



Course Description

The purpose of this core course is to bring classic Jewish texts about government into conversation with the foundational works of American political thought. In so doing, we will consider the following questions: How did Jewish notions of politics, the social contract, and covenant impact the eventual structure and nature of the United States? How did the Bible figure in the debates about democracy and monarchy that took place during the time of America's founding? What tensions exist between the notion of religious authority and the modern conception of personal autonomy? In what way is the United States different from European democracies, and what is the role of religion in American public life?

Attendance & Participation

Students will be expected to have read and reflected upon the readings of each week and participate in class discussions about them. At the end of every week, students will be given a question to facilitate reflection on the readings for the week ahead and will be asked to respond before the first session of the next week with several paragraphs of reflection in response to the question. In addition, students will write a paper by the end of the term that will embody a sophisticated comparative reflection on Jewish and American sources on government. A final will conclude the course.

Grades

Participation and Reading Response	30%
Paper	30%
Final	40%

Course Outline

Introduction

1. *Sefer Shmuel Aleph* (I Samuel), chapters 8 & 12
2. Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*.
3. Berlin, Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehudah. *Haamek Davar Parshat Shoftim*, Selections.
4. Talmud Sanhedrin, Perek 2, Selections.
5. *Midrash Rabbah Devarim Parshat Shoftim*, Selections.

Topic 1: David, Divine Right of Kings, the Bible, and Political Philosophy

1. Wyschogrod, Michael: "A King in Israel," *First Things* May 2010.
2. Nelson, Eric. *The Hebrew Republic*, Chapter 1.
3. Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, Chapter 1.

Topic 2 : Locke, The Hebrew Bible and the Hebrew Republic

1. Nelson, Eric. *The Hebrew Republic*, Chapter 3.
2. Locke, John. *Two Treatises of Government: First Treatise*. Ed. Peter Laslett. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
3. *Chatam Sofer*, Likutei Teshuvot #82



Topic 3: Locke's Second Treatise and The Social Contract

1. Locke, John. *Two Treatises of Government: Second Treatise* (Selections). Ed. Peter Laslett. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988. Print.
2. Oz-Salzberger, Fania. "The Political Thought of John Locke and the Significance of Political Hebraism." *Hebraic Political Studies*. 1.5 (2006): 568-592.

Topic 4: Covenant vs. Social Contract

1. Elazar, Daniel J. *Covenant and Polity in Biblical Israel: Biblical Foundations and Jewish Experiences*. New Brunswick, NJ, Transaction Publishers (1995). Selections.
2. Sacks, Jonathan. *The Home We Build Together*.

Topic 5 : Covenant and American Political Thought

1. Elazar, Daniel J. *Covenant and Polity in Biblical Israel: Biblical Foundations and Jewish Experiences*. New Brunswick, NJ, Transaction Publishers (1995). Selections.
2. Hamilton, Alexander, et. al. *The Federalist Papers*, Selections.
3. Elazar, Daniel. "Deuteronomy as Israel's Ancient Constitution: Some Preliminary Reflections." *The Jewish Political Studies Review*. 4.1-2 (1992).
4. "The Book of Joshua as a Political Classic." *The Jewish Political Studies Review*. 1.1-2 (1989).

Topic 6: Isaac Abravanel and the American Idea

1. Abravanel, *Commentary on the Book of Judges*, Introduction; *Commentary on Samuel*, Selections; *Commentary on Exodus*, selections
2. Soloveitchik, Rabbi Joseph B. "Belnyan Takanat Moshe"
3. James Madison, Federalist 10.
4. Netanyahu, B. *Isaac Abravanel: Statesman and Philosopher*.
5. Strauss, Leo. "On Abravanel's Philosophical Tendency and Political Teaching."

Topic 7: Religion and Democratic Society

1. De Tocqueville, Alexis. *Democracy in America*. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.
2. Morrison, Jeffrey. *John Witherspoon and the Founding of the American Republic*, Selections.
3. Burke, Edmund. *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Selections.

Topic 8: Religious Freedom and the Public Good

1. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "Confrontation."
2. Carter, Stephen L. *The Culture of Disbelief: How American Law and Politics Trivialize Religious Devotion*. New York: Doubleday, 1994. Selections.
3. McConnell, Michael W. "Free Exercise Revisionism and the Smith Decision." *The University of Chicago Law Review* 57.4 (1990):1109-1153.



Yeshiva University

**THE ZAHAVA AND MOSHAEL STRAUS
CENTER FOR TORAH AND WESTERN THOUGHT**

4. U.S. Supreme Court Employment Div. v. Smith. No. 494 U.S. 872. Supreme Court of the US. 17 April 1990. Print.