



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**NOTRE DAME**  
A U S T R A L I A

# Media Release

Friday 13 June 2025

## Notre Dame launches Jewish philosophy initiative

The University of Notre Dame Australia's Centre for the History of Philosophy (CHOP) is launching a new academic initiative focused on the study of Jewish philosophy.

The initiative includes a new public lecture series, the John and Anna Belfer Oration in the History of Jewish Philosophy, to be launched by Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC, Governor of New South Wales on 30 June.

The academic initiative will strengthen the Centre's specialisation in Philosophy in the Abrahamic Traditions (Jewish, Christian, and Islamic intellectual traditions) and will include research, teaching and public engagement activities.

Centre Co-Director, Associate Professor Nathan Lyons said, "In our current climate of social tensions and fractured relationships between Abrahamic faiths, it's really important and timely to promote a shared understanding of the Abrahamic intellectual traditions – not only for insight into the past, but also for finding ways to live together and think together today."

The University of Notre Dame Australia has appointed distinguished scholar of medieval Jewish philosophy Dr Raphael Dascalu to lead the Jewish Philosophy initiative.

Dr Dascalu said, "This initiative is truly unique in Australia. I'm excited and honoured to be a part of it and I'm very much looking forward to sharing and exploring insights into medieval philosophy with scholars, students, and the broader public."

The initiative will focus on the Jewish philosophical tradition, which begins with Philo of Alexandria (born 25 BCE), runs through major medieval thinkers such as Maimonides (1138-1204), and continues into the present.

Centre Co-Director, Associate Professor David Bronstein said, "Our Centre has a special interest in philosophy that is carried on in the Abrahamic religious traditions. In the Middle Ages, there are amazing philosophical conversations that happen between the three traditions, often with Jews, Christians, and Muslims living and studying and translating texts alongside each other. The Jewish philosophical tradition, which is part of that long Abrahamic intellectual story, is one of Judaism's

most important contributions to world culture and world history and we are excited to promote that tradition and explore its relevance for today.”

To further its commitment to study of the Abrahamic Traditions the University of Notre Dame Australia has partnered with The Great Synagogue Sydney to establish a new public lecture series, The John and Anna Belfer Oration in the History of Jewish Philosophy, generously endowed by the Belanna Trust. These lectures will occur each year at The Great Synagogue, with a distinguished scholar addressing a particular theme in the history of Jewish philosophy.

The inaugural lecture will be held on 30 June 2025 and be delivered by leading Sydney rabbinic thought leader, Rabbi Dr Benjamin Elton, Chief Minister and Senior Rabbi at The Great Synagogue, Sydney. Entitled “*The First Rabbinic Philosopher: Saadia Gaon (882 – 942)*,” Rabbi Elton will discuss Saadia's philosophical work and its influence on later Jewish philosophical thought.

“It is an honour to deliver the inaugural lecture in this new series, starting at the very beginning of medieval Jewish philosophy, with a thinker who remains deeply relevant today. The Great Synagogue has long been the cornerstone of Sydney’s Jewish community, and it is a privilege to open our doors to the Sydney Jewish community, leaders of other faiths, as well as the general public to encourage learning, education and understanding,” commented Rabbi Elton.

David Lewis, President of the Great Synagogue said “The Great Synagogue is the foundation of the Jewish community in Australia and we have always been dedicated to outreach to all communities and the presentation of high quality academic discourse. We are greatly honoured to partner with the University of Notre Dame and the Belanna Trust. May this be the commencement of greater collaboration of the Abrahamic faiths.”

Registrations for the inaugural public lecture can be made online [here](#).

#### **Event Details**

**When:** Monday, June 30, 2025

**Time:** 6:00 pm to 7:30 pm (doors open at 5:30pm)

**Where:** The Great Synagogue, 187A Elizabeth St, Sydney NSW

**Register** [here](#).

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