of the Department of German, UC



Berkeley. Her research occupies the intersection of philosophy and literary theory, reflecting a philosophical and literary-critical approach to classic texts of the German literary and philosophical canon, with a strong emphasis in Critical Theory. She is author of *Arts of Connection: Poetry, History, Epochality* (De Gruyter, 2019) and *Binding Words: Conscience and Rhetoric in Hobbes, Hegel, and Heidegger* (Northwestern UP, 2007); and co-editor of *Violent Origins: Freud, Moses, Religion* (Fordham UP, 2018), and of *Continental Philosophy: An Anthology* (Blackwell 1998).

**Ilit Ferber**, Tel Aviv University

### **Améry and Jankélévitch on the Crisis of Jewish Identity**

In my talk I will bring together two texts which center on the crisis and internal paradoxes inherent to Jewish identity. The first is Jean Améry's "The Necessity and Impossibility of Being a Jew" and the second, Vladimir Jankélévitch's "Judaism as an 'Internal Problem'". Both texts (written around the same time) deal with the paradoxical nature of Jewish identity, and raise crucial questions that concern the unstable yet strangely strong feeling of identity that is never singular and always liminal. I will present the two texts

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and delve into the complexity of the problem at hand, and follow by saying a few words about what I take to be an important relationship between the two thinkers.

**Ilit Ferber** is Associate Professor of philosophy at Tel-Aviv University. Her



research focuses on the philosophy of emotions, especially melancholy, suffering and pain, from the perspective of language. She has published articles on Benjamin, Heidegger, Leibniz, Scholem, Herder, Freud, Améry and others. She has co-edited a book on the role of moods in philosophy, two books in English and Hebrew, on lament in Gershom Scholem's thought and a book on the grammar of the cry (in

Spanish). Ferber also published two monographs: *Philosophy and Melancholy: Benjamin's Early Reflections on Theater and Language* (Stanford University Press in 2013) and *Language Pangs: On Pain and the Origin of Language* (Oxford University Press, 2019). She is now working on the role of the five senses in Benjamin's "Berlin Childhood" and on Jean Améry's philosophy of temporality.

**Annabel Herzog**, University of Haifa

### **Messianic Hospitality in Levinas and Derrida**

Derrida's work on hospitality and his reading of Levinas's philosophy as a treatise of hospitality have engendered a vast scholarship that turned hospitality into as a major concept of ethical and political philosophy, political theory, international law and international relations. My question in this paper will be a critical one: can Levinas's and Derrida's conceptions of

hospitality be of any help in real-life situations of precariousness, homelessness, statelessness, and voluntary or forced migrations? Is Derrida's aporetic and Levinas's messianic hospitality able to account for the crises of our time?

**Annabel Herzog** is Professor of Political Theory at the School of Political



Science at the University of Haifa, Israel, where she is Director of the Cultural Studies M.A. Program. Her research focuses on the political aspects of 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Jewish philosophy. Her last book, *Levinas's Politics: Justice, Mercy, Universality* won the 2021 Jordan Schnitzer Award in Philosophy and Jewish Thought.

**Hagi Kenaan**, Tel Aviv University

### **The Crisis of the Book: Levinas and Derrida on the Future of Language**

The paper examines the opposing views of Levinas and Derrida on the place and future of the book in Western civilization which both thinkers tie to a moment of crisis (of meaning and identity) that must be reckoned with. For Derrida, "this crisis is also a symptom" since "this death of the book undoubtedly announces... the death of speech... and a new mutation in the history of writing." For him, "The End of the Book ...[is] the Beginning of Writing," a new phase in "history as writing" that should not be evaluated according to "past rhythms" but with an eye to the radical openness of the future. In Levinas, the book and its crisis figure in a different manner that can be taken as a response to Derrida. "In the great fear of bookishness," he writes, "one underestimates the ontological reference of the human to the

book.” In the present, one all too easily forgets the deep sense in which the book “is a *modality* of our being,” a modality that needs the future to become fully articulated.

My paper reconstructs this virtual debate between the two thinkers and focuses on how their understanding of a present crisis and a future promise, appears today, half a century later, within the horizons of an age in which the experience of language is inseparable from that of digital technology.

**Hagi Kenaan** is a professor of philosophy and the Chair of the Philosophy



Department at Tel Aviv University. He specializes in twentieth century continental philosophy – phenomenology and post-phenomenology, philosophy of existence, hermeneutics and deconstruction – with particular attention to aesthetics and the philosophy of art. Kenaan is the author of *The Present Personal: Philosophy and the Hidden Face of Language* (Columbia University Press, 2005); *The Ethics of Visuality: Levinas and the Contemporary Gaze* (Tauris 2013); and most recently of *Photography and Its Shadow* (Stanford University Press, 2020).

