

Brief Course Outline

Course Title: Introduction to Jewish Philosophy I: From the Beginnings to the Italian Renaissance

Course Number and Section:

PHILOSOP

2665G 550

Instructor Name(s): Dr. D. Conter

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Disclaimer: Information in the brief course outline is subject to change. The syllabus posted on OWL is the official and authoritative source of information for the course.

Course Description:

One way of thinking about the philosophy associated with Judaism is to see it as involving an attempt to provide a reasoned defence for certain central religious practices and beliefs. In this course, the focus will be on historical defences of some kinds of ritual observance ethical conduct beliefs concerning the nature of the universe beliefs concerning the nature of human beings beliefs concerning the nature and existence of an everlasting supreme being thought to be the creator and ruler of everything.

In 2021, the course will cover both less and more than its official title indicates. It will start not with the very beginnings in Jewish philosophy, but with early Jewish philosophical writing of the medieval period, which had a profound effect on the nature of a kind of Jewish religious thinking that remains influential today. Most of the course will be given over to the original presentation during the medieval periods of arguments offered on behalf of particular religious ideas. A wide range of views will be considered, but one philosopher more than any other will be focused upon – the great 12th century figure Maimonides (the Rambam – 1138 CE-1204 CE). The course will also extend beyond the Renaissance to include the early modern philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1632 CE-1677 CE) – certainly the greatest Jewish philosopher in the Western philosophical tradition.

Learning Outcomes:

The aim of the course will be to familiarize students with unfamiliar styles of philosophical argument, and to enable students to set these styles of argument in their differing historical contexts, so that they themselves can develop reasoned assessments of the strengths and weaknesses of competing philosophical views of a certain kind of religious life and thought.

Textbooks and Course Materials:

Medieval Jewish Philosophical Writings, edited by Charles Manekin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007)

Benedict De Spinoza, Theological-Political Treatise, edited by Jonathan Israel, translated by Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007)

Methods Of Evaluation:

Assignment	Due Date mm/dd/yy	Weight - %
2 two-hour open-book essay tests in class		66 %.
a two-hour open-book final exam		34%

In solidarity with the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak, and Chonnonton peoples on whose traditional treaty and unceded territories this course is shared.

Monday, January 27, 2025