

Society of Jewish Ethics 2016 Annual Meeting

January 7-10, 2016

Location: Toronto, Canada

Schedule

Thursday, January 7, 2016

9am-9pm Conference Desk Open Canadian Foyer

7 – 8:30pm Bioethics Public Panel Alberta

Topic: "Searching for a Universal Ethic on Suicide: Natural Law Perspectives from Abrahamic Traditions and Canada's Debate on Assisted Suicide"

Panelists: John Berkman, Regis College

Anver Emon, University of Toronto

David Novak, University of Toronto

Abstract: *On February 6th, 2015, the Canadian Supreme Court (SCC) unanimously struck down laws banning assisted suicide and euthanasia. This panel will focus on a key underlying issue, reflecting on the choice of suicide itself from natural law (NL) perspectives. Speaking from their respective Jewish, Islamic and Christian traditions, each panelist will explain what makes suicide problematic in relation to the NL and the epistemic status of such claims, analyze the relation between NL and civil law on suicide, account for erroneous NL claims from their tradition's history, and speculate on the possibilities of development in NL thinking on suicide.*

Convener: Jonathan Crane, Emory University

Friday, January 8, 2016

7am-6pm Conference Desk Open Canadian Foyer

7:15-8:45am Breakfast with an Author Concert Hall

Buffet opens at 7:15; Discussion 7:45-8:45 (*Pre-registration/payment is required*)

Belser, Julia Watts, *Power, Ethics, and Ecology in Jewish Late Antiquity: Rabbinic Responses to Drought and Disaster*(Cambridge, 2015)

Facilitator: Yonatan Brafman, Jewish Theological Seminary

Dorff, Elliot N., Laurie Zoloth (Eds), *Jews and Genes: The Genetic Future in Contemporary Jewish Thought* (Jewish Publication Society, 2015)

Facilitator: Sarah Imhoff, Indiana University

8:00am-7:15pm Exhibits Open Canadian

9am-10:30pm Concurrent Session I Alberta

Topic: Pedagogy and Classical Jewish Texts

Presenter: Eric Lawee, Bar Ilan University

Title: "Ethical Themes in Classical Jewish Biblical Commentaries: Challenges and Opportunities in the University Classroom"

Abstract: *My paper's aim is twofold: to open a window on ethical themes as they arise in medieval Jewish biblical commentaries and to exemplify how such works can serve as a resource for introducing ethics into the university classroom. My "data" comes from a course titled "Medieval Jewish Biblical Exegesis: Challenges and Opportunities." The paper illustrates how moral themes arise in the commentaries in ways that shaped ethical sensibilities. It also raises pedagogical issues, including a decision to avoid some of the most vexing moral conundrums addressed by the commentators in light of the course's audience and the fraught theologico-political setting in which the course is taught.*

Respondent: Julia Watts Belser, Georgetown University

Convener: Alyssa Henning, Northwestern University

10:30-11:00am

Break

11am-12:30pm

Concurrent Session II

British Columbia

Topic: Sexual Ethics and Rabbinic Thought

Presenter: Aviva Richman, New York University

Title: "Sexual Coercion and Consent and the Development of Legal Subjectivity in Rabbinic Literature"

Abstract: *This paper addresses rabbinic formulations of sexual coercion and consent through study of a Talmudic passage that attempts to correlate sexual coercion and pain (bKet 39a), read alongside a Talmudic passage in personal injury law regarding whether a person may consent to pain (bBQ 93a). Engaging recent studies on subjectivity in rabbinic law and literature, I discuss how the rabbinic discourse of sexual consent relates to questions of female sexual agency and provides a gendered lens on the conception the legal subject. This case-study of highly redacted Talmudic passages allows for analysis of the relationship between critical-textual studies and sexual ethics.*

Presenter: Rebecca Levi, University of Virginia

Title: "Let's Talk About Sex: Navigating Power and Expertise in Ritual and Sexual Health"

Abstract: *In this paper, I take steps toward establishing a Jewish ethic of medical expertise that is responsive to power disparities, using sexual health ethics as a case study. I argue that tannaitic purity discourse offers a model for thinking about ethical issues surrounding STI transmission, and can also be helpful in thinking about power, authority, and expertise within that context. The particular social character of purity discourse can provide a model for disseminating public health norms in a community without shaming members of that community; at the same time, the role of rabbis as experts can help us unpack questions about the nature of expertise and its relationship to authority.*

