

Arabic-Islamic Philosophy

Course Description

This course is an introduction to some of the key figures, seminal texts, and main themes of Arabic-Islamic philosophy during the classical period. Developing in the late ninth century CE and evolving without interruption for almost half a millennium into the fourteenth century, this body of thought was instrumental in the revival of philosophical thought in Europe.

Philosophers in the Islamic world were strongly influenced by Greek and Hellenistic philosophical works and adapted some of the Platonic, Aristotelian, Plotinian, and other ideas to their Islamic brand of monotheism. But they also developed an original philosophical culture of their own and exercised a considerable influence on the development of early modern philosophy in Europe, though that influence is still largely unexplored. This course includes many of the canonical figures and texts in this tradition, but it also attempts to incorporate some philosophers who are often neglected in surveys, including female philosophers, mystics, and critics of the philosophical enterprise.

The philosophical writings to be examined express various viewpoints and tackle a range of philosophical questions. Among the questions to be discussed are the following: What is the nature of the good life? What is the relation between virtue and happiness? What is the best form of government? Can we know anything at all? Is knowledge gained through rational thought or through mystical apprehension? What is the relation between reason and faith? Can religious truths be demonstrated through reason? How is the soul related to the body? What is the nature of prophecy? What is the relationship between cause and effect? Can miracles occur? What are the limits, if any, of God's power? We will read primary sources in translation, though secondary sources can be recommended as needed. No prior knowledge of the Arabic-Islamic philosophical tradition is necessary.

Course Requirements

Presentations (20%): You will be asked to give one presentation on a reading of your choice. You should choose a few texts that you're especially interested in after the first session and I'll make an effort to see that everyone gets one of their top choices, with presentations starting in the second or third meeting of the semester. These presentations will be short (10-minute) overviews of the reading, which will launch us into a discussion, rather than attempts to give a comprehensive account of the text in question. In the final session of the course, we will have a condensed mini-conference based on your term papers. You will be asked to give a short presentation (5-10 minutes) on your term paper, and it will be followed by a short Q&A. I realize that this is too quick to get high-quality feedback, but it can be a good exercise to try to summarize your main argument very briefly and to respond to immediate feedback from colleagues.

Short response papers (20%): You will be expected to submit 10 reading responses (200-300 words) on 10 of the readings covered in class, either before or after the reading has been discussed in class. These responses will be due around 48 hours after class (by 5 pm on Wednesday) and each will develop a point in one of the readings, or raise an objection, or otherwise meaningfully engage with the reading in question. Your response can be based on

issues discussed in class but should go beyond class discussion in some way (if it's posted after the class session). These response papers cannot be submitted late unless there are documented extenuating circumstances.

Draft term paper (20%): Around halfway into the semester, I'll propose some paper topics and will also invite you to come up with topics of your own. Once we've mutually agreed on a topic, you'll have around two weeks to submit a short paper (roughly 2500-3000 words) on that topic. This will be a first draft of your term paper for the course.

Revised term paper (40%): At least two weeks before the end of the semester, I'll return your draft paper with comments and suggestions for development. You will then revise it and expand it into a term paper for the course (roughly 5000-6000 words), which will be due at the end of the semester.

Required Texts

There are no required books to be purchased for this course. I've put some of the relevant books on reserve at the Mina Rees Library, but I'll also make most texts available in electronic format on Blackboard or provide access in some other way. Many of the texts we're reading are drawn from two anthologies:

- J. McGinnis & D. C. Reisman, *Classical Arabic Philosophy: An Anthology of Sources* (Hackett, 2007) (M&R)
- M. A. Khalidi, *Medieval Islamic Philosophical Writings* (Cambridge, 2005) (MIPW)

Reading Schedule

Week 1 Aug 29	Introduction
Week 2 Sep 12	Abu Bakr al-Razi, "The Philosophical Life" and "Doubts against Galen" (M&R) Abu Bakr al-Razi, "Spiritual Physick"
Week 3 Sep 19	Abu Hatim al-Razi, <i>The Proofs of Prophecy</i> , Chs.1-13, Chs.30-33 Al-Sirafi and Abu Bishr Matta debate on logic and language
Week 4 *Sep 29*	Al-Farabi, "The Book of Letters" (MIPW) Al-Farabi, "The Political Regime"
Week 5 Oct 3	Al-Farabi, "On the Intellect" (M&R) Yahya ibn 'Adi, "Establishing the Nature of the Possible" (M&R) and selections
Week 6 Oct 17	Ikhwan al-Safa, <i>Epistle 22: The Case of the Animals</i> , Chs.19-42 'A'ishah al-Ba'uniyyah, <i>Principles of Sufism</i> (selections) Rabi'ah al-'Adawiyyah (selections)

Week 7 Oct 24	Ibn Sina, "Necessary and Possible Existence" and "Flying Man" (selections) Ibn Sina, "On the Soul" (MIPW)
Week 8 Oct 31	Al-Ghazali, <i>Rescuer from Error</i> (MIPW) Al-Shahrastani, <i>Struggling with the Philosopher</i> , pp.33-98
Week 9 Nov 7	Ibn Tufayl, <i>Hayy bin Yaqzan</i> (MIPW) Ibn Tufayl, <i>Hayy bin Yaqzan</i> , "Epilogue"
Week 10 Nov 14	Ibn Rushd, <i>The Decisive Treatise</i> Ibn Rushd, <i>Faith & Reason</i> , selections
Week 11 Nov 21	Ibn Rushd, <i>The Incoherence of the Incoherence</i> , 17 th Discussion (Causation) (MIPW) Ibn Rushd, <i>The Incoherence of the Incoherence</i> , 18 th Discussion (Soul)
Week 12 Nov 28	Maimonides, selections Suhrawardi, selections (M&R)
Week 13 Dec 5	Ibn Khaldun, <i>Muqaddimah</i> , pp.11-48, 91-142 Ibn Khaldun, <i>Muqaddimah</i> , pp.398-411
Week 14 Dec 12	Presentations

Some useful secondary sources:

- P. Adamson and R.C. Taylor (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy* (Cambridge, 2005)
- K. El-Rouayheb and S. Schmitdke (eds), *The Oxford Handbook to Islamic Philosophy* (Oxford: 2016)
- R. C. Taylor and L. X. Lopez-Farjeat, *The Routledge Companion to Islamic Philosophy* (Routledge, 2018)
- M. Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy* (New York: 1983); selections available online at: <http://muslimphilosophy.com/ip/hip.htm>
- S. H. Nasr and O. Leaman (eds), *The Routledge History of Islamic Philosophy* (Routledge 2001).
- Online Dictionary of Arabic Philosophical Terms: <http://www.arabic-philosophy.com/dict/>
- See also relevant entries in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* and the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, on specific authors or topics
- The journal *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* is dedicated to the history of Arabic-Islamic philosophy (and science). There are also occasional relevant articles in the *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, the *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, and elsewhere.

