Islamic Philosophy (PHIL 10197)

Course Organiser: Dr Fedor Benevich
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Office Hours: Signup via calendly at least 8hrs in advance.
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Course Description:

This course will provide a systematic introduction to key issues and debates in Islamic philosophy by focusing on the medieval period and showing its relevance for contemporary philosophical discussions. It will explore the mechanisms of the critical appropriation of the Western (Greek) philosophical heritage in the Islamic intellectual tradition and the relationship between philosophy and religion in Islam.

Islamic philosophy is the missing link between ancient Greek thought and the European (medieval and early modern) philosophical tradition. It offers independent solutions to many philosophical problems which remain crucial for contemporary readers. Starting with a historical overview of the most important figures and schools, this course covers central topics of Islamic philosophy, such as (the selection of topics may vary from year to year):

- faith and reason
- philosophy, and political and religious authority
- free will and determinism (incl. the problem of evil)
- scepticism and natural causation
- self-awareness, personal identity, and the immateriality of soul
- proofs for God's existence

Primary sources will be read in English translation.

Learning Outcomes:

On completion of this course, the student will be able to:

1. Demonstrate knowledge of the central issues of Islamic philosophy
2. Analyse materials independently and critically engage with other interpretations
3. Provide systematic exposition and argumentation for their views
4. Demonstrate understanding of a non-Western intellectual tradition

Topics and Readings:

Week 1. Islamic Philosophy: Definition of Subject and Methods in Islamic Philosophy

Essential Readings:
- Dimitri Gutas, “Avicenna and After: The Development of Paraphilosophy”
- Jari Kaukua, “Post-Classical Islamic Philosophy – A Contradiction in Terms?”
Recommended Readings:
Dimitri Gutas, “Study of Arabic Philosophy in the Twentieth Century”

Week 2. **History of Islamic Philosophy**

**Essential Readings:**

**Recommended Readings:**
Dimitri Gutas, “Heritage of Avicenna: The Golden Age”

Week 3. **Knowledge, Political Authority and Prophecy:**

**Essential Readings:**
al-Fārābī, *Book of Religion* (tr. Butterworth) §§1–6; 11–14d

**Recommended Readings:**
Nadja Germann, “Al-Fārābī’s Philosophy of Society and Religion” [SEP]
Amos Bertolacci, “The Metaphysical Proof of Prophecy in Avicenna”
Catarina Belo, “Averroes (d. 1198), The Decisive Treatise” [OHIP]

Week 4. **Philosophy and Religion**

**Essential Readings:**
al-Ghazālī, *Incoherence of the Philosophers*, “Author’s Introduction”
al-Ghazālī, *Incoherence of the Philosophers*, “Conclusion”
al-Ghazālī, *Deliverance from Error*, §§4-60 (tr. McCarthy)
al-Ghazālī, *Moderation in Belief, Fourth Treatise*, Introduction to ch. 2

**Recommended Readings:**
Frank Griffel, “Incoherence of the Philosophers” [OHIP]
Frank Griffel, *Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology*, ch. 3-4

Week 5. **Morality and Value**

**Essential Readings:**
Heirs of Avicenna: *Good and Evil* [selected texts]

**Recommended Readings:**
Ayman Shihadeh, “Theories of Ethical Value in Kalâm” [OHIT]
Ayman Shihadeh, “Avicenna’s Theodicy and Rāzī’s Anti-Theodicy”

Week 6. **Scepticism, Causation and Miracles**

**Essential Readings:**
al-Ghazālī, *Incoherence of the Philosophers, Discussion XVII, On Causality and Miracles*

**Secondary Readings:**
Ulrich Rudolph, *Occasionalism* [OHIT]
Frank Griffel, *Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology*, ch. 5-7

Week 7. **Mind-Body Problem**

**Essential Readings:**

al-Ghazālī, Incoherence of the Philosophers, Discussion XVIII, Against Substance Dualism

Recommended Readings:
Ayman Shihadeh, “Classical Ash’arite Anthropology”

Week 8. Proofs for God’s Existence

Essential Readings:
Toby Mayer, “Ibn Sīnā’s Burhān al-Ṣiddiqīn”
Heirs of Avicenna: Proofs for God’s Existence [selected texts]

Recommended Readings:
Van Inwagen, “Necessary Being: The Cosmological Argument”

Week 9. Free Will and Determinism

Essential Readings:
Heirs of Avicenna: Free Will and Determinism [selected texts]

Recommended Readings:
Ayman Shihadeh, Theological Ethics of Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, ch. 1: Rāzī’s Theory of Action

Week 10. Eternity of the World

Essential Readings:
al-Ghazālī, Incoherence of Philosophers, Discussion I

Recommended Readings:
Herbert Davidson, Proofs for Eternity, Creation, and the Existence of God in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy, ch. I-IV

Week 11. Revision

Students must prepare all Essential Readings listed for each lecture. All of them are additionally listed with links under “Course Materials”

- Week 5, 8, and 9 include unedited materials from the running DFG-funded project “Heirs of Avicenna” (Principle Investigator: Peter Adamson, LMU Munich). You can find further instructions regarding the access to these materials on Learn (“Course-Materials”)

Assessment:

This course will be assessed based on:

1. Mid-Term Essay
   - 40% of final grade
   - Word limit: 1500words
   - Due date: Thursday 3rd of March, by 12pm (mid-day, UK time)
2. Final Essay

- 55% of final grade
- Word limit: 2500 words
- Due date: Thursday 21st of April by 12pm (mid-day, UK time)

The list of topics for essays and recommended sources as well as detailed requirements and advice for successful essays will be made available on Learn ("Assessment").

3. Participation: Quizzes

- 5% of final grade
- There will be 10 quizzes based on essential readings for 10 lectures. Students will need to complete individual quizzes in advance of the seminars, by 8am of the day of seminar. Every quiz is 100-point worth. Students who failed to complete a quiz by 8am of the day of the seminar will automatically receive 0 credit for it.

Further General Reading:


Students are advised to listen to Peter Adamson’s podcast on Islamic Philosophy.