

JEWISH Civilization and its Discontents:

Foundational Concepts Critical Interventions

The UCLA Center for Jewish Studies

November 3–5, 2001

ROYCE 314

The title of this conference, "Jewish Civilization and Its Discontents," involves the confrontation of two distinct, perhaps even contradictory, perspectives. On the one hand, we follow the American rabbi Mordecai Kaplan, the author of *Judaism as a Civilization* (1934), in understanding Jewish history as the unfolding of an evolving religious civilization, indeed, as a civilization that does not acknowledge boundaries supposedly separating religion from society, community, and culture. On the other, however, we bear in mind Freud's great commentary on civilization and the fate of the Jews from the 1930s, *Civilization and Its Discontents*. There, Freud points not only to the malaise that inevitably accompanies the project of civilization, but also to the singular role that the Jews and anti-semitism have played in its history and structure. Kaplan in America and Freud in Europe write against the backdrop of the rise of Fascism, with its dire consequences for the Jews and for ideas of civilization, enlightenment, and universalism. The paradoxes that Freud describes are the necessary counterpoint to Kaplan's thesis, the darker side of the relationship between civilization and the Jews that speaks directly to some of the most profound contradictions the world faces today.

This conference will inaugurate the next phase of growth of the UCLA Center for Jewish Studies, which will be focused on the concept of Jewish Civilization. By "Jewish Civilization," we mean Jewish history and life as the product of ceaseless cultural absorption, negotiation, and exchange, rather than isolated linguistic or religious self-identity. Hence we intend to examine Judaism both as a collection of minority cultures deserving to be studied in their specificity and as a collectivity that is foundational for the majority cultures and world civilizations that have been their neighbors, in greater or lesser degrees of harmony and conflict. Just as the Jews have never existed outside of civilization, few civilizations have been left unchanged by their contact with the Jews, and our project is informed by the assumption that these interactions are of primary importance to understanding both Judaism and Civilization as such.

Jewish Studies is integral to the study of Civilization, in all its achievements and atrocities — cultural, religious, intellectual, political, historical — and thus a field that is of urgent interest to Jews and non-Jews alike. We believe that a responsible and critical research program in Jewish Studies must have a global scope that reflects the vast dimensions of the Jewish experience in its interactions with world cultures as well as in itself. In the last twenty years, cultural critics and critical theorists have increasingly come to think of Judaism as more than the first half of so-called Judeo-Christian values, or the primitive Hebraic origin of a triumphantly Hellenic culture, but also as the source of textual experiences, ethical insights, and historical conflicts that are not so easily accommodated by those histories. For such thinkers, Judaism functions both as a system that is interwoven with the fabric of Western history, and as a loose thread that allows for that fabric to be unraveled and examined. And these are the strands we hope to follow in the coming years at the UCLA Center for Jewish Studies.

A Conference sponsored by the UCLA Center for Jewish Studies with the support of the UC Humanities Research Institute, the Susan and David Wilstein Institute of Jewish Policy Studies, The University of California Office of the President, and the National Endowment for the Humanities as part of the ongoing Colloquium on Jewish Civilization.

Saturday, Nov. 3rd

Evening reception and Keynote Address by Robert Alter
(Professor of Bible and Comparative Literature, UC Berkeley)

Introduction by Janet Hadda (Department of English, UCLA)

Sunday, Nov. 4th

Morning Session: **Jewish Civilization and Its Discontents: To Open the Question**

9:00–11:00

Ken Reinhard (Director, Center for Jewish Studies, UCLA)

David Myers (Professor of History, UCLA)

Rachel Adler (Professor of Religion, USC)

11:15–12:30

KEYNOTE PAPER: Arnold Eisen (Professor of Religious Studies, Stanford)

Afternoon Session: **The Jewish Political Tradition**

MODERATOR: Steve Spiegel (Professor of Political Science, UCLA)

Sponsored by the Susan and David Wilstein Institute for Jewish Policy Studies

2:00–4:00

Adam Seligman (Professor of Economic Culture, Boston University)

Suzanne Last Stone (Professor of Law, Cardozo Law School)

David Gordis (President, Hebrew College)

4:30–6:00

KEYNOTE PAPER: Michael Walzer

(Professor of Social Science, the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton)

Monday, Nov. 5th

Morning Session: **The Ten Commandments and Their Vicissitudes**

MODERATOR: William Schniedewind

9:00–11:00

Robert Gibbs (Professor of Philosophy, University of Toronto)

Julia Reinhard Lupton (Professor of English and Comp. Lit., UC Irvine)

Bernard Levinson (Professor of Classical and Near Eastern Studies, U. of Minnesota)

11:15–12:30

KEYNOTE PAPER: Calum Carmichael

(Professor of Comparative Literature and Law, Cornell University)

Afternoon Session: **Creation, Revelation, Redemption**

MODERATOR: Chaim Seidler-Feller (Director of Yitzhak Rabin Hillel Center at UCLA)

1:00–2:30

Elliot Dorff (Rector and Professor of Philosophy, U. of Judaism)

Elliot Wolfson (Professor of Hebrew and Judaic Studies, NYU)

3:00–4:30

KEYNOTE PAPER: Paul Mendes-Flohr

(Professor of Modern Jewish Thought, University of Chicago and Hebrew University)

Parking: Parking for the event will be in Lot 2. Please purchase permit (\$6) at the kiosk at Hilgard and Westholme Avenues.

Registration: The conference is free and open to the public. Advance registration is required. Please call the Center for Jewish Studies at (310)825-5387 to register. Seating is on a first-come, first-served basis. There are no assigned seats.



Civilization and Its Discontents

Freud,

him pain, to torture and kill him.

to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause to satisfy their aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without compensation, is for them not only a potential helper or sexual object, but also someone who tempts them themselves if they are attacked; they are, on the contrary, creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness. As a result, their neighbor .. Men are not gentle creatures who want to be loved, and who at the most can defend



UCLA Center for Jewish Studies
302 Royce Hall
Box 951485
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1485

The UCLA Center for Jewish Studies presents

JEWISH Civilization and its Discontents:

Foundational Concepts Critical Interventions

November 3–5, 2001

It is always possible to bind together a considerable number of people in love, so long as there are other people left over to receive the manifestations of their aggressiveness ... In this respect, the Jewish people, scattered everywhere, have rendered most useful service to the civilizations that have been their hosts; but unfortunately all the massacres of the Jews in the Middle Ages did not suffice to make that period more peaceful and secure for their Christian fellows. When once the Apostle Paul had posited universal love between men as the foundation of his Christian community, extreme intolerance on the part of Christendom towards those who remained outside it became the inevitable consequence.

