

Religion 55

DEBATING MUSLIMS

Fall 2010

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Office Hours: Friday, 8-9AM and 10-11AM

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an introduction to the intellectual tradition of Islam. We will explore works of theology, philosophy, governance, and mysticism authored by Muslim intellectuals of various stripes. The course uses primary sources (in English translation) to introduce the concepts that Muslim intellectuals articulated and the movements that they engendered from the 8th century through the 20th century. We will investigate questions of debate concerning language and revelation, prophecy, heresy, causality and miracles, the role of logic and human reasoning in the Islamic tradition, conceptions of the Islamic state in the pre-modern and modern periods, and the experience and identity of Muslims in North America. There are no pre-requisites for this course.

REQUIREMENTS

General: Students are expected to do all of the assigned readings before class, to attend all class meetings and to participate actively in discussion sessions. Be sure to have the texts with you in class, so that you are prepared to answer questions about them. If you have difficulty understanding the text, raise your issues in class. It is likely that others will have had the same difficulty.

Assignments: Weekly writing assignments (2 pp.). These assignments collectively are worth one third of your total grade, and they are to be submitted at the beginning of every class (from 9/22 through 12/1). They will be graded with a check plus, check, or check minus. No extensions (unless accompanied by a dean's note). One research paper (12-15 pp.). We will begin formulating a topic about halfway into the semester, and you will have at least one scheduled meeting with me to discuss it. Proposals and bibliographies for your final projects are due in class on Wednesday, November 17. I will ask you to present your discoveries and to share your ideas on the last day of classes. The paper is due on Wednesday, December 22. I will occasionally ask for volunteers to present secondary literature in class.

Extension policy: An extension on the final paper is likely to be granted if it is formally requested by email well ahead of time. A good reason must be offered for any request for an extension. No extensions will be granted less than twenty-four hours in advance of a paper deadline except in cases of emergency.

Absence policy: I grant students one unexcused absence over the course of the semester. Each unexcused absence will result in a final grade penalty of not less than one-third of a letter grade.

Evaluations: students will be required to submit course evaluations at the end of the semester. Students will not be able to gain access to their course grades until an evaluation has been submitted.

SCHEDULE

Wednesday, Sept. 8: Introduction to the course and informal discussion

Wednesday, Sept. 15 (I will be in Berlin for a conference on this day)

Exercise: Find a disputed issue within a religious tradition other than Islam. The disputed issue might be a religious belief, ritual, institution, scriptural passage, service, or custom. (The list could go on.) In one double spaced page explain what the critical point of the dispute is and why it is a matter of disagreement within the tradition.

If the academic study of Islam is brand new to you, please read chapters one and two of *Islam* by J. Elias. There are several copies of this work at the Amherst College Library (Frost). I have also placed one copy on reserve at Frost.

I have assigned a fair bit of reading for Sept. 22, Some of it will take some time to get through, and you will have to be patient with the material (especially Ash[°]arī!). I suggest that you get started on the reading for Sept. 22 this week.

LANGUAGE AND REVELATION

Wednesday, Sept. 22: The Mu[°]tazila

1. Read the article on the Mu[°]tazila in the *Encyclopedia of Religion* (ed. M. Eliade), which is available in the lounge of Chapin Hall
2. Ṭabarī [d. 923], *History of Prophets and Kings*, 198-223 (packet)
3. Van Ess, “Verbal Inspiration? Language and revelation in classical Islamic theology,” 177-194 (packet)
4. Read Ash[°]arī’s Discussion of the Qur[°]ān and the Divine Will, 20-32 (handout)

FREE WILL AND PREDESTINATION

Wednesday, Sept. 29: Ash[°]arī’s [d. ca. 936] Doctrine of “Acquisition”

1. Ash[°]arī, *Highlights of the Polemic against Deviators and Innovators*, 53-116 (packet)

Discussion topic: How would Ash[°]arī respond to the following question: If God creates our actions, isn’t He unjust to punish us for them?

THE ARABIC PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION (*FALSAFA*)

Wednesday, Oct. 6: The Life of Avicenna [d. 1037]; Proofs of Prophecy

1. Avicenna, *Autobiography*, 22-30 (packet)
2. Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, 149-198 (to be distributed)
3. Avicenna, *On the Proof of Prophecies*, 112-121 (packet)
4. Marmura, *Avicenna's Psychological Proof of Prophecy*, 49-56 (packet)

HERESY, APOSTASY AND TOLERANCE

Wednesday, Oct. 13: Ghazālī [d. 1111]

1. Ghazālī, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, xv-xxvii and 1-11 (packet)
2. Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, 97-109 (packet)
3. Van Ess, "Theology in Its Own Eyes: Division and Heresy in Islam," 1-44 (packet)

CAUSALITY AND MIRACLES

Wednesday, Oct. 20:

1. Marmura, "Ghazālī and Demonstration," (distributed in class)
2. Ghazālī, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, seventeenth discussion (196-207 of packet)
3. McGinnis, "Occasionalism, Natural Causation and Science in al-Ghazālī," (210-221 of packet)

Pay attention to Ghazālī's statement: "Observation, however, [only] shows the occurrence [of burning] at [the time of the contact with fire], but does not show the occurrence [of burning] by [the fire] and that there is no other cause for it" (*Incoherence*, Seventeenth Discussion, para. 5). What role does this statement play in Ghazālī's critique of the Avicennian position?

Discussion topic: Are God's hands tied by the laws of nature, or can he override them in order to create miracles?

THE POISON OF PHILOSOPHY

Wednesday, Oct. 27: Ibn Taymiyya [d. 1328]; Critique of Philosophy

1. Find youtube videos that illustrate the controversial character of Ibn Taymiyya
2. Ibn Taymiyya, *Against the Logicians*, xi-lii and 3-30 (packet)

Wednesday, Nov. 3: Ibn Taymiyya [d. 1328]; In and Out of Jail

1. S. Ahmed, *Ibn Taymiyya and the Satanic Verses* (E-Reserve) [required]
2. H. Algar, *Wahhabism: A Critical Essay*, 1-85 (on reserve at Frost) [required]
3. Little, "Did Ibn Taymiyya Have a Screw Loose?" 93-111 (packet) [recommended]

4. Jackson, "Ibn Taymiyya on Trial in Damascus," 41-85 (packet) [recommended]

POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Wednesday, Nov. 10: Fārābī and Avicenna [d. 1037]

1. Fārābī, *The Attainment of Happiness* (E-Reserve)
2. M. Mahdi, *Alfarabi on Philosophy and Religion* (E-Reserve)
3. Avicenna, *Healing: Metaphysics X* (E-Reserve)

FUNDAMENTALISM AND ISLAMISM

Wednesday, Nov. 17: Mawdudi [d. 1979] and [Khomeini [d. 1989]

1. Mawdudi, *The Islamic Law* (selections on E-Reserve)
2. Khomeini, *Islamic Government* (selections on E-Reserve)
3. Almond, Sivan, and Appleby, *Fundamentalism: Genus and Species*, (E-Reserve)

ISLAM IN NORTH AMERICA

Wednesday, Dec. 1: The Experience and Identity of American Muslims

1. D. Eck, *A New Religious America* (selections on E-Reserve)
2. K. GhaneaBassiri, *A History of Islam in America* (selections on E-Reserve)

Wednesday, Dec. 8: Class presentations of research projects

Wednesday, Dec. 15: Class presentations of research projects