

# Philosophies Of Judaism

REL 238-001 | Fall 2017 | 3 Credit Hours

Lecture

Dr. Steve Jacobs

## Contact Information

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### UA Campus Directory:

- Dr. Steve Jacobs (<https://www.ua.edu/directory/?i=sjacobs#listing>)

**CLASS MEETINGS:** Tuesdays & Thursdays, 2:00-3:15, MA 207 **OFFICE HOURS:** Tuesdays & Thursdays, 12:15-1:45 & By Appointment **OFFICE:** 201 Manly Hall **TELEPHONE NUMBER:** 205-348-0473 **E-MAIL:** [sjacobs@bama.ua.edu](mailto:sjacobs@bama.ua.edu).

## Prerequisites

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### UA Course Catalog Prerequisites:

No prereqs found

## Course Description

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### Course Description and Credit Hours

Survey of major philosophical formulations of the nature and role of Jews and Judaism, written by select Jewish thinkers.

## Required Texts

### Required Texts from UA Supply Store:

- FRANK / JEWISH PHILOSOPHY READER (**Required**)
- SEESKIN, KENNETH / THINKING ABOUT THE TORAH:A PHILOSOPHER READS THE BIBLE (**Required**)
- LEAMAN, OLIVER / JEWISH THOUGHT:AN INTRODUCTION (**Required**)
- HUGHES, AARON W / JEWISH PHILOSOPHY A-Z (**Required**)

## Course Objectives

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(1) The *primary* objective of this course is to introduce students to both Judaic philosophers, largely unknown, and Jewish philosophical ideas, equally largely unknown to the vast majority of Western thinkers.

(2) Secondly, it is to integrate their thinking into the vast corpus of Western ideas and realize how these Judaic ideas provided a foundation for much of that same thought.

## Student Learning Outcomes

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(1) Students will be able to summarize orally in class discussion through individual presentations at least five (5) of the major ideas which constitute the corpus of the Jewish philosophical tradition and its interaction with Jewish religious thought. {Philosophical Summaries}

(2) Students will be able to summarize orally in class discussion through individual presentations at least five (5) major Jewish philosophers among the list provided in class. {Philosopher Summaries}

(3) Students will submit a well-crafted Response paper (3-5 pages) to Kenneth Seeskin's text *Thinking About the Torah*.

(4) Students will summarize their overall learning in response to the Essay-Questions provided in the take-home Final Exam.

## Other Course Materials

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Additional handouts, if appropriate, will be distributed by the instructor.

## Outline of Topics

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(1) Introducing Jewish Philosophy.

(2) Introducing Jewish Philosophers.

(3) Summing Up: Jewish Philosophy in the Present and Future.

## Exams and Assignments

(1) Oral Presentations on five (5) Jewish philosophical ideas.

(2) Oral Presentations on five (5) Jewish philosophers.

(3) Response Paper to Kenneth Seeskin's *Thinking About the Torah* (3-5 pages, Hard-copy, MS Word, 12-point font, *Double-spaced*, citations at end.)

(4) Final Exam: 3-5 Essay-type Questions (Hard-copy, MS Word, 12-point font, *Double-spaced*, citations at end).

## Grading Policy

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(1) 25% = 5 Jewish philosophical ideas (5 points each)

(2) 25% = 5 Jewish philosophers (5 points each)

(3) 25% = Response Paper

(4) 25% = Final Exam

## Policy on Missed Exams and Coursework

Missed exams and missed coursework to be determined in consultation with the instructor.

## Attendance Policy

Attendance is *required* unless otherwise noted on the Calendar of Meetings.

## Notification of Changes

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The instructor will make every effort to follow the guidelines of this syllabus as listed; however, the instructor reserves the right to amend this document as the need arises. In such instances, the instructor will notify students in class and/or via email and will endeavor to provide reasonable time for students to adjust to any changes.

## Statement on Academic Misconduct

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Students are expected to be familiar with and adhere to the official Code of Academic Conduct (<http://catalog.ua.edu/undergraduate/about/academic-regulations/student-expectations/code-academic-conduct/>) provided in the Online Catalog.

## Statement On Disability Accommodations

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Contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) (<http://catalog.ua.edu/undergraduate/about/support-programs/disability-services/>) as detailed in the Online Catalog.

## Severe Weather Protocol

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Please see the latest Severe Weather Guidelines (<http://catalog.ua.edu/undergraduate/about/support-programs/severe-weather-guidelines/>) in the Online Catalog.

## UAct Statement

The UAct website (<https://www.ua.edu/campuslife/uact/>) provides an overview of The University's expectations regarding respect and civility.

