

## Introduction to Jewish Studies (IDIS 330)

(Cross-listed with History 302D, Political Science 493A, and IDIS 330H)

Time and Room: 12:00-1:15 TTh, WTHR 104

Instructor of Record: Professor Daniel Frank

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Teaching Assistant: Dara Hill

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This course is a survey that introduces students to the culture, literature, history, philosophy, and religious customs of the Jewish people from antiquity to the present. We will see how over the centuries, indeed millennia, Jews have successively understood what it is that defines them as a people: a book, interpretations of a book, a promise, a land, a legal code, hatred of Jews by others, etc. The course will provide an historical overview of the long history of the Jews and their wanderings, driven often by what non-Jews imagined Jews to be and to be practicing. The readings and class discussions will divide into three parts covering the ancient, medieval, and modern periods, though the student will quickly learn that when applied to Jewish history these historical designations do not easily map on to the customary ones. Jewish modernity had to wait for 'modern' Europe to live up to its universalist, Enlightenment ideals, while medieval Europe had to play catch-up to the Islamic and Jewish world that had discovered the brilliance of Greek philosophy and science long before it. We will read *Genesis* and the *Book of Job* from the Hebrew Bible, and we will discuss

the theological issues contained therein, the creation of the world, the development of monotheism, and the problem of the meaning of human suffering in a world created by a beneficent deity. We will read selections from Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, the most important Jewish philosophical work, and will attempt to understand how, and why, one might wish to understand a religious way of life in philosophical terms, and then we will turn to Spinoza, whose *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* is the most radical critique ever of the religion of the rabbis and of Maimonides in particular. For Spinoza, the Bible is not amenable to philosophical interpretation, but is a simple book for simple minds. With Spinoza and his critique of traditional Judaism, we reach modernity, and the successive attempts by Jews to enter modern life. Modernity demanded that Jews leave their ages-old traditions and customs at the door, if ever they were to become full-fledged citizens of modern, secular states. And so they did for the most part, little realizing that the invitation was less than heartfelt, given the centuries of antipathy toward Jews and their ways. Jews became Germans and Frenchmen, but neither German nor French. And finally, they were slaughtered in numbers hard to comprehend. Rather than dwelling on the unimaginable, we shall read a novel by Aharon Appelfeld, *Badenheim 1939*, which gives a good sense of the optimism and despair of the final days of Jewry in Europe. In this way, we will come to appreciate better the stranglehold that history has over our cultural ideals. Our final text will be Chaim Potok's *The Chosen*, a novel, set in America, which paints a vivid picture of the struggle of successive generations living between tradition and modernity.

The course will proceed by lecture and discussion, and we will welcome frequent guest lecturers, whose expertise will be helpful to us. Three (3) in-class essay examinations will determine the grade in the course. IDIS 330 has an enrollment limit of 120 and fulfills the Liberal Arts Racial and Ethnic Diversity Core Requirement.

**Required texts:**

1. N. Solomon, *Judaism: A Very Short Introduction*
2. R. Scheindlin, *A Short History of the Jewish People*
3. *Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures*
4. Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed* (abridged)
5. E. Curley (ed. and trans.), *A Spinoza Reader*
6. A. Appelfeld, *Badenheim 1939*
7. C. Potok, *The Chosen*

Syllabus for IDIS 330

**IDIS 330/H (HIST 302D and POL 493A): Introduction to Jewish Studies**

Prof. Daniel Frank (dfrank@purdue.edu)--Office hours MWF 10-11am (7135 BRNG)

TA: Dara Hill (dfishber@purdue.edu)--Office hours TuTh 11-12pm (7131 BRNG)

Purdue University

Spring 2007, TuTh 12:00-1:15

**Requirements:** Three (3) in-class written, essay examinations will determine the grade in the course. The mid-term examination dates are 13 February and 27 March, and the final is TBA. Each examination will count for one-third of the course grade. In addition, a 10-12 page essay (**due Monday 16 April**) is **required** for all students enrolled in the Honors section (IDIS 330H). Regular class attendance is expected, especially since the guest lecturers we will be having will present **testable** material that goes beyond the assigned readings. Class participation is strongly encouraged, and all assigned readings should be completed prior to class.

