

International Conference

MESSIANISM AND THE LAW

Antwerp, 11-12 May 2006

University of Antwerp

MESSIANISM AND THE LAW

"The essential character of messianism may well be precisely its particular relation to the law". This statement by Giorgio Agamben confirms a renewed interest in the interstices between theological, mystical, political and juridical discourse. In the past decades, philosophers and political thinkers repeatedly drew upon the millennial tradition of messianic thinking in their efforts to come to terms with the injustices of the present. Their conceptions of messianism build upon and revise, modify or radicalize politico-theological theories developed in the period between the two world wars by thinkers who, in the face of doom and destruction, reverted to ancient Judeo-Christian visions of redemption.

In the Jewish tradition, the relationship between messianism and the law ranges from ideas of an absolute restoration of order when "all the ancient laws will again be in force" (Maimonides) to visions of the eventual suspension of the law as such. Historically, attitudes toward messianism and the legal tradition interact with the political and historical conditions as well as with the prevailing theoretical and philosophical discourses of their times. Cross-fertilization between messianism, politics and philosophy also informs recent conceptualizations of history and time, language and the law in the writings of Emmanuel Lévinas, Jacques Derrida and, most recently, Giorgio Agamben.

The conference will present new research on historical messianism and explore the contemporary modes and stakes of messianic thinking in its close interaction with previous and present political contexts and theoretical discourses. The analysis of modern messianism encourages reflections on the following questions: How does messianism figure in modern and contemporary philosophy? How does contemporary messianic thinking relate to its historical Jewish and Christian origins and how does it deal with the legacy of its early twentieth-century precursors: Walter Benjamin, Franz Rosenzweig, Ernst Bloch, Gerschom Scholem, Theodor W. Adorno and others? How does it relate to today's state of affairs in the juridical, political and social realm? Is it primarily a Jewish concern and how has it interacted with other religious and political traditions? How does the impact of Jewish messianism on modern philosophy compare with and relate to other influences of Jewish and non-Jewish thought? How valid, how relevant is it to revert to religious and theological concepts for an analysis of concrete historical events, for an assessment of the present state of the planet and for the task of politics in the future?

Thursday, 11 May 2006

- 13:00-13:30 Registration
- 13:30-14:00 Opening Remarks
Francis Van Loon (Rector, University of Antwerp)
Vivian Liska (University of Antwerp)
- 14:00-15:00 **Moshe Idel** (Hebrew University of Jerusalem)
*"Torah Hadashah": Messiah and the New Torah
in Jewish Mysticism and Modern Scholarship*
- 15:00-16:00 **Sigrid Weigel** (Zentrum für Literaturforschung Berlin)
*"Ausnahmezustand" vs. "Absehung vom Gebot":
On the Differences Between Constitutional Law
and Walter Benjamin's Critique of Violence*
- 16:00-16:30 Coffee Break
- 16:30-17:30 **Lieven De Cauter** (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven)
*The Tyrant as Messiah:
Messianism in the Neoconservative Worldview?*
- 17:30-18:30 **Vivian Liska** (University of Antwerp)
*The Messiah Before the Law:
Giorgio Agamben on Kafka*
- 18:30-19:00 Coffee Break
- 19:00-20:00 **Aviezer Ravitzky** (Hebrew University of Jerusalem)
Messianism and Law in Contemporary Orthodox Judaism

Friday, 12 May 2006

- 09:00-10:00** **Astrid Deuber-Mankowsky** (Ruhr Universität Bochum)
*The Image of Happiness We Harbor:
The Messianic Power of Weakness in Hermann Cohen,
Walter Benjamin, and Paul*
- 10:00-11:00** **Micha Brumlik** (Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität
Frankfurt am Main)
*Postmodern Perspectives on the Founder of Christianity:
Alain Badiou, Daniel Boyarin and Slavoj Žižek on Paul*
- 11:00-11:30 Coffee Break
- 11:30-12:30** **Ashraf Noor** (Franz Rosenzweig Research Centre,
Hebrew University of Jerusalem)
*Walter Benjamin:
Temporality and the Storm of Forgiveness*
- 12:30-13:30** **Ada Rapoport-Albert** (University College London)
*Antinomian, Anomian and Metanomian Strands
in Sabbatio-Frankist Eschatology*
- 13:30-14:00 Closing Remarks

NOTES ON THE LECTURERS

Micha Brumlik is Professor at the Institute of Educational Research at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main since 2000, where he has focused on the theory of education. Simultaneously, he has been Director of the Fritz Bauer Institut, the Study and Documentation Center on the History and Impact of the Holocaust from October 2000-2005. Following his studies in Education and Philosophy he became Assistant of Education in Göttingen and Mainz and subsequently Assistant Professor in Hamburg. From 1981-2000 he taught Educational Research at the University of Heidelberg.