# CALENDAR OF MEETINGS

## FALL, 2017

**REL 110.001**

**“Survey of the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible)”**

**Tuesday & Thursday, 11:00-12:15 FA 214**

**REL 238.001**

**“Philosophies of Judaism”**

**Tuesday & Thursday, 2:00-3:15 MA 207**

### AUGUST

**24 Thursday INTRODUCTION, POLICIES, SYLLABI, ETC.**  
**29 Tuesday**  
**31 Thursday**

### SEPTEMBER

**5 Tuesday**  
**7 Thursday<sup>6</sup>**  
**12 Tuesday**  
**14 Thursday**  
**19 Tuesday**  
**21 Thursday NO CLASS: ROSH HA-SHANA (JEWISH NEW YEAR)**  
**26 Tuesday**  
**28 Thursday**

### OCTOBER

**3 Tuesday**  
**5 Thursday REL 110: EXAM # 1 (FIVE BOOKS OF MOSES)**  
**10 Tuesday REL 238: SEESKIN RESPONSE PAPER DUE!**

11	WEDNESDAY	<u>MID-TERM GRADES DUE FOR ALL 100- &amp; 200- LEVEL COURSES</u>
12	Thursday	
17	Tuesday	
19	Thursday	
24	TUESDAY	<u>NO CLASS: MID-WEST JEWISH STUDIES ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE, WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY, DETROIT, MI</u>
26	THURSDAY	<u>NO CLASS: MID-SEMESTER STUDY-BREAK</u>
<u>NOVEMBER</u>		
2	Thursday	<u>REL 110: JACOBS' RESPONSE PAPER DUE!</u>
7	Tuesday	
9	Thursday	
14	Tuesday	
16	Thursday	
21	Tuesday	
23	THURSDAY	<u>NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING</u>
28	Tuesday	
30	Thursday	<u>REL 110: EXAM #3 (WRITINGS)</u>
<u>DECEMBER</u>		
5	Tuesday	<u>REL 238: DISTRIBUTION OF FINAL EXAM QUESTIONS</u>
7	Thursday	LAST DAY OF CLASS!
11-15	MON.-FRI,	FINAL EXAMS ( <u>NO FINAL EXAMS FOR 110 OR 238!</u> )
14	Thursday	<u>REL 238: FINAL EXAM DUE @ 10:30 AM!</u>
16	SATURDAY	COMMENCEMENT
19	TUESDAY	ALL GRADES DUE!

**HAVE A GREAT WINTER BREAK!**

**Oliver Leaman. *Jewish Thought: An Introduction*. New York & London: Routledge, 2006.**

<b>CHAPTER</b>	<b>TITLE</b>	<b>STUDENT</b>
1	Jews and the Bible	
2	The commentatorial tradition: Mishnah and Talmud	
3	Jews versus Greeks	
4	Jews versus Christians	
5	Jews versus Muslims	
6	Written Law versus Oral Law	
7	Philosophers versus kabbalists	
8	The ideal versus the real	
9	The intellectual versus the natural	
10	The “norm” versus the “deviant”: Sex and gender in Judaism	
11	Orthodoxy versus Reform	
12	How special are the Jews?	
13	The future of Judaism versus Jewish futures	

**Daniel H. Frank, Oliver Leaman, and Charles H. Manekin, eds. *The Jewish Philosophy Reader*. London & New York: Routledge, 2000.**

<b>CHAPTER</b>	<b>TITLE</b>	<b>STUDENT</b>
1	<b>Creation: Divine Power and Human Freedom</b>	
2	<b>The <i>Aqedah</i>: Divine Commandments and Moral Duties</b>	
3	<b>'Hardening of Hearts': On Free Will and Repentance</b>	
4	<b>Job and Divine Providence</b>	
5	<b>Justice</b>	
6	<b>Prayer and Faith</b>	
7	<b>Free Will and Divine Foreknowledge</b>	
8	<b>Election</b>	
9	<b>Law and Rationality</b>	
10	<b>Issues of Meaning</b>	
11	<b>Jewish Kalam</b>	
12	<b>Jewish Neoplatonism</b>	
13	<b>Judah Halevi and Abraham Ibn Ezra</b>	
14	<b>Maimonides</b>	
15	<b>Jewish Aristotelianism in Spain and Provence</b>	
16	<b>The Conservative Reaction in Christian Spain</b>	
17	<b>Jewish Philosophy in the Italian Renaissance</b>	
18	<b>A Critique of Traditional Religion</b>	
19	<b>Judaism and the Enlightenment</b>	

<b>20</b>	<b>Scholarship and Religious Reform</b>	
<b>21</b>	<b>The Authority of Tradition</b>	
<b>22</b>	<b>Revelation, Redemption, and the Nature of Judaism</b>	
<b>23</b>	<b>Immortality and Messianism</b>	
<b>24</b>	<b>Other Faiths</b>	
<b>25</b>	<b>Prophecy and the Community</b>	
<b>26</b>	<b>Rationalism</b>	
<b>27</b>	<b>Evil and Suffering</b>	
<b>28</b>	<b>Issues of Inclusion</b>	
<b>29</b>	<b>Election and Covenant</b>	
<b>30</b>	<b>Holocaust</b>	
<b>31</b>	<b>The State of Israel/Zionism</b>	
<b>32</b>	<b>Reason and Faith</b>	
<b>33</b>	<b>Belief</b>	



# RESEARCH PAPER GRADING GRID

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Score (out of 10)

Thesis	10
Conclusion	9
Structure/Length	8
Evidence	7
Analysis/ Content	6
Mechanics	5

