

2006 Annual Meeting

SOCIETY OF JEWISH ETHICS SCHEDULE
2006 Annual Meeting
Hyatt Regency Phoenix

Thursday, January 5, 2006

6:30 pm to 8:30 pm
SJE Board Meeting

Friday, January 6, 2006

9:00 am to 10:30 am

Session I:

Part Animal, Part Angel: Embodiment and Classical Rabbinic Ethical Instruction

- Jonathan Schofer, Harvard Divinity School
- SCE Respondent: Charles Mathewes, University of Virginia
- Convener: Toby Schonfeld, University of Nebraska Medical Center

This paper examines the significance of the body's physicality in classical rabbinic ethics and self-cultivation. I focus on the processes of consumption, excretion, and death, showing a wide range of ways that these functions are symbolized and given pedagogical significance. I argue that the most effective way to frame this material is through the rabbinic dualism of the person being part beastly and part angelic. The paper concludes with more general reflections concerning dualities in rabbinic thought, their relation to embodiment, and their importance for comparative as well as normative ethical inquiry.

10:30 am to 11:00 am
BREAK

11:00 am to 12:30 pm

Session II:

Human Rights in Medieval Halachot

- Peter Haas, Case Western Reserve University
- Convener: Dov Nelkin, Solomon Schechter High School of New York

Human rights in the conventional sense is not a concept in traditional Judaism. The halacha, however, does define certain obligations that people have as regards their treatment of one another. My thesis is that while these halachot do not grow out of a concept of rights per se, they in effect establish what we today would call rights. To illustrate this proposition, I will look at medieval halachot that deal with the judiciary process. This examination will show that although the language of rights is never used, standards are set up in the judicial process which in effect establish a web of expectations that we could consider innate rights.

12:30 pm to 2:00 pm
LUNCH (on your own)

2:00 pm to 3:30 pm

PLENARY SESSION: JEWISH, CHRISTIAN, AND MUSLIM ETHICS

3:30 pm to 4:00 pm
BREAK

4:00 pm to 5:30 pm

Session III:

WHY RIGHTS? WHY ME?

- Jonathan Crane, University of Toronto
- SCE Respondent: William O'Neill, S.J., Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley
- Convener: David Teutsch, Reconstructionist Rabbinical College

Even though Jews throughout the 20th Century contributed to human rights discourse, there was no single reason why they felt it appropriate that Jews can and should participate in these conversations in the first place. The broad range of reasons reflects tensions between the Judaic obligation-centered ordering of society and the more dominant rights-centered method on the one hand; and, on the other, the burning question of what it means to be Jewish and modern, as they depict Jewish self-perceptions as religious people, citizens and human beings. Ultimately, these rationalizations illustrate competing claims on modern Jewish identity and behavior.

5:45 pm to 6:45 pm

SCE PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

7:00 pm to 9:00pm

KABBALAT SHABBAT SERVICES and SHABBAT DINNER (pre-registration required)

Saturday, January 07, 2006

7:45 am to 9:00 am

SJE BREAKFAST WITH AN AUTHOR (pre-registration required)

- Andrew Flescher, *Heroes, Saints, and Ordinary Morality* (Georgetown University Press, 2003)
- Jonathan Schofer, *The Making of a Sage: A Study in Rabbinic Ethics* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2005)
- David Teutsch, *Spiritual Community: The Power to Restore Hope, Commitment and Joy* (Jewish Lights, 2005); *A Guide to Jewish Practice: Bioethics* (RRC Press, 2005); *A Guide to Jewish Practice: Tzedaka* (RRC Press, 2005)

9:00 am to 11:00 am
BREAK

11:00 am to 12:30 pm

OPTIONAL SHABBAT SERVICE

12:30 pm to 2:00 pm

SHABBAT LUNCH PROVIDED (pre-registration required)

2:00 pm to 3:30 pm

SCE PLENARY SESSION

3:30 pm to 4:00 pm

BREAK

4:00 pm to 5:30 pm

Junior Scholar Career Planning Forum

5:30 pm to 8:00 pm

DINNER (on your own)

8:00 pm to 9:30 pm

SJE PLENARY:

SEIZING THE MOMENT: A JEWISH THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

- Professor Marc Ellis
University Professor and Director, Center for American & Jewish Studies
Baylor University
- SJE Respondent: Laurie Zoloth, Northwestern University
- SCE Respondent: John T. Pawlikowski, Catholic Theological Union
- Convener: Elliot Dorff, University of Judaism

For more than two decades, culminating now in the third edition of *Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation*, I have wrestled with the challenges to Jewish identity and ethics that confront us through the Holocaust, anti-Semitism, ecumenism and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. During this time, a Constantinian Judaism has emerged, Israeli expansionism has continued, progressive Jews have faltered, and an exilic community comprised of Jews of conscience has evolved. Anti-Semitism has been on the rise.

This new century now presents us with an opportunity to choose the future of Jewish life that is characterized by an honest reckoning and compassionate action worthy of the Jewish ethical tradition. The time, though, is late, and the road ahead rife with complexity and divisiveness. Is there a way forward? Will such a path precipitate a break with a Jewish tradition defined by mainstream Jewish institutions and the academic classifications of Holocaust and Judaic Studies? Can we enter on such a path in a way that deepens Jewish particularity even as it emphasizes Jewish universality?

9:30 pm – 10:30 pm

SJE PRESIDENTIAL RECEPTION

Sunday, January 08, 2006

9:00 am to 10:30 am

SESSION IV:

From Closed Texts to Open Minds: How Orthodox Rabbis Explain Contemporary Jewish Law on End-of-Life Medical Care and Cigarette Smoking

- Hillel Gray, University of Chicago
- Convener: Louis Newman, Carleton College

Rabbis and scholars typically conceive of Jewish law as a self-contained system. However, such closed models miscast contemporary Orthodox discourse. This paper argues that Orthodox writings are permeated in their language and reasoning by Christian and other moral discourses. First, looking at end-of-life care, the paper demonstrates that Orthodox writings interact with Christian ethics. Second, the paper examines how Orthodox writings on cigarette smoking are permeated by medical discourse. Though not overtly moral, medical discourse injects its own values. The paper explores how a more open model of Jewish legal discourse could alter Jewish social ethics.

10:30 am to 12:00 pm

SJE BUSINESS MEETING