

**PHILOSOPHY 3540: JUDAISM AND PHILOSOPHY
FALL 2017**

Professor Martin D. Yaffe
Office Hours: TR 11:00–12:30, 2:00–3:30 (ENV 310N)

TR 12:30–1:50
CHEM 253

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

The subject matter of this course is Judaism as found both in the Hebrew Bible (or “Old Testament”) and in post-biblical Jewish life and thought. Our aim is to understand what it says about God and the world and human life. Our approach is to probe the views of various thoughtful Jews who are led by both religious and intellectual concerns to raise larger questions about Judaism’s practical and philosophical significance nowadays. Whatever their differences among themselves and with non-Jews, all Jews ultimately trace their way of life as Jews to the Bible, one of the twin ancient roots of our modern American way of life as well (the other being Greek philosophy). Our motive for studying Judaism carefully in this course, whether we are Jewish or not, is thus self-understanding.

In the first half of this course, we look at how a number of our contemporaries are led into larger questions while seeking to defend Judaism against the widespread but dubious opinion that the Bible (notably Genesis 1:26–28) is somehow the cause of our current environmental crisis. Subsequently, we consider the life and thought of the excommunicated Jew Benedict Spinoza (1632–77), whose *Theologico-Political Treatise* (1670) is a philosophical founding-document of modern Judaism, by way of its being the philosophical founding-document of both modern biblical criticism and modern liberal democracy. Finally, we read selected essays on Judaism by Leo Strauss (1899–1973), whose scholarly life’s work was to explore not only the key differences between ancient and modern thought (including Jewish thought) but also the ongoing tension between the Bible and philosophy or science.

The course emphasizes first-hand reading, clear thinking and careful writing. Class lectures, essay examinations and other requirements are all geared to that reading. Give-and-take class discussion is indispensable. There are no other prerequisites.

II. REQUIRED TEXTS

JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh. 2nd ed. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1999.

—or any reliable text and/or translation of the Hebrew Bible (“Old Testament”)

Judaism and Environmental Ethics: A Reader. Edited by Martin D. Yaffe. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001.

Neusner, Jacob. *Routledge Dictionary of Judaism*. New York: Routledge, 2004.

—or: Jacobs, Louis. *Concise Companion to the Jewish Religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Spinoza, Benedict. *Theologico-Political Treatise*. Translated by Martin D. Yaffe. Focus Philosophical Library. Newburyport, MA: Pullins, 2004; reprint, Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2014.

Strauss, Leo. *Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity: Essays and Lectures in Modern Jewish Thought*. Edited by Kenneth Hart Green. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1997.

III. ADDITIONAL REQUIRED TEXT

Harbrace Handbook. 15th ed. Boston: Wadsworth, 2004.

—or any other edition; or any comparable handbook concerning grammar and style

IV. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. These course requirements are designed to fulfill the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences’ mission statement: “The mission of UNT’s College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences is to kindle the thirst for truth, justice, and beauty; to foster cultural literacy and scientific investigation; and to cultivate thinking, speaking, and writing abilities characterized by clear

- expression and logically coherent, evidence-based arguments. We see these as the values, forms of knowledge, and skills most needed by citizens of a democracy and by productive members of the global workforce.”
2. Daily (almost) reading quizzes and/or investigative reports (acceptable in specified format only) are worth approximately one-third of your course grade. These may be supplemented occasionally by optional oral reports (for extra credit), etc.
 3. Midterm and final take-home essay-examinations are each worth approximately one-third of your course grade. To pass the course, you must earn passing grades for each of your answers in both examinations. The final take-home examination is due in CHEM 253 on Thursday, December 14 at 10:30 A.M. sharp.
 4. Regular and punctual attendance is required. Absentees may be penalized. You are encouraged to consult with the instructor about making up for occasional or unavoidable absences.
 5. All examinations or investigative reports, etc., must be submitted in hardcopy, using Times New Roman 12-point font (10-point in any footnotes) and clear black ink, with a single cover-page clearly listing the following information *only*: course number (alongside department name), course name, instructor (including formal title), date, name of assignment (exactly as found in the assignment instructions), and student’s name and student-number.
 6. Use one surface of a page only.
 7. Leave one-inch margins on all sides of each page for comments.
 8. Double-space everything, *including cover-page*.
 9. Spelling counts. So does grammar. Our authority is *Harbrace Handbook*. On the need for correct punctuation, see Lynne Truss, *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation* (New York: Gotham, 2004). On the need for plain, jargon-free, non-ideologized language, see Diane Ravitch, *The Language Police: How Pressure Groups Restrict What Students Learn* (New York: Vintage, 2003). On how to be an effective student, see James Duban, *Be a College Achiever: The Complete Guide to Academic Stardom* (Victoria, BC: Trafford Publications, 2005), especially sections 3 and 4.
 10. Responsibility for documenting primary and secondary sources adequately and correctly rests with the student. Proper footnote, endnote or parenthetical citations, etc., are especially needed where you are relying directly on another’s published work. You are expected to be familiar with UNT’s policies concerning academic dishonesty:
http://www.unt.edu/policy/UNT_Policy/volume3/18_1_11.html.
 11. When you are citing works that have standard reference formats, you *must* use those formats exclusively—e.g., Gen. 1:1; Spinoza, *TTP* 1.2.3. In general, use the citation formats specified in class and/or found in the instructor’s handouts. Do *not* use the formats found on booksellers’ websites, etc.—these are designed for merchants who sell books, not scholars who read them.
 12. Carelessness or sloppiness counts against you. The burden is first and foremost on the writer to make things reasonably clear. If your writing skills do not yet meet the minimum requirements for upper-division college-level work, you may visit UNT’s Writing Lab for remedial help. (Even so, you alone remain responsible for the grammatical correctness, etc., of your written work.)
 13. Assignments that are deficient in any of the aforementioned ways may be returned without a grade, or with a grade of F or D, at the instructor’s discretion. The instructor may offer to read a suitably revised assignment for a possibly improved grade. If so, the revised assignment will be treated as a late submission. (See item 14, below.)
 14. Every effort will be made to return written assignments by the following class period. Late submissions will be accepted if they are in the instructor’s hands *before* the due date for the next assignment, but they will then be graded with minimal or no comments and made available at the instructor’s office at his convenience. Responsibility for retrieving late submissions and/or