Exceeds Expectations (10)	Meets Expectations (8-9)	Approaching Expectations (6-7)	Does Not Meet Expectations (0-5)
Thesis clearly and provocatively advances an original argument	Clear and specific thesis that sets up the central argument(s)	Thesis vague or not central to implied argument(s)	No discernible thesis
Conclusions critically reflect on the topic and positions it within existing and future research	Conclusions are convincing and function to position paper within an external context	Conclusions superficial or unconvincing; relevance of the paper is not clear	No conclusions or connections to the world
Paper structure is fluid and guides reader through arguments; scope of paper is clearly defined and appropriate to the arguments; within length requirements	Paper is organized in a coherent and logical manner; scope of paper is appropriate; within 15% of length requirements	Paper inconsistently organized but attempts to guide reader through arguments; scope of paper may be too broad/narrow; within 20% of length requirements	Paper is disorganized and lacks coherent structure; scope of paper is unclear; significantly outside of length requirements
Engages with scholarly research; synthesizes and critiques the arguments of scholarly geographic research	Appropriately cites academic research to develop arguments; demonstrates comprehension of arguments and distinguishes argument from opinion	Uses academic sources inconsistently; arguments inconsistently supported by evidence; may contain unsubstantiated opinion	Does not cite relevant scholarly research to support arguments; arguments mostly unsubstantiated

<p>Critically and insightfully engages topic; analysis central to argument; demonstrates engagement with different branches of geographic thought</p>	<p>Shows thorough understanding of the topic and goes beyond recitation of facts; may have minor factual or conceptual inconsistencies; engages with at least one branch of thought</p>	<p>Shows basic understanding of ideas and information; may have some factual, interpretive, or conceptual errors; connections not clear or shows lack of understanding of geographic concepts</p>	<p>Lacks an understanding of topic; no clear analysis</p>
<p>Grammar, punctuation, spelling are correct; formatting follows APA style conventions</p>	<p>Grammar, punctuation, and spelling mostly correct; evidence of proof reading; formatting generally consistent with APA, MLA or Chicago Style</p>	<p>Some grammatical, punctuation, or spelling errors; appears not to have been proof read; formatting inconsistent</p>	<p>Grammar, spelling, or punctuation interfere with readability; little or no attempt to use style conventions</p>

Grade Scale: **A** – 90-100%; **B** – 80-89%; **C** – 70-79%; **D** –

## ORAL PRESENTATION EVALUATION MATRIX

	Category	Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Outstanding	How to Improve
Relevance	Relevance of presentation to the audience	Mixed several irrelevant points together.	Points were mostly relevant to the audience.	All points were relevant to the audience.	
Content	Information presented	Used inaccurate irrelevant, or inappropriate level of information that might hinder communication.	Used accurate, relevant information.	Used varied information, of which all was accurate, relevant, and at the right level of detail.	
Organization	Overall organization of presentation	Used unclear organization to present ideas.	Presented ideas in a somewhat organized manner.	Presented ideas in a polished, well organized manner.	
	Introduction	Vague introduction. Didn't introduce topic well.	Introduced topic with one or two brief sentences.	Introduction captured audience interests and established the purpose of the presentation.	
	Body	Lacked facts or used inappropriate facts and examples that didn't support main ideas. No logical sequence of information.	Presented with a logical sequence but not presented in a fluent manner.	Used evidence and examples to support main ideas in a fluent manner.	
	Conclusion	No conclusion.	Vague conclusion.	Conclusion reinforced the main ideas in the presentation.	

Time management	Effective use of time	Didn't conclude presentation in assigned time or concluded earlier than the assigned time.	Kept to time limit and delivered in the assigned time.	Carefully timed so that it "fit" into the time allowed. Spent appropriate amount of time on topics, allowed time for questions, and answered questions effectively.	
	Environment	The presenter didn't care about establishing a comfortable environment.	The presenter had little control, but made as many adjustments as possible.	The presenter established a comfortable environment.	
Strategy	Controlling nervousness	Presenter's nervousness distracted the audience.	Presenter's nervousness was apparent only occasionally.	The presenter controlled nervousness so that it did not distract the audience.	
	Mastery of the subject	Read from notes most of the time, Searched for words frequently with long periods of silence.	Spoke with occasional hesitations without overly relying on notes.	The presenter showed evidence of being prepared by not overly relying on notes, and spoke in a fluent and spontaneous way.	
Presentation	Verbal	Could not be understood because of inappropriate rate, volume, or articulation.	Could be understood, but the presenters voice did not effectively enhance the presentation.	The presenter's use of his or her voice was natural and effectively enhanced the presentation.	
	Non verbal Expression	Did not exhibit poise or used ineffective or distracting hand or facial gestures.	Used positive hand and facial gestures.	The presenter was poised and hand and facial gestures were natural and effectively enhanced presentation.	
Practice					
Delivery					

