

This course will be devoted to philosophy in the medieval Islamicate world—the world culturally dominated by Islam and by the Arabic language, but shared by Muslims, Christians, Jews, and some none-of-the-aboves. We will look mainly at falsafa (Greek-style philosophy modeled on Plato and Aristotle), but also at the distinctively Islamic disciplines of kalâm (dialectical theology) and şûfism, starting from a review of selected issues in Greek philosophy and of the religious context in Islam. We will be interested in the conflicts and debates between these different approaches to philosophy, as well as in ways that they positively shaped each other.

Two main themes of the course will be: (1) What is it appropriate to say about God, or, if we accept things said about God in authoritative religious texts, what are the rules for interpreting them? The concern here is not with the existence of God, which all medieval philosophers accept, but rather with the names or attributes of God, and with God's causal action on the world and on humans: medieval philosophers are especially concerned with the apparently anthropomorphic descriptions of God used in authoritative texts, and with God's knowledge, will and power (especially the freedom of his will), and how God's causality relates to the powers of created things and to human free will. (2) What are the conditions for something to be "science," i.e. knowledge in the strongest sense [epistêmê in Greek, ilm in Arabic], rather than a guess, a metaphor, an approximation, or something repeated on another person's authority? How is such knowledge acquired, and what must the human mind and the world be like, and how must they be related, for such knowledge to be possible? Presumably if the world were controlled by a power that acted entirely at random, or with an intention to deceive us, we could not have scientific knowledge. Science depends on a rationality in human beings and a rationality in the world that somehow connect with each other, and for many medieval philosophers they connect because the mind and the world both depend on the same intrinsically rational God.

These themes combine in the question of how far, and under what conditions, we can have scientific knowledge of what God is and does. People nowadays often say that God is outside the domain of scientific knowledge and belongs instead to faith, but this is not what most medieval Muslims or Jews or Christians thought. On the contrary, they think that although we may need to begin with mere faith in God, we have a religious motivation or even a duty to press on to acquire knowledge about him as far as possible, and this is one of the goals of medieval philosophy. The issue of science connects with the issue of what it is appropriate to say about God: what is it appropriate to say scientifically, once we have purged everything metaphorical or conjectural and everything that depends on assimilating God to the ordinary objects of sensation and imagination? But thinkers who share this ideal of a purified knowledge of God can have widely divergent views of what it will be legitimate or illegitimate to say about God, and on what the conditions of scientific knowledge are and how far they can be achieved: and, as we will see, the question of how far scientific knowledge of God is possible is closely connected with the question of how far scientific knowledge of the physical world is possible.

"Philosophy" in the medieval context can be understood in a broader and a narrower sense. Medieval writers use the borrowed Greek word "philosophia" ("falsafa" in Arabic) only to describe the discipline they took over from the Greeks, namely the teaching of Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy, as interpreted and (often) harmonized with each other by the philosophers of late pagan antiquity (2nd-6th centuries AD). But from a 21st-century perspective

we can also use the word "philosophy" for doctrines and investigations that have no connection with the Greeks, including kalâm and sûfism in Islam, which, like falsafa, discuss the nature of God and his relation to the created universe, the nature of human beings, right and wrong action, free will, the nature and sources of knowledge, and sometimes also the structure of the physical world. While we will focus on falsafa, we will put it in the context of these other Islamic disciplines, looking at their shared aim of religious knowledge and the different methods they think are appropriate to reach it. In particular, we will try to see why some extremely intelligent medieval thinkers thought that Platonic-Aristotelian philosophy offers a path to the desired religious knowledge (to a personal apprehension of God's presence and nature, to an ability to describe God correctly and to interpret the scriptural descriptions, and to a knowledge of right action and why and how to do it, not just to gain heaven and avoid hell, but for its intrinsic value, and ultimately from love of God), while other extremely intelligent medieval thinkers thought that this philosophy was an essentially pagan doctrine that undermines true religion even when professing to interpret its scriptures. One aim of the course will be to gain familiarity with, and respect for, these two opposite views and the wide spectrum of positions in between.

