

Philosophy 373: Arabic and Islamic Philosophy

University of Massachusetts Lowell
Department of Philosophy
Fall 2012

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Meeting Times: Mon & Wed 12:30PM-1:45PM
Course Location: Dugan Hall 207 - SC
Course Number: 8186
Office Hours: Mon & Wed 2:00PM-3:00PM

I. Course Description: In this course, we will study selected works of major figures in classical Arabic and Islamic philosophy from the ninth to twelfth centuries CE, namely Al Kindi, Ar-Razi, Al Farabi, Ibn Sina, Al Ghazali, Ibn Bajja, Ibn Tufayl, Ibn Rushd, and As-Suhrawardi. Course material is arranged thematically across key philosophical areas including ethics, metaphysics, epistemology, logic and language, aesthetics, speculative theology/philosophy of religion, philosophy of culture/identity, and political philosophy. We will also consider particular movements such as Sufism and Illuminationism, and take up contemporary themes such as postcolonial critiques, *Al Nahda/new Nahda*, and Arabic/Islamic feminism. Our course readings will be drawn from classic texts (McGinnis and Reisman's *Classical Arabic Philosophy*), a primer in Islamic philosophy (Oliver Leaman's *Islamic Philosophy*), and a recent work in Arabic philosophy (Elizabeth Kassab's *Contemporary Arab Thought*).

II. Course Objectives: The course invites you to be intellectually challenged, to think open-mindedly about new and traditional philosophical problems that we will examine/re-examine throughout the term. Additionally, you will be expected to "do philosophy" in the course; this entails practicing its methods of critical thought, reflection, analysis, and argumentation. The aim is to: 1) broaden your theoretical presuppositions about the world we inhabit by critically examining the open and free-exchange of ideas that Arabic and Islamic philosophers (and other practitioners) have contributed throughout the ages for the advancement of human knowledge; 2) invite you to draw your own well-informed and well-reasoned conclusions about general philosophical problems of human life; 3) encourage you to further explore your own place in the world by guiding you along on your own philosophical journey in search of truth, meaning and personal understanding of our world.

III. Course Format: The course format consists in a combination of lectures, discussions, weekly readings, in-class presentations, take-home assignments and in-class examinations. On occasion, we may include other media (such as film, artwork, etc.) with special significance to course content or we may invite guest speakers to contribute to our class discussions. Weekly lectures and in-class discussions *will not* be posted online or made available outside of class. Classroom attendance and active participation is an indispensable part of the pedagogical process, substantially contributing to an integral portion of your overall course grade.

IV. Course Texts: In addition to the following required course texts, supplementary instructional material will be made available as needed.

a) Elizabeth Kassab, *Contemporary Arab Thought: Cultural Critique in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). ISBN: 978-0-231-14489-6.

b) Oliver Leaman, *Islamic Philosophy*, 2nd edition (Malden: Polity Press, 2010). ISBN: 978-0-7456-4599-5.

c) Jon McGinnis and David C. Reisman, translation and introduction, *Classical Arabic Philosophy: An Anthology of Sources* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2007). ISBN: 978-0-87220-871-1.

V. Course Requirements and Grading Procedure: Your grade for the course is based on the total number of points accumulated from 1 midterm exam, 1 term paper, 1 final exam, an attendance and participation score, and a brief in-class presentation. The *approximate* grading scale used to assess your final course grade is modeled upon the following grade point system:

94-96 % = A	80-83 % = B-	67-69 % = D+
90-93 % = A-	77-79 % = C+	64-66 % = D
87-89 % = B+	74-76 % = C	60-63 % = D-
84-86 % = B	70-73 % = C-	57-59 % = F

Exams administered during the term will be writing-intensive/essay-based format, conventional in most philosophy courses; hence, there will be no “multiple choice” questions or “fill-ins” on any exam. Detailed instructions on how to write an essay for a philosophy exam will be provided several weeks before the first exam is given. The breakdown for 5 sections that constitute your overall course grade is detailed below:

