Theories of Antisemitism

Note: This syllabus provides a framework for instructors teaching introductory courses on modern theories of antisemitism. The syllabus may be used and modified for educational purposes.

Course Description:

This class explores some of the major theoretical statements on antisemitism produced in the modern period. Beginning with a brief look at the history of Jewish emancipation and the ensuing debates about the “Jewish Question,” the course will consider the ways that antisemitism has been understood from the perspectives of history, theology, psychoanalysis, Marxism, critical theory, postcolonial thought, and more. The class will conclude with a consideration of the fraught contemporary arguments about the relationship between antisemitism and Zionism.

Learning Objectives:

• Close reading, interpretation, and written and oral analysis
• Familiarization with major terms and debates surrounding antisemitism
• Consideration of antisemitism as an historical and philosophical question
• Philosophical literacy; identifying, evaluating, and interpreting philosophical arguments

Required Texts:


Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, translated by Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008).


Course Readings and Schedule:

Week I: The Jewish Question

Tuesday: --Salo Baron, “Ghetto and Emancipation,” in Menorah 14, no. 6 (1928), 515-528

Week II: Capital (I)


Week III: Nationalism

Tuesday: Moses Hess, Rome and Jerusalem: The Last Nationalist Question (1862), in The Revival of Israel (1995), Preface, Letter 1, and Letter 4


Week IV: Psychoanalysis

Tuesday: Sigmund Freud, Moses and Monotheism (1939), pp. 66-90

Thursday: Freud, Moses and Monotheism, pp. 90-117

--Otto Fenichel, “Psychoanalysis of Antisemitism,” in American Imago 1, no. 2 (1940), pp. 24-39

Week V: Critical Theory

Tuesday: Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, “The Concept of Enlightenment,” in Dialectic of Enlightenment (1944) pp, 1-34


Week VI: Existentialism

Tuesday: Jean-Paul Sartre, Anti-Semite and Jew (1944), parts 1-2

Thursday: Sartre, Anti-Semite and Jew, parts 3-4

Week VII: Common Sense


Thursday: Arendt, “Antisemitism,” pp. 53-120

Week VIII: Whiteness

Tuesday: Frantz Fanon, “The Lived Experience of the Black Man,” in Black Skin, White Masks (1952), pp. 89-119

Thursday: Fanon, “The Black Man and Psychopathology,” in Black Skin, White Masks, pp. 120-185

--James Baldwin, “Negroes are Anti-Semitic Because They’re Anti-White,” The New York Times (9 April 1967)

Week IX: Christianity

Tuesday: Joshua Trachtenberg, The Devil and the Jews (1943), Preface (pp. xiii-xvi), Introduction (pp. 3-7), and Part 1 (pp. 11-56)
Thursday: --Gavin Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism* (1990), Introduction (pp. 1-17) and Chapter 13 (pp. 301-310)

**Week X: Orientalism**


*Thursday:* --Maurice Olender, *The Language of Paradise* (1989), chap. 1 (pp. 1-20)

**Week XI: Capital (II)**

*Tuesday:* --Abram Leon, *The Jewish Question: A Marxist Interpretation* (1946), Chapter 1 (pp. 71-93) and Chapter 7 (pp. 219-236)

*Thursday:* --Abram Leon, *The Jewish Question*, Chapter 8 (pp. 249-258)

**Week XII: Prefixes**

*Tuesday:* --Zygmunt Bauman, “Allosemitism: Premodern, Modern, Postmodern” (1997), all

*Thursday:* --David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition*, Introduction (pp. 1-12) and ch. 1 (pp. 13-47)

**Week XIII: Zionism**

*Tuesday:* --Alain Finkielkraut, “In the Name of the Other: Reflections on the Coming Anti-Semitism,” in *Azure* 18 (2004), pp. 21-33


**Week XIV: Anti-Zionism**