Selected publications: *Vernunft und Offenbarung. Religionsphilosophische Versuche* (2000); *Deutscher Geist und Judenhaß. Das Verhältnis des philosophischen Idealismus zum Judentum* (2000); *Bildung und Glück. Versuch einer Theorie der Tugenden* (2002); *Aus Katastrophen lernen. Grundlagen zeitgeschichtlicher Bildung in menschenrechtlicher Absicht* (2004); *Sigmund Freud. Der Denker des 20. Jahrhunderts* (2006).

Lieven De Cauter teaches philosophy of culture in several art schools and universities: currently at the department of Architecture of the Leuven University, the media school RITS and the dance school P.A.R.TS (Brussels) and the Berlage Institute (Rotterdam). He studied Philosophy and History of Art. He published books on contemporary art, experience and modernity, on Walter Benjamin, and more recently on architecture and politics. He is initiator of the Brussels Tribunal, a people's court on 'the Project for the New American Century' and its responsibilities in the invasion of Iraq.

Selected publications: *Het hiernamaals van de kunst* (1991); *Archeologie van de kick: verhalen over moderniteit en ervaring* (1995); *De dwerg in de schaakautomaat: Benjamins verborgen leer* (1999); *De dageraadsmens* (2000); *De capsulaire beschaving: over de stad in het tijdperk van de angst* (2004); *The Capsular Civilization: On the City in the Age of Fear* (2005).

Astrid Deuber-Mankowsky is Professor at the Institute for Media Studies at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum since March 2004. She studied Philosophy and German at the University of Zurich and the Freie Universität Berlin. Since 1995 she has been Scientific Assistant at the Kulturwissenschaftliches Seminar at the Humboldt-Universität Berlin. Her study *Erkenntniskritik und vergängliche Erfahrung bei Walter Benjamin und Hermann Cohen* earned her the Humboldtpreis in 1999.

Selected publications: *1789-1989. Die Revolution hat nicht stattgefunden. Dokumentation des V. Symposiums der Internationalen Assoziation von Philosophinnen* (1989); *Der frühe Walter Benjamin und Hermann Cohen. Jüdische Werte. Kritische Philosophie. Vergängliche Erfahrung* (2000); *Lara Croft. Modell, Medium, Cyberheldin. Das virtuelle Geschlecht und seine metaphysischen Tücken* (2001); *Die Botschaft der Botschaften. Berliner Blätter. „Ethnographische und Ethnologische Beiträge; Heft 34“* (2004); *Lara Croft: Cyber Heroine. Electronic Mediations* (2005).

Moshe Idel is Professor of Jewish Thought at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He holds a Ph.D. in Kabbalah and has served as visiting professor and researcher at many universities and institutions worldwide, including Yale, Harvard and Princeton in the USA and Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris. He is the winner of several awards and prizes, including the EMET Prize, given by the Prime Minister of Israel; the Israel Prize for Jewish Thought (1999); The Gershom Scholem Prize for research in Kabbalah, given by the Israeli Academy for Sciences and Humanities; the Present Tense/Joel H. Caviar Literary Award for Religious Thought; and the Jewish National Book Award.

Selected publications: *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (1990); *Hassidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic* (1995); *Messianic Mystics* (1998); *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation* (2002); *Kabbalah and Eros* (2004).

Vivian Liska is Professor of German Literature at the University of Antwerp, Belgium, where she teaches Modern German Literature and Literary Theory. She is also Director of the Institute of Jewish Studies at the University of Antwerp since its foundation in 2001. Vivian Liska is editor of the ICLA volume on Modernism in the series *History of the European Literatures* (with Astradur Eysteinnsson) and of a volume on *Contemporary Jewish Writing in Europe* (with Thomas Nolden.) She is currently preparing a study on collective identity and the modernist self in German-Jewish literature entitled *When Kafka Says We*.

