

**2013 Society of Jewish Ethics Annual Meeting  
Chicago, IL  
January 4-6**

**Thursday, January 4, 2012**

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|-----------------------|--|--------------------|
| <b>11:45am-1:15pm</b> | <b>Bioethics Group Steering Committee Meeting</b>      | <i>Joliet</i>      |
| <b>1:20-7:00pm</b>    | <b>Bioethics Group of the Society of Jewish Ethics</b> | <i>Williford C</i> |
| <b>1:20-3:00pm</b>    | <b>Jewish Bioethics Session I</b>                      |                    |

**Convener and Discussion Leader:** Michal Raucher, Northwestern University

**Presenter:** Alyssa Henning, Northwestern University

**Title:** “**Jewish Bioethics: Tracing its Past, Mapping its Present, and Shaping its Future**”

**Abstract:**

Jewish bioethics has more to offer bioethics discourse than ever before as scholars incorporate new methods and sources into their work. But Jewish bioethics’ richness remains hidden when new methods are not always clearly articulated or new sources’ full implications only tentatively developed. I arrange American Jewish bioethics into three phases: (I) defining Jewish bioethics as a subset of halakhah (Jewish law); (II) uncovering liberal alternatives within orthodoxy; and (III) looking beyond the Talmud. Analyzing emerging Phase III trends and exploring lessons that earlier phases offer current scholarship, I consider how to maximize Jewish bioethics’ relevance to bioethics discourse.

**Respondents:** Elliot Dorff, American Jewish University  
Louis Newman, Carleton College

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| <b>3:00-3:02</b>   | <b>Greetings from Jewish Bioethics Group:</b><br>Sander Mendelson, Medstar Washington Hospital Center |
| <b>3:02-3:15pm</b> | <b>Break</b>  |
| <b>3:15-4:45pm</b> | <b>Jewish Bioethics Session II</b>  |

**Convener and Discussion Leader:** Jonathan Crane, Emory University

**Presenter:** Yaniv Ron-El, The University of Chicago

**Title:** “**Prenatal Sex Selection: Between Margins of Life and Margins of Liberal Politics**”

**Abstract:**

Novel technology enabling sex selection prior to birth and to conception has sparked fierce ethical debates among religious thinkers, bio-ethicists and policy-makers alike. The question is whether individuals should be allowed to use the technology for non-medical reasons. I will present some recent answers from the Jewish (orthodox) perspective and the official Israeli Ministry of Health guidelines, emphasizing their religious aspects, some of which are rather surprising. In addition, I will discuss my original ethical approach that sees political intervention in the question of sex selection as compatible with liberal philosophy. This approach relies heavily on the unique interpretations by Hanna Arendt and David Heyd to the Genesis creation myth.

**Respondent:** Leonard Sharzer, The Jewish Theological Seminary

**Convener and Discussion Leader:** Lila Kagedan, Harvard University and Yeshivat Maharat

**Presenter:** Rebecca Levi, University of Virginia

**Title:** “Community, Authority and Autonomy: Jewish Responses to the Vaccine Wars”

**Abstract:**

What can the Jewish tradition contribute to the current public debate about vaccination? Much of the rhetoric surrounding vaccine refusal appeals to concepts of individual autonomy and fears of political and intellectual authority, claiming that the individual is the best expert on their own health and actively denying accepted medical consensus. Unlike many other health decisions, vaccine refusal has direct and measurable consequences for one’s community. The Jewish tradition’s emphasis on community and the well-being of the collective, as well as its tradition of respect for intellectual authority, can be a critical support to the medical community in encouraging widespread vaccination.

**Respondent:** Paul Wolpe, Emory University

**4:45-5:00pm**                      **BREAK**

**5:00-5:45pm**                      **Jewish Bioethics Session III**

**Convener and Discussion Leader:** Cristina Traina, Northwestern University

**Presenter:** Mara Benjamin, St. Olaf College

**Title:** “Bringing Maternity in from the Margins”

**Abstract:**

In recent decades, feminist theologians and ethicists have argued that maternal obligation and childrearing offers a lens through which claims about ethical obligation can and should be refracted. This paper evaluates how these investigations – largely undertaken within a Christian context – may be used to advance normative Jewish thought. I argue that Jewish feminists have given short shrift to the significant role obligation has traditionally played in Jewish conceptions of human life and propose how a Jewish feminist examination of commandedness and obligation could benefit from theological and ethical considerations of maternal activity.

