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 shall look at how a number of our contemporaries are led into larger questions while seeking to defend Judaism against the widespread opinion that the Bible (notably Genesis 1:26–28) is somehow the cause of our current environmental crisis. Subsequently, we shall 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 shall read selected essays on Judaism by Leo Strauss (1899–1973), whose scholarly life’s work was to explore not only the important 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.

II. REQUIRED TEXTS

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


III. ADDITIONAL REQUIRED TEXT

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

IV. RECOMMENDED TEXT

V. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Daily (almost) reading quizzes 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).

2. There are midterm and final take-home essay-examinations, 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 exam is due in WH 310 on Thursday, December 12, 2013, at 10:30 a.m. sharp.

3. Regular and punctual attendance is required. Absentees may be penalized.

4. All exams 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 and title, instructor (including formal title), date, name of assignment (exactly as found in the assignment instructions), and student’s name and student-number.

5. Use one surface of a page only.

6. Leave one-inch margins on all sides of each page for comments.

7. Double-space everything, including cover-page.


9. Citations are needed where you are relying directly on another’s published work. You are responsible for knowing the UNT policy on academic dishonesty: http://www.vpaa.unt.edu/academic-integrity.htm.

10. 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.

11. 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 the UNT Writing Lab for remedial help. (Even so, you alone remain responsible for the grammatical correctness, etc., of your written work.)

12. *Assignments that are deficient in any of the aforementioned ways may be returned 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 13, below.)*

13. Every effort will be made to return written assignments by the next 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 without comments and made available at the instructor’s office at his convenience. Responsibility for retrieving late submissions, etc., rests entirely with the student.

14. Handouts will be made available on Blackboard.

15. If you wish to drop the class, please refer for scheduling and deadline information to: http://essc.unt.edu/registrar/schedule/scheduleclass.html.

16. 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.

17. The University of North Texas is on record as being committed to both the spirit and the letter of federal equal opportunity legislation; reference Public Law 92-112 – The Rehabilitation Act of
1973 as amended. With the passage of new federal legislation entitled Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), pursuant to section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, there is renewed focus on providing this population with the same opportunities enjoyed by all citizens.