



# Yeshiva University

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

### Maimonides and his Enemies: Syllabus

**Semester:** Spring 2023

**Course Number:** JTP 1362H [CRN: 12332]

**Sessions Meet:** T/Th (4:30pm—5:45 PM) [Location – TBD]

**Instructor:** Rabbi Dr. Dov Lerner ([dov.lerner@yu.edu](mailto: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 and Gersonides to Luzzatto—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.

#### *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, [rkohn1@yu.edu](mailto:rkohn1@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.mywconline.com](http://yu2.mywconline.com). Click on the arrow next to "Academic Advisement" and scroll down to "Student Academic Support".*

**Evaluation:**

Attendance and Participation – 10%

Midterm – 35%

Final Assessment – 55%

### **Week 1: Welcome**

Readings: n/a

**January 19<sup>th</sup>**: Welcome and Overview

### **Week 2: Introduction**

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

**January 24<sup>th</sup>**: Meeting Maimonides I

Readings: *Moses Maimonides: An Intellectual Portrait* (as above)

**January 26<sup>th</sup>**: Meeting Maimonides II

### **Week 3: Beginnings**

Readings: Richard E. Rubenstein, *The Murder of "Lady Philosophy"*

**January 31<sup>st</sup>**: Neoplatonism & Intellectual Context

Readings: Maimonides, *Commentary to the Mishna* [selections on Canvas]

**February 2<sup>nd</sup>**: Purpose and Law

### **Week 4: Commentary**

Readings: Maimonides, *Introduction to Sanhedrin Ch. 10* [selections on Canvas]

**February 7<sup>th</sup>**: Philosophy

Readings: Maimonides, *Introduction to the Commentary to Avot* [selections on Canvas]

**February 9<sup>th</sup>**: Ethics

### **Week 5: Law I**

Readings: Maimonides, *Sefer HaMitzvot* [selections on Canvas]

**February 14<sup>th</sup>**: Root and Branch

Readings: Maimonides, *Book of Knowledge* [selections on Canvas]

**February 16<sup>th</sup>**: Law and Philosophy I

### **Week 6: Law II**

Readings: Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah* [selections on Canvas]

**February 21<sup>st</sup>**: Law and Philosophy II

Readings: Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah* [selections on Canvas]

**February 23<sup>rd</sup>**: Conceptual Halakha I

### **Week 7: Law III**

Readings: Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah* [selections on Canvas]

**February 28<sup>th</sup>**: Conceptual Halakha II

Readings: Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah* [selections on Canvas]

**March 2<sup>nd</sup>**: Traditional Responses

### **Week 8: MIDTERM**

Readings: n/a

**March 7<sup>th</sup>**: PURIM

Readings: n/a

**March 9<sup>th</sup>**: \*MIDTERM\*

### **Week 9: Philosophy and History**

Readings: D. Frank, *Structure of the Guide*

**March 14<sup>th</sup>**: *Guide of the Perplexed*—Four Perspectives

Readings: Maimonides, *Letter to Yemen*

**March 16<sup>th</sup>**: Community and Consolation

### **Week 10: Mysticism and Nachmanides**

Readings: Maimonides, *Letter to Obadiah*

**March 21<sup>st</sup>**: Being Jewish and Human

Readings: Nachmanides [selections on Canvas]

**March 23<sup>rd</sup>**: Nachmanides, Maimonides, and Mysticism

### **Week 11: Rationalism and Gersonides**

Readings: Gersonides [selections on Canvas]

**March 28<sup>th</sup>**: Gersonides, Maimonides, and Miracles

Readings: Gersonides [selections on Canvas]

**March 30<sup>th</sup>**: Gersonides, Maimonides, and Politics

### **Week 12-13: PESACH**

### **Week 14: Scientism and Crescas**

Readings: Crescas [selections on Canvas]

**April 18<sup>th</sup>**: Crescas, Maimonides, and Prophecy

Readings: Crescas [selections on Canvas]

**April 20<sup>th</sup>**: Crescas, Maimonides, and Free Will

### **Week 15: Sympathy and Modernity**

Readings: Alan Nadler, "Rambam Revival"

**April 25<sup>th</sup>**: The Maimonidean Comeback

Readings: Luzzatto [selections on Canvas]

**April 27<sup>th</sup>**: Luzzatto, Maimonides, and Narcissism

### **Week 16: Sympathy and Modernity Continued**

Readings: Luzzatto [selections on Canvas]

**May 2<sup>nd</sup>**: Luzzatto, Maimonides, and Community

Readings: Presentations

**May 4<sup>th</sup>**: Presentations

### **Week 17: Endings**

Readings: Presentations

**May 9<sup>th</sup>**: Presentations

Readings: Menachem Kellner, "*Maimonides' Disputed Legacy*"

**May 11<sup>th</sup>**: Overview and Legacy

**May 22<sup>nd</sup> @ 11:59pm: *Final Assessment Due***