I will start by reviewing some texts of Plato and Aristotle—and, briefly, some texts of their late ancient Greek interpreters—in order to bring out the aspects of Greek philosophy that were of greatest importance for philosophers in the Islamic world. We will then turn to Islam, trying to understand the Muslim demand for religious knowledge, especially in Shî'ism and the other strands of the "pious opposition" to the caliphate; we will then examine the different Islamic disciplines (including jurisprudence, kalâm, and sûfism) created to fill that need, and the attempt of Fârâbî and Avicenna to make falsafa serve as the highest religious discipline. We will then study Ghazâlî's Deliverance from Error, describing his search for wisdom through the different sects and disciplines and giving his judgment on the values and dangers of kalâm, falsafa and sûfism. We will then look at some of his detailed arguments against the scientific and religious claims of Fârâbian-Avicennian philosophy in his Incoherence of the Philosophers, and then at Averroes' defense and reformulation of a more strictly Aristotelian version of philosophy against Avicenna in his reply, the Incoherence of the Incoherence. If there is time, in the last week or so we will also look at some medieval Latin developments from these Arabic disputes.

The course will be divided into six units of about two weeks each (U1 about three weeks):

U1 Issues in Greek philosophy from the Muslim point of view

U2 Islam, sectarian divisions, and kalâm

U3 Fârâbî: falsafa as an alternative to kalâm

U4 Şûfism and Ghazâlî's Deliverance from Error

U5 Ghazâlî and Averroes on falsafa and kalâm; Averroes vs. Avicenna on essence and existence

U6 From Ghazâlî & Averroes to the Latins: philosophy & theology, God's freedom vs. Aristotle

I have ordered the Basic Works of Aristotle, edited by McKeon with a new preface by Reeve, Classical Arabic Philosophy: An Anthology of Sources, edited by McGinnis and Reisman, and Ghazâlî's Deliverance from Error ("The Faith and Practice of al-Ghazâlî", translated by Watt) at the Word Bookstore on Milton Street; ask for them by the course name and number. (The Word takes cash and checks but not cards, but they also take orders on line through <https://www.thewordbookstore.ca/phil-356-early-medieval-philosophy>.) Some students may already own McKeon-Reeve. Further assigned texts will be distributed electronically via

MyCourses. It is not sufficient to do these readings in the library or on the web: you must bring the books or photocopies or printouts of the readings with you to class. All of these readings, and not just the books available at the Word Bookstore, are equally required. In all cases it is essential, both that you have done the assigned reading before each class, and that you have the texts with you in class, in print and not electronically, so that you can look at them in class and answer questions about them. Computers, phones, and other electronic equipment may not be used in class: if you have done some of the reading on your screen, you must make printouts and bring them with you. Not having the assigned texts with you in class is a serious offence against class rules.

The course will meet for two 90-minute lecture-discussion sessions per week. Discussions will depend very heavily on details of the reading: you should always have done each day's reading carefully and on time (allow yourself enough time—these are difficult texts), and have the texts with you in class, so that you are prepared to answer questions about them. Do not come to class if you have been unable to do the readings. The lectures and discussions will make no sense without the readings. You can find out what a given day's readings are from MyCourses.

The course is appropriate for students from Philosophy, Islamic Studies, Jewish Studies, or Religious Studies; graduate students can take the course under an appropriate graduate number, typically Philosophy 760, with slightly modified requirements. The normal prerequisite for the course is either Philosophy 354 (Plato) or Philosophy 355 (Aristotle) at McGill, or their equivalents elsewhere. A general philosophy course with some reading of Plato or Aristotle is not sufficient, nor is a course on Aristotle's Ethics or Politics. Medieval philosophy is essentially dependent on ancient philosophy: it is not the place to start studying the history of philosophy. I will consider waiving the prerequisite for students with strong backgrounds in Islamic intellectual history. Students must be ready to listen to discussions of the meaning of Greek and Arabic words, and to adopt some of them as technical terms into English for the duration of the course, but no prior linguistic knowledge is required.

