

Jewish Philosophy (GSE512)

Lecturers: Dr. Seth Postell; Mr. Eli Haitov

School year: 2024-2025

Semester: Spring

Day and time of course:
Wednesday

Course Description: This course explores Jewish philosophy from ancient to modern times, focusing on key texts, thinkers, and ideas. Topics include the nature of God, the problem of evil, ethics, law, faith, and reason. One component is the interaction between Jewish and Christian philosophy, examining Jewish critiques of Christian ideas and possible Christian responses. Students will study foundational figures such as Philo, Saadia Gaon, Maimonides, Isaac Israeli, Ibn Paquda, Spinoza, along with contemporary Jewish philosophers. Through readings, discussions, and critical analyses, participants will be equipped to articulate and analyze the central themes and debates within Jewish philosophy, appreciate its relevance to broader philosophical and theological discussions, and understand the dynamic relationship between Jewish and Christian philosophical traditions.

Course Objectives:

1. To familiarize students with the major figures and texts in Jewish philosophy from ancient to modern times.
2. To provide a framework for understanding the historical context and development of Jewish philosophical thought.
3. To facilitate a comparative analysis of Jewish and Christian philosophical traditions, highlighting key points of interaction and divergence.
4. To encourage critical thinking and discussion on the major themes in Jewish philosophy, such as the nature of God, ethics, and the problem of evil.

Learning Outcomes:

1. Students will learn to analyze and interpret key philosophical texts within the Jewish tradition, gaining insights into the development of Jewish thought.
2. Students will learn to critically engage with the interactions between Jewish and Christian philosophy, understanding Jewish critiques of Christian ideas and possible responses from Christian philosophy. *
3. Students will learn to articulate and debate fundamental questions of existence, morality, and spirituality, developing skills in philosophical analysis and dialogue.

Course Structure:

1. Classes will be lectures combined with discussion. Each student should prepare for class by reading the material assigned and doing the weekly assignments.
2. An open discussion during lessons according to the learned material.
3. Each student has to read and accomplish his reading assignment

Required Readings

Frank, D., & Leaman, O. (Eds.). (2005). *History of Jewish philosophy*. Routledge.

Frank, D. H., & Leaman, O. (Eds.). (2006). *Cambridge Companions to Philosophy: The Cambridge Companion to medieval Jewish philosophy*. Cambridge University Press.

Frank, D., & Segal, A. L. (Eds.). (2016). *Jewish philosophy past and present: Contemporary responses to classical sources*. Routledge.

Guttmann, J. (1973). *Philosophies of Judaism: The history of Jewish philosophy from biblical times to Franz Rosenzweig* (D. W. Silverman, Trans.). Schocken Books.

Lebens S. Is God a person? Maimonides, Crescas, and beyond. *Religious Studies* 58 (2022): S34-S60.
doi:10.1017/S0034412521000299

Morgan, M. L., & Gordon, P. E. (Eds.). (2012). *Cambridge companions to religion: The Cambridge Companion to Modern Jewish philosophy*. Cambridge University Press.

Rudavsky, T.M. (2018). *Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages: Science, Rationalism, and Religion*. Oxford University Press.

Spinoza, Baruch. (1670). *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. London: Trübner and Co., 1862.

Topics:

An Introduction to Jewish Philosophy

The Historical Background of Jewish Philosophy

Jewish Philosophical views on God

Jewish Philosophical Views on Creation.

Jewish Philosophical Views on the Problem of Evil and God's Sovereignty and Free Will.

Jewish Philosophical Objections to the Christian faith

Class Dates, Topics and Reading Assignments:

Date	Topic	Reading Assignments/Assignments Due
Feb 12, 2025	An Introduction to Jewish Philosophy and Hellenistic Jewish Philosophy	Frank & Leaman, <i>History of Jewish Philosophy</i> , Chapter 1. Guttman, <i>Philosophies of Judaism</i> , chapter 2.
Feb 19, 2025	Medieval Jewish Kalam	Frank and Leaman, <i>The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy</i> , chapter 1.
Feb 26, 2025	Medieval Jewish Neoplatonism	Guttman, <i>Philosophies of Judaism</i> , chapter 3.
<i>Mar 5, 2025</i>	Medieval Jewish Aristotelianism	Frank and Leaman, <i>The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy</i> , chapter 7.
Mar 12, 2025	Jewish Philosophical Theology	Frank & Segal, <i>Jewish philosophy Past and Present</i> , chapter 7. Lebens, "Is God a person? Maimonides, Crescas, and beyond"
Mar 19, 2025	(Dallas Spring Break)- no class	No Reading
Mar 26, 2025	Jewish Philosophy of Religion	Rudavsky, <i>Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages: Science, Rationalism, and Religion</i> , chapters 4-5.
Apr 2, 2025	Creation, Time and Eternity in Jewish Thought	Rudavsky, <i>Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages: Science, Rationalism, and Religion</i> , chapter 6.
Apr 9, 2025	Jewish-Christian Philosophical dialogue	Frank and Leaman, <i>The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy</i> , chapter 16.
Apr 16, 2025	(Passover)- no class	No Reading
Apr 23, 2025	Modern Jewish Philosophy	Frank & Leaman, <i>History of Jewish Philosophy</i> , chapter 21.
Apr 30, 2025	(Independence Day Eve)- no class	No Reading
May 7, 2025	Spinoza and his Philosophy	Morgan & Gordon, <i>Modern Jewish Philosophy</i> , Chapter 2. Spinoza, <i>Tractatus Theologico-Politicus</i> , chapter 6.

Term Paper:

For your term paper in the Philosophy of Judaism class, you are required to focus on topics, thinkers, or debates discussed during the course. This paper should showcase your critical engagement with the material covered in class, providing analysis and interpretation of a central theme, view, or figure studied. Here are some examples of topics you may choose to explore:

- Philo's synthesis of Jewish thought and Greek philosophy.
- Key themes in Jewish Kalam or Neoplatonism and their significance (or how the Kalam movement and Neoplatonic philosophy influenced Jewish Philosophy).
- The impact of Aristotelianism on Jewish Philosophy.
- Philosophical and theological tensions within medieval Jewish philosophy.
- Addressing critiques of Jewish philosophers of Christian doctrines.
- The relationship between faith and reason in Jewish philosophy.
- Views on Free will and God's sovereignty in Jewish Philosophy (you may choose to critique views and defend a view represented by a Jewish Philosopher)

Requirements:

- Length: 10-12 pages, double-spaced
- Cite at least 5 academic sources
- Format: Follow standard academic citation styles (MLA, APA, or Chicago)

Objective: This paper should demonstrate a deep understanding of the material covered, reflecting your ability to analyze and critically engage with the philosophical ideas and arguments central to the course.

Date of Submission: **05.30.2025**

Bibliography

Frank, D. H. and O. Leaman (eds.), *History of Jewish Philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997).

Frank, D. H., O. Leaman, and C. H. Manekin (eds.), *The Jewish Philosophy Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).

Husik, I. *A History of Mediaeval Jewish Philosophy* (New York: Atheneum, 1976) [originally published 1916].

Hyman, A. and J. J. Walsh (eds.), *Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1973).

Lerner, R. and M. Mahdi (eds.), *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Source Reader* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963).

Sirat, C. *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).