	Eye contact	Established no/indistinct eye contact.	Established eye contact with the audience.	Established direct, consistent eye contact with the audience.	
	Effective use of humor	No humor was used.	No humor was tried or humor was used in an intrusive way.	Any humor used in the presentation was effective and not offensive.	
	Use of visual aids	Included no graphics or pictures or used irrelevant and distracting visual aids.	Included graphics and pictures that were relevant to the topic	Used good quality visual aids that were appropriate for the setting.	
Visual Aids	Visual aids design	Included no graphics or pictures or used distracting/poor looking visual aids.	Graphics and pictures were visible to all	Visual aids were professional looking, and followed text size/amount guidelines. Graphics and pictures were attractive, creative and precise so as to enhance the presentation.	
	Effective management of visual aids	Included no graphics or pictures or the use of visual aids was distracting.	Used some kind of visual aids to facilitate the presentation.	The presenter effectively managed the use of visual aids to enhance the effect of the presentation.	
Overall	Overall impression	Very boring, unpleasant to listen to, very poor presentation.	Somewhat interesting. Could make some improvements.	Very interesting, pleasant to listen to, very good presentation.	

*Judaism is the evolving cultural expressions of the people originally known as Hebrews or Israelites over the course of the generations, in response to their (and others') changing perceptions of themselves, their historical journeys, their stories and ideas, their celebrations, and their understandings of their relationship with their God.*

**Steven Leonard Jacobs, *The Jewish Experience: An Introduction to Jewish History and Jewish Life* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 3.**

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## **“Jewish Philosophy”**

- I. An interpretation of the unique aspects of Jewish tradition:**
- The election of Israel
  - The revelation, content, and eternity of the Torah
  - The special character of the prophecy of Moses
  - Jewish conceptions of the Messiah and the afterlife
- II. As a philosophy of religion, it investigates issues common to Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and metaphysics:**
- The existence of God
  - Divine attributes
  - The creation of the world
  - The phenomenon of prophecy
  - The human soul
  - General principles of human conduct
- III. As a philosophy proper, it studies topics of general philosophic interest:**
- The logical categories
  - The structure of logical arguments
  - The division of being
  - The nature and composition of the universe

*Historically, three periods:*

- (1) The second century B.C.E. until the middle of the first century C.E.
- (2) The tenth until the early 16<sup>th</sup> century (Middle Ages)
- (3) The 18<sup>th</sup> Century and continuing to the present (Modern Phase)

**SOURCE:** *The Encyclopedia Judaica*. Jerusalem, IS: Keter Publishing Limited;  
CD-ROM Edition © Judaica Multimedia (Israel) Ltd. (1972 & 1997)

## THE RAMBAM'S\* THIRTEEN PRINCIPLES OF JEWISH FAITH

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1. I believe with perfect faith that G-d is the Creator and Ruler of all things. He alone has made, does make, and will make all things.
2. I believe with perfect faith that G-d is One. There is no unity that is in any way like His. He alone is our G-d He was, He is, and He will be.
3. I believe with perfect faith that G-d does not have a body. physical concepts do not apply to Him. There is nothing whatsoever that resembles Him at all.
4. I believe with perfect faith that G-d is first and last.
5. I believe with perfect faith that it is only proper to pray to G-d. One may not pray to anyone or anything else.
6. I believe with perfect faith that all the words of the prophets are true.
7. I believe with perfect faith that the prophecy of Moses is absolutely true. He was the chief of all prophets, both before and after Him.
8. I believe with perfect faith that the entire Torah that we now have is that which was given to Moses.
9. I believe with perfect faith that this Torah will not be changed, and that there will never be another given by G-d.
10. I believe with perfect faith that G-d knows all of man's deeds and thoughts. It is thus written (Psalm 33:15), "He has molded every heart together, He understands what each one does."
11. I believe with perfect faith that G-d rewards those who keep His commandments, and punishes those who transgress Him.
12. I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah. How long it takes, I will await His coming every day.
13. I believe with perfect faith that the dead will be brought back to life when G-d wills it to happen.

Rambam = Rabbi Moshe [Moses] ben [son of] Maimon [his father]





Notable 20th Century Jewish Philosophers

Adler, Mortimer (1907–2001)	American Aristotelian/Thomistic philosopher
Alexander, Samuel (1859–1938)	British metaphysical philosopher
Arendt, Hannah (1906–1975)	German-American political theorist
Baumgardt, David (1907–1971)	German-American historian of philosophy
Benda, Julien (1867–1956)	French philosopher of rationalist/scientific inquiry
Benjamin, Walter (1895–1942)	German Marxist philosopher
Bergman, Samuel H. (1883–1975)	German-Israeli philosopher of science
Bergson, Henri (1859–1941)	French philosopher of language and mathematics
Black, Max (1909–1988)	British-American analytic philosopher
Bloch, Ernst (1885–1977)	German Marxist philosopher
Boas, George (1891–1980)	American historian of philosophy
Brunschvicg, Léon (1869–1944)	French idealist philosopher
Buber, Martin (1878–1965)	Austrian-Israeli existentialist philosopher
Cassirer, Ernst (1874–1945)	German Idealist philosopher
Cohen, Morris R. (1880–1947)	American logical positivist philosopher
Fackenheim, Emil (1916–2003)	German-Canadian philosopher of the Holocaust
Feigl, Herbert (1902–1988)	Austrian-American empirical philosopher
Frank, Semyon (1877–1950)	Russian philosopher of metaphysics
Frank, Philipp (1884–1966)	Austrian-American logical-positivist philosopher
Geiger, Moritz (1880–1937)	German phenomenological philosopher
Goodman, Nelson (1906–1998)	American philosopher of language and aesthetics
Gurwitsch, Aron (1901–1973)	American philosopher of phenomenology
Halevy, Elie (1870–1937)	French philosopher of history
Heinemann, Fritz (1889–1970)	German philosopher of logic
Hook, Sidney (1902–1989)	American philosopher of pragmatism
Husserl, Edmund (1859–1938)	Austrian philosopher of phenomenology
Jankélévitch, Vladimir (1903–1985)	French moral philosopher
Jerusalem, Wilhelm (1854–1923)	Austrian philosopher of education
Joel, Karl (1864–1934)	German philosopher of history and nature
Jonas, Hans (1903–1993)	German-American philosopher religion and history