**Required texts:**

1. N. Solomon, *Judaism: A Very Short Introduction* [=J]
2. R. Scheindlin, *A Short History of the Jewish People* [=H]
3. *Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures* [=T]
4. Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed* (abridged) [=M]
5. E. Curley (ed. and trans.), *A Spinoza Reader* [=S]
6. A. Appelfeld, *Badenheim 1939*
7. C. Potok, *The Chosen*

## Reading and Discussion Schedule:

- Jan 9: Introduction to course  
Jan 11: Problems of Self-Definition (J chaps 1-3)  
Jan 16: Practices (J chaps 4-6)  
Jan 18: Modernity (J chaps 7-9)  
Jan 23: *Genesis*: God, Nature, and Human History (T)  
Jan 25: *Genesis*  
Jan 30: Ancient History (H chaps 1-3)  
Feb 1: Ancient History (H chaps 1-3)  
Feb 6: *Job*: God and Human Suffering (T)  
Feb 8: *Job*  
Feb 13: **First examination**  
Feb 15: Medieval History (H chaps 4-6)  
Feb 20: Medieval History (H chaps 4-6)  
Feb 22: Maimonides: Adam and Eve, Divine and Human (M pp 41-55, 71-77)  
Feb 27: Maimonides: Creation and Prophecy (M pp 94-99, 114-118, 126-139)  
March 1: Maimonides: Divine Providence, Human Good (M pp 165-173, 184-202)  
March 6: Spinoza: Religion, Superstition, and Prophecy (S pp 6-23)  
March 8: Spinoza: God in History, Divine Law, and Miracles (S pp 23-40)  
March 13 & 15: **Spring Vacation**  
March 20: Spinoza: On the Interpretation of Scripture (S pp 40-48)  
March 22: review  
March 27: **Second examination**  
March 29: Modern History (H chaps 7-11)  
April 3: Modern History (H chaps 7-11)  
April 5: Modern History (H chaps 7-11)  
April 10: Appelfeld, *Badenheim 1939* (Intimations of Doom)  
April 12: Appelfeld  
April 17: Appelfeld  
April 19: Potok, *The Chosen* (Tradition and Modernity)  
April 24: Potok  
April 26: Potok  
**Final examination date to be announced**

## Guest Lecturers:

- Jan 16: Rabbi Michael Rascoe on the Primacy of Practice in Jewish Life  
Jan 25: Sandor Goodhart (English) on *Genesis* and the Hebrew Bible  
Jan 30: Gordon Young (History) on Ancient Israel  
Feb 1: Stuart Robertson (FLL/Biblical Hebrew) on the Intertestamental Period and the Rise of Christianity from Judaism

- Feb 8: Thomas Ryba (St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Center, Purdue) on *Job* and the Problem of Human Suffering
- Feb 15: Dara Hill (Jewish Studies) on the Contours of Medieval Jewish History
- March 8: Chris Martin (Philosophy) on Spinoza on Divine History, Law, and Miracles
- March 29: Rabbi Audrey Pollack on Jewish Modernity and the Reform of Judaism
- April 3: Gordon Mork (History) on the Shoah
- April 5: Robert Melson (Political Science) on Zionism
- April 10: Jennifer William (FLL/German) on *Badenheim 1939* and Holocaust Literature
- April 12: Zev Garber (Los Angeles Valley College) on the Shoah in Fact and Fiction
- April 19: Joseph Haberer (Political Science) on Judaism in America
- April 24: Daniel Morris (English) on *The Chosen* and American-Jewish Literature
- April 26: Mark Bernstein (Philosophy) on Growing Up in New York in the '50s and '60s

**\*\*\*For information on the Jewish Studies Major and Minor, see the JS website:  
<http://www.cla.purdue.edu/jewish%2Dstudies/undergraduate/>**