

Jewish Philosophy

2015-2016/5775

Period A

Noam Weissman and Rabbi Ari Segal

Course Description: In this course, we will explore some of the core question marks in Jewish philosophy, essentially taking late night conversations in camp as well as conversations with Uber drivers and formalizing them by giving the students the knowledge and ability to have the necessary *literacy* of the main topics in Jewish philosophy. Primary focus will be on:

- A. God - Belief and knowledge
- B. Defining God?
- C. Free will, theodicy, and the Afterlife
- D. Prayer
- E. Morality vs. Halakha
- F. The Jewish conception of law
- G. Challenges to faith: Chosenness, War in Jewish ethics

Moreover, our goal is for our students to come out with a fluency of the key thinkers in Jewish philosophy and theology in the last century, namely Rabbis Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Yeshayahu Leibovitz and Eliezer Berkowitz. Naturally, we will also spend significant time studying Maimonides.

Texts: A real understanding of Jewish philosophy is predicated on being well read. Most of the readings will be photocopies and handouts and some sources will simply be online. Coming to class unprepared will result in a less meaningful classroom experience. We are not interested in that.

Modalities of learning

1. Parallel thinking
2. Chavruta
3. Group work
4. Lecture
5. Watch and respond
6. Half class
7. Independent work

Class Rules

1. Respect
2. Be punctual

Contract

1. We do not judge one another.
2. We are not cynical towards one another.
3. We do not attack one another.
4. We learn *with* one another. We are on this journey together.

Grading: We are going to take a very different approach to grading in this class and instead of viewing any assignment as an assignment per se, **we are going to view them as opportunities.** The goal is to reach a certain amount of points and each assignment will be worth a different amount of points. However, you choose your own assignments and you choose to revise them if you want.

"Currency" is listed below.

1. Final project (mandatory): 300 points

*2. Reflections (max two per month) - 75 points each (2+ pages). Minimum thought simply gets a zero. Real thought earns a "75."

3. Test - 100 points

4. Quiz - 50 points

5. Read and response to article we post - 100 points

6. Attend shiur of Jewish philosopher and write one page response - 75 points

7. Discussion with your parents or siblings and recorded 1-2 pages of thoughts - 75 points

8. Class Presence - 15 points per week

Important note: You ALWAYS have the opportunity to revise your work.

Grades:

1,000 + = A

900 = B

800 = C

*Reaction papers are two page papers (12 point font, double spaced), which can be longer if you choose. The goal of these papers is for you to continue to think about what we discussed in a particular class. Grammar and diction are not considered for these short papers. The cool thing about these papers is that *you* will choose which topic *you* want to write on.

Each student will research one famous Jewish philosopher and write an expose of sorts on this person's life, similar to *The Philosophy Book: Big Ideas Simply Explained* by Urban Outfitters.

The writing should be exceptional, but fun;

The big ideas should be sophisticated, but simply explained;

The key facts of this person's life should be mentioned and the graphics should be creative and professional.

You must demonstrate that you've read a minimum of **three** of their works (though many more is likely necessary) and you will need to articulate a minimum of their views on a minimum of **five** issues. Benchmarks throughout the semester are determined below.

The writing should be exceptional, but fun;

The big ideas should be sophisticated, but simply explained;

The key facts of this person's life should be mentioned and the graphics should be creative and professional.

Below is the process we will follow to ensure that the learning process is excellent, productive and meaningful throughout:

1. By 10/12, you will have selected a philosopher. **15 points**
2. By 10/22, you will have selected three articles/books and send me an email with their title and link. **15 points**
3. By 11/9, you will determine five topics that interest you and 1-2 sentences saying why. **30 points**
4. By 11/16, you will write out a minimum of these 5 topics in paragraph form and explain the significance. **30 points**
5. By 12/7, you will send in a rough draft of your project. **30 points**
6. By 12/21, you will send in a rough draft of your project with peer edits and how you incorporated it AND you will peer edit someone else's. **30 points**
7. By 1/6, you will complete a formal rough draft and receive formative feedback. **30 points**
8. By 1/13, you will complete your final draft and send in copy by email and a hard copy. **90 points**
9. During the week of January 18, you will present for 7-10 minutes in class and take questions from your peers. **30 points**