Kallen, Horace (1882–1974)	American political philosopher
Klibansky, Raymond (1905–2005)	German-Canadian philosopher of history
Kojève, Alexander (1902–1968)	Russian-French political philosopher
Koyré, Alexander (1892–1964)	Russian-French philosopher of history and science
Lask, Emil (1875–1915)	German neo-Kantian philosopher
Lévinas, Emmanuel (1906–1995)	French existential and ethical philosopher
Lukacs, Gyorgy (1885–1971)	Hungarian Marxist philosopher
Marcuse, Herbert (1898–1979)	German-American Marxist philosopher
Mauthner, Fritz (1849–1923)	German philosopher of language
Meyerson, Emile (1859–1933)	Polish-French philosopher of science
Nelson, Leonard (1882–1927)	American philosopher of mathematics
Pap, Arthur (1921–1959)	Swiss-American analytic philosopher
Perelman, Chaim (1912–1984)	Polish-Belgian philosopher of law
Pines, Shlomo (1908–1990)	French-Israeli philosopher of Judaism and Islam
Popkin, Robert Henry (1923–2005)	American historian of philosophy
Popper, Karl (1902–1994)	Austrian-British philosopher of science
Reinach, Adolf (1883–1917)	German philosopher of phenomenology and law
Reines, Alvin (1958–2004)	American philosopher of Judaism
Richter, Raoul (1871–1912)	German philosopher of pragmatism and law
Rosenzweig, Franz (1887–1929)	German philosopher of religion and Judaism
Rotenstreich, Nathan (1914–1993)	Israeli philosopher of Judaism
Roth, Leon (1896–1963)	British-Israeli philosopher of Judaism
Scheler, Max (1874–1928)	German philosopher of phenomenology and ethics
Shestov, Lev (1896–1938)	Russian-French philosopher of irrationalism
Simmel, Georg (1858–1918)	German philosopher of sociology
Stein, Edith (1891–1952)	German metaphysical philosopher
Wahl, Jean (1888–1974)	French philosopher of innovation
Waltzer, Richard (1906–1975)	German-British philosopher of Greek philosophy
Weil, Simone (1909–1943)	French philosopher of metaphysics and religion
Weiss, Paul (1901–2002)	American philosopher of metaphysics
White, Morton (b. 1917)	American philosopher of history of ideas
Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1889–1951)	Austrian-British philosopher of language and logic
Wolfson, Harry A. (1887–1974)	American philosopher of Judaism & Jewish thought

Steven Leonard Jacobs. *The Jewish Experience: An Introduction to Jewish History and Jewish Life*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010.

# Jewish Philosophy

Cohn-Sherbok, Dan. *Medieval Jewish Philosophy: An Introduction*. Richmond Surrey: Curzon Press, 1996.

Efros, Israel. *Studies in Medieval Jewish Philosophy*. New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1974.

Frank, Daniel H., and Leaman, Oliver, eds. *History of Jewish Philosophy*. London and New York: Routledge 1997.

Frank, Daniel H., Leaman, Oliver, and Manekin, Charles H., eds. *The Jewish Philosophy Reader*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000.

Guttman, Julius. *Philosophies of Judaism: The History of Jewish Philosophy from Biblical Times to Franz Rosenzweig*. Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1964. Translated by David W. Silverman.

Hughes, Aaron W. *Jewish Philosophy A-Z*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2005.

Isaacs, Ronald H. *Every Person's Guide to Jewish Philosophy and Philosophers*. Northvale and Jerusalem: Jason Aronson, 1999.

Levenson, Alan T. *Modern Jewish Thinkers: An Introduction*. Northvale and Jerusalem: Jason Aronson, 2000.

Patai, Raphael, and Goldsmith, Emanuel S., eds. *Thinkers and Teachers of Modern Judaism*. New York: Paragon House, 1994.

Rotenstreich, Nathan. *Jewish Philosophy in Modern Times: From Mendelssohn to Rosenzweig*. New York and Chicago: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968.

Samuelson, Norbert M. *Jewish Philosophy: An Historical Introduction*. London and New York: Continuum, 2003.

Seeskin, Kenneth. *Jewish Philosophy in a Secular Age*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990.

# Martin Buber

*I and Thou*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958. Translated by Ronald Gregor Smith.

