



Public Policy and Social Issues: Jewish Sources and Perspectives

Marshall J. Breger

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Designing public policies to meet the needs of a diverse society is challenging, and the variety of necessary perspectives are often clouded by competing ideas about social responsibility, personal freedom, religious beliefs, and governmental intervention. Here, prominent Jewish scholars and commentators address various social issues and public policies from a Jewish perspective, using Jewish sources and documents to elucidate responses and propose solutions that are in keeping with Jewish law as set out by the major documents of the Jewish faith.

Abortion, stem cell research, welfare reform, euthanasia, genetic engineering, and other hot-button issues are topics of primary concern to politicians, lawmakers, religious leaders, and ordinary citizens alike. Designing public policies to meet the needs of a diverse society is challenging, and the variety of necessary perspectives are often clouded by competing ideas about social responsibility, personal freedom, religious beliefs, and governmental intervention. Here, prominent Jewish scholars and commentators address various social issues and public policies from a Jewish perspective, using Jewish sources and documents to elucidate responses and propose solutions that are in keeping with Jewish law as set out by the major documents of the Jewish faith. Their conclusions about ways to consider issues of public concern and private consideration, and their adherence to conservative politics, may surprise readers. What emerges is the notion that Jewish thought can contribute to the American political discourse and is available to anyone looking for answers to today's toughest questions.

Creating a public policy to address social issues that is both responsible and morally guided can be a difficult proposition for lawmakers. Making personal decisions about these same issues can be even more difficult as people struggle for guidance. Addressing many of the issues that are hotly debated in the media and in the corridors of our government, conservative, reform, and orthodox commentators carefully outline an approach for lawmakers and individuals. This approach incorporates Jewish law into a public policy philosophy that is both conservative-leaning and politically available. Taken as a whole, the essays underscore that Jewish tradition mostly (albeit not invariably) leads one to the politically conservative side of the aisle.

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