Selected Publications: *Die Nacht der Hymnen. Paul Celans Gedichte 1938-1944* (1993); *Die Dichterin und das schelmische Erhabene. Else Lasker-Schülers Die Nächte Tino von Bagdads* (1997); *Die Moderne - Ein Weib* (2000); Articles on Nietzsche, Kafka, Benjamin, Arendt, Adorno, Blanchot, Kofman, Uwe Johnson, Rahel Varnhagen, German Expressionism, German-Jewish Literature and Literary Theory.

Ashraf Noor is currently Research Fellow at the Franz Rosenzweig Research Centre for German-Jewish Literature and Cultural History. He studied English Literature and German Literature at the University of Sussex, Philosophy and German Literature at the Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg and the History of Modern Philosophical Systems at the University of Paris I - Sorbonne. He has been a Visiting Research Fellow, Associate Fellow, then Research Fellow at the Franz Rosenzweig Research Centre since 1994. Ashraf Noor's research is in the field of the philosophy of language, philosophy of history, narrative theory, and theory of historiography.

Selected publications: Ashraf Noor is general editor of the monograph series of the Franz Rosenzweig Centre, Makom. He is also general editor of the journal of the Centre, Nahareim. Titles include: *Erfahrung und Zäsur: Denkfiguren der deutsch-jüdischen Moderne* (ed.) (1999); *"Jüdische" und "christliche" Sprachfigurationen im 20. Jahrhundert* (co-ed.) (2002); *Walter Benjamin und die französische Moderne* (ed.) (2002); *Benjamin und das Gesetz* (ed.) (2002); Articles on Husserl, Heidegger, Cohen, Benjamin, Arendt, Musil, Bataille, Bonnefoy, Ricœur, Bachtin, Chomsky.

Ada Rapoport-Albert is Reader of Jewish History and Head of the Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies at University College London, where she studied for both her BA and Ph.D. in Jewish history. She has also taught at the Oriental Institute in Oxford and, as visiting professor, at various universities in Europe and the USA, including Harvard Divinity School, Ludwig-Maximilians Universität München, and Stanford University. Dr. Rapoport-Albert teaches courses and supervises postgraduate research on the history and literature of Hasidism, on the Kabbalah and other schools of Jewish esoteric spirituality, and on various aspects of medieval and early modern Jewish history. She has published various studies on the history of Eastern European Hasidism and the Sabbatian messianic movement, from the 17th to the early 19th century.

Selected publications: *Hasidism Reappraised* (ed.) (1996); *Biblical Hebrew, Biblical Texts: Essays in Memory of Michael P. Weitzman* (co-ed.) (2001). Her forthcoming books to be published by the Littman Library include *Female Bodies, Male Souls: Asceticism and Gender in the Jewish Tradition*; *Emergent Hasidism: Spontaneity and Institutionalization*; and *Messianic Hasidism: From Nineteenth-Century Bratslav to Twentieth-Century Habad*.

Aviezer Ravitzky is the Sol Rosenblum Professor of Jewish Philosophy at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and is a Senior Fellow at the Israel Democracy Institute. He received his Ph.D. from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and was a Post Doctorate Fellow at Harvard University. A main focus of his research is medieval Jewish philosophy. He has served as the Chair of the Department of Jewish Thought and as Chairman of the Institute of Jewish Studies at the Hebrew University. He has also served as a member of the Israeli Counsel of Higher Education. Professor Ravitzky has taught as a visiting professor at leading universities in the United States. In 2001, Professor Ravitzky was honored with the Israel Prize for his research in Jewish Thought.

Selected publications: *Messianism, Zionism and Jewish Religious Radicalism* (1996); *History and Faith: Studies in Jewish Philosophy* (1996); *The Land of Israel in Jewish Thought* (ed.) (1990, 1998, 2004) (H); *Religion & State in Jewish Philosophy* (1998) (H), (2002) (E); *Religion & State in the 20th Century Jewish Thought* (ed.) (2005) (H); *Iyyunin Maymoniyim: Studies in the philosophy of Maimonides and his Disciples* (2006) (H).