V.1 Attendance and Participation: 10%

Regular attendance is essential for succeeding in this course. Your attendance and participation score is largely determined by (fully awake) physical presence and active in-class participation; this involves speaking up and contributing to our in-class discussions. Participation scores are not tallied automatically; they are earned as a result of regular in-class participation and assessed at the sole discretion of the professor. The weekly lectures will assume that students have done the assigned readings (and thought critically about them) before coming to class; therefore, please be prepared to discuss the material *enthusiastically*. Each absence is penalized at 2 points per class meeting. For any exceptions in the form of unexpected or immediate special circumstances, a student must notify me in advance or *ex post facto* of their serious and compelling reasons for missing class; this generally involves circumstances beyond a student’s control which may not only impact our own course but other classes as well. Supporting documentation may be requested in order to verify any urgent matters impacting class attendance. In the event that you are unable to make it to class, please remember that you are nonetheless responsible for obtaining and knowing any material covered during your absence (absences do not absolve you from accountability). Excessive absences will very likely impact your understanding of the material, thereby preventing you from succeeding in the course. What’s more, information such as weekly reading assignments, handouts, and current announcement of exams, is often made during class. Lastly, *please make sure you have a current Umass Lowell email account and check it frequently (at least daily). I often email students course updates and other pertinent announcements as new information becomes available.*

V.2 Midterm Exam: 25%

A three part midterm exam will test knowledge base acquired in the first half of the term. The basic format is 2 long essays and 1 short essay. The midterm exam is worth 25 points total; the long essays are worth 10 points each and the short essay is valued at 5 points. You may also attempt an extra credit question at the end of your exam which may boost your overall exam score (see section VI on extra credit). *Please note that electronic devices may not be used or accessed during your midterm exam.*

V.3 Term Paper: 25%

The term paper assignment asks you to explore an issue or theme in Arabic and Islamic philosophy. You may write on any topic that interests you from our course readings; it is also possible to write on related material that we may not be studying. Recommended length for these papers is 6-8 pages. More detailed information on the term paper assignment will follow.

V.4 Final Exam: 25%

A final exam will be administered during our regularly scheduled exam time (see bottom of page 4). The final will be very similar to the midterm in format, though it will cover knowledge base acquired in the second half of the term. It is not a *comprehensive* exam, which means it will not cover everything we learned since the first week of class, but only material acquired in the second half of the semester. *Please note that electronic devices may not be used or accessed during your final exam.*

V.5 Class Presentation: 15%

Each student is required to conduct an in-class presentation. This may involve presenting one of the readings for the course (excluding introductions, prefaces, forwards, or short excerpts), research material from your term paper, an in-class dialogue of a philosophical text, or other possibilities. Student presentations run approximately 10-15 min, depending on content, complexity of material, and classroom dynamics. Students may present material individually or in pairs. Presentations are assessed for strength, clarity, originality, and engagement with course content. Students should arrange to discuss their presentation ideas with me well in advance of their proposed presentation date. *Presentations may not be conducted during the final two lecture weeks of the semester.*

VI. Extra Credit: While there are no formal assignments made for the exclusive purpose of gaining extra credit points, students have the opportunity to earn “extra credit” on both the midterm and final exam. Please keep in mind that extra credit exam questions may not come directly from the text and might be more challenging than ones contained in the body of the exam. Generally speaking, extra credit problems are set to a higher degree of assessment.

VII. Make-Up Exams and Late Work Acceptance Policy: Please make every effort to take the midterm and final exam during their regularly scheduled class time. Make-ups may only be administered in the event of serious and compelling reasons beyond the student’s control; this includes but is not limited to immediate family emergencies, documented medical reasons, or other university-approved exemptions. You must notify me in advance of your impending emergency and schedule a mutually-convenient appointment time for any make-ups. Please submit all written work on time, late work is penalized at 2 points per day after the due date.

VIII. Snow Emergencies and Unexpected Class Cancellations: In the event of an unexpected campus wide emergency due to inclement weather or other unforeseen circumstances that result in class cancellation, I will contact you (by email) with specific instructions on how the emergency impacts any exams, papers, or other assignments scheduled for the day/s in question. Depending on where we are at in the semester, I may postpone your exam, convert it to a take-home, or make other arrangement for you to complete the assigned course work.

