

Philosophy in the Islamic World

Instructor: Prof Peter Adamson (peter.adamson@kcl.ac.uk)

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*.

LONGER VERSION

Semester One

Term One: al-Kindi, Saadia and the Mu‘tazilites

1. Arabic philosophy: an overview of the tradition

Suggested reading: *G. Endress, “The Defense of Reason: the Plea for Philosophy in the Religious Community,” *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der arabisch-islamische Wissenschaften* 6 (1990), 1-49. For a combative view with which I have much sympathy, see D. Gutas, “The Study of Arabic Philosophy in the Twentieth Century,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 29 (2002), 5-25.

2. The translation movement and al-Kindi’s circle

Primary text: excerpts from Arabic translations of Neoplatonic texts.

Suggested reading: For lectures 2, 4 and 5 see P. Adamson, *Al-Kindi* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). See also *P. Adamson, “Al-Kindi and the Reception of Greek Philosophy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy* (see above), 32-51.

3. The Mu‘tazilites

Primary text: excerpts from reports on Mu‘tazilite views

Suggested reading: *P. Adamson, “Al-Kindi and the Mu‘tazila: Divine Attributes, Creation and Freedom.” B. Abrahamov, *Islamic Theology* (Edinburgh: 1998). W.M. Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology* (Edinburgh: 1962). J. van Ess, *The Flowering of Muslim Theology* (Cambridge, MA: 2006).

4. Al-Kindi and Saadia on God

Primary text: al-Kindi, *On the One, True and Complete Agent*, in Hackett reader

Suggested reading: *P. Adamson, “Before Essence and Existence: al-Kindi’s Conception of Being”. *P. Adamson, “The Beginnings of Philosophy in the Middle Ages,” in *The Blackwell History of Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, ed. J. Inglis, D. Frank, and T. Kukkonen (forthcoming).

5. Al-Kindi and Saadia on the eternity of the world

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

Suggested reading: 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.

Term Two: Tenth Century Philosophy

6. The Baghdad school and the dispute over grammar and logic

Primary text: *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.

Suggested reading: *M. Mahdi, "Language and Logic in Classical Islam," in *Logic in Classical Islamic Culture*, ed. G.E. von Grunebaum (Wiesbaden: 1970), 51-83. *P. Adamson, "Knowledge of Universals and Particulars in the Baghdad School," *Documenti e Studi sulla Tradizione Filosofica Medievale* 18 (2007), 141-64.

7. Al-Farabi's practical philosophy

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*. Al-Farabi, *Book of Religion*, in C.E. Butterworth (trans.), *Alfarabi: The Political Writings* (Ithaca: 2001). E. Gannagé et al (eds) *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph 62: The Greek Strand in Islamic Political Thought* (2004) [The contributions of Crone, Gannagé, Gutas and Lahoud discuss al-Farabi; Lahoud is a useful overview and Gutas is a good critique of the Straussian interpretation of al-Farabi].

8. Al-Farabi's theoretical philosophy

Primary text: al-Farabi, *On the Intellect*, in Hackett reader

Suggested reading: *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.

9. 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. L.E. Goodman, "Muhammad ibn Zakariyya' al-Razi," in S.H. Nasr and O. Leaman (eds), *History of Islamic Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1996), 198-215. M. Fakhry, "A Tenth Century Arabic Interpretation of Plato's Cosmology," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 6 (1968), 15-22.

10. 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).

Semester Two

Term One: Avicenna and al-Ghazali

11. Avicenna on modality, essence and existence

Primary text: *G.F. Hourani, "Ibn Sina on Necessary and Possible Existence," has translations of several relevant passages.

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*.

12. Avicenna's proof of God's existence

Primary text: Avicenna, selection VIII from Hackett reader

Suggested reading: *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.

13. Avicenna's epistemology

Primary text: Avicenna, selection II and X 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.

14. Avicenna's psychology

Primary text: Avicenna, selection VI from Hackett reader

Suggested reading: *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. P. Adamson, "Correcting Plotinus: Soul's Relationship to Body in Avicenna's Commentary on the *Theology of Aristotle*," in *Philosophy, Science and Exegesis in Greek, Arabic and Latin Commentaries* (London, 2004), vol. 2, 59-75.

15. Al-Ghazali's autobiography

Primary text: al-Ghazali, *Deliverer from Error* (several translations available)

Suggested reading: M. Marmura, "Al-Ghazali," in *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*. *S. Menn, "The Discourse on the Method and the Tradition of Intellectual Autobiography," in *Hellenistic and Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. J. Miller and B. Inwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 141-91.

Term Two: Ghazali, Averroes and Maimonides

16. 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*.

17. Averroes against Ghazali, part one: causation

Primary text: al-Ghazali, *On Power*, in Hackett reader

Suggested reading: *B. Dutton, "Al-Ghazali on Possibility and the Critique of Causality," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 10 (2001), 23-46. *B. Kogan, "The Philosophers al-Ghazali and Averroes on Necessary Connection and the Problem of

the Miraculous,” in *Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism*, ed. P. Morewedge (Delmar: 1981), 113-132.

18. Averroes against Ghazali, part two: 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.

19. Maimonides on divine attributes

Primary text: *The Guide for the Perplexed*

Suggested reading: For lectures 19-20, see H.A. Davidson, *Moses Maimonides*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005; K. Seeskin (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Maimonides* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005). On divine attributes see A. Hyman, “Maimonides on Religious Language,” in J. Kraemer, Joel (ed.), *Perspectives on Maimonides: Philosophical and Historical Studies* (London: 1996), 175-91; Wolfson, H. A. “Maimonides on Negative Attributes,” in his *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion* (Cambridge: 1973), vol. II, pp. 195-230.

20. Maimonides on the eternity of the world

Primary text: *The Guide for the Perplexed*

Suggested reading: K. Seeskin, *Maimonides on the Origin of the World* (New York: 2005). *A. Hyman, “Maimonides on Creation and Emanation,” in *Studies in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. J. F. Wippel (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 45–61.