**Vivian Liska**, University of Antwerp, and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem

### **Crisis, Decision and Deferral: German-Jewish Thinkers vs. Carl Schmitt**

Early 20th century German-Jewish literature and thought can be considered as a variegated response to the cultural, religious and political crisis of modernity often described as a rupture of tradition without any firm new ground in sight. A central feature of the reflections about this state of in-

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betweenness by authors and thinkers such as Franz Kafka, Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem involve a tension between a temporality of suddenness and immediacy on the one hand, and on the other, an emphasis on expanding time in waiting, deferral and postponement. In what follows I will propose to consider this tension against the background of a notorious approach to situations of crisis: Carl Schmitt's decisionism.

**Vivian Liska** is Professor of German literature and Director of the Institute



of Jewish Studies at the University of Antwerp, Belgium. She is also Distinguished Visiting Professor in the Faculty of the Humanities at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Prof. Liska has published extensively on literary theory, German modernism, and German-Jewish authors and thinkers. She is the (co-) editor of numerous books, among them the two-volume ICLA publication *Modernism*, which was awarded the Prize of the

Modernist Studies Association in 2008; *Contemporary Jewish Writing in Europe: A Guide* (with Thomas Nolden; 2007); *Theodor Herzl between Europe and Zion* (with Mark Gelber; 2007); *What does the Veil Know?* (with Eva Meyer; 2009); *The German-Jewish Experience Revisited* (with Steven Aschheim; 2015); *Kafka and Universalism* (with Arthur Cools; 2016); *Sartre, Jews, and the Other* (with Manuela Consonni; 2020) and *The Idea of Europe* (with Vladimir Biti and Joep Leersen; 2021) Prof. Liska is the editor of the book series "Perspectives on Jewish Texts and Contexts" (De Gruyter, Berlin), co-editor of the *Yearbook of the Society for European-Jewish Literature*, and *Arcadia. International Journal of Literary Studies*. Her book publications as author include *Die Nacht der Hymnen* (On Paul Celan's early poetry), *Die*

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*Dichterin und das schelmische Erhabene* (On Else Lasker-Schüler); *‘Die Moderne – ein Weib’* (On turn of the century women novelists); *Giorgio Agambens leerer Messianismus* (2008); *When Kafka Says We. Uncommon Communities in German-Jewish Literature* (Indiana University Press, 2009); *Fremde Gemeinschaft. Deutsch-jüdische Literatur der Moderne* (2011), and *German-Jewish Thought and its Afterlife. A Tenuous Legacy* (Indiana University Press 2017).

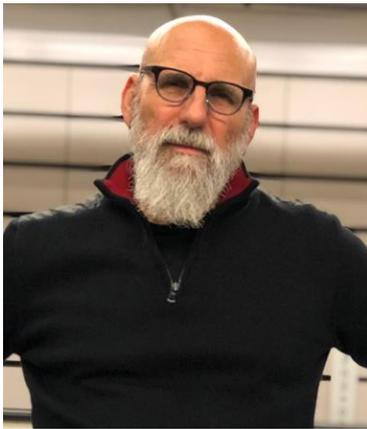
**Shaul Magid**, Dartmouth College

### **Is Heresy a Crisis or Progress?**

Scholars of Judaica in the Humanities are arguably engaged in two distinct but overlapping programs: the interpretation of a textual tradition, and the production of knowledge. The first can take many forms that includes the critical assessment of past claims and the contextual analysis of received traditions. This can sometimes produce apologetic readings, that is, readings that confirm the claims the texts make about themselves or the norms they produce, and critical readings that challenge and undermine those claims. Crisis arguably ensues when that critique challenges norms born from those claims. The production of knowledge is a different matter, one dedicated to producing knowledge from texts as opposed to simply describing and interpreting them. Heresy is often born from a combination of critical reading and the production of knowledge from that reading. Does knowledge produced from a critical reading of texts also produce heresy? This talk will explore the question of crisis and heresy as products of the scholarly enterprise

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**Shaul Magid** is Professor of Jewish Studies at Dartmouth College and Kogod



Senior Research Fellow at the Shalom Hartman Institute of North America. Author of many books and essays, his latest books are *The Bible, the Talmud and the New Testament: Elijah Zvi Soloveitchik's Commentary to the Gospel* (UPenn, 2019), and *Piety and Rebellion: Essay in Hasidism* (Academic Studies Press, 2019). His most recent book is *Meir Kahane: The Public Life and Political Thought of an American*

*Jewish Radical* published with Princeton University Press in 2021. He is presently working on the political theology of Joel Teitelbaum of Satmar.