The assigned texts are not (as in some science courses) there to help you to learn some subject that the course is about. Rather, the assigned texts, and other similar texts, are what the course is about. These are difficult technical texts with a distinctive set of cultural presuppositions, and it will take some time and effort to learn to read them well, to make sense of them and respond critically to them. Some readers will need to overcome an initial sense of the foreignness of the texts; for others, the texts may seem so familiar that it needs effort to take a critical distance from them. All readers will have to acclimatize themselves to the extreme diversity of opinions in the Islamicate world: not all of our authors can be right, and we can learn to read them more critically by seeing how they would critically evaluate each other. For many of our authors (not only those who call themselves "falâsifa" using a version of the Greek word) we need a background in Greek philosophy to appreciate what they are saying, but they are reading Greek philosophy from interests formed by Islam and more generally Islamicate culture. So besides giving a quick introduction to Islam, its expectations of knowledge, and its disputes which some people turned to Greek philosophy to resolve, we will also give an opening review of those aspects of Greek philosophy which were most important for Arabic-language (Muslim and Christian and Jewish) readers, which may not be the aspects most stressed in current courses on Greek philosophy. And they are not only interpreting Greek philosophy (Aristotle, and to a lesser extent Plato, as read through their late ancient Greek followers, and also Galen, taken as not just a doctor but also a philosopher), but also in some cases criticizing and competing with it.

But the goal of the course is not to learn what e.g. Fârâbî or Averroes thought about some

philosophical issues, but to gain orientation in the larger philosophical conversation (among "falāsifa" and others) that they are part of, so that you can pick up a different author, or a different text by an author we have read—and a great many Arabic philosophical texts are now available in translation—and make sense of what the author is trying to accomplish and of his strategy for doing it. Our authors hold such radically different views that it is remarkable that they can engage with each other, but they do, and they all belong to the same conversation. The aim of the handouts, class participation, the short paper and the term-paper is to exercise you and evaluate you in making sense of the texts in this conversation: handouts and class participation on texts that have been assigned to the class, and the short paper and term-paper on texts that have not been assigned.

Grades will be based on a 5-7 page paper (20%) due either at the end of Unit 3 or at the end of Unit 4 (your choice, but different topics will be appropriate depending on which due-date you choose), a 12-15 page term-paper due on the last day of class (40%), class participation (20%), and two short outline-analyses of the arguments of particular texts to be handed out in class (20% total). I will ask each student twice during the term to prepare such an analysis and to copy it and distribute it in class as an aid to discussion. Do not ask for extensions: if a paper is handed in late, I may or may not grade it, but I will make no guarantees ahead of time. The papers should be on texts or topics that we have not discussed, or have only touched on, in class; you should design them as if they were additional lectures or discussion-pieces on a text or a topic that the class did not have time to get to. You should consult with me at least three weeks before the end of term on your proposed topic for the term-paper. 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. To receive a passing grade for the course, students must show that they have kept up with the readings and are able to discuss them in class. Participation presupposes that you are attending, and have the assigned texts with you in class. You cannot pass the course if you are regularly absent; if you must unavoidably miss a class because of illness, a religious holiday, or a family emergency, keep up with the reading and make up for it by extra participation when you're back.

Class participation includes not only raising questions and making comments in class about the assigned texts, but also being able to answer questions in class about the assigned texts: not necessarily to give the right answers, but answers that show that you have read and thought about the texts, and that, even if wrong or even if not the whole truth, help to advance the discussion. (If there is something that you don't understand in the texts, it is very likely that some other students will also have had problems with it, and bringing the issue out for discussion will benefit the class.) Being able to answer questions about the texts, and participate more generally, is necessary for passing the course—think of it as the lab component of a philosophy course. The aim of the course is for each student to be able to actively engage in making sense of medieval Islamicate philosophical texts for themselves, and to engage in cooperative discussions with others who are also trying to make sense of the texts, and we will do this collectively in class.

The handouts are also an essential component and necessary for passing the course. I will ask each student twice during the term to prepare a short outline and analysis of a particular assigned text and to make copies and distribute them at the beginning class as an aid to discussion. (Put your name but not your student number on the handout.) Typically, you should give an outline of the assigned text, breaking it down into sections and stating the main points of each section, giving page-references for each section and quoting in full what seem to you to be the most important sentences, flagging some interpretive issues, perhaps formally laying out some

arguments, or whatever you think would be most helpful for everyone to have on their desk during the discussion to help us understand the text. Handouts should be two to four single-spaced pages: if they're as long as the text you're summarizing, they won't help us survey it. Typically I will not grade a handout but will simply give full credit for it; at worst, if it seriously fails to do what was asked, I will ask you to modify it or produce a new one. However, I will give no credit for a handout unless you are there in class to answer questions about the text and handout; and this may wind up taking more than one class (you must be ready to answer questions at all of them) or being deferred to the following class if we get behind schedule.

