I. Description:

What does it mean to say that a text or a law is divine? In “The Rabbinic Mind and Divine Law,” we will trace the radically divergent conceptions of divine law that emerged in biblical Israel and in ancient Greece: For the Greeks, divine law was divine because it was rational, allied with truth and static. In biblical Israel, divine law was divine because it issued from the will of a divine being which can be arbitrary, override “truth” and evolve. Students will enter into the “talmudic workshop” to see how the rabbis managed the tension between these dueling conceptions of divine law. Their labors gave rise to a conception of divine law that was scandalous to outsiders and perhaps even to themselves. How did they come to see the authoritative divine law as sometimes divorced from truth and rationality, and as evolving rather than static? And what do we gain or lose if we view Torah one way rather than the other?
II. Course Calendar:

August 3rd: Biblical and Greco-Roman Notions of Divine Law
9:30 AM – 12:30 PM
Readings:
- Michael LeFebvre, *Collections, Codes and Torah: The Recharacterization of Israel’s Written Law*, chapter 1 (pp. 1-30).

August 4th: When Worlds Collide
9:30 AM – 12:30 PM
Readings:

August 5th: T’sha B’Av, no meeting

9:30 AM – 12:30 PM
Reading:
- Moshe Halbertal, *People of the Book*, pp 16-50

August 7th: The Rabbinic Construction of Divine Law II: The (Ir)rationality of Torah
9:30 AM – 12:30 PM
Reading:

August 8th: The Rabbinic Construction of Divine Law III: The Flexibility of Torah
9:30 AM – 12:30 PM
Reading:
- Weiss, Dov. “Confrontations with God in Late Rabbinic Literature” (Ph.D Diss., University of Chicago Divinity School, 2011) selections TBD
III. Faculty Biographies:

Core Instructor

Christine Hayes

Christine Hayes is Professor of Religious Studies in Classical Judaica. Before joining the Yale faculty in 1996, she was Assistant Professor of Hebrew Studies in the Department of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University for three years. Her published works include several books and many articles in *Vetus Testamentum*, *The Journal for the Study of Judaism*, *The Harvard Theological Review*, and various scholarly anthologies. Her first book, entitled *Between the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds* (Oxford University Press, 1997) was honored with a Salo Baron prize from the American Academy for Jewish Research (1999). Her second book, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities: Intermarriage and Conversion from the Bible to the Talmud* (Oxford University Press, 2002), was a 2003 National Jewish Book Award finalist. With the support of a New Directions Fellowship from the Mellon Foundation, Hayes spent 2005-2006 at the Yale Law School and is currently completing a fifth book, entitled *What’s so Divine about Divine Law?*. Hayes is active in professional and academic organizations, currently serving as co-editor of the Association for Jewish Studies Review and as an editor of the *Encyclopedia for the Bible and its Reception*. A specialist in talmudic-midrashic studies, Hayes offers undergraduate courses on the literature and history of the biblical and talmudic periods (including Introduction to the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible and Introduction to Judaism) as well as advanced text courses and graduate-only seminars. In 2005, Hayes was awarded the Sidonie Miskimin Clauss Prize for Teaching Excellence in the Humanities. She is currently Chair of the Department of Religious Studies.

Dean

Daniel Mark

Daniel Mark is an assistant professor of political science at Villanova University. Daniel also serves on the nine-member, bipartisan United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, to which he was appointed by Speaker of the US House of Representatives John Boehner. He teaches political theory, philosophy of law, American government, and politics and religion. At Villanova, he is a faculty associate of the Matthew J. Ryan Center for the Study of Free Institutions and the Public Good and the faculty adviser for the men’s club lacrosse team. In addition, he is informally affiliated with the Navy ROTC program. Daniel is also an assistant editor of *Interpretation: A Journal of Political Philosophy*. He holds a BA, MA, and PhD from the Department of Politics at Princeton University. There, he was affiliated with the Witherspoon Institute, the James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions, the Program in Law and Public Affairs, and the Penn-Princeton Bioethics Forum. He wrote his dissertation under Professor Robert P. George on the subject of “Authority and Legal Obligation.” He works with the Tikvah Fund in New York and has taught at the Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought at Yeshiva University. Before graduate school, he spent four years as a high school teacher. He also attended Yeshivat Har Etzion (Gush) in Israel.
IV. Our Mutual Commitment

Our pledge to you is that the program will be excellent and that the teachers are, in every case, among the best people in the world teaching the subjects they are teaching. Your pledge to us is that you will invest yourselves in the texts and the seminars, and do the work to the fullest extent of your talents. You have put your everyday work on hold to join us, so we know you come to us with great interest and commitment. We will insist that you continue that commitment—a commitment to attending each and every session, a commitment to coming to class on time, a commitment to doing all the readings—throughout the duration of the Institute. If anyone fails to honor his or her commitment, he or she will be dismissed from the seminar.