

## **PHILOSOPHY 435: JEWISH PHILOSOPHY FROM ANTIQUITY TO THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY**

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Office hours: M 1-2; W 1:30-2:30, and by appointment.

### **REQUIRED TEXTS:**

Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*

Spinoza, *Ethics*

Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*

There are additional readings in a course packet available in the Humanities Copy Center, noted below as 'PDF'

The books are available in the University Bookstore.

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

There will be three papers, 5 pages each. The papers constitute 75% of your final grade. I will distribute paper topics, although you are also free to come up with your own.

The other 25% of your final grade is based on attendance and participation. Attendance and participation in class discussion is mandatory. More than 5 unexcused absences from class will result in an 'F' for participation.

### **READING SCHEDULE:**

#### **UNIT ONE: VIRTUE, PROVIDENCE, EVIL AND HAPPINESS**

##### **Week 1**

W 9/5: Introduction: Rationalism in Jewish Philosophy

F 9/7: The Problem of Evil

##### **Week 2**

M 9/10: The Book of Job (PDF), chapters 1-14

Questions for discussion: Why does Job finally complain to God? What is Eliphaz saying in 4:7-9? What kind of theodicy (justification of God's ways) is being proposed by Job's friends? What is Job's reply to them? Why does God allow Job to be afflicted?

W 9/12: Job, ch. 15-31

What points are made by Job's friends in the second cycle of speeches? Are Bildad and Eliphaz saying the same thing?

What does Job believe about God's providence?

F 9/14: Job, ch. 32-42

What does Elihu mean when he says "You are wrong!?" How does Elihu's response differ from the others? What does he have to say about God's justice?

##### **Week 3**

M 9/17: Philo of Alexandria, "On Providence" (PDF)

How does Philo frame the problem of evil? What kinds of solutions to it does he offer? Do his solutions, in fact, address the problem?

W 9/19: Philo (continued)

F 9/21: Saadya ben Joseph, *Book of Beliefs and Opinions* (PDF), Prolegomena, 25-47

In terms of our beliefs, what are the two extremes to be avoided? What is knowledge by reason?

Week 4

M 9/24: Saadya, pp. 115-154

What are Saadya's views on human freedom? How does he prove that we are free?

W 9/26: Saadya, continued.

F 9/28: No class.

Week 5

M 10/1: Saadya, pp. 181-191

What is Saadya's solution to the problem of evil? Why is there sin and wickedness and suffering in a world created by God?

W 10/3: Maimonides, *Ethical Writings* (PDF), pp. 51-64, 77-85.

What does Maimonides believe about human freedom? What are the different kinds of virtue? Is the good life a life of moral action or a life of intellectual contemplation?

F 10/5: Maimonides, *Ethical Writings* (continued), pp. 362-386.

What is good action? What is Maimonides' doctrine of the mean?

Week 6

M 10/8: Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, pp. 430-459 (Sin and Evil):

What is evil? What is its ontological status? What are the different kinds of evil? What is Maimonides' response to the claim that the world is (predominantly) evil?

W 10/10: *Guide*, pp. 461-485; 625-6 (On Providence)

Why and how does God allow evil? What are the different theories of providence that Maimonides rejects? How does providence work for Maimonides? Does God engage in active intervention in particular cases or does it work in a more general way? How does his account of providence deepen his theodicy?

F 10/12: *Guide*, pp. 486-502 (On Job)

How does Maimonides reduce the various viewpoints in Job to the categories of providence that he has laid out in the *Guide*? What does Maimonides think is the point of the Book of Job?

Week 7

M 10/15: *Guide*, pp. 618-638 (Virtue and Happiness)

In the *Guide* (as opposed to the ethical writings), what is the relationship between moral virtue and intellectual virtue? Where does true happiness lie? What is the relationship between being good/virtuous and being happy? Who can achieve true happiness? How does Maimonides' conception of our "union with God" differ from Philo's?

W 10/17: Spinoza, *Ethics*, Book I, Definitions, Axioms, Propositions 1-16

What is Spinoza's conception of God? What view of God is he arguing against? How does Spinoza argue that God is the only substance and that everything else is "in God"?

F 10/19: *Ethics* I.1-16 continued.