- submissions not picked up during the class period when they were originally returned rests entirely with the student.
15. Handouts will be made available on Blackboard.
 16. If you wish to drop the class, please refer for scheduling and deadline information to: <http://essc.unt.edu/registrar/schedule/scheduleclass.html>.
 17. The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request accommodations at any time; however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. For additional information see the Office of Disability Accommodation website at <http://www.unt.edu/oda>. You may also contact them by phone at 940-565-4323.
 18. Generally speaking, the instructor does not return phone calls (940-565-2259—no voicemail, unfortunately). Please feel free, however, to e-mail a clear and concise message or inquiry to yaffe@unt.edu. Every effort will be made to answer e-mail messages promptly.

V. CLASS SCHEDULE

Tues., Aug. 29	INTRODUCTION	
Thurs., Aug. 31	Cohen, Allen	(Yaffe, pp. 73–79, 80–85)
Tues., Sept. 5	Kay, Schaffer	(Yaffe, pp. 86–104, 112–24)
Thurs., Sept. 7	Ehrenfield and Bentley, Blidstein	(Yaffe, pp. 125–35, 136–42)
Tues., Sept. 12	Sacks	(Yaffe, pp. 143–57)
Thurs., Sept. 14	Artson, Troster	(Yaffe, pp. 161–71, 172–82)
Tues., Sept. 19	Rosenblum	(Yaffe, pp. 183–205)
	INVESTIGATIVE REPORT #1 DUE	
Thurs., Sept. 21	ROSH HA-SHANA / READING/WRITING DAY	
Tues., Sept. 26	Benstein, Schwartz	(Yaffe, pp. 206–29, 230–49)
Thurs., Sept. 28	Jonas	(Yaffe, pp. 250–63)
Tues., Oct. 3	Wyschogrod, Schwartz, Katz	(Yaffe, pp. 289–97, 297–308, 309–20)
Thurs., Oct. 5	Levy, Bleich (2)	(Yaffe, pp. 321–32, 333–83)
Tues., Oct. 10	Kass	(Yaffe, pp. 384–409)
Thurs., Oct. 12	REVIEW	
Tues., Oct. 17	MIDTERM EXAM DUE	
	TRANSITION TO SPINOZA	
Thurs., Oct. 19	Spinoza, <i>Theologico-Political Treatise</i> , Preface (with pp. 267–88) ¹	
Tues., Oct. 24	Spinoza, <i>Theologico-Political Treatise</i> , Chapters 1–2 (with pp. 288–301)	
Thurs., Oct. 26	Spinoza, <i>Theologico-Political Treatise</i> , Chapters 3–6 (with pp. 301–16)	
Tues., Oct. 31	Spinoza, <i>Theologico-Political Treatise</i> , Chapters 7–15 (with pp. 316–29)	
Thurs., Nov. 2	Spinoza, <i>Theologico-Political Treatise</i> , Chapters 16–20 (with pp. 329–47)	
Tues., Nov. 7	CATCH-UP AND REVIEW OF SPINOZA	
Thurs., Nov. 9	READING/WRITING DAY	
Tues., Nov. 14	Strauss, “Progress or Return?” (Green, pp. 87–100) ²	

¹ The reference is to Spinoza, *Theologico-Political Treatise*, trans. Martin D. Yaffe (Newburyport, MA: Focus Philosophical Library, 2004; reprint, Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2014). Page numbers in parentheses which accompany the primary readings from Oct. 22 through Nov. 7 refer to corresponding sections of the translator’s Interpretive Essay.

Thurs., Nov. 16	INVESTIGATIVE REPORT #2 DUE Strauss, "Progress or Return?" (Green, pp. 100–16)
Tues., Nov. 21	Strauss, "Progress or Return?" (Green, pp. 117–32)
Thurs., Nov. 23	THANKSGIVING
Tues., Nov. 28	Strauss, "On the Interpretation of Genesis" (Green, pp. 359–66)
Thurs., Nov. 30	Strauss, "On the Interpretation of Genesis" (Green, pp. 366–75)
Tues., Dec. 5	REVIEW OF STRAUSS
Thurs., Dec. 7	REVIEW OF SPINOZA
Thurs., Dec. 14	FINAL EXAM DUE: 10:30 A.M. sharp

² Page numbers in parentheses which accompany the primary readings from Nov. 14 through Dec. 3 refer to Leo Strauss, *Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity*, ed. Kenneth Hart Green (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1997).