

SAN FRANCISCO STATE UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
Spring 2013

ISLAMIC POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

PHIL 436
TTH 4:10-5:25
HUM 471

Instructor: Dr. Mohammad Azadpur
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DESCRIPTION:

The political turmoil in the Muslim Middle East and its far-reaching consequences are commonplace knowledge. What people may not be aware of is the long and rich tradition of political philosophy in the Islamic cultures of the middle-east. This course aims at a comprehensive introduction to Islamic political philosophy.

We begin with a survey of medieval Islamic philosophy; this survey includes the political writings of philosophers such as Alfarabi and Avempace. We are concerned with what these thinkers have to say on the purposes of the state, its relationship with the Qur'anic revelation (and the Islamic law), and its ideal organization. We also attempt to identify what makes classical Islamic political philosophy unique in relation to its Greek predecessors.

The second part of the course concentrates on the Islamic responses to modern Western politics. We read from texts by Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad Iqbal, Ali Shari'ati, and Ruhollah Khomeini. We will also draw from the relevant writings of Jean-Paul Sartre, Frantz Fanon, Norman O. Brown, and Michel Foucault in this segment of the course.

Next, we consider three issues in contemporary Islamic political thought. We address Islam and the politics of gender through readings from the works of Amina Wadud-Muhsin, Fatima Mernissi, and Leila Ahmed. Second, we will bring our considerations to bear on the neo-con's favorite, Samuel Huntington's essay "The Clash of Civilizations," and Edward Said's reply to it. Finally, we will deal with the more recent upheaval in the Islamic world, i.e., the so-called Arab Spring, through readings from the work of Hamid Dabashi.

This is primarily a course in political *philosophy*, but it does not and cannot remain within any narrow departmental limitations. Its non-traditional subject matter requires that the inquirer be open and attentive to approaches from a variety of disciplines. As a result, this course can be of interest not only to philosophy students, but also to those majoring in other areas of humanities and in the social sciences.

This course is also part of two GE Segment III clusters: (1) Islamic Societies and Cultures and (2) Religious Studies. Therefore, students can take this class to meet these Segment III requirements should they choose to do so. However, Segment III credit for the course depends on the completion of cluster requirements as described in the Class Schedule and Bulletin. The course is also on the list of electives for the minor in Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies.

TEXTS:

The main text for the course is Joshua Parens and Joseph C. Macfarland's *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011. Other material is available on iLearn.

REQUIREMENTS:

Class attendance and participation are required and count for 10% of the grade (based on the attendance record and meeting the TA at his or her office at least once). There will be two exams, each of which counts for 45% of the grade. There will also be an optional essay assignment to improve your grade. I will discuss that in class after the midterm.

TEACHING ASSISTANTS:

Allison Sherman (egranik@mail.sfsu.edu) and Sam Badger (eclanton@mail.sfsu.edu) are the graduate teaching assistants. Allison's office hours are W 3-4, and Sam can meet you TH 2-3. We also have an undergraduate TA, Paymun Zargar (paymun@mail.sfsu.edu). He is available TH 1-2. Their office is the Philosophy lounge (HUM 392).

WRITING ASSISTANCE:

There are two free writing assistance centers on campus. Use the links below for more information.

1-Community Access & Retention Program (CARP): <http://www.sfsu.edu/%7Ecarp1>

2-Learning Assistance Center (LAC): <http://www.sfsu.edu/%7Elac>

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:

Academic accommodation is available for students with disabilities. Please see the **DISABILITY PROGRAMS AND RESOURCE CENTER** ([HTTP://WWW.SFSU.EDU/~DPRC](http://WWW.SFSU.EDU/~DPRC)) in the Student Services Building 110 and talk to the instructor as soon as possible to discuss any accommodation that you may need for the course.

PLAGIARISM:

All work submitted for the course must be your own. Plagiarism will result in disciplinary action. For more details see: <http://www.sfsu.edu/~collhum/plagiarism.html>.

CALENDAR: This calendar is subject to revision.

