



Yeshiva University

THE ZAHAVA AND MOSHAEL STRAUS CENTER FOR TORAH AND WESTERN THOUGHT

Maimonides and his Enemies: Syllabus

Semester: Fall 2021

Course Number: 15052 (JTP)

Sessions Meet: T/Th (4:30—5:45 PM) [Location – Belfer 203]

Instructor: Rabbi Dr. Dov Lerner (dov.lerner@yu.edu)

Course Overview

This semester we will explore the legacy of perhaps the most renowned and influential Jewish thinker in history: Maimonides. Over the first half of the course, we will examine his historical and intellectual context, and then survey his central works—attending to their central claims and innovations. The second half of our course will be devoted to the study of a series of thinkers—ranging from Nachmanides to Spinoza and the Netziv—who opposed at least a portion of Maimonides' thought, and, through the lens of their critique, deepen our grasp of what's at stake in the Maimonidean imagination that shaped Judaism as we know it today, in so many ways.

Required Texts

For this course there are no materials that you will be required to purchase—all readings will be made available on canvas or are available online and will be linked or indicated on the canvas page.

Attendance and Participation

This class is a collaborative endeavor and depends for its success on your steady attendance and informed participation, so your final grade may well be swayed by the quality—in addition to the quantity—of your participation in class. Poor attendance (i.e., more than three absences during the term and/or frequently arriving late to class) will lower your final course grade noticeably.

Due Dates

Assignments must be turned in on the date and hour they are due unless an extension has been arranged in advance. If you anticipate needing an extension, please let me know well before the due date. Readings listed above a particular date are to be read for that date.

Please be aware of the University's *Academic Integrity Statement* as all students are expected to abide by it, and note the following two announcements:

Students with disabilities who are enrolled in this course and who will be requesting documented disability-related accommodations should contact the Office of Disability Services, rkobn1@yu.edu during the first weeks of class. Once you have been approved for accommodations, please submit your accommodation letter and discuss any specifics with me to ensure the successful implementation of your accommodations.

Academic support is available to you if you are having any difficulties that could include the following but are not limited to these: understanding assignments, navigating research papers, issues with time management of your schedule and your life or general college adjustment, please make an appointment with Dr. Beth Hait. She is available Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 9am - 6pm. To make an appointment, go to yu2.myyuonline.com. Click on the arrow next to "Academic Advisement" and scroll down to "Student Academic Support".

Evaluation:

Attendance and Participation – 10%

Midterm – 35%

Class Presentation – 10%

Final – 45%

Week 1: Overview

Readings: n/a

August 26th: Welcome and Overview

Week 2: Introduction I—Meeting Maimonides

Readings: J. Kraemer, *Moses Maimonides: An Intellectual Portrait*

August 31st: Biography I

Readings: *Ibid.*

September 2nd: Biography II

Week 3: Rosh Hashana

Week 4: Introduction II—The Meeting of Greece & Islam

Readings: P. Remes, *Neoplatonism (Introduction)*

September 14th: [REMOTE] Intellectual Context

Readings: n/a

September 16th: *Yom Kippur*

Week 5: Sukkot

Week 6: Commentary to the Mishna I

Readings: n/a

September 28th: *Shmini Atzeret*

Readings: Maimonides, *Introduction to the Commentary to the Mishna*

September 30th: [REMOTE] COMMENTARY TO THE MISHNA—Structure and Purpose

Week 7: Commentary to the Mishna II

Readings: Maimonides, *Introduction to the Commentary to Avot; Introduction to Sanhedrin Ch. 10* [selections]

October 5th: COMMENTARY TO THE MISHNA—Ethics and Authority

Readings: TBD

October 7th: SEFER HAMITZVOT (Dr. Ezra Blaustein)

Week 8: Mishneh Torah

Readings: Maimonides, Laws Concerning the Foundation of Torah [selections]

October 12th: MISHNEH TORAH I—Philosophy

Readings: Maimonides, Laws Concerning Mourning [selections]

October 14th: MISHNEH TORAH II—Conceptual Halakha

Week 9: The Guide I

Readings: D. Frank, *Structure of the Guide*; M. Halbertal, *Conclusion*

October 19th: GUIDE OF THE PERPLEXED I

Readings: *The Guide of the Perplexed* [Selections]

October 21st: GUIDE OF THE PERPLEXED II

Week 10: The Guide II

Readings: *The Guide of the Perplexed* [Selections]

October 26th: GUIDE OF THE PERPLEXED III

Readings: *The Guide of the Perplexed* [Selections]

October 28th: GUIDE OF THE PERPLEXED IV

Week 11: Letters & Epistles

Readings: TBD

November 2nd: *Grand Epistle to the Scholars of Lunel* (Rabbi Charles Sheer)

Readings: *****MIDTERM*****

November 4th: *****MIDTERM*****

Week 12: Halevi and Nachmanides

Readings: Halevi [selections]

November 9th: Halevi, Maimonides, and Membership

Readings: TBD

November 11th: Nachmanides, Maimonides, and the Commandments (Dr. Daniel Rynhold)

Week 13: Gersonides and Crescas

Readings: Gersonides [selections]

November 16th: Gersonides, Maimonides, and the Polis

Readings: Crescas [selections]

November 18th: Crescas, Maimonides, and Free Will

Week 14: Medieval Mystics

Readings: Meir ibn Gabbai [selections]

November 23rd: Meir ibn Gabbai, Maimonides, and Hypostases

Readings: n/a

November 25th: *Thanksgiving*

Week 15: Spinoza and Hume

Readings: Spinoza [selections]

November 30th: Spinoza, Maimonides, and Human Nature

Readings: Hume [selections]

December 2nd: Hume, Maimonides, and the Mutakallimun

Week 16: Berlin and Luzzatto

Readings: Netziv [selections]

December 7th: Berlin, Maimonides, and Devotion

Readings: Luzzatto [selections]

December 9th: Luzzatto, Maimonides, and Enlightenment

Week 17: Modern Materialists

Readings: n/a

December 14th: *Asara B'Tevet*

Readings: TBD

December 16th: Wyschogrod, Maimonides, and the Bible (Rabbi Dr. Soloveichik)

Week 18: Class Presentations

Readings: n/a

December 21st: Presentations I

Readings: n/a

December 23rd: Presentations II

Week 19: From Moses to Moses

Readings: Final Preparation

December 27th: Overview

January 7th @ Midday: *Final Due*