



Maimonides and His *Guide for the Perplexed*

Hilary (Spring) 2024

Term Dates:	January 13–March 22 2025
Department:	Theology
Difficulty:	Advanced
Instructor:	Ryan Hurd (r.hurd@davenanttrust.org)
Meeting Time:	Saturday, 10 AM to 12:15 noon (Eastern Time)
Zoom Link:	Populi > click My Courses tab > click course > click Conferences (left menu).

Course Description

This course is a close reading of Maimonides's famous *Guide for the Perplexed* (particularly chapters 1–60), especially as it influences Christian tradition through Latin medievals in translation as *Dux neutrorum*. Particular focus will be given to the twin issue of interpreting holy Scripture but remaining Aristotelian, and saying various names of God but holding to his altogether simplicity. In the former, we will consider Arabic Jewish/Muslim principles of interpreting sacred texts, e.g., attending to various equivocal senses of scriptural names, which for Maimonides can occasion Corporealism (imagining that God is body), as well as to problems of improper and/or metaphorical locutions (such as that God can see or be merciful). In the latter, we will attend to the peculiar and intense nature of Maimonides's negative theology, and how other divine names for Maimonides are interpreted either negatively or positively (God is good means either he is not evil, or that something good arose from him)--both of which he appropriates from Avicenna. Throughout, use will be made of Thomas's engagement with Maimonides, both his appropriation and criticism. Although this course prioritizes study of Maimonides's own text(s), students will also be familiarized with important secondary sources of Maimonidean scholarship more generally.

Objectives

- Better understanding of the nature of holy Scripture, and how to solve apparent contradictions therein.
- Familiarity with principles of interpretation, particularly ones which require one to read against the grain of the letters.
- Overall insight into Maimonides and his thought regarding doctrine of God, especially making true propositions and what they do/do not amount to.
- Not to mention Strauss.

Course Texts

The course texts are English copies of Maimonides's *Guide* (if you can read the Arabic, wonderful!). **Required purchase is the new, one-volume translation: Maimonides, *The Guide to the Perplexed: A New Translation* (2024).** I would like to request that you have access and/or purchase also the older, classic translation by Pines (just volume 1): Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, volume 1 (1974). The reason for this doubling is that the translations are rather different, and comparing/contrasting them on difficult passages is thus extremely helpful.

If desired, I can supply pdf the Latin *Dux neutrorum*.

Course Format

Each class period will usually be a mix of lecture (first hour) and discussion (second hour).

Course Delivery

Classroom Resources

- [Populi](#) online classrooms are used for all course content, including assignments, grades, announcements, course records, and more.
- [Zoom](#) links & recordings are provided on the Populi course page Conferences tab. Class sessions are two hours weekly (2.5 in summer) for ten weeks (8 weeks in summer) and recorded for absent students (not for dissemination outside of class).
- [Discord](#) may be used for additional student and instructor interaction as well as Davenant community discussions.

Attendance: Required for all students taking courses for credit. If the scheduled time does not work for a particular student, they may drop the course according to the Drop Policy in the Academic Catalog.

Auditors: No requirements, but may participate in all class activities.

Late work: Grade reduction of -5% per calendar day upon instructor discretion. No assignments will be accepted after the last due date without an approved extension.

Course Calendar

Subject to change. [Click here](#) for the most current syllabus.

The class as a whole focuses on 1, 1–60; but our class periods will usually have two parts. In the first hour of each class period I will primarily lecture, and we will be working (overall) through 1, 50–60, which broadly speaking involve issues of divine names. In the second hour, we will have class discussion working progressively through 1, 1–49, which broadly speaking involve interpretation of various scriptural locutions. (Slight variations to this plan will be seen below.)

Please come thoroughly prepared to discuss the few chapters each week; note that a significant part of the grade is based upon “attendance,” by which is meant *actively engaging in and contributing to discussion during the second hour*.

In addition, the student is expected to read through the entire *Guide* once, to sufficiently have an idea of the whole. In general, we will not be discussing these readings in class, but can work through them (as desired) on e.g. Discord.