Convener: Molly Farneth, Haverford College

11am-12:30pm

Concurrent Session II (Co-sponsored with SCE)

Territories

Topic: "Divine Command Theory in Jewish and Christian Ethics"

Speakers: Elliot Dorff, American Jewish University

Richard Mouw, Fuller Theological Seminary

Abstract: *In what ways, and to what extent, can/should Jewish and Christian ethics be conceived as divine commands? How does one know what God commands? Can God's moral commands, or our perception of God's commands, change over time? What is the role of ethics beyond the law in Judaism? How do divine commands interact with Spirit in Christianity? Our dialogue will be based on these two books: Richard J. Mouw, The God Who Commands: A Study of Divine Command Ethics, and Elliot N. Dorff, For the Love of God and People: A Philosophy of Jewish Law.*

Convener: John Fitzgerald, St. John's University

12:30pm-2pm

Lunch

12:45-1:45pm

SJE Board Meeting

Boardroom

12:45-2pm

JRE Editorial Board

Library

12:45-2pm

Student Caucus

Salon B

(Pre-registration needed for lunch.)

Conveners: Melanie Jones, Chicago Theological Seminary

Brett McCarty, Duke University Divinity School

12:45-2pm

Junior Faculty Caucus

York

(Pre-registration needed for lunch.)

Co-Sponsored by the Wabash Center

Speaker: Eboni Marshall Turman, Duke Divinity School

Conveners: Elise Edwards, Baylor University

Eli McCarthy, Georgetown University

12:45-2pm

Contingent Faculty Caucus

Saskatchewan

Conveners: Debra Erickson, Siena College

Lincoln Rice, Marquette University

12:45pm

Historical Tour of the Fairmont Royal York

Hotel Lobby

(Pre-registration requested.)

4:00-5:30pm

Concurrent Session III (Co-sponsored with SCE) Territories

Interest Group: Covenantal Ethics

Topic: "Emmanuel Levinas and Covenantal Ethics: A Jewish-Christian Discussion"

Panelists: Kevin Jung, Wake Forest Divinity School

Timothy Beach-Verhey, St. Andrews University

Martin Kavka, Florida State University

Robert Gibbs, University of Toronto

Abstract: *Michael Faggenblat's A Covenant of Creatures: Levinas's Philosophy of Judaism* (Stanford University Press, 2010) argues that the image of covenant is central to Emmanuel Levinas's philosophical ethics. This year, the Covenantal Ethics Interest Group will have a panel discussion of Faggenblat's book, co-sponsored by the Society of Jewish Ethics, as a way of opening up a dialogue about covenant as a significant moral image across different faith traditions and between religious and philosophical ethics.

Convener: David True, Wilson College

4:00-5:30pm

Concurrent Session III

Alberta

(Co-sponsored with SCE/SSME)

Interest Group: Climate Justice

Abstract: *The Climate Justice Interest Group will meet in a session hosted by the Society of Jewish Ethics to explore a "conference sabbatical" for 2022 in light of anthropogenic climate change and the fossil fuel economy that undergirds the meeting of scholarly bodies such as our own. Building on Laurie Zoloth's 2014 Presidential Address at the American Academy of Religion, this substantive and discussion-oriented session will describe the conference sabbatical proposal (approved by SJE Board and under consideration by SCE and SSME Boards), survey what other scholarly bodies have done, and brainstorm possibilities. Members of the SJE, SCE, and SSME are warmly invited to attend.*

Conveners: Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, Seattle University

Christiana Z. Peppard, Fordham University

4:40pm

Shabbat Candle Lighting

On your own

7:00-7:45pm

Kabbalat Shabbat Services

York

Followed by Kiddush and Hamotzi (Please bring your own siddur.)

Service is in Hebrew; all are welcome.

7:45-9:15pm

Shabbat Dinner

Library

SJE Presidential Greetings: Geoffrey Claussen, Elon University

(Pre-registration required for dinner. Meal is kosher vegetarian.)

