

# INTERSECTIONS

*between*

**PHILOSOPHY**

*and*

**JEWISH THOUGHT**

**BERLIN, MARCH 7-9, 2022**  
**Freie Universität Berlin**

## Program



Bundesministerium  
für Bildung  
und Forschung



SELMA STERN ZENTRUM  
FÜR JÜDISCHE STUDIEN  
BERLIN-BRANDENBURG

Freie Universität  Berlin

*The relationship between philosophy and Jewish thought has often been a matter of lively discussion. But despite its long tradition and the variety of positions that have been taken in it, the debate is far from being closed. On the contrary, it is alive and well, and keeps posing challenges that this conference aims to address.*

*The central topic of the conference is broken down into three subtopics, each examined in a dedicated section.*

*The first - "Philosophy AND Jewish Thought" - is to lay the foundation for further reflections, as it is concerned with the basic question of how two such different ways of thinking as the philosophical and the Jewish can relate to each other.*

*Through the analysis of some exemplary cases, the second section - "Philosophy IN Jewish Thought" - aims to give insights about the contribution of philosophical reasoning to the development of modern Jewish thought.*

*Finally, the third section - "Jewish Thought IN Philosophy" - is conceived of as complementary to the second, dealing with reception and role of Jewish conceptions in modern philosophy.*

**MARCH 7, 2022**

*at 18:00*

Opening Lecture

–

**Intersections**

between Philosophy and Jewish  
Thought

–

*Giuseppe VELTRI*

**MARCH 8, 2022**

**PHILOSOPHY  
AND  
JEWISH THOUGHT**

09:00 - 09:45

**The Critique of Pure Jewish Reason.  
Gershom Scholem's Implicit Return to an Enlightened Discourse of Jewish Thought**  
*Christoph Schmidt*

Taking the program of the symposium as a point of departure, I want to analyze the relationship between philosophy and Jewish thought in its two directions: Philosophy in Jewish thought (1) and Jewish thought in philosophy (2) as an opportunity to reconstruct Gershom Scholem's implicit conception of an alternative Science of Judaism based on Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms.

Against his earlier explicit critique of the enlightened fundament of the sciences (Kant), which turned to radical post-Nietzschean life philosophy (Georg Simmel, Henry Bergson) and translated this philosophy into a kabbalist tune (with a national Zionist apology), his later investigations into Jewish mysticism can be read as a return to Neo-Kantian methodology proposed by Ernst Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms. Scholem's "Kabbala of symbolic forms" offers indeed a revolutionary option for rereading the Jewish tradition as a pluralism of responses to the event of Sinai from the perspective of the Sabbatian crisis.

09:45 - 10:30

**Der Geschichtsbegriff: „eine Schöpfung des Prophetismus“?**  
*Myriam Bienenstock*

Das Geschichtsdenken ist seit dem 19. Jahrhundert einer der größten Ruhmestitel der deutschen Forschung. Es hat auch das moderne jüdische Denken tief geprägt, obwohl die Distanz zwischen dem ursprünglich griechischen Begriff der Historie (*historein*) und dem jüdisch-biblischen, prophetischen Glauben von jeher als kaum überbrückbar erscheint. Jüdische Historiker, auch Philosophen, haben aber doch versucht, die Kluft zu überbrücken. Ziel dieses Vortrags ist es, die Strategie einiger ihrer Versuche zu entdecken, um zu bestimmen, ob und inwiefern sie erfolgreich gewesen sind, oder sein könnten.

**MARCH 8, 2022**

**PHILOSOPHY  
AND  
JEWISH THOUGHT**

11:00 - 11:45

**Jewish Thought and the Everyday: Franz Rosenzweig's Later Philosophy**

*Benjamin Pollock*

In 1921, Rosenzweig published *The Star of Redemption*, a "system of philosophy" that seeks to grasp the All of what is in its identity and difference. But in the very year the *Star* appeared, Rosenzweig also composed a very different kind of work: a short book he entitled *The Little Book of Healthy and Sick Human Understanding*. The *Little Book* presents the traditional philosophical quest for essences as symptomatic of a sickness of the understanding which can lead to paralysis, and it presents everyday language both as an antidote to philosophical sickness and as the only context in which philosophical questions find their resolutions. Despite Rosenzweig's wish to present the *Little Book* as a dumbed-down introduction to the ideas of the *Star*, I will argue that it instead marks the beginning of the development of a new philosophical position, which Rosenzweig takes to be situated within everyday life, and which he identifies as quintessentially Jewish thought. While first developed in the *Little book*, this new position - Rosenzweig's "later philosophy" - finds expression in Rosenzweig's conceptualization of adult education at the Lehrhaus as well as in the translation and interpretation of Scripture which he undertook with Martin Buber.