*Moses: The Revelation and the Covenant*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1946.

Biemann, Asher D., ed. *The Martin Buber Reader: Essentials Writings*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.

Cohen, Arthur A., ed. *The Jew: Essays from Martin Buber's Journal Der Jude, 1916-1928*. Tuscaloosa and London: The University of Alabama Press, 1980.

Herberg, Will, ed. *The Writings of Martin Buber*. New York: Meridian Books, 1956.

Schmidt, Gilya Gerda. *Martin Buber's Formative Years: From German Culture to Jewish Renewal, 1897-1909*. Tuscaloosa and London: The University of Alabama Press, 1995.

# Emil L. Fackenheim

*Encounters between Judaism and Modern Philosophy: A Preface to Future Jewish Thought.* New York: Schocken Books, 1973.

*An Epitaph for German Judaism: From Halle to Jerusalem.* Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2007.

*God's Presence in History: Jewish Affirmations and Philosophical Reflections.* New York: Harper & Row, 1970.

*The Jewish Return into History: Reflections in the Age of Auschwitz and a New Jerusalem.* New York: Schocken Books, 1978.

*To Mend the World: Foundations of Future Jewish Thought.* New York: Schocken Books, 1982.

*Quest for Past and Future: Essays in Jewish Theology.* Westport: Greenwood Press, 1968.

*The Religious Dimension in Hegel's Thought.* Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1967.

Greenspan, Louis, and Nicholson, Graeme, eds. *Fackenheim: German Philosophy & Jewish Thought.* Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1992.

Morgan, Michael L., ed. *Emil L. Fackenheim: Jewish Philosophers & Jewish Philosophy.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996.

Morgan, Michael L., ed. *The Jewish Thought of Emil Fackenheim: A Reader.* Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987.

# Saadya Gaon

*The Book of Beliefs & Opinions.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976.  
Translated from the Arabic and the Hebrew by Samuel Rosenblatt.

*Three Jewish Philosophers: Philo, Saadya Gaon, Jehuda Halevi.* New York: Atheneum  
(1969).

# Emmanuel Levinas

*Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism.* Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990. Translated by Sean Hand.

*Nine Talmudic Readings.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990. Translated by Annette Aronowicz.

*Time and the Other.* Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987. Translated by Richard A. Cohen.

*Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority.* Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969. Translated by Alphonso Lingis.

Bernasconi, Robert, and Critchley, Simon, eds. *Re-Reading Levinas.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991.

Cohen, Richard A., ed. *Face to Face with Levinas.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986.

Davis, Colin. *Levinas: An Introduction.* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996.

# Moses Maimonides

Angel, Marc D. *Maimonides, Spinoza, and Us: Toward an Intellectually Vibrant Judaism*. Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2009.

Arbel, Ilil. *Maimonides: A Spiritual Biography*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001.

Davidson, Herbert A. *Moses Maimonides: The Man and His Works*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Guttman, Julius. *Maimonides—The Guide of the Perplexed*. Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1995. Translated from the Arabic by Chaim Rabin.

Halkin, Abraham, and Hartman, David. *Crisis and Leadership: Epistles of Maimonides*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1985.

Harris, Jay M., ed. *Maimonides after 800 Years: Essays on Maimonides and His Influence*. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2007.

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# Rationalist Judaism

Exploring the legacy of the rationalist medieval Torah scholars, and various other notes

Monday, July 4, 2011

## Interpretations of Maimonides: A Guide for the Perplexed

Are you perplexed by all the different approaches to Rambam's theology? The solution is here! This handy-dandy chart explains the differences between the various schools of thought. (If you are reading this via e-mail, please note that you might have to visit the website for the chart to display properly.)

School of Thought	Sample Representatives	Was Rambam similar to Aristotle?	Did Rambam accurately reflect traditional Judaism?	Was Rambam's theological approach correct?
Traditional Non-Orthodox	Rashba, Yama Saora, Hirsch	Mostly	Mostly not	No
Orthodox Hyper-rationalist	Jose Faur, YBT	Mostly	Entirely	Yes
Traditionalist Ultra-Orthodox	Charadim	Partially	Mostly not	No, but he didn't say it; didn't mean it; he could say it but we can't, etc.
Traditionalist Orthodox	Ben Zion Buchman	Barely	Entirely	Yes
Isolative Academic	Strauss	Entirely	Not at all	It's a secret
Mainstream Academic	Kellner, Shapiro	Mostly	Mostly not	Partially

Bear in mind that, as with all summaries, this chart is necessarily a simplification, and thus roughly around the edges. But note the

### About This Site

This website is an exploration into the rationalist approach to Judaism that was most famously presented by Maimonides. It will also explore contemporary rationalist approaches, as well as being a forum for various other notes. Well-written comments in the spirit of this enterprise will be posted; please include a name (even a pseudonym).

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## Franz Rosenzweig

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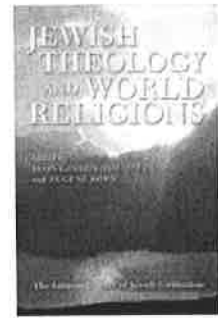
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Alon Goshen-Gottstein, Eugene Korn, eds. *Jewish Theology and World Religions*. Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2012. xiv + 344 pp. \$64.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-906764-09-8.

