Messianism grew as a religious idea in relation to notions of redemption, judgement day and end of times, and reflects the belief in God as ultimate sovereign. Historically, however, the messianic idea was received and transformed in often paradoxical ways, as will be examined in the context of modern German-Jewish thought.

In this course we will discuss how messianic notions in modern German-Jewish thought are situated on major ideational intersections in the intellectual history of the period: processes of secularisation where messianic ideas are expressed in non-religious and even atheist terminology (e.g. Ernst Bloch and the Frankfurt School); the divergence between Enlightenment and 19th-century ideas of progress (in historicist and Marxist thought) and anti-historicist writing which nonetheless envisions messianic outcomes (Gershom Scholem and Walter Benjamin); the phenomena of assimilation and dissimulation in which German-Jewish thinkers negotiate between a traditional Jewish vocabulary of prophecy and “messianic time” and German philosophical legacies such as the dialectics of history (Hermann Cohen and Franz Rosenzweig). We will also examine the correlation between theoretical writings on messianism and the response to immediate historical events (World War One, political Zionism, the Bavarian Räterepublik) which invite messianic interpretations (Gustav Landauer, Kurt Eisner, Ernst Toller, Martin Buber). The course will, moreover, demonstrate how messianic ideas are present also in concurrent literary works (e.g. Franz Kafka).

The course will thus attempt to provide definitions to key concepts and figures in German-Jewish messianic thought within the relevant historical contexts.

Course Bibliography (selection):


Moses, Stephane, *The Angel of History: Rosenzweig, Benjamin, Scholem*, Barbara Harshav (trans.) (Stanford, 2009)


-----, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York 1971)

-----, “Jewish Messianism and the Idea of Progress”, *Commentary* 25/4 (1958), 298-305