

Religion Senior Seminar: Hobbes and Spinoza

Religion 370

Classroom: 301 PPHAC

Class times: TTh 2:35-3:45

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Office: 108 Comenius Hall, x1314

Office Hours: TTh 4:00-5:00pm
and by appointment

The Senior Seminar in Religion

This course is the Senior Seminar in Religion, which is intended to form part of the “capstone” in your senior year as a Religion major or minor. The Senior Seminar is a research-based course, which emphasizes research methods and writing skills within the discipline of religious studies. For Religion majors, this course can serve as excellent preparation for Religion 385, the independent study program within the Religion Department. For Religion minors, this course can serve as an excellent stand-alone capstone to the minor. For both majors and minors, this course will utilize many of the skills that you have developed throughout your time with the Religion Department, including interpretation, close reading skills, research methods and academic writing.

Hobbes and Spinoza

Every year the Senior Seminar is different. This year, we will be studying the perspectives on the Bible through the eyes of two pioneers in early critical biblical scholarship, the seventeenth-century political and religious philosophers Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) from England and Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) from the Netherlands. Hobbes and Spinoza were part of the scientific revolution occurring in their time, and they contributed some of the earliest critiques of the Bible and religious uses of it, based on the new scientific perspectives of their era. We will be studying their work because theirs forms the foundation point for the critical study of Bible as well as Christianity and Judaism in general that continues to highly inform and influence modern thought on these subjects.

Course Content

We will be reading the second half of Thomas Hobbes’s classic masterpiece, *Leviathan* (1651) as well as Spinoza’s work on biblical/social criticism, the *Theological-Political Treatise* (1670). We will be focusing on specific biblical problems that Hobbes and Spinoza raise in these books, and we will examine some of them in detail. We will have four exams on their general arguments. For the specific biblical issues they raise, you will write papers exploring how those problems have been dealt with before and after their time, including how they are handled today. These papers will be fairly short, 5-7 pages in length, and you’ll do presentations on them. There will be five papers per student, and they will have revisions. Due dates to be announced.

Assignments and Grading

1) Grading will be based on four essay examinations and five short research papers as well (see the Student Handbook for the academic honesty policy). The exams and papers are weighted equally, and the course grade will be based on an average of all of these assignments. Plagiarized papers will receive F grades, and will result in a one-letter grade reduction for your course grade overall at least, and a failing grade in the class at most. Students who wish to request accommodations in this class for a disability should contact Mr. Joe Kempfer, Assistant Director of Learning Services for Disability Support, 1307 Main Street (extension 1510). Accommodations cannot be provided until authorization is received from the office of Learning Services.

3) Active, in-class participation. Cell phones must be silenced in class, and texting is not allowed.

4) Readings, which should be done by the day on which they appear on the syllabus; that is, before class.

5) Attendance. After two unexcused absences, each further unexcused absence will reduce your overall course grade by one third of a letter. Two times late unexcused counts as one unexcused absence. This is not a passive-learning course; we will be actively studying and discussing the texts and other material in class.

Required Reading:

Hobbes, Thomas; *Leviathan, with selected variants from the Latin edition of 1668*, ed. by Edwin Curley; Hackett Publishing, 1994.

Spinoza, Baruch; *Theological-Political Treatise*, 2nd edition, trans: Samuel Shirley; Hackett Publishing, 2001.

Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha, Oxford University Press.

Course Schedule

Overview

Introduction to the Course August 27th

History of Biblical Interpretation August 29th
Readings: Handout

Thomas Hobbes

The Politics of Hobbes September 3rd
Readings: *Leviathan* chs. 13 and 14

No class September 5th for Rosh Hashanah

Hobbes on Religion in General

Readings: Leviathan ch. 12

September 10th

The Authorship of the Bible

Readings: Leviathan chs. 32-33

September 12th

Spirit, Angels, Inspiration, Kingdom of God, Holiness

Readings: Leviathan chs. 34-35

September 17th

Word of God, Prophets, Miracles

Readings: Levenson chs. 36-37

September 19th

Afterlife and Church

Readings: Leviathan chs. 38-39

September 24th

First exam

Patriarchs, Priests, Messiah

Readings: Leviathan chs. 40-41

September 26th

Ecclesiastical Power and Entrance into Heaven

Readings: Leviathan chs. 42-43

October 1st

Misinterpretation and Demonology

Readings: Leviathan chs. 44-45

October 3rd

Vain Philosophy and Fabulous Traditions

Readings: Leviathan chs. 46-47

October 8th

Those who benefit from Darkness

Readings: Leviathan chs. 48-49

October 10th

Baruch Spinoza

Introduction to Spinoza

Readings: Treatise Preface

Second Exam

October 17th

Prophecy and Prophets

Readings: Treatise chs. 1-2

October 22nd

Hebrew Chosenness and Law

Readings: Treatise chs. 3-4

October 24th

Ceremonies and Miracles <i>Readings:</i> Treatise chs. 5-6		October 29 th
Interpretation and Historical Authorship <i>Readings:</i> Treatise chs. 7-8		October 31 st
Completion of Hebrew Bible <i>Readings:</i> Treatise chs. 9-10		November 5 th
New Testament and Divine Law <i>Readings:</i> Treatise chs. 11-12		November 7 th
Third Exam		
Obedience and Faith <i>Readings:</i> Treatise chs. 13-14		November 12 th
Theology and State <i>Readings:</i> Treatise chs. 15-16		November 14 th
Biblical Politics <i>Readings:</i> Treatise chs. 17-18		November 19 th
Sovereignty and Freedom <i>Readings:</i> Treatise chs. 19-20		November 21 st
Concluding discussions <i>Readings:</i> TBA		December 3 rd
Concluding discussions, continued <i>Readings:</i> TBA		December 5 th
Final (fourth) Exam	1:30pm	December 11th