

ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY

Course: PHIL 267
Semester: Fall 2012
Professor: Peter Groff
Times: MW 3-4:22 pm
Location: Coleman 20

Office: Coleman 64
Phone: x. 73130
Office hours: MW 12:30-2 pm,
or by appointment
Email: pgroff@bucknell.edu

Required texts:

Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of the Healing*, trans. M. Marmura (BYUP).
al-Ghazali, *Path to Sufism (Deliverance from Error)*, trans. R. J. McCarthy (Fons Vitae).
Averroës, *Decisive Treatise and Epistle Dedicatory*, trans. C. E. Butterworth (BYUP)
Ibn Tufayl, *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, trans. L. E. Goodman (University of Chicago)
P. S. Groff, *Islamic Philosophy A-Z* (Edinburgh University Press).

In addition to these, PDFs of readings by al-Kindi, Abu Bakr al-Razi, Abu Hatim al-Razi, Abu Ya‘qub al-Sijistani, al-Tawhidi, al-Farabi, Ibn Sina (Avicenna), al-Ghazali and Ibn Rushd (Averroës), will be posted on the course’s Moodle page.

Course Description:

This course examines the rich and diverse tradition of Islamic philosophy. Those in the West familiar with this intellectual tradition have long recognized its profound influence on medieval Christian and Jewish thought, as well as the essential role Islamic philosophers played in preserving and transmitting the legacy of classical Greek thought to Europe. However, today there is a growing awareness that Islamic philosophy constitutes a vital, flourishing tradition *in its own right*—one that needs to be approached not just from the perspective of its European beneficiaries, but on its own terms.

In this course, we will focus specifically on the classical period of Islamic philosophy, which begins with the flowering of the great Graeco-Arabic translation project in the ninth century and draws to a close with the death of Ibn Rushd (or Averroës, as the Latins called him) at the end of the twelfth century. After a brief overview of some early Islamic theological debates, we will examine the writings of a few formative figures in the tradition such as al-Kindi, al-Razi, al-Sijistani, and al-Farabi, focusing mostly on ethical/political themes. We will also look at two significant early controversies within the tradition: (1) the debate about reason and authority between the freethinker Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Zakariya al-Razi and the Isma‘ili theologian Abu Hatim al-Razi and (2) the debate over the primacy of logic or grammar between the founder of the Bagdad Peripatetic school, Abu Bishr Matta, and the defender of the traditional Islamic sciences, Abu Sa‘id al-Sirafi. After this introductory period, we’ll turn to the three heavyweights of classical Islamic philosophy: Avicenna, al-Ghazali, and Averroës, who grapple with fundamental questions of metaphysics regarding God, the soul and the natural world. After Thanksgiving break, we’ll wind down the semester by reading Ibn Tufayl’s remarkable philosophical novel, *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, which attempts to synthesize philosophy and mysticism, and points towards the emergence of a new tradition in Islamic philosophy: Illuminism.

Some of the topics we will be discussing and debating are the attainment of happiness, the fate of the soul, the nature and existence of God, the createdness or eternity of the world, the problem of evil, the function and value of organized religion, the best possible political arrangement of a society, and the relation between reason, revelation and mystical knowledge as potential sources of human knowledge and practical guidance in life.

In addition to acquiring a broad familiarity with the key historical thinkers and concerns of classical Islamic philosophy, the goals of this class are to develop (a) the capacity to interpret and analyze complex, abstract philosophical texts, and to explain and evaluate these texts and arguments in a critical fashion, (b) an appreciation of the fundamental ambiguities and complexities involved in the human attempt to answer questions about knowing, valuing, and living, and (c) the ability to take a reasoned stand of one's own on these philosophical issues.

Requirements:

Class Attendance and Participation: In accordance with Bucknell's official attendance policy, you will be expected to attend all class periods. Because this class meets only twice a week, more than two unexcused absences will adversely affect your grade. If you have a legitimate excuse for missing class (e.g., sickness, family emergency, religious holiday) you must let me know before the class period, as far in advance as possible.

This class will take place in a seminar room and will be structured like a seminar, with an emphasis on discussion and dialogue. The philosophical texts we will be reading in this class are rich and interesting but often quite challenging, and mastering the material will require active engagement on your part. Some assignments may require a second reading for comprehension. You will be expected to bring your texts to class consistently, keep up with the reading assignments (which must be completed prior to the course meeting for which they are scheduled), read carefully and critically, participate in class discussions, and complete all writing assignments in a timely manner. Students who show up without the relevant book or have obviously not read the assigned material will be marked absent for that day. All late work will be marked down in accordance with the extent of lateness (1/3 grade lower for every day they are late).

