ISLA 380
Islamic Philosophy and Theology
Fall 2014
Wednesdays and Fridays, 2:35PM-3:55PM, in Leacock 210

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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 a thousand years ago, debates over how to solve them still resonate throughout the Islamic world. The classes will alternate between those devoted to lecturing and to answering questions, and those devoted to student-led debates over particular philosophical and theological problems. All the readings are in English.

Requirements

Students will be required to:

a) Lead one side of one debate. In each debate, two student debaters will give twenty-minute presentations of their opposing positions, and then respond to questions and criticisms from the rest of the class.

b) Complete three take-home exams. Each take-home exam consists in one 1000-word-long (+/- 50 words) essay, which must be emailed to me (at robert.wisnovsky@mcgill.ca) as a pdf file by 5:00PM on the date of the exam. (Class will not meet on the day of the take-home exam.) For each take-home exam, students will choose one of three essay questions that will be posted on the MyCourses website at 5:00PM on the day before the exam is due; students will therefore have 24 hours to complete the exam. The take-home exams are open-book: students are allowed to consult the assigned readings as well as their notes from the lectures and the debates. Students should not use or cite any texts other than those on the syllabus.

c) Come to class a) having read the assigned readings and b) prepared to participate in the discussions, especially those during the debates. The readings average about 100 pages per class (lecture or debate).

Course grades will be determined as follows:

a) debate: 20%
b) take-home exam #1: 20%
c) take-home exam #2: 20%
d) take-home exam #3: 20%
e) participation: 20%
**Textbooks**

The following textbook is available for purchase at the Paragraphe Bookstore.


Copies of the remaining textbooks are on reserve at the Islamic Studies Library.


Amina Wadud, *Qur’an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman’s Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999)


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

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.
**Schedule**

**Wed Sep 3 (Lecture): Introductory session**

**Fri Sep 5 (Lecture): Early sectarianism; Mu’tazilism**
- Watt, 1-63
- Wolfson, 1-58

**Wed Sep 10 (Debate): "If God creates our actions, isn’t He unjust to punish us for them?"**
- Wolfson, 601-719

**Fri Sep 12 (Lecture): The Mīḥna; Ash‘arī and Ash‘arism**
- Watt, 64-68 and 75-84

**Wed Sep 17 (Debate): "Is the Qur‘ān created or uncreated?"**
- Wolfson, 235-303

**Fri Sep 19: NO CLASS**

**Wed Sep 24 (Lecture): Greek into Arabic; Kindī; logic and epistemology**
- Adamson and Taylor, 10-51

**Fri Sep 26 (Debate): "Do we need a divine text in order to know things with certainty, or can we use logic instead?"**
- Kindī [d. 865], *Sketch of Aristotle’s Organon* [N. Rescher, trans., “Al-Kindi’s sketch of Aristotle’s Organon”, *The New Scholasticism* 37 (Baltimore: The American Catholic Philosophical Association, 1963), 44-58]
- Abrahamov, 1-64
**Wed Oct 1 (Lecture): Fārābī; ethics and political philosophy**
Adamson and Taylor, 52-71

**Fri Oct 3 (Debate): "Do prophets or philosophers make better lawgivers?"
Adamson and Taylor, 266-286
Ashʿarī [d. ca. 936], *Highlights of the Polemic against Deviators and Innovators* [R. J. McCarthy, trans., *The Theology of al-Ashʿarī* (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1953), 112-116]

**Wed Oct 8: Take-home exam #1 due at 5:00PM**

**Fri Oct 10 (Lecture): Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā); metaphysics and psychology**
Adamson and Taylor, 92-136
Avicenna [d. 1037], *On Necessary and Possible Existence* [G. Hourani, “Ibn Sina on necessary and possible existence”, *Philosophical Forum* 6 (Boston: Boston University Department of Philosophy, 1974), 74-86]

**Wed Oct 15 (Debate): "After we die, do our souls alone survive, or will our bodies be resurrected as well?"
Adamson and Taylor, 308-326
Ghazālī [d. 1111]/Averroes [d. 1198], *Incoherence*, 333-363

**Fri Oct 17 (Lecture): Ghazālī; reactions to falsafa**
Adamson and Taylor, 137-154; 247-265

Wed Oct 22 (Debate): "Are God’s hands tied by the laws of nature, or can He override nature in order to create miracles?"
Wolfson, 518-600
Ghazzâli [d. 1111]/Averroes [d. 1198], Incoherence, 311-333

Fri Oct 24 (Lecture): Averroes (Ibn Rushd); Arabic into Latin
Adamson and Taylor, 155-200 and 370-404
Averroes [d. 1198], Harmony, 44-81

Wed Oct 29 (Debate): "Is God so sublime that He only knows things in a general way, or can He know particular things just as we do?"
Ghazzâli [d. 1111]/Averroes [d. 1198], Incoherence, 255-285
Giles of Rome [d. 1316], Errors of the Philosophers [J.O. Riedl, trans., Giles of Rome: Errores Philosophorum (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1944), 3-67 (odd pages only--i.e., only the facing translation)]

Fri Oct 31 (Lecture): Post-classical Sunni and Shi’ite muḥaqiqūn and mutakallīmūn

Wed Nov 5: Take-home exam #2 due at 5:00PM

Fri Nov 7: (Guest Lecture: Naser Dumairieh): Illuminationism; the Akbarian Turn
Adamson and Taylor, 201-246 and 405-425
Shahrazūrī [d. after 1288], "Introduction" to his Commentary on Suhrawardī’s [d. 1191] Philosophy of Illumination [J. Walbridge and H. Ziai, trans., Suhrawardī: The Philosophy of Illumination (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1999), xxxviii-xliii]
**Wed Nov 12 (Debate):** "Was the world created out of nothing or is it eternal, just as God is?"
Ghazâlî [d. 1111]/Averroes [d. 1198], *Incoherence*, 1-58, 156-170

**Fri Nov 14 (Lecture): Imperialism; Early Modernism**
Hourani, 1-160

**Wed Nov 19 (Debate):** "Does progress presuppose Westernization?"
Martin and Woodward, 128-138

**Fri Nov 21 (Lecture): Late Modernism**
Rahman, 1-162
Martin and Woodward, 199-203

**Wed Nov 26 (Debate):** "How useful is the Islamic philosophical and theological tradition to modern Muslims?"
Martin and Woodward, 158-179

**Fri Nov 28 (Lecture): Postmodernism and Postcoloniality**
Martin and Woodward, 204-219
Wadud, ix-xxvi and 1-108

**Wed Dec 3: Take-home exam #3 due at 5:00PM**