Both the short paper (5-7 pages, due on your choice of either of two due-dates, with different ranges of topics acceptable for the two due-dates) and the long paper (12-15 pages, due at the last class) are also essential and necessary for passing the course. Each paper should be on a text that falls within the topic of the course but that we have not discussed, or have just touched on, in class: you should design them as if they were additional lectures or discussion-pieces on a text that the class did not have time to get to. In each case, you need to explore relevant texts (starting with parts of the assigned books that we did not discuss in class) and find something that would be worth discussing in class if we had some extra time: it may be just a section of a larger text. In your paper, start by briefly putting your text in context (e.g. this section has this function in support of the larger argument of this book) and then say what the author is aiming to accomplish in this text and what his strategy is for accomplishing it. For instance, if his aim is to argue for some conclusion p based on premises he thinks his intended audience will accept, show how each step of this argument works; or the aim may be to refute someone else's thesis, to show that someone else's argument doesn't work, to do better at what someone else is trying to do by their own standards, and so on. Your claims must be supported at each stage by explicit quotations from the text, properly referenced so that I can check them, and if you are not citing from one of the books that I have ordered for the course or one of the texts that I have put on MyCourses (or from the Cooper-Hutchinson complete Plato or the Barnes complete Aristotle), you must attach copies of the pages you are citing from. If you discover, in the process of writing, that you cannot cover the text in this way without superficiality, then you need to cut down and discuss only a smaller section of the text. The point is to understand what the author is doing, rather than to decide whether you think he is right or wrong, but raising objections against the author, and seeing whether he can answer them, can be illuminating as long as they are objections that someone could have raised (and perhaps did raise) against the author in his own lifetime, that the author could have understood and seen the need to reply to. (Objections to Aristotelian physics based on quantum mechanics are unlikely to be helpful.) One possibility is to put two texts in dialogue, showing how one author would object to another and exploring how that author might be able to respond. Naturally there will be more scope for this in the long paper than in the short paper. Both papers must be handed in, in person, at the end of the class when they are due.

The task in all of these kinds of exercises is to make sense of a text on your own. Do not make use of any secondary literature other than translations (that includes: do not make use of the translators' introductions or summaries) without specifically clearing it with me. Of course you must properly acknowledge any sources you do use.) It is generally OK to use secondary literature for historical background (e.g. when was so-and-so born, when did he die, what cities did he live in, who did he study with) and to get clues to other primary sources it might be helpful to read, but not for any substantive philosophical interpretation: that is your task and should not be outsourced to anyone else. If you do use secondary sources on such questions, you

may never take a modern scholar's opinion (including mine!) as evidence for any interpretive conclusions, and you should look at scholars who disagree, so that you do not risk becoming the captive of any one modern opinion.

No artificial-intelligence tools may be used for any work for the course, beyond word-processors (including spelling and grammar checkers but no more), web browsers and printers. If in doubt, ask.

In all papers and class handouts, references to texts of Aristotle must be either to the Bekker page and line numbers printed in the margins of most editions and translations (e.g. "1042b21") or to book and chapter numbers (e.g. "De Anima II,7"), never to the page numbers in McKeon or any other volume of translations. Likewise, references to texts of Plato must be to the Stephanus page and line numbers printed in the margins of most editions and translations, never to the page numbers of English translations. Don't worry if your line numbers are one or two lines off.

McGill requires me to add the following paragraph: "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/ for more information)."

McGill also asks me to say that "In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the control of McGill University"—which are more frequent than they used to be—"assessment tasks in a course are subject to change, provided students are sent adequate and timely communications regarding the change."

Computers, phones, and other electronic equipment may not be used in class; classes may not be recorded under any circumstances. Course material and handouts, generated either by the instructor or by other students, may not be further distributed.

My office is Leacock 921; I will be available there Wednesdays from 4:00 to 6:00. I cannot in general respond to emails; I may be able to briefly answer brief questions on MyCourses, but it is much better to raise questions in class or in office hours.