11:45 - 12:30

**Truth in Judaism**

*Antonios Kalatzis*

The paper aspires to deliver a corrective reading of the relationship between Judaism and Philosophy according to Rosenzweig. While it is widely assumed that Rosenzweig in his *Star of Redemption* is depicting this relationship in a dichotomous way, the paper will argue that the true dichotomy consists between Judaism (, Christianity) and Truth, that has to be understood as the complete, redemptive agreement between Philosophy and Theology. This insight, the paper further claims, unearths the proper place of Judaism within Rosenzweig's theory of Truth and offers an original understanding of both. In order to accomplish this, the paper will proceed in four distinctive steps/parts. In the first part it will juxtapose Rosenzweig's understanding of Philosophy and of Truth. The second part will further elaborate on Rosenzweig's concept of Truth, while the third part will investigate the systematic function of Judaism in the light of Rosenzweig's theory of Truth. The fourth and final part will assess Rosenzweig's endeavor and reflect on its implications for today.

**MARCH 8, 2022**

**PHILOSOPHY  
IN  
JEWISH THOUGHT**

14:30 - 15:15

**Method in Spinoza and Maimonides**

*Michael Zank*

Each one of the philosophers named in the title has proved sufficiently vexing to historians of philosophy that reading them together often yields little more than superficial observations. To start the juxtaposition afresh, I will investigate the role of method in Spinoza and ask whether the *Guide* offers at least an implicit gesture toward method, to allow for a more thorough investigation of the relationship between Judaism and philosophy in these two seminal thinkers.

15:15 - 16:00

**Martin Buber's Conception of Idolatry**

*Beniamino Fortis*

In a brief passage from the third part of *Ich und Du*, Buber expounds his conception of idolatry as an objectifying disposition that contradicts the relational nature of an authentic religious act. I will show that the main categories of Buber's dialogical thought - i.e., the *Grundworte* 'ich-du' and 'ich-es' - can provide the theoretical coordinates for understanding the antithesis between authentic religion and idolatry. In this sense, Buber's reflections represent a perfect example of how philosophical categories can be employed in dealing with a problem that is typical of Jewish thought.

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**PHILOSOPHY  
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16:30 - 17:15

**The Tail or the String of the Kite? Gadamer, Schwarzschild, and Jewish Hermeneutics**

*Massimo Giuliani*

This contribution will ponder and reevaluate Steven Schwarzschild's critique of Hans-Georg Gadamer's "rehabilitation of authority and tradition" as found in his *Truth and Method* (1960). Such concepts – tradition and authority – are also pillars of the complex architecture of Jewish hermeneutics, understood as *shalsholet ha-qabbalah*, that claims a divine origin (*Torah min ha-shanmaim*). But, as Gadamer is rehabilitating them in polemics with the idea of *raison critique* inherited from the Enlightenment, on the contrary Schwarzschild is defending such concepts – and Jewish hermeneutics as well – in a positive dialectics with that *raison* and the modern consciousness of its limits, almost in a symbiosis with such a *raison*, according to the long history of Jewish philosophy from the Middle Age (Rambam) until modern time (Mendelssohn and Hermann Cohen). At stake, then, is the intrinsic confrontation with Heidegger's thought and his an-ethical implications, which were denounced and opposed by Sartre's (latest) existentialism and Levinas' phenomenology.