Class attendance and participation are an essential element in any small, seminar-style course, and they will constitute a substantial portion (25%) of your final grade. In evaluating your participation in this class, I will not simply be looking at quantity, but rather *quality*—i.e., I'm not just interested in how frequently or how much you talk, but whether your comments, questions and suggestions reflect a thoughtful and considered engagement with the ideas and arguments we are examining. I realize not everyone is equally comfortable participating in discussion on a daily basis. While I encourage you to find your voice in class, I also count after-class discussion, office hour discussion, and email exchange as forms of participation.

NB: No electronic devices (e.g., laptops, ipads, smartphones, etc) are permitted in this class unless you have prior written authorization from the Dean. We're going medieval here. Savor your brief respite from immediate accessibility.

Paper and Exams: You will be assigned three papers, based on the sources we have read in class. Because they are relatively short (4-5, 6-7 and 8-9 pp. respectively) they will need to be dense papers, chockfull of philosophical explication, analysis and critique, and with no fluff or padding. It will be your responsibility to say what needs to be said as economically, clearly and precisely as possible. Detailed instructions for these assignments will be provided on topic handouts, which I will distribute approximately 2 weeks in advance of their due dates. You will also receive a more general set of guidelines/expectations for writing philosophy papers in this class.

Academic Honesty: You are expected to know what constitutes plagiarism. If you do not, please consult Bucknell's policy on the matter at <http://www.bucknell.edu/x1341.xml> and <http://www.bucknell.edu/x1343.xml>. It goes without saying that all suspected cases of plagiarism will be automatically pursued and turned over to the Board of Review on Academic Responsibility.

Grading:

Your final grade breaks down as follows:

- 20% 1st Paper (4-5 pp.); due Monday, Sept. 24 (in class).
- 25% 2nd Paper (6-7 pp.); due Monday, Oct 29 (in class).
- 30% 3rd Paper (7-8 pp.); due Friday, Dec 7, 6:30 pm (drop off at office).
- 25% class participation

Class Schedule:¹

Aug. 22 (W): Introduction to Islamic philosophy.

I. Early developments.

Aug. 27 (M): Formative debates in early Islamic theology. Read A-Z entries on Islam, theology

(*kalam*), rationalism, traditionalism, Shi'ites, Kharijites, Murji'ites, Qadarites, Jabrites, Free Will and Predestination, Mu'tazilites, Ash'arites, Sunnis, Hanbalites, Zahirites, Qur'an, God (main entry), God (anthropomorphic descriptions of), God (attributes of), assimilation & *shirk* (sharing/associating).

Aug 29 (W): al-Kindi (the founder), "Epistle on Banishing Sorrows," (PDF). See A-Z entries on

al-Kindi, philosophy, and God (imitation of).

¹ Note: all PDFs are posted on our Moodle class page online.

- Sept 3 (M): Abu Bakr al-Razi (the heretical freethinker), *The Book of the Philosophical Life* (PDF).
 See A-Z entries on al-Razi (Abu Bakr), Socrates, Plato, and freethinking.
- Sept 5 (W): Abu Hatim al-Razi (the Isma‘ili missionary vs. the freethinker), “Razi vs. Razi” (PDF), pp. 84-92. See A-Z entries on Isma‘ilis & Batinites.
- Sept. 10 (M): Abu Hatim al-Razi (the Isma‘ili missionary vs. the freethinker), “Razi vs. Razi” (PDF), pp. 92-107.
- Sept. 12 (W): Abu Ya‘qub al-Sijistani (the Isma‘ili Neoplatonist), excerpt from *Unveiling of The Hidden*, pp. 70-71 and 80-87 (PDF); Paul Walker, “The Ultimate Recourse in God and the *tawhīd*,” pp. 84-103 (PDF). See A-Z entry on al-Sijistani (Abu Ya‘qub) and Neoplatonism.
- Sept. 17 (M): Abu Hayyan al-Tawhidi (the humanist), excerpt from *Pleasure and Conviviality: “The Discussion Between Abu Bishr Matta and Abu Sa‘id al-Sirafi on the Merits of Logic and Grammar”* (PDF). See A-Z entries on al-Tawhidi, language (1st two paragraphs) and logic (1st paragraph).

