

## Philosophy 3570: Hebrew Bible

Professor Martin D. Yaffe  
Office Hours: TR 12:30-1:50  
Office: ENV 310N

Spring 2009  
TR 11:00-12:20  
WH 117

### SYLLABUS

#### I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

Our subject-matter is the Hebrew Bible (or “Old Testament”). Our aim is to understand its views of God and the world and human life so far as possible *in its own terms*, apart from the various sectarian interpretations (Jewish, Christian, Muslim) to which it has given rise. Our reason for studying it carefully in this way is that it is one of the twin roots of our modern way of life (the other being Greek philosophy). A clear, first-hand grasp of its teachings is therefore essential for our own self-understanding.

Our method is to look closely at the narrative books that are the most basic layer of the biblical writings, especially the Book of Genesis. Seen in its own terms, the Genesis narrative turns out to be interdependent with the narratives of the eleven other books that follow in a narrated sequence, from Exodus to II Kings. We call these twelve books the Dodecateuch. Our course therefore consists of a first-hand reading of the Book of Genesis—which takes into account not only *what* it says but also *how* it says it—in the context of the Dodecateuch as a whole, with the ongoing help of Robert Sacks’s penetrating and insightful commentary.

The course emphasizes close reading, clear thinking and careful writing. Give-and-take class discussion is indispensable.

#### II. REQUIRED TEXTS

Sacks, Robert D. *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*. Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990.

*JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1999.

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

#### III. ADDITIONAL REQUIRED TEXT

*Harbrace Handbook*. 16<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: Wadsworth, 2006.

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

#### IV. OPTIONAL TEXTS

Anastaplo, George. *The Bible: Respectful Readings*. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2008.

Kass, Leon R. *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis*. New York: Free Press, 2003.

Sacks, Robert D. *The Book of Job with Commentary: A Translation for our Time*. Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1999.

Spinoza, Benedict. *Theologico-Political Treatise*. Translated by Martin D. Yaffe. Newburyport, Mass.: Focus Philosophical Library, 2004.

## V. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Daily (almost) pop 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,<sup>1</sup> each worth approximately one-third of your course grade. You must earn passing grades in both examinations to pass the course.
3. Regular and punctual attendance is required. Absentees may be penalized.<sup>2</sup>
4. All examinations, investigative reports, etc., must be submitted in hardcopy, using Times New Roman 12-point font and clear black ink, with a single title-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 title-page*.
8. Spelling counts. So does grammar. Our authority is *Harbrace Handbook*. On the need for correct punctuation, see Lynne Truss, *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation* (New York: Gotham, 2004). On the need for plain, jargon-free, non-ideologized language, see Diane Ravitch, *The Language Police: How Pressure Groups Restrict What Students Learn* (New York: Vintage, 2003).
9. Footnote citations, etc., are needed where you are relying directly on another's published work. You are expected to be familiar with UNT's policies concerning academic dishonesty: [http://www.unt.edu/policy/UNT\\_Policy/volume3/18\\_1\\_11.html](http://www.unt.edu/policy/UNT_Policy/volume3/18_1_11.html).
10. When you are citing works that have standard reference formats, you *must* use those formats exclusively—e.g., Genesis 1:1 (or: Gen. 1:1).
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 University Writing Center for remedial help.
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 handed in *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 you may have missed will be photocopied for you on request at the reception desk in ENV 225.
15. Generally speaking, the instructor does not return phone calls. Please feel free, however, to leave a clear and concise message at 940-565-2259 (voicemail) or [yaffe@unt.edu](mailto:yaffe@unt.edu) (e-mail). Every effort will be made to answer e-mail messages promptly.

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<sup>1</sup> The final take-home exam is due in WH 117 on Tuesday, May 12, at 10:30 a.m. sharp.

<sup>2</sup> You may consult the instructor about making up for occasional or unavoidable absences.