**Omer Michaelis**, Tel Aviv University

**“Crisis and the Structure of Tradition in Medieval Jewish philosophy”**

Moses Maimonides (d. 1204) fashioned his *Guide of the Perplexed* as a work dedicated to a rectification of a severe crisis in the realm of Jewish esotericism, that is, as a work of recovery of what he considered to be a long-lost Jewish esoteric tradition. This act of ‘recovery’ was based on two premises: the first is that it is in the powers of an outstanding individual – or more precisely, in his own individual powers – to restore (at least parts of) a body of knowledge containing the lost esoteric teachings; the second is that such an individual must disseminate these teachings in writing, despite a clear prohibition, as part of their revival and in order to prevent another case of their falling victim to forgetfulness. In this talk, I will briefly present Maimonides’ outlook, before turning to the far-reaching consequences that the two Maimonidean premises had on the genre of Jewish esotericism in both Spain and Provence in the thirteen century. I will argue that these premises

have shaped the consciousness of authors for generations, instigating a long-term process of multifaceted writings in the realm of the *Secrets of the Torah*. The establishment of the notion of an acute crisis in the realm of Jewish esotericism, that was brought about by the very dissemination of the *Guide of the Perplexed* in the Iberian Peninsula and beyond, generated a cultural movement that instilled the paradoxical norm of violating the prohibition on writing the secret teachings. Authors such as Samuel ibn Tibbon (d. 1232) , Isaac Ibn Latīf (d. 1280) and Abraham Abulafia (d. 1291) – some of whose arguments will be examined in this talk – employed the Maimonidean premises to construct their own works, in which they claimed to be revealing the esoteric teachings of Judaism, however different these teachings proved to be in comparison to those of the *Guide*.

**Omer Michaelis** is a Senior Lecturer at Tel Aviv University's department of



Jewish Philosophy and Talmud. Specializing in medieval Jewish thought and philosophy in the Islamicate world, he focuses on the dynamics of production, transmission, and integration of knowledge in medieval Judaism, and its intersection with parallel processes in the Islamic culture. He is the author of the forthcoming *Crisis Discourse and the Dynamics of Tradition in Maimonides' Oeuvre* (Hebrew; Magnes, 2022)

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**Ronny Miron, Bar Ilan University**

**Religion, Change and Continuity in History - The Case Study of Modern Jewish History**

It is argued that secularization creates a fundamental change, to the point of break, in the history of culture, or alternatively, starts a new history. This statement assumes a relation between religion and historical reality. Thus, in a reality in which religion possesses weight and significance for people, the historical process is characterized by continuity, but this is broken in a reality of secularization. The paper explores two models. The break model is based on a diachronic observation, which examines present reality in light of past events. Accordingly, the reality of secularization is perceived as expressing a break and detachment from the collective memory, whose roots are planted in religion and tradition. The Continuity model is based on a synchronous observation focused on the present-day reality of life. It holds that despite the great changes in the status of religion, in a reality of secularization there occur processes of translation, adoption, and adaptation of contents and values from the tradition to the present-day reality. Thus, historical continuity is enabled. Finally, a third way is indicated out of the analysis of the hermeneutical possibilities and the deficiencies of both models.

**Ronny Miron** is Professor of Philosophy at Bar Ilan University, Israel. Her research is focused on post-Kantian Idealism, Existentialism, Phenomenology, and Hermeneutics, as well as current Jewish thought. She employs an interdisciplinary perspective combining the aforementioned traditions. She is the author of *Karl Jaspers: From Selfhood to Being* (Brill, 2012), *The Desire for Metaphysics: Selected Papers on Karl Jaspers* (2014), *The Angel of Jewish History: The Image of the Jewish Past in the Twentieth Century* (Academic Studies Press, 2014), *Husserl and Other Phenomenologists* (edited book with Routledge, 2018) and *Hedwig Conrad-Martius, The Phenomenological Gateway to Reality* (Springer, 2021).