II. The Neoplatonic-Aristotelian (*mashsha‘i*) Philosophers.

- Sept. 19 (W): al-Farabi, “Selections from the Book of Demonstrations,” pp. 63-67 (PDF) and “The Political Regime” pp. 31-42 (PDF). See A-Z entries on Aristotle, al-Farabi and active intellect.
- Sept. 24 (M): **FIRST PAPER DUE.** al-Farabi, “The Political Regime” (PDF), pp. 42-57.
- Sept. 26 (W): al-Farabi, “The Attainment of Happiness” pp. 34 (start with §37)-50 (PDF).
- Oct. 1 (M): Avicenna (Ibn Sina), “Autobiography/Biography of Avicenna” (PDF); excerpt from *The Cure/Healing*, “The Soul”, I.1.7 and V.7.4-7, pp. 178-79 & 207-9 (PDF) [on the ontological independence and separability of the soul]. See A-Z entries on Ibn Sina, metaphysics, and the floating man argument.
- Oct. 3 (W): Avicenna (Ibn Sina), The Metaphysics of *The Healing*, Bk I, Ch. 1, 6 & 7, pp. 1-6, 29-38 [the science of metaphysics and its subject matter; necessary and possible existence]. See A-Z entry on God (arguments for the existence of).
- Oct. 8 (M): **FALL BREAK.**
- Oct. 10 (W): Avicenna (Ibn Sina), The Metaphysics of *The Healing*, Bk VI, Ch. 1-2, pp. 194-205 and Bk VIII, Ch. 1 & 3, pp. 257-61 & 270-73 [how to think about causality; a cosmological proof of the existence of God]. See A-Z entry on causality/cause (stop at 5th line on p. 26).
- Oct. 15 (M): Avicenna (Ibn Sina), The Metaphysics of *The Healing*, Bk VIII, Ch. 6-7, pp. 283-98 [God’s knowledge: can the Necessary Existent know temporal particulars?]. See A-Z entry on God’s knowledge.
- Oct. 17 (W): Avicenna (Ibn Sina), The Metaphysics of *The Healing*, Bk IX, Ch. 6, pp. 339-47; Ibn Sīnā, *al-Isharāt wa ‘l-tanbīhāt (Remarks and Admonitions)*, in *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia*, pp. 237-41 (PDF) [divine providence and the problem of evil].
- Oct. 22 (M): Avicenna (Ibn Sina), The Metaphysics of *The Healing*, Bk IX, Ch. 7, pp. 347-57

[the “return,” or hereafter].

III. The Response to the Peripatetics: Traditionalist/Sufi Critiques, Rationalist Purification, and Synthesis.

- Oct. 24 (W): al-Ghazali (Ash‘arite theologian and Sufi), *Deliverance From Error*, pp. 15-51 (NB: the notes to this translation are outstanding, and will help a lot in terms of comprehension). See A-Z entry on al-Ghazali.
- Oct. 29 (M): **2ND PAPER DUE.** al-Ghazali, *Deliverance From Error*, pp. 51-80. See A-Z entry on Sufism.
- Oct. 31 (W): al-Ghazali, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, Religious Preface and First Discussion (On Refuting their Claim of the World’s Past Eternity), pp. 1-20 (PDF). See A-Z entry on creation vs. eternity of the world.
- Nov. 5 (M): al-Ghazali, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, Thirteenth Discussion (on God’s knowledge of temporal particulars), pp. 134-43 & Seventeenth Discussion (on causality and miracles), pp. 166-77 (both PDFs). See A-Z entry on causality/cause.
- Nov. 7 (W): Averroës (Ibn Rushd), *The Incoherence of the Incoherence*, “About the Natural Sciences” [response to al-Ghazali’s Seventeenth Discussion, on causality and miracles], pp. 316-33 (PDF). See A-Z entry on Ibn Rushd.
- Nov. 12 (M): Averroës (Ibn Rushd), *Decisive Treatise Determining the Connection Between the (Religious) Law and (Philosophical) Wisdom*, pp. 1-22. See A-Z entry on law.
- Nov. 14 (W): Ibn Rushd (Averroës), *Decisive Treatise and Epistle Dedicatory*, pp. 23-33 and 38-42.
- Nov. 19 (M): Traditionalist Critiques of Islamic Philosophy/Logic. See A-Z entry on traditionalism, Zahirites, Ibn Hazm, Hanbalites, Ibn Taymiyya & Islamism. **IN-CLASS MOVIE: *Al-Massir* (“Destiny”), Youssef Chahine (France/Egypt, 1997).**
- Nov. 21 (W): **THANKSGIVING BREAK**
- Nov. 26 (M): Ibn Tufayl, *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, pp. 95-118. A-Z entries on Ibn Tufayl & Eastern philosophy.
- Nov. 28 (W): Ibn Tufayl, *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, pp. 118-42 (end of 2nd full paragraph).
- Dec. 3 (M): Ibn Tufayl, *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, pp. 142 (start at 2nd full paragraph)-166.

FINAL PAPER DUE: The final paper will be due by the end of the final exam hour established by the registrar for this course (note: although a final exam time is scheduled, there is no final exam in this course, only the final paper). The date for this is **Friday, Dec 7, 6:30 pm**. Please drop your paper off at Coleman 64 by that time (If I am not there, or you want to hand in the paper before this deadline, please slide it under my office door or leave it with Jane Baker, the philosophy department secretary, in Coleman 69).