Yeshiva University
THE ZAHAVA AND MOSHAEL STRAUS
CENTER FOR TORAH AND WESTERN THOUGHT

Prof. Leon Wieseltier
Prof. Meir Soloveichik
Spring 2016
Wednesdays, 4:50-6:30

Moses Mendelssohn and His American Counterparts

It was within Jewish thought, in Moses Mendelssohn's great work *Jerusalem*, that the idea of the liberty of conscience was most forcefully stated and developed in the era of the Enlightenment. Moreover, it was championed by a thinker who simultaneously championed the irreversible obligations of Jewish law. This groundbreaking philosophy was based on a certain theory of the relationship between religion and the state and on a certain theory of the nature of belief. Both these notions deserve close textual and analytical scrutiny. Most uncannily, these same ideas about faith and power were being developed at the very same time, unknown to Mendelssohn, by Jefferson and Madison in far-away Virginia. This seminar will investigate this extraordinary convergence and seek thereby to arrive at a better understanding of the modern difference and the American difference in the philosophical foundations of tolerance. We will then conclude by pondering the implications of this difference for theology and religious thought.

Every class will involve an in-depth study of the primary sources listed in each unit. As such, students are expected to prepare the readings ahead of time and one student will present them to the class each week. Students will also be assigned secondary background readings on Judaism, religion, and the Enlightenment by scholars such as Alan Arkush, Alexander Altmann, Shmuel Feiner, and David Sorkin. A 15-20 page paper, whose nature and requirements will be discussed in class, will be due on 5/18.

PART I

1/27, 2/3, 2/10, 2/17, 2/24

Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem, or, On Religious Power and Judaism*, translated by Alan Arkush, introduction and commentary by Alexander Altmann (Hanover: Published for Brandeis University Press by University Press of New England, 1983).

Alexander Altmann, *Essays in Jewish Intellectual History* (Hanover, NH: Published for Brandeis University Press by University Press of New England, 1981).

Alan Arkush, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Enlightenment* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994).

Shmuel Feiner, *Moses Mendelssohn: Sage of Modernity*, trans. Anthony Berris (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

David Jan Sorkin, *Moses Mendelssohn and the Religious Enlightenment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

Yeshiva University
THE ZAHAVA AND MOSHAEL STRAUS
CENTER FOR TORAH AND WESTERN THOUGHT

Leora Batnitzky, *How Judaism Became a Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011).

PART II

3/2, 3/9, 3/16, 3/30

Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, edited with an introduction and notes by William Peden (Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture at Williamsburg, Virginia by the University of North Carolina Press, 1995). It is also accessible in electronic format: https://www.thefederalistpapers.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Thomas-Jefferson-Notes-On-The-State-Of-Virginia.pdf

James Madison, "Memorial and Remonstrance against Religious Assessments, 20 June 1785," in *The Papers of James Madison*, edited by William T. Hutchison et al. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1962-1977), 8:298-304. It is also accessible in electronic format: http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/amendI_religions43.html

John Locke, "A Letter Concerning Toleration," accessible in electronic format: https://www.thefederalistpapers.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/John-Locke-A-Letter-Concerning-Toleration.pdf

Philip Hamburger, *Separation of Church and State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

Michael McConnell, "The Origins and Historical Understanding of Free Exercise of Religion," *Harvard Law Review*, Vol. 103, No. 7 (May, 1990): 1409-1517.

PART III

4/6, 4/13, 4/20, 5/4

William James, "The Will to Believe," in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*, ed. Frederick Bukhardt et al. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979). It is also accessible in electronic format: https://www.gutenberg.org/files/26659/26659-h/26659-h.htm

William K. Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief," in *The Ethics of Belief and Other essays* (Prometheus: 1999). It is also accessible in electronic format: http://people.brandeis.edu/~teuber/Clifford_ethics.pdf

Maimonides, "Perek Heleq," *Mishnah 'im perush Mosheh Ben Maimon*, translated by Yosef Kafah (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kuk, 1966), vol. 4.

Joseph Albo, *Sefer Ha-Iqqarim*, edited with an introduction by Eliezer Schweid (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1967).
Leo Baeck, *The Essence of Judaism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1948).

Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "Confrontation," *Tradition* 6:2 (Spring-Summer 1964): 5-29.

Michael Wyschogrod, *The Body of Faith: Judaism as Corporeal Election* (New York: Seabury Press, 1983).