Week 8

M 10/22: No class

W 10/24: No class

F 10/26: *Ethics*, Part I, Propositions 17-28

What is the relationship between God and Nature? Between God and particular things? What kind of universe has Spinoza constructed? In what sense are all things necessary and determined? Is God itself a free being?

Week 9

M 10/29: No class: **FIRST PAPER DUE**

W 10/31: *Ethics*, Part I, Propositions 29-Appendix

Is Spinoza a devious atheist, reducing the divine to the natural? Or is he a pious pantheist, elevating the natural into the divine? What is his critique of religion? How does his conception of God avoid the pitfalls of the traditional religious conception of God? Does Spinoza's conception of God rule out a theory of divine providence?

F 11/2: *Ethics*, Book II, Definitions, Axioms, Propositions 1-10.

Here we will simply try to make sense of the order of nature in Spinoza's system. How do things/events in the realm of Extension (body) relate to things/events in the realm of Thought (mind)?

Week 10

M 11/5: *Ethics*, Book II, Propositions 11- 31

What is the nature of the human being? How does the mind relate to the body? What is the "self"?

W 11/7: *Ethics*, Book II, Proposition 32-end

What varieties of knowledge are available to us? What are their relative values? What insights does knowledge by way of reason provide?

F 11/9: *Ethics*, Book III

What are passions? How do they differ from actions? How are we supposed to control or moderate the passions?

What is Spinoza's goal in Book III?

Week 11

M 11/12 *Ethics*, Book IV, Preface, Definitions, Axioms, Propositions 1-46

Why is the title of this part "On Human Bondage?" Are human beings free? In what sense? What is human virtue?

W 11/14: *Ethics*, Book IV, Proposition 47-end

What are good and evil? What is the "free man"? What is the relationship between virtue and rational behavior? How are we supposed to act toward others?

F 11/16: *Ethics*, Book V, Preface, Axioms, Propositions 1-20.

What does human happiness consist in? How can we achieve it? Is there any personal immortality?

Week 12

M 11/19: *Ethics*, Book V, Proposition 21-end

Does Spinoza have a solution to the problem of evil? Does he have a theory of divine providence? Is the *Ethics*, with its discussion of salvation and beatitude, fundamentally a "religious" book?

W 11/21: No new reading; summary discussion of Philo, Saadya, Maimonides, and Spinoza on providence and the problem of evil. **SECOND PAPER DUE**

F 11/23: Thanksgiving

## UNIT TWO: SCRIPTURE, PROPHECY AND THE LAW

Week 13

M 11/26: Saadya, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions* (PDF), pp. 75-105

What is the distinction between rational laws and revealed laws? Are all laws ultimately rational? What is the extent of Saadya's "rationalism" about the Law?

W 11/28: *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, pp. 105-114

How do you know when someone is a true prophet? How is prophecy/revelation/Scripture to be interpreted?

F 11/30: Maimonides, *Guide*, pp. 21-45, 65-81, 327(bottom)-328 (On Interpreting the Law)

What is Maimonides' principle for how to interpret Scripture? When is a literal reading called for and when is a figurative reading necessary?

Week 14

M 12/3: *Guide*, 360-403 (Prophecy)

What is the nature of prophecy? How does one become a prophet? How can you tell when someone is a true prophet?

W 12/5: *Guide*, 502-538 (The Laws)

What purpose does the Law serve? Are all laws "rational"? What is the extent of Maimonides' rationalism about the Law? Why should we obey the Law? How do the ways of transgressing the law differ?

F 12/7: Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise* (TTP) Preface - Chapter 2.

What is prophecy? How does Spinoza's view represent a "reductio" or subtle critique of Maimonides's view?

Week 15

M 12/10: TTP, chapters 3-6

What, according to Spinoza, is the "election of Israel"? What is the divine law? What are miracles?

W 12/12: TTP, chapter 7

How is Scripture to be interpreted? What is Spinoza's critique of Maimonides on this question? What is the relationship between truth and meaning?

F 12/14: TTP, chapters 8-9, 12-15

What, in the end, is the status of the Bible? In what sense is it "divine"? What do you think is Spinoza's overall purpose in the TTP?

**THIRD PAPER DUE**