Saturday, January 9, 2016

7:15-8:45am

Breakfast with an Author

Concert Hall

Buffet opens at 7:15; Discussion 7:45-8:45 *(Pre-registration is required.)*

Claussen, Geoffrey, *Sharing the Burden: Rabbi Simhah Zissel Ziv and the Path of Musar* (SUNY, 2015)

Facilitator: Ira Stone, Mussar Leadership Institute

8:15am-6pm **Exhibits Open** *Canadian*
8:15am-6pm **Conference Desk Open** *Canadian foyer*

9-10:30am **Shabbat Services** *Algonquin*
Session is open to all.
D'var Torah: Ira Stone, Mussar Leadership Program

11am-12:30pm **Concurrent Session IV** *Quebec*

Topic: Ethics and Narrative

Presenter: Andrea Cooper, University of North Carolina

Title: "Ethics and Maternal Sacrifice"

Abstract: *I examine Levinas's reading of ethical sacrifice, epitomized in the phenomenology of the maternal body, and consider current cultural echoes of his interpretation. Levinas's re-reading of the Aqedah and his philosophical emphasis on ethically substitutive maternity continues to resonate with popular narrative interventions. The independent video game "The Binding of Isaac" offers a contemporary twisted take on the episode, substituting a homicidal mother for the Abrahamic sacrificial father. Contemporary echoes of sacrifice and gender subvert traditional models of Greek and Hebraic paternal sacrifice, and demonstrate that the horizon of sacrifice, gender and ethical substitution continues to gain cultural relevance.*

Presenter: Joel Gereboff, Arizona State University

Title: "Rabbinic Stories of Reconciliation: Successful and Failed"

Abstract: *The Babylonian Talmud contains numerous sayings, discussions and stories about issues relating to conflict, reconciliation, forgiveness and peace. My paper focuses on several narratives in the Talmud depicting interpersonal conflicts and analyzes them in terms of their positions on the challenges of overcoming conflicts, including not only the strategies for doing so, but also the nature of the desired outcome. In many ways these accounts provoke consideration of the connection between notions of appeasement, deference, forgiveness, reconciliation and peace.*

Convener: Emily Filler, Earlham College

12:30-2pm **Shabbat Lunch** *Saskatchewan*
(Pre-registration required for lunch. Meal is kosher vegetarian.)

12:30-2:00pm **Women's Caucus** **Library**
(Pre-registration needed for lunch.)

The women's caucus meeting is a time of meeting and connecting with colleagues, as well as discussing issues for women in the academy.

Conveners: Amy Levad, University of St. Thomas

Nikki Young, Bucknell University

12:30pm **Fairmont Royal York Kitchen tour** *Hotel Lobby*
(Pre-registration requested.)

3:30-4pm

Break

Canadian

4:00-5:30pm

Concurrent Session V

Salon 2 - 3rd

Topic: Passion and Jewish Ethics

Presenter: Jeremy Phillip Brown, University of San Francisco/NYU

Title: "Jewish Ethics of Dispassion: On the Virtue of Equanimity and its Mystical Basis in Kabbalah"

Abstract: *In order to assess G. Scholem's claim that the attitude of indifference to praise or blame in Jewish pietism and kabbalism is practically indistinguishable that of the Cynics and Stoics, the present paper delineates several instructive differences between medieval kabbalistic and ancient stoic teachings on the cultivation of a dispassionate temperament through the contemplation of divinity. Rather, the kabbalistic ethic of equanimity resembles another ancient Hellenistic school, namely pyrrhonism. This is evident in its adoption of a paradoxical method of affirmation and negation, which, in turn, facilitates the cultivation of a dispassionate temperament. For the kabbalists, this can be achieved by contemplating the tetragrammaton. This mystical objective, however, poses patent challenges to axiological approaches to ethics, and to strategies for establishing an affective basis—or outcome—for ethical behavior.*

Presenter: Benjamin Ricciardi, Northwestern University

Title: "Hermann Cohen on Compassion: A Cognitivist Take on the Peculiarly Religious Emotion"

Abstract: *One of the most salient features of Hermann Cohen's Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism is its account of compassion as the peculiarly religious emotion, i.e., as that which allows religion to emerge from the shadow of ethics. One problem plaguing our understanding of it is that of what Cohen thinks that compassion is. I argue that Cohen is a cognitivist about emotions, very much in the tradition of Stoics and of Martha Nussbaum. This allows him to resolve simply the convoluted problem of emotion and ethical action in Kantian moral theory, and to distinguish conceptually between (mere) ethical feeling and religious feeling (i.e., compassion).*

