

Medieval Arabic and Hebrew philosophy

Dr. Jacob Archambault

Course description

This course provides an introduction to medieval Jewish and Islamic thought from the beginning of the classical period of Islam through the flourishing of Jewish rationalism in the fourteenth century west.

Like later scholasticism, classical Islamic thought is strongly marked by the problem of the relationship between the authority of the philosophers and that of the sacred text. Earlier Islamic authors such as Ibn Sina sought to integrate classical Greek metaphysics, psychology, and politics with the worldview of the Koran. But this attempted reconciliation would later be forcefully attacked by Al-Ghazali, whose views continue to influence Islamic thought today. Earlier Islamic thought exercised a strong influence on medieval Jewish philosophy: many of the most important Jewish philosophical contributions - including those of Maimonides - were originally written in Arabic, and later Hebrew writers like Gersonides drew on the Aristotelian commentaries of Ibn Rushd and others. In contrast with the Byzantine Greek philosophy of Christian east and the Scholasticism of the Latin west, medieval Islamic and Jewish thought place a somewhat stronger emphasis on questions of civic life and religious practice, which shines through in a number of legal and political contributions of its authors.

By the end of the course, the student shall have attained an understanding of the main currents in medieval Arabic and Hebrew thought, their relations to each other, and a grasp of their continued ramifications for Jewish-Muslim relations today.

Course requirements

Homework (33%) - Questions are assigned for each reading, to be completed prior to discussion of the text. Assignments are collected periodically and on random days at the beginning of class, and graded for quality and comprehension.

Midterm (33%) - Administered in class.

Final paper (33%) - The student will write a paper on a figure or theme discussed during the course. 3000 words or fewer.

Required texts

Hyman, Arthur, James J. Walsh, and Thomas Williams (eds.) *Philosophy in the Middle Ages: The Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Traditions*. Third Edition. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2010.

Syllabus

Week of:	Monday	Thursday
Week 1	Course overview	Al-Farabi, <i>The Principles of Existing Things</i>
Week 2	Al-Farabi, <i>The Principles of Existing Things</i> (cont.).	Al-Farabi, <i>The Principles of Existing Things</i> (cont.).
Week 3	Saadia, <i>Book of Doctrines and Beliefs</i> 1.1-1.3	Saadia, <i>Book of Doctrines and Beliefs</i> 3.1-3.3
Week 4	Ibn Sina, <i>The Salvation</i> 2.1-2.5, 2.12, 2.13, 2.18, 2.19; <i>The Cure</i> 6.1-6.2.	Ibn Sina, <i>The Salvation</i> 6.9, 6.12, 6.13.
Week 5	Ibn Sina, <i>The Cure</i> 5.7.	Solomon ibn Gabirol, <i>The Fountain of Life</i>
Week 6	Al-Ghazali, <i>The Incoherence of the Philosophers</i> , On the Eternity of the World.	Al-Ghazali, <i>The Incoherence of the Philosophers</i> , On the Eternity of the World (cont.).
Week 7	Al-Ghazali, <i>The Incoherence of the Philosophers</i> , Concerning the Natural Sciences.	Midterm
Week 8	Ibn Rushd, <i>The Decisive Treatise</i>	Ibn Rushd, <i>The Decisive Treatise</i> (cont.)
Week 9	Ibn Rushd, <i>Long Commentary on "The Soul"</i> 3.4, 3.5.	Ibn Rushd, <i>Long Commentary on "The Soul"</i> 3.18-3.20
Week 10	Ibn Rushd, <i>The Incoherence of the Incoherence</i>	Ibn Rushd, <i>The Incoherence of the Incoherence</i> (cont.)
Week 11	Moshe ben Maimon, <i>The Guide of the Perplexed</i>	Moshe ben Maimon, <i>The Guide of the Perplexed</i> (cont.)
Week 12	Moshe ben Maimon, <i>The Guide of the Perplexed</i> (cont.)	Moshe ben Maimon, <i>The Guide of the Perplexed</i> (cont.)
Week 13	Levi ben Gershom, <i>The Wars of the Lord</i> 3.1-3.6.	Hasdai Crescas, <i>The Light of the Lord</i> 2.6.1
Week 14	Hasdai Crescas, <i>The Light of the Lord</i> 2.6.1 (cont.)	Semester review