Sigrid Weigel is Director of the Center for Literary Research Berlin and Professor at TU Berlin since 1999 and is an Honorary Member of the MLA. Sigrid Weigel earned her Ph.D. at Hamburg University, where she was Professor from 1984-1990. In 1986, she completed her Habilitation at Marburg University. From 1990-1993, Professor Weigel was a member of the directory board of the 'Kulturwissenschaftliches Institut' Essen, from 1992-1998 she was Professor of German Literature at Zürich University. In 1998/1999 she was Director of the Einstein Forum Potsdam. Sigrid Weigel has taught as visiting professor in Berkeley, Stanford, Princeton, et al.

Selected publications: *Body-and Image-Space. Re-Reading Walter Benjamin* (1996); *Entstellte Ähnlichkeit. Walter Benjamins theoretische Schreibweise* (1997); *Ingeborg Bachmann. Hinterlassenschaften unter Wahrung des Briefgeheimnisses* (1999); *Literatur als Voraussetzung der Kulturgeschichte. Schauplätze von Shakespeare bis Benjamin* (2004); *Genea-Logik. Generation, Tradition und Evolution zwischen Kultur- und Naturwissenschaften* (2006).

THE INSTITUTE OF JEWISH STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ANTWERP

The Institute of Jewish Studies was established in the autumn of 2001. It is fully integrated into the University of Antwerp and funded by the Ministry of Education of the Flemish Community in Belgium. Its goal is the academic study of Judaism from a variety of perspectives: historical, philological, cultural, literary, religious, philosophical and sociological. The Institute's activities cover academic research, university teaching and educational services for a general public.

The Institute organizes an annual series of over twenty lectures on various topics in the field of Jewish Studies, language courses in Yiddish and contemporary Hebrew at different levels of linguistic competence, a Jewish Studies Minor integrated in the Department of Literature, History and Philosophy, and special academic and public events such as conferences, symposia, workshops, and reading groups. The Institute's research topics, academic gatherings and public events focus on modern Jewish history, literature, philosophy and cultural studies. Simultaneously, they touch upon a range of issues at the heart of current concerns in Europe's academic, cultural and social life.

The International Conference "Messianism and the Law" organized in collaboration with the Department of Philosophy at the University of Antwerp, the International Walter Benjamin Association and the Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf, manifests the Institute's commitment to develop interdisciplinary national and international partnerships and to create opportunities of encounter between the university and the public at large.

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Organizers

Institute of Jewish Studies, University of Antwerp
in cooperation with
Department of Philosophy, University of Antwerp
International Walter Benjamin Association
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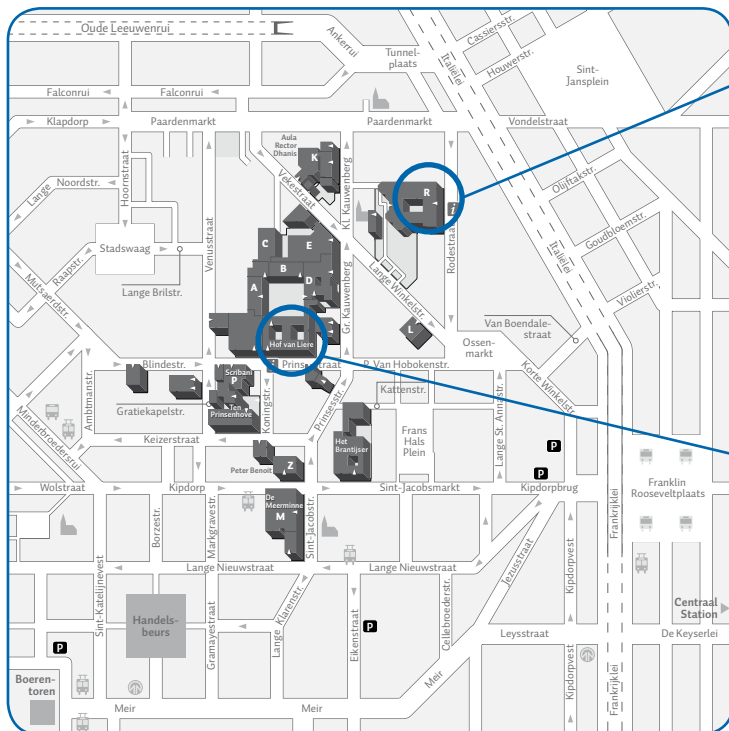
with the kind support of
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Registration & Contact

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Venue

Thursday, 11 May 2006
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Friday, 12 May 2006
University of Antwerp
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Hof van Liere
Prinsstraat 13
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