ISLA 380
Islamic Philosophy and Theology
Fall 2019
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 8:35AM-9:55AM, in Birks 111
Instructor: Prof. Robert Wisnovsky
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Office hours: By appointment

ISLA 380 is an introduction to the most important philosophers and theologians in Islamic intellectual history, with a focus on the concepts they articulated and the movements they engendered. Although many of the philosophical and theological problems we will examine first arose over a thousand years ago, debates over how to resolve them still resonate throughout the Islamic world. The classes will alternate between those devoted to lecturing and answering questions, and those devoted to student-led debates over particular philosophical and theological questions. The readings are a mix of primary and secondary sources; all are in English.

Requirements

Students will be required to:

a) Lead one side of one debate. In each debate, two student debaters will each give a twenty-minute presentation of their opposing positions, and then respond to questions and criticisms from the rest of the class. The two debaters should prepare a handout (two pages maximum) in which they outline their position and arguments.

NB: There are only eleven debates. If more than 22 students end up enrolling in the class, the remaining students will each choose a debate and submit a 2500-word (+/- 50 words maximum) essay in which they lay out the arguments in favor of one side of that debate, and against the other side. This essay will be due at the beginning of the class in which that debate is held.

b) Complete the take-home midterm exam. For the take-home midterm exam, students will choose one of three essay questions to answer. The essay questions will relate to topics covered up to and including the October 10 class. The exam is open book; however, in the essay, which must be 2500 words long (+/- 50 words maximum), students should only cite the course readings (required as well as recommended), lectures and debates. The midterm exam will be posted on the ISLA 380 MyCourses webpage at 5:00PM on Thursday, October 10. It will be due at 5:00PM on Tuesday, October 15.

c) Complete the take-home final exam. For the take-home final exam, students will choose two of six essay questions to answer. The essay questions will relate to topics covered in the readings, lectures and debates, from the entire semester. The exam is open book; however, in the two essays, each of which must be 2500 words long (+/- 50 words maximum), students should only cite the course readings (required as well as recommended), lectures and debates. The final exam will be posted on the ISLA 380 MyCourses webpage at 5:00PM on Thursday, November 28. It will be due at 5:00PM on the final day of exam period: Friday, December 20.

d) Come to class i) having read the required readings, and ii) prepared to participate in the discussions, especially those during the debates. The required readings average about 100 pages per week.
Final course grades will be determined as follows:

a) debate: 22.5%
b) take-home midterm exam: 22.5%
c) take-home final exam: 45%
d) class participation: 10%

Textbooks

The following textbook is available for purchase at Paragraphe Bookstore.


PDFs of all readings other than Adamson and Taylor are available for download from the MyCourses webpage.

McGill Policies

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures” (see [www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/](http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/) for more information).

In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

Class Schedule

**Tuesday Sep 3: Logistics**

**Thursday Sep 5 (Lecture): The study of Islamic philosophy and theology; early sectarianism**

Required for all students (62 pages):


**Tuesday Sep 10 (Lecture): Early sectarianism (cont’d); Muʿtazilism**

Required for all students (61 pages):


**Thursday Sep 12 (Debate): “If God creates our actions, isn’t He unjust to punish us for them?”**

Required for debaters/Recommended for all other students (138 pages):


**Tuesday Sep 17 (Lecture): The Miḥna; al-Ash'arī**

Required for all students (75 pages):


**Thursday Sep 19 (Debate): “Is the Qurān created or uncreated?”**

Required for debaters/Recommended for all other students (138 pages):


**Tuesday Sep 24: (Lecture): Greek into Arabic; al-Kindī; logic and epistemology**

Required for all students (104 pages):

P. Adamson, “Al-Kindi and the reception of Greek philosophy,” in Adamson and Taylor, 32-51


**Thursday Sep 26 (Debate): “Do we need a divine text in order to know things with certainty, or can we use logic instead?”**

Required for debaters/Recommended for all other students (109 pages):


T. Street, “Logic,” in Adamson and Taylor, 247-265


**Tuesday Oct 1 (Lecture): al-Fārābī; ethics and political philosophy**

Required for all students (80 pages):