IX. Class Conduct and Miscellaneous Policies: A successful learning environment is generated by respect, professional courtesy, and kind consideration of others. Please refrain from eating (drinks are fine), sleeping, talking privately, texting, and using any and all electronic equipment (i.e., cell phones, iPods, Blackberrys, personal stereos/headphones, palm pilots, recording devices, scientific calculators, laptops, etc.) while in class. Please be sure you understand that the use of cellular/mobile phones as well as laptops is not permitted in class at any time (or in my office hours). If it is imperative that you use your phone, please conduct your business outside of class as quickly as possible and disable your phone before returning to class. For special or personal circumstances, please see me in advance about any exceptions to the prohibition on the use of electronic devices in class. In addition, please do not bring young children or non-human animals/pets (unless pre-approved by the university) to class. Finally, if you have any questions or concerns with respect to grades or your specific course performance, please contact me personally. As a general rule, your grades (among other educational records) are confidential, thus I am *not permitted nor required* to discuss your course performance with anyone else on your behalf. The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (also known as FERPA) prohibit me from discussing your educational records with other parties. In brief, please conduct yourselves appropriately and adhere to commonsensical, mutually beneficial, classroom etiquette.

X. Special Circumstances and Students with Disabilities: Please do not hesitate to meet with me in the event that you encounter difficulties of a personal nature that may hinder your ability to succeed in this course. Students with documented disabilities (physical, learning, etc.) which may impact course performance, should contact me immediately so that I may accommodate your needs as early on as possible. If you would like to request accommodations or review the university’s policies governing disability disclosures, please contact the Office of Disability Services at (978) 934-4574 or visit their office located at One University Avenue, Cumnock C4, Lowell, MA 01854.

XI. Tentative Course Outline: (Subject to revision as needed)

- Week 1: 9/5: Introduction to Arabic and Islamic Philosophy, Leaman (Ch 1), McGinnis-Reisman (Preface & Introduction)
- Week 2: 9/10, 9/12: Main Controversies, Leaman (Ch 2), McGinnis-Reisman (Al Kindi pp. 18-35)
- Week 3: 9/17, 9/19: Knowledge, Leaman (Ch 3), McGinnis-Reisman (Al Farabi pp. 68-78, Ibn Bajja pp. 269-283)
- Week 4: 9/24, 9/26: Mysticism and Sufism, Leaman (Ch 4), McGinnis-Reisman (Ar-Razi pp. 36-44, As-Sijistani pp. 139-145, Al Ghazali pp. 254-265)
- Week 5: 10/1, 10/3: Ontology and Illuminationism, Leaman (Ch 5), McGinnis-Reisman (As-Suhrawardi pp. 367-379)
- Week 6: 10/8 (No Class: Columbus Day), 10/10: Ethics and Aesthetics, Leaman (Ch 6), McGinnis-Reisman (Al Ghazali pp. 241-254), Selected Readings/Handout
- Week 7: 10/15, 10/17: Politics, Leaman (Ch 7), McGinnis-Reisman (Al Farabi pp. 104-120, Ibn Sina pp. 224-237), **Midterm Exam**
- Week 8: 10/22, 10/24: The Question of Transmission, Leaman (Ch 8), McGinnis-Reisman (Ibn Tufayl pp. 284-293)
- Week 9: 10/29, 10/31: Logic and Language, Leaman (Ch 9), McGinnis-Reisman (Ibn Rushd pp. 294-330)
- Week 10: 11/5, 11/7: Contemporary Themes in Arabic and Islamic Philosophy, Leaman (Ch 10 & Ch 11), Kassab (Preface & Introduction)
- Week 11: 11/12 (No Class: Veterans Day), 11/14: *Al Nahda*, Kassab (Ch 1)
- Week 12: 11/19, 11/21: Existential Dramatization, Nationalism, and Democratic Critiques, Kassab (Ch 2)
- Week 13: 11/26, 11/28: Historicization, Cultural Malaise, and Feminist Perspectives, Kassab (Ch 4 pp. 173-200 & pp. 217-219, Ch 5 pp. 238-281)
- Week 14: 12/3, 12/5: Resistance and Postcolonial Critiques, Kassab (Ch 6)
- Week 15: 12/10: The New *Nahda*, Kassab (Conclusion), Final Review, **Term Papers Due**
- Week 16: 12/17: **Final Exam**

According to University of Massachusetts Lowell Fall 2012 Final Examination Schedule, our officially scheduled final exam will take place on:
Monday, December 17th 2012 at 12:30PM in Dugan Hall 207 - SC