**Respondent:** Rabbi Suzanne Brody, PhD, Saul Mirowitz Jewish Community School

**5:45-7:00pm**                      **Jewish Bioethics Keynote**

**Convener and Discussion Leader:** Jonathan Cohen, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati

**Speaker:** Laurie Zoloth, Northwestern University

**Topic:** Interdisciplinarity in Jewish Bioethics

**5:00-7:00pm**                      **Hotels and Worker Justice**

*Continental Blrm B*

**Panelists:**

Kim Bobo, Interfaith Worker Justice  
 Stewart Herman, Concordia College  
 Moses Pava, Yeshiva University

Co-sponsored by SJE, SSME, and Interfaith Worker Justice (IWJ)

The purpose of the pre-conference is to: 1) inform the membership of the societies about the multiple considerations of the Executive Director in choosing a venue for annual meetings, 2) provide information about labor issues related to hotel workers in the US and discuss best practices to consider when booking meetings, 3) frame the issue of labor concerns within a broader context of social concerns related to conferencing, 4) start a dialogue about worker justice issues related to annual meetings.

During the second hour participants will be invited to discuss the issues at hand and engage the questions of socially responsible meeting planning from the perspective of their various traditions. We would attempt to develop a set of “best practices” for professional societies to consider when planning meetings. Small groups will talk for 20 minutes and then we will have 40 minutes for plenary conversation.

**Convener:** Rebecca Todd Peters, Elon University

**7:15-10:00pm**                      **SJE Board Meeting**                      *Joliet*

**Friday, January 4, 2013**

**9:00-10:30am**              **Plenary**                      *International South*  
**Speaker:** George "Tink" Tinker, Iliff School of Theology, University of Denver

**Convener:** Teresa Delgado, Iona College  
**Respondent:** Traci West, Drew University Theological School

**10:30-11:00am**              **BREAK**                      *International North*

**11:00 am-12:30pm**      **Concurrent Session I**                      *Continental Blrm A*

**Topic: Casualties of a Global Economy: Examining Worker Justice in the United States**

**Convener:** Moses L. Pava, Yeshiva University

**SJE/SCE/SSME Panelists:**

Rick Axtell, Centre College  
 Gerald J. Beyer, Saint Joseph's University  
 Elliot Dorff, American Jewish University, Los Angeles  
 Jennifer Leath, Yale University  
 Rebecca Todd Peters, Elon University

**12:45-1:50pm**              **SJE Lunch Session**                      *Boulevard C*  
 (Pre-registration required for lunch. Meal is Kosher vegetarian.)

**Topic: Obligations to Workers: What Does Justice Require of Us?**

**Convener:** Moses Pava, Yeshiva University

**Panelists:**

Laurie Zoloth, Northwestern University  
David Teutsch, Reconstructionist Rabbinical College  
Elliot Dorff, American Jewish University, Los Angeles

**2:00-3:30pm**

**Concurrent Session II**

*Boulevard C*

**Topic: Talmudic Reasoning on Two Contemporary Ethical Challenges**

**Convener:** Joel Gereboff, Arizona State University

**Presenter: Chaim Saiman, Villanova Law School**

**Title: “Talmudic Analytics and Ethical Thought: A Study of the Jewish law of the Worker's Wages as an argument for Neo-Lamdanut”**

**Abstract:** Talmudism has always attracted ardent devotees as well as fierce critics. To some, the classical Talmudic tradition represents the essence of authentic Judaism. However, a competing, and more humanistic line of thought finds Talmudic legalism too narrow a prism through which to view the Jewish experience. Owing to this bifurcation however, serious engagement with the substantive content of halakha has remained the exclusive province of the classical talmudists. This paper joins a growing chorus of voices that rejects this dichotomy, and introduces an alternative approach, “neo-lamdanut.” Neo-lamdanut delves head first into the give-and-take of Talmudic discourse while it employs a variety of tools developed by legal and literary theorists to analyze the form of halakhic reasoning and the substance of its doctrines. The study proceeds via a case study of the biblical prohibition of withholding a worker’s wages (Lev. 19:13 & Deut. 24:14-15) and the correlative Bavli sugya (B. Metz. 110-112).