Presenter: Michael Friedman, Georgetown University

Title: "Ramchal's Paths of the Just and Jamgon Kongtrul's Great Path of Awakening, Comparing Two Roads to Spiritual Reorientation"

Abstract: *This paper brings comparative methodology to the study of mussar by reading Tibetan Buddhist "lojong" (mind training) practices described in Jamgon Kongtrul's The Great Path of Awakening against techniques of self-cultivation explored by the Ramchal in Mesillat Yesharim. Lojong practitioners attempt to whittle away at self-centeredness by harnessing negative situations as opportunities for sublimation and intentionally cultivating an other-centered consciousness. Through an immersive reading of Kongtrul and the Ramchal, this study explores how lojong and mussar rely on distinctive anthropologies, cosmologies, and soteriologies, yet retain much similarity, and how differences within these similarities shed greater light on both traditions.*

Convener: Sarah Zager, Yale University

5:41pm

Havdallah

On your own

8-9:30pm

Working Groups II (Cosponsored with SCE/SSME)

Tudor 7

Topic: Latino/a Working Group: "Martyrdom and Political Violence: An Interfaith Dialogue"

Panelists: Rubén Rosario Rodríguez, Saint Louis University

Aryeh Cohen, American Jewish Universtiy

David P. Gushee, Mercer University
Sohail H. Hashmi, Mount Holyoke College
Santiago Slabodsky, Hofstra University

Abstract: *In exploring the theme of Humanity and the Global Future, with special emphasis given to the "deep connectivity among peoples as well as conflicts that riddle our shared world context," the Latino/a Working Group presents a panel in partnership with the Society of Jewish Ethics and the Society for the Study of Muslim Ethics that explores the retrieval of classical martyr narratives as resources for nonviolent resistance to political violence in the world today. Panelists will respond to Rubén Rosario Rodríguez's forthcoming book, Faithful Witness: Reconstructing Theologies of Martyrdom, and offer critical analysis and response from a diversity of cultural and religious perspectives.*

Conveners: Kecia Ali, Boston University
Victor Carmona, Oblate School of Theology
Geoffrey Claussen, Elon University
Ruben Rosario Rodriguez, St. Louis University

8-9:30pm **Interest Groups II (Co-sponsored with SCE/SSME)** *Quebec*

Topic: Animal Ethics

Panelists: David Clough, University of Chester
Aaron S. Gross, University of San Diego
Sarra Tlili, University of Florida

Abstract: *We invite all members of the SCE/SJE/SSME to our inaugural meeting. Three panelists, one from each of society, will showcase recent work in animal ethics by discussing the central aims and key findings of their recently published groundbreaking monographs: (1) Sarra Tlili (SSME), Animals in the Qu'ran (Cambridge UP, 2012), (2) Aaron Gross (SJE), The Question of the Animal and Religion (Columbia UP, 2015), and (3) David Clough (SCE), On Animals, vol. 1: Systematic Theology (T&T Clark, 2012). Light refreshments will be served and a resource table featuring other books/articles of interest will be available.*

Conveners: Charles C. Camosy, Fordham University
Grace Y. Kao, Claremont School of Theology

8-9:30pm **Bioethics Workshop** *Saskatchewan*

Presenter: Jeffrey Rubenstein, New York University

Title: "Can a gose survive for more than three days? The history and definition of the gose"

Abstract: *This paper presents a comprehensive history of the rabbinic concept of the gose, an individual whose death is imminent. It traces the sources of the prevalent opinion that defines a gose as someone who will inevitably die within three days and argues that this view was never universally accepted. This issue is of great ethical significance as traditional Jewish sources only permit the withholding of medical treatment from a gose, but advances in medical care have led to a narrowing of this category if defined in terms of three days. The awareness of alternative definitions of the gose would therefore allow for the withholding of treatment in more cases when treatment is futile.*

Presenter: Yoelit Lipinsky, University of Toronto

Title: "Hepsed & Bechi: Halakha, Bioethics and Post-Mortem Artificial Insemination"

Abstract: *This paper explores the complexities surrounding both secular and Jewish bioethics and post-mortem artificial insemination. Utilizing Torah and Talmud in compliment with bioethical discourse and Israeli policies, I opine that peri-mortem insemination is allowable under halakhic parameters. Particularly, post-mortem insemination ought to be utilized as a modern substitution for Levirate marriage. Quite literally, it can and should be implemented halakhically so that a deceased husband's name is not 'written out of Israel.'* Comparisons between Jewish thought and secular bioethics are showcased, particularly pertaining to issues of child welfare, inheritance and consent for sperm retrieval.