17:15 - 18:00

**The Potential for a Deconstructivist Approach to Liturgy in Modern Jewish Philosophy**

*Miriam Feldmann Kaye*

This paper will set forth the principles of postmodern philosophy and the ways in which they stimulate new philosophical discourse in Jewish thought today. The paper will examine one particular case in point – that of philosophical understandings of sacred texts. Hermeneutical responses to phenomenology of the early twentieth century – according to Emmanuel Levinas – will be employed to analyse the role of sacred texts. Postmodern theory, in particular the deconstructionist approach of Jacques Derrida, was accompanied by his proposal of dissemination. Dissemination, will be viewed as a tool by which the approaches of Levinas might be conceived of as offering new approaches to revelation according to Jewish tradition. This is manifested in original interpretations of the role of liturgy, and prayer, as fulfilling the notion of the "life of the text". Ultimately, entertaining the Derridean shift from mimesis to poesis, makes new demands on the Jewish idea of revelation to define itself anew. Questions will be posed as to, how far the Derridean theory of dissemination should or can be entertained in Jewish theology. And if this approach is amalgamated in certain ways, then what does this new approach to revelation mean for Jewish consciousness and thinking today.

**MARCH 9, 2022**

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09:00 - 09:45

**Wiping Away the Tears of Esau: Adorno's Reconciliation with Nature**

*Agata Bielik-Robson*

In the recent debates on ecology, Adorno's name resurfaces very rarely, despite the fact that his late thought is concerned almost uniquely with the idea of *reconciliation with nature*. In my essay, I will attempt to reconstruct Adorno's variation on the Hegelian theme of *Versöhnung* as very different from the idea of return to nature, and because of that as a unique – perhaps even the most convincing – solution to the problem of antagonism between mankind and natural life. In contrast to the post-humanist position, here associated with Martin Heidegger's famous 'turn,' I will call Adorno's unfinished project a *neohumanism* and explain it along the famous quote from Levinas, according to which "a little humanity distances us from nature, a great deal of humanity brings us back." In my presentation, the gesture of wiping away the tears of Esau, the biblical emblem of natural life, which *Zohar* describes as the necessary precondition of redemption, will emerge as the best metaphor (perhaps even an inspiration) of Adorno's philosophical strategy: his reconciliation with nature does not aim at the atonement / at-one-ment, which would annul the anthropological difference, but at the ethical act of giving justice to nature understood as the Levinasian other.

09:45 - 10:30

**Rethinking Violence - Critical Interventions.  
A Dialogue with Hannah Arendt and Simone Weil**

*Anne Eusterschulte*

Which conclusions can we draw from an analysis of the political situation of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, if we consider wars, destruction, and barbarism, in short, the excesses of totalitarian regimes, under the category of 'violence', taking not only a cultural-historical and social-critical perspective, but also following a social history of affects? This contribution will bring two Jewish intellectuals into conversation with each other. Simone Weil's studies *The Iliad or the Poem of Violence* and *Some Reflections on the Origins of Hitlerism* undertake a cultural-critical reconstruction of European politics of destruction and dehumanization from the perspective of Greek and Roman sources, thus exposing structures of violence and brutalization in their presence. How does the reflection on violence relate to the question of resistance and the possibility of thinking? The relationship between violence and thought leads us to Hannah Arendt's exploration of violence and structural power in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The life-philosophical presuppositions of an 'apology of violence' are subjected to critical analysis, along with such other topics as: the dehumanizing structures of bureaucracy, the apparatus mentality, and mass society as a prerequisite for disinhibited terror in political systems in which the thinking subject is suspended. The discussion will focus on the extent to which the respective conceptions of historicity, humanism, and love reveal traces of Jewish thought in 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy.



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11:00 - 11:45

**Messianic Subjectivity. Levinas' Talmudic Lectures in Light of his Philosophy**

*Silvia Richter*

Emmanuel Levinas' (1906-1995) thinking evolves on one hand through his philosophical writings and on the other hand through the Talmudic lectures he gave at the *Colloque des intellectuels juifs de langue française* on a regularly basis, from 1960 to 1989. In my contribution, I want to bring together these two genres of Levinas' oeuvre - his philosophical and his so-called confessional or Jewish writings - by discussing his Talmudic exegeses of the Tractate *Sanhedrin*, published under the title "Messianic texts" in his anthology *Difficult Freedom* (1963).

By way of introduction, I will briefly outline Levinas' turn to the study of Talmud in the years following World War II as well as the relationship between his philosophy and his Talmudic exegeses, differently discussed in the research literature on Levinas.

After that, I will deep dive in a case study, by turning to Levinas' interpretations of the "Messianic texts" and putting them in dialogue with his philosophy. In so doing, the philosophical notions of 'subjectivity', 'freedom', and 'responsibility' will be revisited through the lens of Levinas' Jewish thought: How does Levinas' philosophy resonate in his Talmudic lectures and how does his Talmudic thinking fruitful influence his philosophical, namely phenomenological, approach?