D. C. Reisman, “Al-Fārābī and the philosophical curriculum,” in Adamson and Taylor, 52-71


**Thursday Oct 3: (Debate): “Do prophets or philosophers make better lawgivers?”**

Required for debaters/Recommended for all other students (83 pages):

Ch. Butterworth, “Ethical and political philosophy,” in Adamson and Taylor, 266-286

al-Ashʿarī [d. ca. 936], Highlights of the Polemic against Deviators and Innovators, in R. J. McCarthy, trans., The Theology of al-Ashʿarī (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1953), 112-116


al-Fārābī [d. 950], The Enumeration of the Sciences, in R. Lerner and M. Mahdi, eds and trans, Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook (New York: The Free Press, 1963), 22-30


Avicenna [d. 1037], On the Proof of Prophecies, in R. Lerner and M. Mahdi, eds and trans, Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook (New York: The Free Press, 1963), 112-121

**Tuesday Oct 8: (Lecture): Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā); metaphysics and psychology**

Required for all students (77 pages):

R. Wisnovsky, “Avicenna and the Avicennian tradition,” in Adamson and Taylor, 92-136


**Thursday Oct 10**: (Debate): “After we die, do our souls alone survive, or will our bodies be resurrected as well?”

Required for debaters/Recommended for all other students (56 pages):
D. Black, “Psychology: Soul and intellect,” in Adamson and Taylor, 308-326

**Tuesday Oct 15**: NO CLASS: take-home Midterm due at 5:00PM

**Thursday Oct 17** (Lecture): Ghazālī; reactions to falsafa

Required for all students (82 pages):
M. Marmura, “al-Ghazālī,” in Adamson and Taylor, 137-154

**Tuesday Oct 22** (Lecture): Averroes (Ibn Rushd) and Maghribi philosophy; Arabic into Latin

Required for all students (95 pages):
C. Burnett, “Arabic into Latin: The reception of Arabic philosophy into Western Europe,” in Adamson and Taylor, 370-404

**Thursday Oct 24** (Debate): “Are God’s hands tied by the laws of nature, or can He override nature in order to create miracles?”

Required for debaters/Recommended for all other students (130 pages):
F. Griffel, Al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 147-173

**Tuesday Oct 29** (Lecture): Post-classical “verifiers” (muḥaqiqūn)

Required for all students (108 pages):
H. Ziai, “Recent trends in Arabic and Persian philosophy,” in Adamson and Taylor, 405-425
Thursday Oct 31 (Debate): “Is God so sublime that He only knows things in a general way, or can He know particular things just as we do?”
Required for debaters/Recommended for all other students (64 pages):

Tuesday Nov 5 (Lecture): Illuminationism; the Akbarian turn
Required for all students (92 pages):
J. Walbridge, “Suhrawardī and Illuminationism,” in Adamson and Taylor, 201-223
S. H. Rizvi, “Mysticism and philosophy: Ibn ʿArabī and Mullā Ṣadrā,” in Adamson and Taylor, 224-246
al-Shahrazūrī [d. after 1288], “Introduction” to his Commentary on Suhrawardi’s [d. 1191] Philosophy of Illumination, in J. Walbridge and H. Ziai, eds and trans, Suhrawardi: The Philosophy of Illumination (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1999), xxxviii-xliv

Thursday Nov 7 (Debate): “Was the world created out of nothing or is it eternal, just as God is?”
Required for debaters/Recommended for all other students: (71 pages)

Tuesday Nov 12 (Lecture): Revival, reform and early modernism
Required for all students (108 pages):

Thursday Nov 14 (Debate): “Does progress presuppose Westernization?”
Required for debaters/Recommended for all other students (158 pages):

**Tuesday Nov 19 (Lecture): Late modernism; Neo-Mu‘tazilism**

Required for all students (123 pages):

**Thursday Nov 21 (Debate): “How useful is the Islamic philosophical and theological tradition to modern Muslims?”**

Required for debaters/Recommended for all other students (129 pages):

**Tuesday Nov 26 (Lecture): Postmodernism and postcoloniality; Muslim feminist theology**

Required for all students (111 pages):
- A. Wadud, *Qur’an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman’s Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), ix-xxvi and 1-43

**Thursday Nov 28 (Debate): “How ‘Islamic’ are Islamic philosophy and theology?”**

Required for debaters/Recommended for all other students (105 pages):