

6AANB019 Philosophy in the Islamic World

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Module description

From the 7th century onward, while Europe was undergoing the medieval period, the Islamic world was an advanced civilization which spread from modern-day Spain to central Asia. Some of the great figures of the history of philosophy were Muslims – like Avicenna and Averroes – or lived in the Islamic world, like the great Jewish philosopher Maimonides. This module covers the highpoints of philosophy in the Islamic world, beginning with the reception of Greek thought into Arabic and exploring how Greek ideas were woven into the intellectual framework of revealed religion. Figures covered include al-Kindi, al-Razi, al-Farabi, Avicenna, and Averroes; some attention is also paid to the non-Aristotelian reaction to Avicenna by al-Ghazali and others, and to the indigenous Islamic theological tradition of *kalam*. Philosophical ideas to be dealt with include proofs of God's existence; the problem of divine attributes; the relation of philosophy to revelation; freedom; the nature of the intellect; and the eternity of the world. The module does not presuppose knowledge of Arabic or Greek philosophy, though the latter would be useful.

Readings

- The assigned primary texts are all in J. McGinnis and D.C. Reisman (ed. and trans.), *Classical Arabic Philosophy: an Anthology of Sources* (Indianapolis: 2007). Referred to below as 'Hackett reader.' I suggest buying this book for the purposes of the course.

- Further reading is indicated below in the syllabus. Some articles are available on reserve in the xerox library at KCL Philosophy Dept. These are marked below with an asterisk.

- Other general works:

P. Adamson and R.C. Taylor (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy* (Cambridge: 2005).

M. Campanini, *An Introduction to Islamic Philosophy* (Edinburgh: 2008).

M. Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy* (New York: 1983).

S.H. Nasr and O. Leaman (eds), *History of Islamic philosophy* (London: 1995).

- There are numerous relevant entries on the online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

Teaching Plan

Each week's teaching will involve a one-hour lecture and a discussion seminar on a primary text in translation.

1. Al-Kindi on God

Primary text: al-Kindi, *The Explanation of the Proximate...* and *The One True and Complete Agent*, in Hackett reader.

Suggested reading: P. Adamson, *Al-Kindi* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), ch.3. See also P. Adamson, "Al-Kindi and the Reception of Greek Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy* (see above), 32-51.

2. Al-Kindi on the eternity of the world

Primary text: al-Kindi, *On Divine Unity*, in Hackett reader.

Suggested reading: P. Adamson, *Al-Kindi* (see above), ch.4. H.A. Davidson, "John Philoponus as a Source of Medieval, Islamic and Jewish Proofs of Creation," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 89 (1969), 357-391.

3. Al-Razi's cosmology

Primary text: Al-Razi, *On the Five Eternals*, in Hackett reader

Suggested reading: *T.-A. Druart, "Al-Razi's Conception of the Soul: Psychological Background to his Ethics," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 5 (1996), 245-263. M. Fakhry, "A Tenth Century Arabic Interpretation of Plato's Cosmology," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 6 (1968), 15-22.

4. Al-Razi on ethics and prophecy

Primary text: Al-Razi, *The Philosopher's Way of Life*, in Hackett reader

Suggested Reading: *T.-A. Druart, "The Ethics of al-Razi," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 5 (1997), 47-71. S. Stroumsa, *Freethinkers of Medieval Islam* (Leiden: 1999), ch.3. *P. Adamson, "Platonic Pleasures in Epicurus and al-Râzî," in P. Adamson (ed.), *In the Age of al-Farabi: Arabic Philosophy in the 4th/10th Century* (London: 2008).

5. The Baghdad school

Primary text: Yahya Ibn 'Adi, *On the Nature of the Possible*, in Hackett reader.

Suggested reading: *D.S. Margouliath, "The Discussion Between Abu Bishr Matta and Abu Sa'id al-Sirafi on the Merits of Logic and Grammar," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1905), 79-129. *P. Adamson, "Knowledge of Universals and Particulars in the Baghdad School," *Documenti e Studi sulla Tradizione Filosofica Medievale* 18 (2007), 141-64.

6. Al-Farabi

Primary text: al-Farabi, *Directing Attention to the Way to Happiness*, in Hackett reader.

Suggested reading: *"Al-Farabi," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. D. Reisman, "Al-Farabi," in *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*. *T.-A. Druart, "Al-Farabi and Emanationism," *Studies in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. J.F. Wippel (Washington DC: 1987), 23-43. *D. Black, "Knowledge ('Ilm) and Certainty (Yaqin) in al-Farabi's Epistemology," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 16 (2006), 11-45.

7. Avicenna's metaphysics

Primary text: Avicenna, selections VIII and IX in Hackett reader.

Suggested reading: *F. Rahman, "Essence and Existence in Avicenna" *Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies* 4 (1958). R. Wisnovsky, "Avicenna and the Avicennan Tradition," in the *Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*. *T. Mayer, "Avicenna's *Burhan al-Siddiqin*," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 12 (2001), 18-39. *M. Marmura, "Avicenna's Proof from Contingency for God's Existence in the *Metaphysics* of the *Shifa'*," *Medieval Studies* 42 (1980), 337-352.

8. Avicenna's epistemology and psychology

Primary text: Avicenna, selection VI from Hackett reader.

Suggested reading: *P. Adamson, "On Knowledge of Particulars," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 105 (2005), 273-294. D. Hasse, "Avicenna on Abstraction," in *Aspects of Avicenna*, ed. R. Wisnovsky, (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 2001), 39-72. *M. Marmura, "Avicenna's 'Flying Man' in Context," *Monist* 69 (1986). * T.-A. Druart, "The Human Soul's Individuation and its Survival After the Body's Death: Avicenna on the Causal Relation Between Body and Soul," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 10 (2000), 259-273.

9. Al-Ghazali on the eternity of the world

Primary text: al-Ghazali, *Incoherence of the Philosophers*, 'First Discussion,' in Hackett reader.

Suggested reading: Al-Ghazali, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, translated by M. Marmura (Provo: 1997). *T. Kukkonen, "Possible Worlds in the *Tahafut al-Tahafut* : Averroes on Plenitude and Possibility," and "Possible Worlds in the *Tahafut al-Falasifa*: al-Ghazali on Creation and Contingency," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 38 (2000), 329-348 and 479-502.

10. Averroes on religion and philosophy

Primary text: Averroes, *The Decisive Treatise*, in Hackett reader.

Suggested reading: *R.C. Taylor, "Truth Does Not Contradict Truth: Averroes and the Unity of Truth" *Topoi* 19 (2000), 3-16. R.C. Taylor, "Averroes: Religious Dialectic and Aristotelian Philosophical Thought," in the *Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*.