

**Philosophy 3570: Hebrew Bible
Fall 2004**

Professor Martin D. Yaffe
Office Hours: TR 11:00-12:20
Office: ENV 310N

TR 12:30-1:50
MAST 319

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

Our subject-matter is the Hebrew Bible (or “Old Testament”). Our aim is to understand its views of God and of human life so far as possible *in its own terms*, apart from the various sectarian interpretations (whether Jewish, Christian or Muslim) to which it has given rise. Our reason for studying it carefully in this way is that it is one of the twin roots of our modern way of life (the other being Greek philosophy). A clear, first-hand grasp of its teachings is therefore essential for our own self-understanding.

Our method will be to look closely at the narrative books that are the most basic layer of the biblical writings, especially the Book of Genesis. We shall find that the Genesis narrative is, when looked at in its own terms, interdependent with the narratives of eleven other books that follow in a narrated sequence, from Exodus to II Kings. We shall call these twelve books the Dodecateuch. The emphasis of the course is thus on the first-hand reading of the Book of Genesis in the context of the Dodecateuch as a whole, with the help of Robert Sacks’s penetrating and insightful *Commentary on the Book of Genesis*.

This course requires careful reading, writing, and thinking. Class attendance and give-and-take discussion are indispensable.

II. REQUIRED TEXTS

Sacks, Robert D. *A Commentary on the Book Genesis*. Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990.

JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh. 2nd ed. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1999.

—or any reliable text and/or translation of the Hebrew Bible (a.k.a. “Old Testament”)

III. OPTIONAL TEXTS

Kass, Leon R. *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis*. New York: Free Press, 2003.

Pangle, Thomas L. *Political Philosophy and the God of Abraham*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.

Sacks, Robert. *The Book of Job with Commentary: A Translation for our Time*. Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1999.

Spinoza, Benedict. *Theologico-Political Treatise*. Translated by Martin D. Yaffe. Newburyport, Mass.: Focus Philosophical Library, 2004.

Thomas Aquinas. *The Literal Exposition on Job: A Scriptural Commentary Concerning Providence*. Translated by Anthony Damico. Interpretive Essay and Notes by Martin D. Yaffe. Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1989.

IV. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Daily (almost) pop quizzes or mini-essays (acceptable in specified format only) are worth approximately one-third of your course grade. These may be supplemented occasionally by optional oral reports (for extra credit).
2. There are midterm and final take-home essay-examinations, each worth approximately one-third of your course grade.
3. Regular and punctual attendance is expected. *Absentees may be penalized.*

V. SPECIFICATIONS FOR WRITTEN WORK, ETC.

1. All exams or essay assignments must be typed in standard 12-point font, with a single title-page clearly listing the course number and title, instructor, date, exact name of assignment (as found on handout), and student's name and number.
2. Use one surface of a page only.
3. Leave one-inch margins on all sides of each page for comments.
4. Double-space everything (including title-page).
5. Spelling counts. So does grammar. My authority is *Harbrace Handbook*. For why I insist on proper punctuation, see Lynne Truss, *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation* (New York: Gotham, 2004). For why I insist on plain, jargon-free, non-ideologized language, see Diane Ravitch, *The Language Police: How Pressure Groups Restrict What Students Learn* (New York: Vintage, 2003).
6. Footnote citations, etc., are usually not necessary in exams, but where they are made to works that have standard reference formats, you *must* use those formats exclusively. (See also Rule 7, below.)
7. Be sure to consult the University of North Texas *Student Guidebook's* statement on academic dishonesty.
8. Carelessness or sloppiness counts against you.
9. *Assignments that are deficient in any of the aforementioned ways may be returned with a grade of F or D*, at the instructor's discretion, with the suggestion that they be revised for an improved grade. They will then be treated as late submissions. (See Rule 10, below.)
10. Every effort will be made to return written assignments by the next class period. Late submissions will be accepted if they are handed in *before* the due date for the next assignment, but they will then be graded without comments and made available at the instructor's office at his convenience. Responsibility for retrieving late submissions, etc., rests entirely with the student.
11. Photocopies of handouts you may have missed will be made available to you on request at the reception desk in ENV 225.
12. Generally speaking, the instructor does not return phone calls. Please feel free, however, to leave a clear and concise message at 940-565-2259 (voicemail) or yaffe@unt.edu (e-mail). Every effort will be made to answer e-mail messages promptly.