Reviewed by Steven L. Jacobs (University of Alabama)  
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Commissioned by Jason Kalman



## The Question of the Non-Judaic Other

The people who inhabited post-Enlightenment Europe after the initial granting of citizenship to Jews (France first and other countries following) could not have imagined a scenario that would have occasioned a text such as this one: a new world where Jews, emerging from their ghettos, would *positively* confront other religious communities theologically (i.e., how now to make “theological sense” of others’ religious traditions). To be sure, there is a long literary history of engagement with Christianity, largely negative, and an equal engagement with Islam, somewhat more ambivalent, but both Hinduism and Buddhism must be added to the mix.

In 2005, at the University of Scranton, Pennsylvania, twenty-five Judaic scholars came together under the conference rubric “Towards a Contemporary Jewish Theology of World Religions,” reflecting on “Jewish relations with non-Jews, Judaism’s norms regarding other religions, and the nature of Jewish uniqueness and identity” (p. vii). The work of fourteen participants is included here; unfortunately, we do not know who else was in attendance, the titles of their presentations, the criteria for inclusion, and why they were not included. That being said, however, these skillfully edited essays are rich food for reflection and future work. As coeditor and co-convenor Eugene Korn writes in his preface: “Christianity and Christians no longer pose threats to Judaism and the Jews people that they once did, while some interpretations of Islam and many Muslims today see Judaism, Jews, and Israel as enemies. Jews travel frequently to

Asia where they encounter Hindus and Buddhists and their religious systems.... There are two points of departure, two strategic orientations, from which the essays in this volume proceed. The first is doctrine, philosophy, halakhah, and kabbalah.... The second is not normative or theoretical, but personal and empirical.... Ultimately, any successful Jewish theology of world religions must strike a dialectical balance, since authentic Jewish theology takes into account both the normative doctrinal thought of our texts and thinkers as well as the continuing living experiences of the Jewish people” (pp. vii-ix).

The collection of essays is divided into three sections: “Philosophical Perspectives on Jewish Pluralism” (Alan Brill and Rori Picker-Neiss, Avi Sagi, Raphael Jospe, and Joelene S. Kellner and Menachem Kellner); “Judaism and the Other” (Stanislaw Krajewski, Meir Sender, and Ruth Langer); and “Judaism and World Religions” (Korn, David Novak, Paul B. Fenton, Alon Goshen-Gottstein, and Jerome [Yehuda] Gellman). Each essay is worthy of far more expansive commentary than this all-too-brief review occasions. Thus, we will restrict our observations to what this reviewer regards as the essential thrusts of each contribution before making some concluding comments.

Goshen-Gottstein posits four concerns to frame the issues in the volume’s introduction. First, the contributors ask whether a religion or spiritual path outside Judaism can be considered legitimate and valid. Next, they

point to definitions of “idolatry” (i.e., the notion of what constitutes *avodah zarah*). Third, the essays examine Revelation and Truth. And finally, they discuss concerns for Jewish continuity and identity. Goshen-Gottstein acknowledges pointedly that “the underlying assumption of all Jewish reflection on other religions is that they are competitive, and therefore constitute a threat to Judaism in terms of loyalty, membership, and affiliation. An ‘us versus them’ mentality is deeply ingrained in Jewish approaches to other religions” (p. 7). How to engage without demeaning and/or diminishing one’s own religious tradition or that of one’s neighbors (and the operative word here is “neighbors”) then becomes the question.

Brill and Picker-Neiss posit four models worth examining by looking at the work of inclusivist Judah Halevi (1075-1141); universalist Sa’adiah Gaon (882-942); present-day pluralist Michael Kogan (*Opening the Covenant: A Jewish Theology of Christianity* [2008]); and exclusivist Zevi Yehuda Kook (1891-1982).[1] In so doing, they suggest that foundational to all Jewish/rabbinic thinking are the concepts of “chosenness” and “uniqueness.” Philosophically rigorous, Sagi suggests that “religious exclusivism is a hard position to defend philosophically and that a pluralistic thesis that advocates the inner value of different religions is logically preferable” (p. 61). Unfortunately and correctly, however, halakhically (from the perspective of Jewish law), this notion is far easier to construct externally to the Jewish people rather than internally regarding the various streams of modern Jewish life (Orthodox-Mitnagdic, Orthodox-Hasidic, Reform/Liberal/Progressive, Conservative/Positive-Historical, Reconstructionist, Humanist). Jospe begins with Alexander Altman’s (1906-87) 1957 lecture “Tolerance and the Jewish Tradition” published by the Council of Christians and Jews, and notes that “the challenge of toleration and pluralism, both external and internal, remains acute” more than fifty-five years later, but, unlike Sagi, he draws his support from non-halakhic midrashic and other rabbinic literatures, and takes issue with the position of Menachem Kellner who, in turn together with his wife Joelene, responds to Jospe in “respectful disagreement” (p. 89). (Here, in microcosm, these three essays together model proper dialogical conversation in accord with the highest ideals of the Jewish intellectual enterprise.) For the Kellners, however, the central question is that of “truth,” and, using their own metaphor, “Judaism is not one of the three flavours of Western monotheistic ice cream; it is a different snack altogether” (p. 126). Thus, for the two of them, it is the very truth embodied in the Torah that renders the positions of both

Christianity and Islam highly problematic and questionable.