**Ori Rotlevy**, Tel Aviv University

### **The crisis of Democracy and the Medium of Tradition: Habermas and Benjamin**

Jürgen Habermas' turn to dialogue with the Judeo-Christian tradition in response to the crisis of western democracies surprised many of his readers. The critical theorists, who willingly inherited the antagonistic relations between critique and tradition from the Enlightenment, implicitly opened up the question of these relations in the last two decades for the sake of critique of contemporary society. Significantly, he designates Walter Benjamin in this context as a model for translating religious contents to a secular language in a manner that develops an awareness of what is missing in our societies. Yet, I argue that Habermas misses the more radical potential of rethinking the relation between critique and tradition through Benjamin:

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Benjamin, both in his correspondence with Scholem on the Talmud and on Kant and in his work on the *Arcades Project*, suggests tradition as a transformative medium, rather than as a source of content, and it is this character that turns it to a critical tool in modernity.

**Ori Rotlevy** teaches at Tel Aviv University and at Reichman University. He is



a research fellow in the Minerva Humanities Center at Tel Aviv, where he co-directs the research group "Tradition: Canon, Transmission and Critique". Rotlevy is a scholar of Continental philosophy specializing in ethics, political philosophy and critical theory. He received his PhD from the Philosophy Department at Tel Aviv on a dissertation concerning the foundations of critical philosophy by examining the

figures of orientation and erring in thought in Kant and Walter Benjamin. He was a postdoctoral fellow at FU-Berlin, the Hebrew University and Tel Aviv University, and published articles in venues such as *Continental Philosophy Review* and *New German Critique*. His research in the last years continues to dwell on critical philosophy, especially in the context of contemporary critical theory, and concerns the problem of freedom in political-collective contexts such as resistance and revolution on the one hand, and religious, cultural and philosophical traditions on the other hand. The book he is currently writing is titled "Tradition and Critique: Habermas, Mahmood and Benjamin".

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**Orr Scharf**, University of Haifa

### **Catastrophe or Salvation? Zionist Intellectuals' Responses to 1948**

In his Foreword to *Two Types of Faith*, Martin Buber remarks that the writing of the book had helped him through the vicissitudes of Israel's War of Independence, "the most difficult of the three [wars]." My paper will propose to use Buber's comparison between this conflict and the two world wars as an opportunity to reflect on Jews' armed campaign for sovereignty as an historical moment possessing not only salvific, but also catastrophic potential. My discussion will explore responses to "1948" by Zionist intellectuals who saw an apocalypse where their counterparts saw redemption. Alongside Buber, the paper will discuss responses by Hugo Bergman and Gershom Scholem. Focusing on the years leading up to, and immediately following the founding of Israel, I will reconstruct their politico-theological positions in relation to the War and its aftermath. The paper will argue that despite their differences – political as well as theological – as self-defined as Zionists all three intellectuals experienced a similar conflict with political Zionism under David Ben-Gurion's leadership. It will be argued that this conflict, exacerbated by the threat to their personal well-being as Jerusalemites (partially in absentio in Bergman's case), underscored the tension between the violent predicament of the Yishuv and their own moral sensibilities as Jewish scholars and thinkers.

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**Orr Scharf** is faculty at the Cultural Studies M.A. Program, and research



fellow at the Bucerius Institute for Research on Contemporary German History and Society, at the University of Haifa. He is author of *Thinking in Translation: Scripture and Redemption in the Thought of Franz Rosenzweig* (De Gruyter, 2019), and editor of volume 5 in the critical edition of Martin Buber's works, *Vorlesungen über Judentum und Christentum* (Gütersloh, 2017), and the essay anthology *Hebrew Literature and its Cultural Impact* (Schocken, 2021).

**Galili Shahar**, Tel Aviv University

**Galili Shahar** is professor of comparative literature and German studies and



the head of the School of Cultural Studies at Tel Aviv University. His work is dedicated to research and teaching of German, Jewish and Hebrew literatures and classical Persian literature. His recent publications include: *Bodies and Names* (2016), *The Stone and the Word* (2020), and *Der Stern, ein Narr, das Gebet* (2021), and among his many edited volumes, the following appeared in 2020: *Made in*

*Germany: Technologie, Geschichte und Literatur in Deutschland*; *Disseminating Jewish Literatures: Knowledge, Research, Curricula*; and *Paul Celan: Prose from his Nachlass*.