Notes for the first day of class, Wednesday August 28

Some Arabic terminology that will be important throughout the semester: you should memorize the five words tawhîd, shirk, tashbîh, tanzîh and ta'tîl, none of which have straightforward English equivalents.

Tawhîd, literally "unification," making or declaring to be one: monotheism, the assertion or belief that there is no god [ilâh] except God [allâh], or that God has no partners. (But there is a problem about what this excludes: what would it be for something to be a god other than God?)

This is opposed to shirk, assigning partners to God, an accusation made against pre-Islamic pagan Arabs who worshipped God's daughters as mediators between humans and God, but also against the Christians.

Tashbîh, literally "assimilation," making or declaring something to be similar: the assertion or belief that God is similar to human beings or other creatures, i.e. shares some attribute with them.

Tanzîh, literally "purification," often means specifically purifying God, or purifying our descriptions of God, from tashbîh, either by denying descriptions of God that seem to assimilate him to creatures, or by reinterpreting such descriptions to avoid this implication.

It is widely accepted (by Muslims, and by Jews and Christians in the Islamic world) that tashbîh is wrong (although there will be problems about what this entails) and that tanzîh is obligatory. But tanzîh risks falling into the opposite danger of ta'tîl, literally "nullification,"

denial of the divine attributes, having nothing left to say about what God is in himself or how he is a cause of other things, because we have either denied all predicates of God or reinterpreted them in such a way that they have no content left. The problem is: is it possible to avoid tashbîh without falling into ta'tîl, and is there any principled way to determine what predications of God are appropriate?

Readings for the second day of class, Friday August 30:

Beyond the attached texts from Plato's Republic and Aristotle's Metaphysics, please read Plato's Phaedo 96a-b and 97b-100e, Timaeus 27a-53d and 62c-63e and Aristotle's De Caelo (On the Heavens) I,2-3 and II,1 and his Physics II,1-3. The Plato texts will be posted on MyCourses; the Aristotle texts are in McKeon-Reeve except De Caelo II,1, which is included in the handout on the same page as the Metaphysics excerpts. I need three volunteers: one to prepare a handout on the Phaedo and Physics texts, another on Timaeus 27a-47e (but skip the details about vision), and a third on Timaeus 47e-53d and 62c-63e and the De Caelo texts.

Modern scholars almost all think (based largely on evidence about the development of Plato's Greek style) that Plato wrote the Timaeus long after the Phaedo: he seems to be trying in the Timaeus to do something that in the Phaedo he had regarded as desirable but perhaps impossible.

Some questions to bear in mind in doing Friday's reading:

How do Plato's criticisms of the poets, and Aristotle's criticisms of Plato, relate to what in Arabic are called tashbîh and tanzîh? What kinds of criticisms does Aristotle make of Plato on the Forms or Ideas or eternal models of sensible things?

How does Plato in the Phaedo (and some related passages in the Timaeus) criticize the "physicists" or "natural philosophers" such as Anaxagoras? How would he hope to explain physical things? What does he settle for, as a second-best, in the Phaedo? How is his approach in the Timaeus like or unlike his approach in the Phaedo? How do the different kinds of (alleged) "causes" or "explanations" that he considers in the Phaedo and Timaeus relate to the kinds of causes that Aristotle distinguishes in Physics II,3?

What things does Plato, in the Timaeus, posit as having existed from eternity? What does he posit as having been produced, but existing for ever once they have been produced? What things are mortal? What special roles does he give to things that exist from eternity, and to things that have not existed from eternity but will exist forever, like the "young gods"? And why?

What kinds of criticisms does Aristotle make of Plato on the heavenly bodies and the world-soul? What do Plato and Aristotle think of explanations of the circular motions of the heavenly bodies and the upward motions of light bodies and downward motions of heavy bodies by something like a "vortex" (a whirlpool or tornado), or a random shaking?

What does Aristotle's definition of a nature mean? What kinds of things does he think best satisfy the definition of a nature? How is his view like or unlike the view he attributes to Antiphon? Does Plato believe in natures? Does Plato think "physics"/"natural philosophy" is a science? Does Aristotle? If they disagree here, then why, and what is at issue between them?