

Introduction to Jewish Philosophy (3 credits)

This course enables students to understand and engage with some of the classic works from the history of Jewish philosophy. After an introductory discussion of what Jewish philosophy is, we will turn to Jewish philosophy's medieval "golden age," in which thinkers, including Judah Halevi and Moses Maimonides, grappled with some of the most challenging metaphysical issues, such as: Did God create the world? Can human freedom be reconciled with divine foreknowledge? Are the Commandments rational?

Beginning with the rather inauspicious excommunication of Baruch Spinoza, we will explore how modern Jewish philosophers like Moses Mendelssohn, Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig and Joseph Soloveitchik have been interpreting Judaic questions for current times.

Course Outcomes:

Upon successful completion of this course, students will,

1. Be familiar with a selection of classic problems from the history of philosophy, understand the nature of philosophical analysis, and the most basic forms of philosophical argument.
2. Know the broad sweep of Jewish thought and philosophy.
3. Analyze works of Jewish thought and philosophy.
4. Understand some of the key debates analyzing Jewish thought and philosophy found in secondary literature.

Topics (Subject to Change):

- Introduction to Philosophy
- Arguments
- Introducing Jewish Philosophy (Medieval)
- Introducing the Guide of the Perplexed
- Topics in Medieval Jewish Philosophy I: God
- Topics in Medieval Jewish Philosophy II: Prophecy
- Topics in Medieval Jewish Philosophy III: Freewill and Divine Knowledge
- Topics in Medieval Jewish Philosophy IV: Mitzvot
- Understanding Modern Jewish Philosophy: The Challenges of Modernity
- Moses Mendelssohn: Is Judaism a Religion?
- Jewish Existentialism: Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig on Mitzvot
- Joseph Soloveitchik and Yeshayahu Leibowitz on the nature of Jewish Faith
- Eliezer Berkovits and Yeshayahu Leibowitz on the place of ethics in Judaism
- Post-Holocaust Theology I: Theodicy and the Holocaust
- Post-Holocaust Theology II: Anti-theodicy and the Holocaust

Assessments:

This course utilizes a mix of engaging discussions, collaborative projects, and knowledge checks, to assess students understanding and ability to apply newly acquired knowledge to the world in which they live. Students will use Web 2.0 tools and technology to collaborate, engage, and reflect.