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**Gilad Sharvit**, Towson University, Maryland

**“Arendt on the Modern Individual: The Pariah, the Parvenu, and the Crisis of Jewish Assimilation”.**

This presentation addresses Arendt’s model of the Jewish pariah as signaling her early attempts to rethink the modern individual. The point of entry to the discussion is Arendt’s critique of Jewish assimilation, which she perceives in terms of crisis. The pariah is supposedly a solution to this crisis. Many, to note, even found Arendt to personify this ideal. My claim is that the figure of the pariah, which she developed in response to Heidegger’s *Mitsein*, is however problematic to Arendt’s developing political taste. I further argue that her short remarks on the conscious pariah indicate a much more nuanced conceptualization of modern individuality.

**Gilad Sharvit** is an assistant professor in the Department of Philosophy and



Religious Studies at Towson University. A scholar of modern Jewish thought, Sharvit's interests lie in Jewish philosophy, German and continental philosophy, psychoanalysis, German-Jewish literature and culture, and critical theory. Sharvit is the author of *Dynamic Repetition: History and Messianism in Modern Jewish Thought* (Brandeis UP, 2022) and *Therapeutics and Salvation: Freud and Schelling on Freedom* (Magnes, 2021), and co-editor and contributing author of the volumes *Canonization and Alterity: Heresy in Jewish History, Thought, and Literature* (De Gruyter, 2020) and *Freud and Monotheism: The Violent Origins of Religion* (Fordham UP, 2018). His current book project deals with heresy as a political-theological concept.

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**Ghilad H. Shenhav**, University of Potsdam

**The “Messianic Today” and the Moment of Crisis: Between the Talmud and Derrida**

This paper wishes to offer a new perspective on the ties between Jewish messianism and the concept of crisis by examining the modern reception of the Talmudic tale about the messiah at the gates of Rome (Sanhedrin 98.a). In tractate “Sanhedrin,” rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi meets the messiah, asks about the date of his arrival, and the redeemer surprisingly answers, “Today.” However, as redemption fails to arrive, ben Levi complains to the prophet Elijah that the messiah is a liar. At this point, Elijah deciphers the messianic message and explains the true meaning of the redeemer’s words “Today, if you will listen to my voice.” In my paper I will argue that the tale provoked the imagination of modern Jewish intellectuals because it captures the drama of the messianic experience and crisis; a state of affairs in which a radical event might take place at any moment, but the way of hastening or delaying it remains an enigma.

My paper will focus on three interpretations of the tale by Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, and Jacques Derrida. Beginning with Buber, I will show how he changes the content of the tale and transforms it into an urgent call for Jewish communal and political action. Afterward, I will argue that Rosenzweig offers a counter reading to Buber’s interpretation, and emphasizes the messianic urgency and stakes involved in following the Jewish commandments and maintaining the Jewish communal life in the diaspora. I will conclude with Derrida’s reading of the tale, which on the one hand, crystalizes from the Talmudic text a sense of urgency in the wake of the unexpected event, but on the other hand, aspires to present the final messianic event at any cost.

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**Ghilad H. Shenhav** is postdoctoral fellow at the department of religious



studies at the University of Potsdam. He has recently completed his doctoral studies at the department of cultural studies at Tel-Aviv University and in the theology department at the Goethe University Frankfurt am Main. Ghilad's dissertation studies Gershom Scholem's early writings on language and Scriptures and develops through them a new methodological approach for reading texts in the field of modern German-Jewish thought. The approach puts a spotlight on the relations between modernity and tradition and on the categories of gender and post-colonialism. Ghilad is currently working on the adaptation of his dissertation into a book manuscript and develops his second project on the reception of Talmudic-messianic tales in the literature and philosophy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**Daniel H. Weiss**, University of Cambridge

**Talking with heretics and de-catastrophizing the moment of crisis: tracing a theme in classical rabbinic literature and Moses Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem***

This talk aims to trace a stream in Jewish thought that seeks to oppose the 'condemning of heretics', with particular focus on relevant passages from the Babylonian Talmud, as well as from Moses Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem*. Typically, if something is judged as 'heresy', this usually means that it is treated as dangerous, and is simply condemned rather than being discussed or debated. By contrast, I will trace an attitude that focuses on treating a wider range of views as worthy of discussion and examination, even when one doesn't agree with them. This tendency in Jewish thought (which may

have distinctively different features from treatments of heresy in dominant Christian understandings) can provide an alternative conceptual framework for engaging with debate and disagreement in the present context, in which one often finds tendencies among various groups to functionally treat their opponent's position as 'secular heresy', such that even discussion and debate is treated as dangerous and thus as something to be unilaterally rejected. Such attitudes can lead to polarization and breakdown of discourse, whereas an alternative stance to 'heresy' (whether 'secular' or 'religious') may provide space for a more fruitful orientation to disagreement.