Krajewski argues that “Jews are to be priests for the rest of humanity,” and raises the intriguing question whether or not accepting such an understanding would enable Jews and Judaism to be more open to other religious traditions (p. 140). Somewhat unfortunately, he fails to make his case, perhaps because such a mythologizing view tends to elevate the Jews and Judaism above other religious traditions, privileging the former and failing to further any notion of dialogue among equals. Sendor pointedly looks at the question of violence in interfaith work and examines the writings of Emmanuel Levinas (1906-95), Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), and Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005), all the while reminding us that it has been the Jews who have been the *primary* victims of religious violence throughout the history of the monotheisms. Jewish liturgical scholar Langer, in contrast, looks at how non-Jews appear in the context of prayer and worship—indirectly, semi-directly, and directly, and, as the *Aleinu* would have it, “On that [future] day, [the] God [of Israel] will be One and His Name will be One” (or, as she writes, “at the end of days all the nations will realize the error of their ways and come to worship God” [p. 171]). Significantly, after the Holocaust/Shoah, she concludes, “a world which perpetuates oppositional understandings of the Other is one in which tragedies will continue to occur” (p. 186).

Korn in “Rethinking Christianity,” identifies two sets of questions that modern Jewry, regardless of expression, has yet to fully confront: “What do Jewish thought or theologically oriented Jews make of their Christian neighbors [again this word “neighbors”] and colleagues, particularly the pious among them who no longer seek to undermine Judaism or the Jewish people? Can Jews see the image of God in the face of a believing Christian? And can Jewish theology understand contemporary Christianity as a positive religious and spiritual phenomenon? Are there halakhic and religious grounds for appreciating contemporary Christianity and its current teachings?” (p. 190). And secondly: “Are there grounds for a new *theological* relationship in which Jews understand Christians as participating in a common covenant with them? And can this new theological relationship function as a the foundation for Jews and Christians for forging an active partnership in building a future based on a common religious mission?” (p. 209). Collectively, these six questions are worthy of a fully independent volume by these same scholars and others as well (e.g., Irving “Yitz” Greenberg, who wrote *For the Sake of*

*Heaven: The New Encounter between Judaism and Christianity* [2004]).

Novak, whose own seminal work on both the Noahide laws (*The Image of the Non-Jew in Judaism: The Idea of Noahide Law* [2004]) and Jewish-Christian relations (*Jewish-Christian Dialogue: A Jewish Justification* [1992]), returns us to the work of Maimonides (1135-1204) and his attitude not only to Christians and Muslims but pagans as well. Fenton, in subtitled his contribution "Islam in Jewish Thought and Faith," refers to Muslims as "The Banished Brother," and likewise addresses a somewhat lesser-known *responsum* wherein he regards Islam, given his own close experience as a "derivative monotheism," critiquing Muslim intolerance as well (p. 240). Goshen-Gottstein, perhaps for the first time for many readers, examines the relationship between Jews and Hindus, the latter perceived as a polytheistic tradition, while tolerant of a relatively ancient Jewish community, regardless of the understanding of Brahma as the ultimate singular deity, and perhaps the classical case of *avodah zarah*. Yet he takes care to point out that "recognition of India and its religious tradition as a repository of wisdom is the most persistent view of India in Jewish literature, and it is about as old as rabbinic Judaism itself" (p. 275). Finally, Gellman addresses, equally fascinatingly, the case of Buddhism as a truly non-theistic expression of "religion." Gellman finds the great insight of Buddhism—that of decentering the self and refocusing outward (in his case on God)—as particularly meaningful to him as a halakhic Jew.

Finally, in his concluding reflections, Goshen-

Gottstein summarizes well the issue before today's Jews and modern expressions of Judaism. "To talk of 'world religions' leads us to taking a position regarding the legitimacy and possible recognition of other religions. To talk about the Other invites us into the domain of relationships, and leads us to reflect on how we might conceive or rather relate to other religions other than through the classical discussions centering on recognizing other religions" (p. 319).

It is this kind of creative thinking—regardless of past historical experiences and the foundational texts of the Jewish religious tradition (Torah, Talmud, Midrash, Responsa, Kabbalah)—that might very well prove a substantive breakthrough in both the present and the future for all religious communities in contact with each other. For just as the past is no guarantor of the present nor predictor of the future, it remains a place to start, a vote but not a veto as some would have it. Goshen-Gottstein and Korn are to be commended for assembling the scholars initially in a conference and joining them together in this volume. One hopes that this project is only the beginning of several volumes addressing the multitude of questions, observations, and insights raised herein.

#### Note

[1]. In this context, see Brill's own important contributions: *Judaism and Other Religions: Models of Understanding* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); and *Judaism and World Religions: Encountering Christianity, Islam, and Eastern Traditions* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

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