In conclusion, my contribution seeks to emphasize the parallels between the two text genres, with particular emphasis on Levinas' Jewish thought in light of his philosophy.

11:45 - 12:30

**Das Bilderverbot in der Ästhetik von Emmanuel Levinas**

*Johannes Bennke*

Der bis heute anhaltende und nicht enden wollende Streit um das sogenannte Bilderverbot ist so alt, wie dessen Verkündung selbst. Dabei sind die Überlegungen von Emmanuel Levinas erstaunlich wenig präsent. Für Levinas ist das Bilderverbot nicht als historisch-religiöses Phänomen interessant, sondern als Herausforderung für das Denken. Meine These ist, dass der zentrale Impuls für eine ideologiekritische Lesart des Bilderverbots bei Levinas von der Theodizee nach der Shoah herkommt und in eine Denkbewegung mündet, die *das Bilderverbot umkehrt in ein Gebot der Bilder*. Diese ideologiekritische Lesart des Bilderverbots hat Konsequenzen für eine Theorie des Bildes und ein Denken von Ästhetik. Am Ende meiner Ausführungen gehe ich daher auf Konturen einer jüdischen Ästhetik ein.

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14:30 - 15:15

**„...von der kulturell erheischten Hingabe an das geschaffene Idolon“.  
Aby Warburgs Kulturwissenschaft als Idolatriekritik**

*Ellen Rinner*

Das Beispiel des Bildhistorikers Aby Warburg zeigt, dass das Idolatrieverbot geradezu als Paradigma der modernen Kulturwissenschaft gelten kann. In Gestalt einer programmatischen Idolatriekritik liegt es nicht nur seinem Bildbegriff zugrunde, sondern lässt sich auch für Warburgs zentrales Thema des Nachlebens der Antike in der europäischen Kulturgeschichte nachweisen. Durch diese Lesart tritt der ideologiekritische Impetus seiner kulturwissenschaftlichen Methode in den Vordergrund, mit der sich Warburg in den kulturpolitischen Debatten seiner Zeit gegen den zunehmenden Nationalismus und Antisemitismus während des Ersten Weltkriegs und der Weimarer Republik positionierte.

15:30 - 16:15

**„Dieser Stillstand ist Utopie“.  
Zur Sprengkraft der Geschichtsphilosophie Walter Benjamins**

*Lars Tittmar*

Das Geschichtliche und das Theologische sind im Werk Walter Benjamins in stetiger Wechselwirkung aufeinander bezogen. Insbesondere im späten Schaffen entfaltet dieses Verhältnis in seinem Bekenntnis zum Materialismus eine eigentümliche Wirkung. Zentral wird hier die Frage nach der Verschränkung der zeitlichen Ebenen von Vergangenheit und Gegenwart in seiner Konzeption des dialektischen Bildes. Daran anknüpfend wird der Zusammenhang von Erinnerung, auch als Ausdruck von Trauer, wie das darin liegende Moment des Erwachens aus dem Traumschlaf der Gegenwart relevant. In seiner Idee einer Dialektik im Stillstand wird das in der Geschichte auffindbare Uneingelöste, seiner Erlösung harrende, zur Quelle von Hoffnung in Form einer schwachen messianischen Kraft. Die Verbindung dieser Überlegungen mit dem Bilderverbot soll in dessen Forderung, den radikalen Blick auf das Gewesene zu legen, um so noch das ganz Andere denken zu können, zum Ausdruck kommen.

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16:30 - 17:15

**The Adaptation of the Jewish Prohibition of Idolatry in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment***

*Mario Cosimo Schmidt*

The Jewish prohibition of idolatry (*Bilderverbot*) appears in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in the section dedicated to the history of epistemic forms. Adorno and Horkheimer phrase its meaning in a very distinct manner: "the prohibition on invoking falsity as God". While ancient Greek Enlightenment condemns the image as a non-epistemic form, the Jewish prohibition is capable of rescuing 'the right of the image'. Therefore, Adorno and Horkheimer see the *Bilderverbot* as an important example of demythologization and even as a model for it. The adaptation of this prohibition in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* has various dimensions: a religious, an epistemological, an aesthetical, a social, and a historical one. In my speech, I will focus on the epistemological und aesthetical dimensions.



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