**Daniel H. Weiss** is Polonsky-Coexist Senior Lecturer in Jewish Studies at the



Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge, UK. He is the author of *Paradox and the Prophets: Hermann Cohen and the Indirect Communication of Religion* (Oxford University Press, 2012) and co-editor of *Tsimtsum and Modernity: Lurianic Heritage in Modern Philosophy and Theology* (De Gruyter, 2020) and of *Scripture and Violence* (Routledge, 2020). He is actively involved in the Cambridge Inter-Faith Programme and in Scriptural Reasoning.

**Yotam Yzraely**, Tel Aviv University

### **Prophetic Politics: From Phenomenology to Theology**

In recent years, academic political theory has been revisiting the concept of the prophetic, a culturally and historically charged typos of political and humanistic radicalism, which from a sociological perspective tends to take the stage in times of crisis. Alluding to the Biblical prophets of Judaea, the modern employment of the term stresses – and not always consciously – the

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anarchic, hence heretical, disposition towards presiding social or political adulterated structures while envisaging alternatives, often labeled from the prophetic point of view as “a return” to the “true”, “original”, “unadulterated” ones – e.g. the Sinai Covenant, Natural Law, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, etc. Whether employed innocently, and somewhat romantically, by charismatic personas and their followings (a hallmark of mid 18<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> century thought), or whether employed critically by scholars of past and present – it seems that the dominating features of the modern concept of the prophetic are almost always phenomenological, i.e. charisma, anti-institutional sentiment, religious rhetoric, zealousness and asceticism, to name but a few.

While accepting the contribution of such features in constructing the idea of the prophetic, and moreover, being admittedly empathetic towards them, I argue in this paper that the phenomenological features above do not – and must not – suffice in constructing the current concept of prophetic politics. Rather, it is solely the theological aspect – if indeed it is present – that renders this type of political critique prophetic. This argument is threefold, and is derivative from a hermeneutic, a historical and my personal political understanding of the current crisis of liberal thought. If time allows, I hope to demonstrate this argument by reading anew some segments from A.D. Gordon’s writings.

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**Yotam Yzraely** is a PhD student at The Chaim Rosenberg School of Jewish



Studies and Archeology, Tel Aviv University. His dissertation topic, which he is writing under the supervision of Prof. Menachem Lorberboim, is “Prophetic Politics: Political Theology in Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Jewish Thought and the Question of the Legitimacy of the State – Gustav Landauer, Martin Buber, A.D. Gordon.”

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## The Bucerius Institute for Research of Contemporary German History and Society

The Bucerius Institute at the University of Haifa promotes research on contemporary history and on the social, cultural and political reality of Germany. It addresses different disciplinary backgrounds and methodologies, historical periods and immediate geographical contexts, to bring to the fore aspects of modern German and Jewish history, and to reveal the complexity of contemporary German history. The Bucerius Institute was established in 2001 by the ZEIT-Stiftung Ebelin und Gerd Bucerius and its chairman Prof. Dres. H.c. Manfred Lahnstein. Its basic idea is to foster greater familiarity and understanding of modern Germany among the academic community as well as among the Israeli public, and create a bridge between Germany and Israel in particular.

The Bucerius Institute realizes its perceptions on three levels:

### 1. Research:

The Bucerius Institute conducts through its academic staff own researches in a broad range of topics within the fields of its interests such as German and Jewish History, Philosophy, Sociology, Science, Photography, Racism, Immigration, German-Israeli relations and more. The institute also supports its researchers with the means of financial aid, helping them with expenses that may arise in the publishing process.

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## 2. Academic Events:

The Bucerius Institute organizes various public activities in order to facilitate direct encounters between Academia and the broader public. These events include the following:

- Inviting international guest lecturers and visiting research scholars to give lectures and seminars under the institute's auspices
- Conducting academic workshops, seminars, conferences and organizing special events such as film festivals or musical and theater performances
- Hosting international delegations

## 3. Scholarships and Academic Exchange:

The Bucerius Institute facilitates academic exchange between Germany, Europe, US and Israel at different levels: M.A., Ph.D, Post-doc.

- It offers financial support to students of the University of Haifa whose thesis or dissertation addresses the research interests of the Institute.
- Each year, the Institute offers financial support (The Manfred Lahnstein Short Term Fellowships) to foreign and Israeli young researchers who are in the process of writing an article in the Institute's fields of interest.