

MAIMONIDES' *Guide of the Perplexed*

Maimonides' famous book, *Guide of the Perplexed*, was written – or so Maimonides claims in the Epistle Dedicatory to the book – for his disciple, Rabbi Joseph ben Judah, and others like him. When these students had moved away from Maimonides and thus could no longer study with him directly, he wrote the book "in dispersed chapters" so that they "might reach [them] where [they] are, one after the other." In all of his teaching, Maimonides sought to establish the truth in his students' minds "according to the proper methods" and to have "certainty . . . not come . . . by accident."

In this course, we will read Maimonides' huge (630 some odd pages) book together as carefully as possible. By talking about it in class discussions, we will attempt to discover how it might help us escape from the perplexity that arises when important questions about human life -- individual as well as communal – are raised. In many respects, we who consider ourselves thoughtful students of politics and ardent seekers of justice share much with Maimonides and his students. Though they lived as strangers in foreign lands, we live in ones we call our own. But perhaps we find a parallel in their having often found it necessary to abide by customs or seem to acquiesce in dominant opinions, all the while seeking to understand better and maintain ways and opinions that – though old and sometimes even foreign in all important respects – were more promising. The accuracy of such a tentative parallel will become clear only through more attention to this ever so important book.

Finally, it is especially important to consider Maimonides and this book of his now when the rationalism of the Enlightenment has come into such doubt. Is there another rationalism more suitable to human phenomena, one that entertains the possibility of intelligent discourse about all things important to human beings – even guidance by revelation?

Credit and grade evaluation will be based on the quality of two papers, plus the teacher's assessment of the student's contribution to class discussion. One of the papers is to provide a short critical analysis (1750 words or 7 double-spaced pages) of a particular reading scheduled for a class meeting. **It is due before we discuss the reading for that particular class.** The second paper is to be an analysis of a major question raised in the book; it should be about 3750 words or 15 double-spaced pages in length and is due by the date of the final examination. The theme of this paper should be cleared with me before it is submitted.

Clearly, it is to the student's interest to attend all classes and be prepared to discuss the assigned material intelligently. It will be necessary to read before coming to class, and the reading is very hard and quite long. To profit from the class, one must be willing to devote 9 hours per week preparation for class participation. And by all means, do take advantage of office hours both to become acquainted with me and to discuss any problems you might have.

For the record:

1. The UMD Code of Academic Integrity will be enforced. In short, no cheating. See [www.inform.edu/CampusInfo/Departments/po/code\\_acinteg.html](http://www.inform.edu/CampusInfo/Departments/po/code_acinteg.html).
2. Students with disabilities should see the instructor. Their needs will be accommodated.
3. The UMD policy of respecting the religious observances of students will be followed.

## READING SCHEDULE

CLASS 1, Jan. 30 INTRODUCTION, plus *GUIDE*, Epistle Dedicatory, Introduction, & Part I, Chapters 1-7 (pp. 1-33)

### **February 6, No Class**

CLASS 2, Feb. 13 *GUIDE*, Part I, Chapters 8-36 (pp. 33-85)

CLASS 3, Feb. 20 *GUIDE*, Part I, Chapters 37-60 (pp. 85-147)

CLASS 4, Feb. 27 *GUIDE*, Part I, Chapters 61-70 (pp. 147-175)

CLASS 5, Mar. 5 *GUIDE*, Part I, Chapters 71-76 (pp. 175-231)

CLASS 6, Mar. 12 *GUIDE*, Part II, Chapters 1-12 (pp. 235-280)

### **MARCH 19, SPRING BREAK!! NO CLASS**

CLASS 7, Mar. 26 *GUIDE*, Part II, Chapters 13-24 (pp. 281-327)

CLASS 8, Apr. 2 *GUIDE*, Part II, Chapters 25-34 (pp. 327-367)

CLASS 9, Apr. 9 *GUIDE*, Part II, Chapters 35-48 (pp. 367-412)

CLASS 10, Apr. 16 *GUIDE*, Part III, Introduction & Chapters 1-16 (pp. 415-464)

CLASS 11, Apr. 23 *GUIDE*, Part III, Chapters 17-24 (pp. 464-502)

CLASS 12, Apr. 30 *GUIDE*, Part III, Chapters 25-35 (pp. 502-538)

CLASS 13, May 7 *GUIDE*, Part III, Chapters 36-49 (pp. 539-613)

CLASS 14, May 14 *GUIDE*, Part III, Chapters 50-54 (pp. 613-638)

## BOOK TO ORDER

*The Guide of the Perplexed, Moses Maimonides*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963).

Volume 1. cxxxiv, 232 p. Paper \$28.00 0-226-50230-9

Volume 2: cxxxiv, 231 p. Paper \$28.00 0-226-50231-7

## WORKING BIBLIOGRAPHY

Joel L. Kraemer, "How Not to Read *The Guide of the Perplexed*," in *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 32 (2006), 350-409.

Oliver Leaman, *Moses Maimonides* (Arabic Thought and Culture; London: Routledge, 1990). reviewed by Maya Shatzmiller in *MESA Bulletin* 28/1 (July, 1994), pp. 116-117.

Ralph Lerner, "Philosophy in the Public Square" and "Teaching by Example," in *Maimonides' Empire of Light: Popular Enlightenment in an Age of Belief* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 3-13 and 65-76.

Joshua Parens, "Maimonidean Ethics Revisited: Development and Asceticism in Maimonides?" *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 12/3 (2003): 33-61.

Leo Strauss, "The Literary Character of the *Guide for the Perplexed* in *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1952), pp. 38-94.

\_\_\_\_\_, "How to Begin to Study Medieval Philosophy," in *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism: An Introduction to the Thought of Leo Strauss, Essays and Lectures by Leo Strauss*, Selected and Introduced by Thomas L. Pangle (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 207-226.

\_\_\_\_\_, "How to Begin to Study Medieval Philosophy," revised edition, by David Bolotin, Christopher Bruell, and Thomas L. Pangle *Interpretation: A Journal of Political Philosophy* 23/3 (Spring 1996), 319-338.

\_\_\_\_\_, *Philosophy and Law; Contributions to the Understanding of Maimonides and his Predecessors*, trans. Eve Adler (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995). ISBN 0-7914-1976-2

\_\_\_\_\_, *Philosophy and Law; Essays toward the Understanding of Maimonides and his Predecessors*, trans. Fred Baumann (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1987).

\_\_\_\_\_, *Philosophie und Gesetz: Frühe Schriften in Leo Strauss: Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2, ed. Heinrich Meier (Stuttgart-Weimar: Verlag J. B. Metzler, 1997).