

Religion Senior Seminar: Authority of Torah

Religion 370

Classroom: 114 Comenius Hall

Class times: TTh 2:35-3:45

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Office: 108 Comenius Hall, x1314

Office Hours: Tuesdays 4:00-6:00pm
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.

Four Views on the Authority of Torah

Every year the Senior Seminar is different. This year, we will be studying a classic debate on the authority of the Bible, specifically of the Torah/Pentateuch (the first five books). We will be studying the writings on this topic by four key figures in the discussion; three Jews and one Christian. These will be the Dutch-Jewish philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677), the German-Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786), the German Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888), and the German Protestant biblical scholar Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918). These four thinkers represent, respectively, a highly critical perspective, a moderate accommodation with the modern world, a vigorous defense of traditional religion, and a historical analysis of Torah authority. While most of this class has to do with Judaism, the issues it raises are important for all questions of scriptural authority in any religion seeking to stay relevant in the modern world.

Course Content

We will be reading all of the books except that by Wellhausen, from which we’ll read about half. We will be focusing on specific biblical problems that are raised in these books, and we will examine some of them in detail. We will have five 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 8-12 pages in length, and you’ll do presentations on them (time permitting). There will be three papers per student, and they will have revisions.

Assignments and Grading

1) Grading will be based on five essay examinations and three 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 Ms. Elaine Mara, Assistant Director of Learning Services for Disability Support, 1st Floor of Monocacy Hall (extension 1401). 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:

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

Mendelssohn, Moses, *Jerusalem: or, On Religious Power and Judaism*, trans: Allan Arkush; Brandeis University Press, 1983.

Hirsch, Samson Raphael, *The Nineteen Letters about Judaism*, trans: Joseph Elias; Feldheim Press, 1996.

Wellhausen, Julius, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, trans. J.S. Black and A. Menzies; Cambridge University Press, 1885 (2013 printing)

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

Course Schedule

Overview

Introduction to the Course	August 26 th
Overview of the History of Israel <i>Readings:</i> Handout	August 28 th

Baruch Spinoza

On Prophecy <i>Readings: Spinoza Preface and chs.1-3</i>	September 2 nd
Biblical Law <i>Readings: Spinoza chs. 4-5</i>	September 4 th
Miracles and Interpretation <i>Readings: Spinoza chs. 6-7</i>	September 9 th
No Class, Prof. Radine at a conference	September 11 th
Biblical Authorship <i>Readings: Spinoza chs. 8-10</i>	September 16 th
First exam	
Apostles and Divine Law <i>Readings: Spinoza chs. 11-12</i>	September 18 th
On Basic Faith <i>Readings: Spinoza chs. 13-15</i>	September 23 rd
No class for Rosh Hashanah	September 25 th
The Role of the State <i>Readings: Spinoza chs. 16-18</i>	September 30 th
The Proper Relationship between Religion and State <i>Readings: Spinoza chs. 19-20</i>	October 2 nd
Moses Mendelssohn	
Introduction to Mendelssohn <i>Readings: Mendelssohn pp. 33-56</i>	October 7 th
Second Exam	
On the Rights of Government <i>Readings: Mendelssohn pp. 56-75</i>	October 9 th
No Class: Fall Break	October 14 th
On Judaism and Law <i>Readings: Mendelssohn pp. 77-106</i>	October 16 th
First paper due	

On Judaism and Society <i>Readings:</i> Mendelssohn pp. 106-139	October 21 st
Samson Raphael Hirsch	
Introduction to Hirsch, Problem and Response <i>Readings:</i> Hirsch, letters 1-4 Third Exam	October 23 rd
Education, History, Jews' Place in the World <i>Readings:</i> Hirsch, letters 5-9	October 28 th
Jewish Law <i>Readings:</i> Hirsch, letters 10-14	October 30 th
The Modern Situation <i>Readings:</i> Hirsch, letters 15-19	November 4 th
Julius Wellhausen	
Wellhausen and the Documentary Hypothesis Fourth Exam (No Readings)	November 6 th
Wellhausen and the Date of the Priestly Source <i>Readings:</i> Wellhausen, Introduction (pp. 1-13)	November 11 th
The Place of Worship <i>Readings:</i> Wellhausen, ch. 1 Second paper due	November 13 th
Sacrifice <i>Readings:</i> Wellhausen ch. 2	November 18 th
Sacred Feasts <i>Readings:</i> Wellhausen ch. 3	November 20 th
No Class – Prof. Radine at Society of Biblical Literature Conference	November 25 th
Oral and Written Torah <i>Readings:</i> Wellhausen ch. 10	December 2 nd
Theocracy as Idea and Institution <i>Readings:</i> Wellhausen chs. 19-20 Last paper due	December 4 th
Final (fifth) Exam	1:30pm Monday, December 8 th