Convener/Moderator: Laurie Zoloth, Northwestern University

Sunday, January 10, 2015

7:45-8:45am	JJE Board Meeting	<i>Boardroom</i>
8am-12:30pm	Registration Desk Open	<i>Canadian Foyer</i>
8:30-11:15am	Exhibits Open	<i>Canadian</i>
9-10:30am	Plenary	<i>Concert Hall</i>

Presenter: Rachel Adler, Hebrew Union College, Jewish Institute of Religion

Title: "Women as Human Beings in the Global Future"

Abstract: *Gender essentialists regard gender as instinctual, and ahistorical. For gender constructivists, gender categories and presentations vary sociohistorically. Because they believe that human volition and social change continuously transform gender, constructivists require an ethics: How ought we to shape our future gender performances? Many religious texts represent women as deviations from a male norm, important instrumentally rather than inherently. This lack of moral imagination affects law, ethics, and theology. I offer three cases 1) rabbinic traditions about a female scholar, Beruriah; 2) a medieval controversy about whether Christ could have been incarnated as a woman; 3) the practice of honor killing in Middle-Eastern Islamic cultures. I will argue that moral imagination combined with rejecting the concept of gender normativity would furnish tools to address gender injustices in our present global culture.*

Respondent: Anver Emon, University of Toronto

Convener: Elias Sacks, University of Colorado Boulder

10:30-11am	Break	<i>Canadian</i>
11am-12:30pm	Concurrent Session VI	<i>British Columbia</i>

Presenter: Samuel Brody, University of Kansas

Title: "Political Theology and the Ethical-Political Border: On Recent Interpretations of Martin Buber's Politics"

Abstract: *The paper will consider a number of the recent treatments of Martin Buber's politics that have stemmed from the increased interest in "political theology" in the 2000s and 2010s. A crucial disagreement seems to exist between Nitzan Lebovic and Paul Mendes-Flohr on the question of whether Buber changed his position on Schmittian-style political theology after having fled Nazi Germany for Mandate Palestine in 1938. Other scholars seem to fall on one side or the other of this*

divide. After presenting and clarifying the discussion of this question over the past decade, the paper will take interpretive and normative sides.

Presenter: Shira Billet, Princeton University

Title: "The Great Divide: Relationality and Collectivity in Twentieth-Century Jewish Ethics"

Abstract: *Jewish ethical theory, over the past century, has shifted from a model of considering ethical norms as universal imperatives grounded in both theoretical philosophy and Jewish texts toward a more "social" model of ethics. This paper suggests that twentieth-century Jewish philosophical ethics can be understood as a movement between two aspects of sociality: relationality and collectivity. I show that a dichotomy has emerged between Jewish ethical models that focus on (universalistic) interpersonal relationships and those that focus on (particularistic) Jewish collectivity. I suggest that there resources from the thought of Hermann Cohen can be usefully appropriated for thinking beyond this dichotomy.*

Presenter: Yemima Hadad, University of Potsdam

Title: "What Ought to Be Done? The Non-Categorical Imperative: Kav ha-Tichum"

Abstract: *In this talk I will examine Martin Buber's non-categorical imperative, namely Kav ha-Tichum or the Line of Demarcation, as an antithetical concept to Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative. Against the achievements of the Western Humanism, Buber poses the Jewish Humanism. Both imperatives answer the question: what ought I to do? However, whereas Kant formulates a universal and absolute duty, Martin Buber – inspired by the biblical prophets, Kabbalah and Hasidism – takes into consideration temporal and local differentials. Without allowing for cultural relativism to enter the equation, Buber calls for a gradual application of universal values that take into consideration the contingent dictations of the historical moment, with the unique challenges and missions it presents.*

Convener: Paul Nahme, Brown University

12:45-2pm

SJE Business Meeting

Saskatchewan

Open to all SJE Members