Faith, Reason and Dogma in Jewish Philosophy

Dr. Avi Kadish

Course Number: 702.2190
Class Time: TBA
Class Location: TBA
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Course Description:
Can God be proven? Can ideas ever be commanded? How did Judaism, Jewish philosophy and general philosophy change between the Middle Ages and that of the modern world? Can the Jewish tradition be read in a rational way? The axis of Jewish philosophy is in the tension between universal human reason and the unique experience of individuals or groups, and we will deal with that tension from many different angles throughout this course.

In this course we will study the philosophy and dogmatics of Moses Maimonides (1135-1204). We will contrast his rationalistic approach towards understanding the Torah and Jewish tradition to that of his critics (in the centuries between his own lifetime and the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492).

Course Requirements:
- Weekly reading assignments: These include questions to answer (via Moodle) about secondary texts from the bibliography, followed by discussion of them in class.
- Oral Presentation and Short Term Paper: The student is to choose a primary text on any issue in Jewish philosophy, which s/he will teach and analyze together with the rest of the class. Following this, a short written paper on the topic will be submitted.
- Final Examination

Final Grade:
Weekly Reading Assignments (online written summaries and feedback): 30%
Oral Presentation and Short Term Paper (both on the same topic): 30%
Final Examination: 40%
Course Outline and Reading List

Week 1: The Illuminated Palace: An Introduction to Jewish Philosophy
Online essay in two parts <http://thetorah.com/discovering-god-rationalistic-1/> (read both parts)
*Collected Excerpts from Primary Sources

Week 2: The Illuminated Palace: An Introduction to Jewish Philosophy (continued)
Raphael Jospe, "What is Jewish Philosophy" in Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages, pp. 3-44.
*Collected Excerpts from Primary Sources

Week 3: "A Share in the World to Come": From Rabbinic Thought to Maimonides
Menachem Kellner, Must a Jew Believe Anything?, pp. 26-43 (chapter 2).
*Mishnah Sanhedrin 10:1

Week 4: Maimonides' Introduction to Helek: The Goal of Study and Action
*Primary Text for weeks 4-8: “Maimonides' Introduction to Helek” in Isadore Twersky, A Maimonides Reader, pp. 401-423.

Week 5: Maimonides' Introduction to Helek: Allegorical Interpretation of the Jewish Tradition
*Primary Text for weeks 4-8: “Maimonides' Introduction to Helek” in Isadore Twersky, A Maimonides Reader, pp. 401-423.

Week 6: Maimonides' Introduction to Helek: Philosophical Eschatology
*Primary Text for weeks 4-8: “Maimonides' Introduction to Helek” in Isadore Twersky, A Maimonides Reader, pp. 401-423.

Week 7: Maimonides' Introduction to Helek: The Philosophical Triangle and the First Jewish System of Dogma
Shalom Rosenberg, In the Footsteps of the Kuzari, pp. 49-64.
*Primary Text for weeks 4-8: “Maimonides' Introduction to Helek” in Isadore Twersky, A Maimonides Reader, pp. 401-423.

Week 8: Maimonides' Introduction to Helek: The Thirteen Foundations of the Torah
Menachem Kellner, Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought, pp. 10-65 (chapter one).
*Primary Text for weeks 4-8: “Maimonides' Introduction to Helek” in Isadore Twersky, A Maimonides Reader, pp. 401-423.

Week 9: Creation and the First Critique of Maimonidean Dogma (Nissim Gerondi)
Seth (Avi) Kadish, Rabbi Shimon ben Zemah Duran and the School of Rabbenu Nissim Gerondi, chapter 3 <https://sites.google.com/site/kadish67/avraham-avinu>.
*Collected Excerpts from Primary Sources (some included in Kellner)
Week 10: Creation and the First Critique of Maimonidean Dogma (Duran)
*Collected Excerpts from Primary Sources (some included in Kellner)

Week 11: The Foundations of Relationship (Hasdai Crescas)
Menachem Kellner, *Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought*, pp. 108-139 (chapter four).
*Collected Excerpts from Primary Sources

Week 12: The Foundations of Law (Joseph Albo)
Menachem Kellner, *Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought*, pp. 140-164 (chapter five).
*Collected Excerpts from Primary Sources

Week 13: The Fate of Maimonides' Thirteen Principles

Week 14: Final Examination