

2004 Annual Meeting

Society of Jewish Ethics
Annual Meeting Program
January 9-11, 2004

Note: All SJE events will take place in the Field Room, 3rd floor (Silver), West Tower

Friday, January 9

9:00-10:30

Byron Sherwin, Spertus College of Judaica

"Implications of the Golem for Contemporary Jewish Problems"

Convener: Elliot Dorff

The golem occupies a distinctive category as a living entity in Jewish legal and theological literature. Many of the ethical problems characteristic of current developments in diverse areas such as: "artificial life," "artificial intelligence," reproductive biotechnology, genetic engineering, genetically modified food, robotics, computer science and corporate malfeasance, have been anticipated by discussions of the golem in Jewish ethical, legal and mystical literature. This paper will demonstrate how reflections about the legal status of the golem in classical Jewish texts can be applied to a wide variety of issues that are currently of concern to theologians and ethicists.

10:30 - 11:00 Break

11:00 - 12:30

SJE Keynote Address: David Novak, University of Toronto

"Natural Law as a Border Concept Between Judaism and Christianity"

Respondents: John Pawlikowski, Catholic Theological Union; Martin Kavka, Florida State University

Convener: Louis Newman

12:30 - 2:00 Lunch

4:00 - 5:30

Jonathan Crane, Wheaton College

"Because. . .: Justifying Law/Rationalizing Ethics"

Convener: Dov Nelkin

Only on occasion do we find rationales embedded in Jewish law (*halakhah*). What purpose do these rationales serve? In which ways do these reasons justify or explain the laws to which they are attached? To what degree do these rationales differentiate and prioritize human concerns over against divine goals? What role does rationalization play in the evolution of *halakhah*? In some ways rationales complicate distinguishing law from ethics; but they also illustrate how ethical concerns influence law. This paper will address these questions through an analysis of two particular rationales: *mipnei darkhei shalom* (for the sake of the ways of peace) and *mipnei eivah* (for the sake of preventing enmity).

7:00-9:00 Shabbat dinner

Saturday, January 10

7:30-8:45 Breakfast with an SJE Author
Elliot Dorff, *To Do the Right and the Good*
Aaron Mackler, *Introduction to Jewish and Catholic Bioethics*

11:00-12:30 (During SCE Annual Business Meeting)
Shabbat morning service

12:30-2:00 Shabbat lunch

4:00 - 5:30 Jewish text study, Laurie Zoloth, Northwestern University
II Kings 4:8-44, plus midrash

7:00-8:30 SJE Annual Business Meeting

8:30-9:30

Les Friedman, Northwestern University
"Woody Allen: The Schlemiel as Moral Philosopher"
Convener: Laurie Zoloth

Along with Barbara Streisand, Woody Allen is the most recognizable Jewish figure in the American cinema. He is also, in the words of French critic Robert Benayoun, "the only comic of international renown who can be described as an intellectual (and) is the first to found a reputation on an instantaneous reaction to the great problems of our times." Aided by his position as director, writer and star of most of his films, Allen has created and sustained a particular persona, one perpetually engaged with his own Jewishness and its relation to the Jewish experience in America. This talk will make some generalizations about Jewish humor, discuss Allen's place within it, and pay particular attention to his 1991 film "Crimes and Misdemeanors." Though often overlooked, this movie features some of Allen's most poignant and perceptive ruminations about the nature of justice and retribution, the role of guilt and punishment, and connection between the sacred and the profane. Clips of this film will be included to illustrate how Allen uses his visual artistry to explore these complicated moral issues.

9:30-10:30 SJE Presidential Reception

Sunday, January 11

9:00 - 10:30

Jonathan Schofer, University of Wisconsin-Madison
"Temporality and Rabbinic Character Ethics"
Convener: Dov Nelkin

A crucial factor in character ethics is mortality, and more generally a life span moving toward death, with each moment shaped by memory of the past and anticipation of the future. How does rabbinic literature address these issues and set out notions of temporality in relation to ethical concerns? This paper discusses two temporal frameworks: the life-span and anticipation of death, and the theology of divine justice, which implies a highly developed sense of causality. The result is a constant state of anticipation in which one waits for a future fulfillment of this causal chain, which may come during one's lifetime or in "the world to come," a category I examine for its practical as well as theoretical significance. I take up the intersections between these two temporal frameworks, and conclude with reflections of the significance of my analysis for contemporary ethical theory.

11:00 - 12:30

Robert Gibbs, University of Toronto

"An Other Law: Levinas' Ethics"

Respondent: Nigel J. Biggar, University of Leeds

Convener: Ronald Green

While Levinas' ethics of the face challenges the role of all institutions, including the laws, there is a call for justice at the center of his ethics, and that call also requires a specific role for law. The heteronomy of my responsibility leads beyond it to a place for making laws. However, Levinas also challenges us not to think of law as co-extensive with the political, with the state. A possibility for a religious law, a law that is not the state's, also appears in both his philosophical and his Jewish works. Thus we can read Levinas not only changing our most basic principles of ethics, but also challenging our concept of the relations of ethics and law, and of the state and religion.