I. INTRODUCTION.

1. **Jan 29-31:** The Greek Predecessors
 Plato's *Republic* (selections). On iLearn.
 Aristotle's *Politics* (selections). On iLearn.
2. **Feb 5:** The Islamic Background

II. MEDIEVAL ISLAMIC POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY.

3. **Feb 7, 12, 14:** Alfarabi's Political Thought.
 - *Medieval Political Philosophy*, Alfarabi's "The Attainment of happiness," and "The Political Regime."
 - *On the Perfect State* (selections, Handout).
 - Recommended Reading: Hans Daiber's "The Ruler as Philosopher: A New Interpretation of Alfarabi's View." On iLearn.
4. Sunni & Shi'i Medieval Political Thought
 - **Feb 19-21:** Ghazali and the Revival of Sunni Politics
 - Antony Black, "Al-Ghazali's Balance." On iLearn.
 - Mahdi, "The Political Orientation of Islamic Philosophy," on iLearn.
 - Recommended Reading: *Ghazali's Book of Counsel for Kings*, "Qualities required for Kings," on iLearn.

- **Feb 26-28:** Al-Tusi and the Shi'i Politics
 - Antony Black, "Nasir al-Din Tusi (1201-74): Social Philosophy and Status Groups," On iLearn.
 - Wilferd Madelung's "Nasir ad-Din Tusi's Ethics: Between Philosophy, Shi'ism, and Sufism." On iLearn.
 - *Nasirean Ethics*, selection from "On Politics," on iLearn.
- 5. **Mar 5-7:** Andalusian Political Philosophy.
 - *Medieval Political Philosophy*, Avempace's "The Governance of the Solitary."
 - Alexander Altmann's "Ibn Bajja on Man's Ultimate Felicity," on iLearn.
 - Recommended Reading: Mohammad Azadpur's "Interpreting Political Violence in Islamic Philosophy." <http://them.polylog.org/5/fam-en.htm>.

March 12: Review

March 14: Midterm Exam

- 6. **Mar 19-21:** Al-Afghani's Response to Imperialism
 - Al-Afghani's "The Benefits of Philosophy," and Nikki Keddie's "The Life of Sayyid Jamal al-Din al-Afghani" in *An Islamic Response to Imperialism*. Both on iLearn.

March 26, 28: No Class. Spring Recess

III. ISLAM AND MODERNITY: RESPONSES TO THE WEST.

- 7. **Apr 2-4:** Film: *The Battle of Algiers*
 - Selections from Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, and Jean Paul Sartre's introduction to *The Wretched of the Earth*. Both on iLearn.
- 8. **Apr 9-11:** The Governance of Jurists
 - Ruhollah Khomeini, *Islam & Revolution*, "The Form of Islamic Government," on iLearn.
 - Michel Foucault, "The Mythical Leader of the Iranian Revolt," and "Iran: The Spirit of a World Without Spirit." Both on iLearn.
 - Norman O. Brown, "Shi'ite Islam: The Politics of Gnosticism," on iLearn.
 - Recommended Readings: Michel Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom," on iLearn.
- 9. **Apr 16-18:** Iqbal on Islam and Democracy
 - Iqbal's "The Principle of Movement in the Structure of Islam," on iLearn..
 - Recommended Reading: Fazlur Rahman, "Muhammad Iqbal and Attaturk's Reforms," on iLearn
- 10. **Apr 23-25:** Shari'ati's Islamic Reply to Marxism
 - Ali Shariati, *Marxism and Other Western Fallacies*, selections from "Humanity Between Marxism and Religion," on iLearn.
 - Recommended Reading: Assef Bayat's "Shariati and Marx: A Critique of an 'Islamic' Critique of Marxism," on iLearn.

IV. ISLAM AND THE CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL DEBATE.

- 11. **Apr. 30-May 2:** Islam and the Politics of Gender
 - Fatima Mernissi, "A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam," on iLearn.
 - Amina Wadud-Muhsin, "Quran and Women," on iLearn.

- Abdulaziz Sachedina, "Woman, Half the Man? The Crisis of Epistemology in Islamic Jurisprudence," on iLearn.
- Leila Ahmed, *Women & Gender in Islam*, "Discourse of the Veil," on iLearn

12. **May 7-9:** The "Clash of Civilizations"

- Huntington's "The Clash of Civilizations," Said's reply: "The Clash of Ignorance," Safi's "I and Thou in a Fluid World: Beyond 'Islam versus the West'," All on iLearn.

13. **May 14-16:** The "Arab Spring"

- Selections from Hamid Dabashi's *Arab Spring: The End of Postcolonialism*, pp. 1-16; 155-170. Electronic book available through the card catalogue on the library's website.

May 18, 1:30-3:30: FINAL EXAM.