**Presenter: Julia Watts Belser, Missouri State University**

**Title: “Confidence and Disaster in Rabbinic Tales of Destruction and Contemporary Environmental Crisis”**

**Abstract:**

Recounting the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple (Bavli Gittin 55b-58a), the Babylonian Talmud evokes a recurring motif of “misplaced confidence,” critiquing human tendency to misjudge risk in the midst of crisis. By setting talmudic narrative in conversation with contemporary environmental passivity, I examine how confidence often mutes responses to environmental danger in industrialized nations, whether through trust that God will prevent catastrophe—or appeal to techno-scientific salvations. Drawing on the Bavli’s evocative portrayals of power in the midst of powerlessness, I offer an alternate imaginary for resilience in the midst of disaster that might lay seeds for communal transformation, not apocalypse.

**Respondent:** Barry Wimpfheimer, Northwestern University

**3:30-4:00pm**

**BREAK**

**4:00-5:30pm**

**Concurrent Session III**

*Joliet*

**Topic: Jewish Ethics, Politics and Moral Psychology**

**Convener:** Martin Kavka, Florida State University

**Presenters:** Sydney Levine, Rutgers University Center for Cognitive Science  
Joshua Rottman, Boston University

**Title: “Jewish Ethics on the Margins of Moral Psychology”**

**Abstract:**

The theories prominent in the field of moral psychology claim to be universal – that is, they make claims that should apply to all human ethical systems because they describe something deep and true about human psychology. However, the study of Jewish ethics has been generally ignored by researchers in this field. We aim to explore whether current theories of moral psychology adequately account for Jewish ethics – and if they are therefore truly universal in their present formulations. To answer this question, we have conducted an empirical investigation of how Jews in various communities across the country understand the interaction between halakha and ethics. From these findings, we draw theoretical conclusions about human psychology and the structure of the lay concept of Jewish morality.

**Presenter:** Jeffrey Israel, The New School

**Title: “Jewishness and Rawlsian Political Liberalism “**

**Abstract:**

In this paper I will assess the relevance of John Rawls’s political liberalism to Jewish political ethics. I will argue that Jewishness presents a distinctive challenge to Rawls’s theory and that Rawls’s theory presents a distinctive challenge to Jewish political ethics. In the former case, I will show why the challenge of Jewishness ought to stimulate an important corrective to Rawls’s view. In the latter case, I will show how Rawls’s challenge presents a new conceptual framework that can aid the moral-psychological analysis of Jewishness.

**Respondent:** Martha Nussbaum, University of Chicago

<b>4:15pm</b>	Shabbat Candle Lighting	<i>On your own</i>
<b>5:45-6:45pm</b>	<b>SCE Presidential Address</b> <b>Title: "Doing Latina/o Ethics from the Margins of Empire: Liberating the Colonized Mind"</b> <b>President: Miguel De La Torre, Illiff School of Theology, University of Denver</b>	<i>International South</i>
<b>6:45-7:00pm</b>	<b>Lifetime Achievement Award</b> <b>Recipient: Beverly Wildung Harrison</b>	<i>International South</i>
<b>7:00-7:45pm</b>	<b>Kabbalat Shabbat Services</b> Followed by <i>Kiddush and Hamotzi</i> (Please bring your own <i>siddur</i> .) All are welcome	<i>PDR 2</i>
<b>8:00-9:30pm</b>	<b>Shabbat Dinner</b> (Pre-registration required for dinner. Meal is Kosher vegetarian.) <b>SJE Presidential Greetings: Aaron Mackler, Duquesne University</b>	<i>Astoria</i>