	First Hour Lecture/Readings	Second Hour Discussion/Readings	Whole Guide Reading
1	Introduction to Maimonides and His Guide: Perplexity, Causes of Contradiction, and Overall Sources of Solution. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Please come to this first class thoroughly prepared to discuss Maimonides's introduction to the text, especially his seven causes of contradiction in texts more generally. 		<i>Guide</i> pp 1–50
2	Intro to Maimonides's Negative Theology	Chapters 1–2: Image and Likeness; and being like <i>elohim</i>	<i>Guide</i> pp 51–100
3	Intro to Negative Theology, Part 2	Chapters 3, 4–5: Figure and Shape; and being seen	<i>Guide</i> pp 101–150
4	Making Progress in Negative Theology	Chapters 7, and 8–9: Bearing, Place, and Throne	<i>Guide</i> pp 151–200
5	Intro to Maimonides's Positive Theology	Chapters 10–11: Ascending/descending, and sitting	<i>Guide</i> pp 201–250
6	Names of Divine Works	Chapters 12–13, 15: Rising, Standing, Standing-up	<i>Guide</i> pp 251–300
7	Names of Divine Works, part 2	Chapter 16: God is rock	<i>Guide</i> pp 301–350
8	Interpreting holy Scripture: Against the Attributists and Following Moses		<i>Guide</i> pp 351–400
9	Torah Speaks According to the Language of Men <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note: Paper drafts due Wednesday of this week, for class discussion. 		<i>Guide</i> pp 401–450
10	Interpreting holy Scripture: Final Issues		<i>Guide</i> pp 451–end

Requirements

1. Attendance (40%)

Students are expected to read required texts beforehand and come with texts, notes, and questions in hand. Please include your first and last name when attending Zoom. **One unexcused absence is permitted.**

2. Reading (10%)

3. Term Paper (50%)

- **Length:** 3,000 – 4,000 words (12 – 15pp).
- **Sources:** Various.
- **Instructions:**

Write an essay defining what Maimonides intends by the phrase “the Torah speaks in human language” (e.g., 1, 26), and explain how this principle (according to Maimonides) impacts reading holy Scripture.

The essay is due in two stages. First, **a draft is due the Wednesday of Week 9:** I will read these drafts (but not distribute them/share them in class), and we will discuss this issue as our class-time period. This is an opportunity not only for me to lecture on this issue and provide teaching, but for you to refine your thoughts, ask questions, and so on. I expect that you will use this period for significant ends, and thus turn in a much better final version accordingly. Second, **the final version is due the Saturday after Week 10,** incorporating whatever changes/additions you see fit.

- **Formatting:** Times New Roman, double-spaced, 12-pt font, footnotes, Title page, Bibliography.

Institutional Policies

Drop Policy

The policies below apply to changes made after the registration deadline two weeks prior to term. To change registration before the term starts, please log on to Populi. To change registration after the term starts, email the registrar at registrar@davenantinstitute.org. See the Academic Calendar section for exact dates.

Drop Date (100% Refund): Before the term starts, students may drop with a 100% tuition refund. Registration fee is non-refundable.

Drop Date (50% Refund): Within the first two weeks of a term, students may drop the course with a 50% tuition refund. Registration fee is non-refundable. To drop, please email the registrar.

Withdrawal: Within weeks three and four of a term, students who drop a course will receive no refund and will earn a “W” on their transcript. Students cannot drop after this time will receive a letter grade. To drop, please email the registrar.

Attendance & Class Meeting Time Scheduling

Attendance is required for all students taking courses for credit. Most classes are scheduled for evenings or weekends, especially core classes. If the scheduled time does not work for a particular student, they may drop the course according to the Drop policy.

Extension Policy

All coursework and exams must be submitted no later than two weeks after the term end date. Before that time, homework extensions are at the discretion of the instructor. If a student requires more time, the student may submit a formal extension request by emailing the registrar at registrar@davenportinstitute.org. If approved, an extension will be granted to the student for a specific period of time agreed upon by the student and instructor. Extension requests will be assessed on a case-by-case basis and will generally be granted for medical and family emergencies only.

Minimum Grade Requirement for Degree Students

Students enrolled in one of our degrees must maintain a minimum GPA of 3.0 (B average). If the students' GPA falls below 3.0, Davenport will initiate conversation with the student to judge whether the student is ready for their program. If the student earns a grade lower than a "C" (2.0) on a course required for their degree, they must retake the course in order to graduate. Their new grade will replace their former grade. If a degree student earns a grade lower than a "C" (2.0) on an elective, they are not required to retake the course, but they may request to retake the course or a close equivalent as a substitute for their former grade.

Grading Scale

A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	F
93	90	87	83	80	77	73	70	67	63	60	

Passing: ≥ 93 :A • ≥ 90 :A- • ≥ 87 :B+ • ≥ 83 :B • ≥ 80 :B- • ≥ 77 :C • ≥ 73 :C

Retake if Core: 70–72:C- • ≥ 67 :D+ • ≥ 63 :D • ≥ 60 :D- • < 60 :F.

For a complete list of policies, see the Academic Catalog at davenanthall.com