

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO  
DEPARTMENT FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGION &  
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

POL 421S/  
RLG 433S

MAIMONIDES AND HIS MODERN INTERPRETERS

2016-17

Kenneth Hart Green

Office:	UC Room F104	Seminar:	Monday 2-4
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The course offers an introduction to Moses Maimonides' seminal work of Jewish philosophy, *The Guide of the Perplexed*. Through close textual study, a broad range of topics will be considered, such as: divine attributes; the question of biblical interpretation and its proper method; dialectical theology and the status of imagination; proofs for the existence of God; creation versus eternity of the world; prophecy and revelation; providence, theodicy, and the problem of evil; divine law; the search for wisdom and the character of human perfection. Thus, we will delve into some of the basic themes of Jewish philosophical theology and religion as they are treated by Maimonides. In addition, readings in some of the leading modern interpreters of Maimonides' Guide will be examined.

**Prerequisite:**

Permission of the professor. I would like to discuss with all prospective members of the class what their previous studies have been concentrated on, so as to ensure that they are (more or less) appropriately prepared for this advanced course.

**PRIMARY TEXTS:**

**MOSES MAIMONIDES, THE GUIDE OF THE PERPLEXED**. Translated with an Introduction by Shlomo Pines, and with an Introductory Essay by Leo Strauss (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963).

NOTE: The paper edition is in two volumes.

**LEO STRAUSS ON MAIMONIDES: THE COMPLETE WRITINGS**, Edited by Kenneth Hart Green (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

**MAIN REQUIREMENTS:**

- (1) Class presentation(s);
- (2) A first shorter paper;
- (3) A second longer paper.

Requirements will be adjusted for graduates and undergraduates: graduate students in RLG 3622S are required to submit papers of 8-10 pp. on the first paper, and 12-14 pp. on the second paper. What the papers will focus on is discussed in what follows.

**FIRST PAPER:**

Due Date: Monday 6 February 2017

Length: 6-8 pages (typed and double-spaced)

Topic: Write an analysis of one of the main themes in the chapters of the Guide on which you will be doing your presentation. Be sure to bring to light as clearly and as succinctly as possible the gist of Maimonides' leading argument in those chapters. Also, try to fit

the chapters into an overview of the purpose of the Guide as you understand it.

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**SECOND PAPER:**

Due Date: Monday 27 March 2017

Length: 8-10 pages (typed and double-spaced)

Topic: **EITHER:**

Write a critical interpretive essay on, Leo Strauss, "The Literary Character of The Guide of the Perplexed," in Leo Strauss on Maimonides, pp. 341-98.

**OR:**

Write a critical interpretive essay on one work by some other modern interpreter of Maimonides' Guide, such as: S. Pines, J. Guttman, I. Twersky, M. Fox, L. Roth, R. Lerner, M. Kellner, K. Seeskin, A. Ivry, L. Kravitz, W.Z. Harvey, J. Faur, M. Halbertal, J. Stern, A. Tepper, K.H. Green.

The author and the book/essay written on should be discussed with, and endorsed by, the professor, but especially if it is an author or book/essay not listed.

**COURSE WORK VALUE:**

First Paper = 30%;  
Second Paper = 40%;  
Participation = 30%.

The penalty for lateness in submission of assignments is 5% deducted per day that the work is late (unless this later date for submission has been previously authorized by the professor).

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**LIST OF READINGS:**

1/1. Introduction = what type of book is the Guide?

2/1.1-7 = the form of man/created in the image of God

3a/1.14, 17, 26 = the two types of language in the Torah

3b/1.10, 42, 44 = equivocal, derivative, and amphibolous terms

4/1.31-35 = science and its moral difficulties

5/1.46, 50-60 = negative theology (what is true knowledge?)

6a/1.68-70, 72 = God, intellect, and the universe

6b/1.71 = a history of philosophy and theology

7/2.1-12 = proofs for the existence of God and the angels

8/2.13, 15-16, 23-25 = creation versus eternity

9/2.32, 36-40, 45, 48 = prophetology: what is a prophet?

10/3.1-7 = ma'aseh merkavah/the account of the chariot

11/3.8-14 = evil, suffering, and theodicy

12a/3.17-24 = divine providence properly defined

12b/3.15, 34 (1.73[209-12]) = possibility, imagination, omnipotence

13a/3.27-28 (2.40) = what is a divine law?

**13b**/3.29, 32, 34 = anthropology of law & human individuals

**14**/3.51-54 = how to achieve human perfection