Thursday, May 22, 2014
12:00-3:00pm
University of Denver Sturm Hall, Room 286

3-hour Intensive Text Seminar:
Strauss, Cohen, Maimonides: What is the History of Philosophy? What is Jewish Philosophy?

Using Leo Strauss's 1931 essay "Cohen and Maimonides" as a springboard, we explore a number of big questions in philosophy and religion:
1. How ought we interpret the history of philosophy? For instance, what does it mean to distinguish Plato from Aristotle or Kant from Hegel, since Aristotle was a Platonist and Hegel a Kantian.
2. What does it mean to understand a philosophical text? Should we (scholars, philosophers, intellectual historians) aim, to use Kant's words about Plato, to understand an author better than he understood himself? Or is the goal of interpretation to understand an author as he understood himself? If so, what would this mean? In dealing with these issues, Strauss also raises questions about the relation (or lack thereof) between modern historicist approaches and premodern allegorical approaches to interpretation.
3. What is Jewish philosophy about? Are its concerns closest to ethics, epistemology, or political theory?

Thursday, May 22, 2014
6:30-8:00pm
Jewish Community Center
350 S. Dahlia St., 80246

Public Lecture:
How Judaism Became a Religion

Is Judaism a religion, a culture, a nationality—or a mixture of all of these? Join visiting Princeton scholar Leora Batnitzky for an exploration of these themes based on her recent acclaimed book, How Judaism Became a Religion in which she boldly argues that this question more than any other has driven modern Jewish thought since the eighteenth century. Leora's wide-ranging and lucid account tells the story of how Judaism came to be defined as a religion in the modern period—and why Jewish thinkers have fought as well as championed this idea.

Ever since the Enlightenment, Jewish thinkers have debated whether and how Judaism—largely a religion of practice and public adherence to law—can fit into a modern, Protestant conception of religion as an individual and private matter of belief or faith. Batnitzky makes the novel argument that it is this clash between the modern category of religion and Judaism that is responsible for much of the creative tension in modern Jewish thought.

Leora F. Batnitzky is the Ronald O. Perelman Professor of Jewish Studies, and is Professor of Religion in the Department of Religion at Princeton University.
Dr. Batnitzky's teaching and research interests include philosophy of religion, modern Jewish thought, hermeneutics, and contemporary legal and political theory. In 2002 she received Princeton's President's Award for Distinguished Teaching. She is the author of Idolatry and Representation: The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig Reconsidered (Princeton, 2000), Leo Strauss and Emmanuel Levinas: Philosophy and the Politics of Revelation (Cambridge, 2006), and How Judaism Became a Religion: An Introduction to Modern Jewish Thought (Princeton, 2011). Her current book project, tentatively titled "Conversion Before the Law: How Religion and Law Shape Each Other in the Modern World," focuses on a number of contemporary legal cases concerning religious conversion in the U.S., Great Britain, Israel, and India. She is also currently completing an edited volume for the Brandeis Library of Modern Jewish Thought on modern Judaism and legal theory. She is co-editor, with Peter Schäfer, of Jewish Studies Quarterly. Dr. Batnitzky is the Director of Princeton's Tikvah Project on Jewish Thought, and she currently serves as Chair of the Department of Religion.