**Presenters: Sonja Buehring, University of Wisconsin-Madison Jewish Studies Graduate Association  
Susan Orpett Long, John Carroll University**

**Title: “Remembering the Dead: Social Ethics on the Margins of Life and Community”**

**Abstract:**

All societies have rules and customary practices constituting an ethical framework for the treatment of the deceased’s body and spirit, and for memorialization of the dead. Based on a series of interviews in 2011, this paper explores the interpretation and practice of such rules by American interfaith couples as they navigate the ethical expectations of remembering in Jewish, Christian, and American secular communities. On the margins of their religious communities, some drew upon their own religions, sometimes incorporating customs of the spouse’s traditions. Many, however, turned toward more individualized and secularized approaches considering the margins of life and death.

**Respondent:** Aana Vigen, Loyola University

**3:30-4:00pm**                      **BREAK**    *International North*

**4:00-5:30pm**                      **Concurrent Session V**    *Williford C*

**Topic: The Ethics of Encapsulating Jewish Ethics: a Panel Discussion of the Oxford Handbook of Jewish Ethics and Morality**

**Conveners:** Elliot N. Dorff, American Jewish University  
Jonathan K. Crane, Emory University

**Abstract:**

With original essays from nearly thirty leading scholars around the world, *OHJEM* surveys the breadth and depth of Jewish ethics. It covers textual, historical, thematic and communal approaches, as well as a host of practical issues from bioethics to business ethics, from the personal to the political. Questions arise, however, whether Jewish ethics *can* be encapsulated, and what are the ethics of this kind of project. The project of surveying Jewish ethics presupposes that the terrain of the field can be demarcated, traversed, and assessed. It also suggests that it is possible to essentialize the field. Is this a reasonable task for Jewish ethics – at any stage of development? Can it be done well, and if so, what would that look like?

**Panelists:**

**David Ellenson**, Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion, President

**Jean Porter**, University of Notre Dame, Professor of Theology

**Abdulaziz Sachedina**, University of Virginia, Professor of Religious Studies

**6:16pm**                      *Havdalah*    *On your own*

**Sunday, January 6, 2013**

**7:45-8:45am**                      **SJE Business Meeting**    *PDR 2*  
*Open to all SJE Members*

**9:00-10:30am**                      **SSME Plenary**    *International South*

**Speaker: Michael Sells, University of Chicago**

**10:30-11:00am**

**BREAK**

***International North***

**11:00am-12:30pm**

**Concurrent Session VI**

***Joliet***

**Topic: Jewish Ethics and Divine Command**

**Convener: Emily Filler, University of Virginia**

**Title: “Yeshayahu Leibowitz's Axiology: A 'Polytheism' of Values and the Most Valuable Value”**

**Presenter: Yonatan Brafman, Columbia University**

**Abstract:**

In this essay Leibowitz’s axiology and its relationship to the value that he claims halakhic practice instantiates, service of God, is explicated and assessed. It is argued that, while often Leibowitz affirms a relativistic ‘polytheism’ of values, sometimes he implies that the religious value is the most ‘valuable value.’ However, this is not due to its material content, because serving God is objectively best, rather it is because, consonant with his negative theology, it most fully instantiates the formal properties of a value. The tenability of this contentless value as a possible intention and reason for action is then assessed.

**Title: “Eating in Holiness: The Tension between Ethics and Command in Orthodox Kosher Practice”**

**Presenter: Jody Myers, California State University, Northridge**

**Abstract:**

This presentation examines the role of ethics in contemporary American Orthodox Jewish interpretations of *shechita*, the dietary laws, and eating. If one were to judge by the public declaration of leading Orthodox kosher certification agency, ethical concerns are paramount. However, my research, based primarily on participant-observation and qualitative interviews with Orthodox laypeople and rabbis in Los Angeles, shows a resistance to acknowledge the ethical dimensions of *shechita* or any other aspect of Jewish food practices. I consider how the current discourse has been affect by the changed role of women and the emergence of new strictures in Orthodox Jewish life.

**Respondent: Aaron Gross, University of San Diego**