

THE ORIGINS OF ISLAMIC POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

The political philosophers of the medieval Islamic tradition were buffeted by two currents. As they looked around and tried to think about how to live as individuals and organize life in political communities, they noticed how much Greek predecessors like Plato and Aristotle contributed to their understanding of these questions. At the same time, they were drawn up by the fact that a new teaching – one based on revelation – claimed precedence over that older understanding. For some within the medieval Arabic and Islamic tradition, most notably the theologians and jurists, the teaching of those older Greek predecessors no longer had any value.

Yet some within the tradition deemed it important to prove the value of the old understanding. To do so, these individuals – the political philosophers – made it speak a new language and cast it in new paradigms.

For a number of reasons, what they had to teach is no longer held to be of interest. But precisely because it addresses the most important human questions – individual happiness, political well-being, and the issue of natural versus divine providence – it continues to seize our attention. To examine that older teaching and learn what the political philosophers within the medieval Arabic and Islamic tradition have to teach us about such important questions, it is essential to become acquainted with the thought of Alfarabi, 870-950 and Ibn Rushd (Averroes), 1126-1198. Alfarabi may be said to have founded political philosophy within the medieval Arabic-Islamic tradition, and Averroes is surely the most famous writer in it as well as the greatest commentator on Aristotle. In addition, a remarkable treatise by Ibn Tufayl (1110-1185) that looks as though it were something like a philosophical novel, provides great insight into the tradition as a whole.

Such readings provide an excellent introduction to the politics of the contemporary Middle East, one far too often neglected – this to the peril of politics today.

The questions we will pursue are difficult, albeit of prime importance for our political and personal life. To ensure some modicum of success, students must be willing to read **before** coming to class and to attend every class. Proper preparation for each class will require about 3 hours of reading, note-taking, and reflection. Those unable or unwilling to devote such time and effort will find other courses more attractive.

To receive credit, students must write a short critical analysis (1500-2000 words or 6-8 double-spaced pages) on each of the three authors, attend class, and contribute to class discussion. Each paper counts for 30 % of the final grade while attendance plus intelligent participation in class discussion counts for the remaining 10%.

Grades are assessed without curve such that 60-69 = D, 70-79 = C, 80-89 = B, and 90+ = A.

The first paper is due October 21, the second November 11, and the third December 17.

For the record:

1. The UMD Code of Academic Integrity will be enforced. In short, no cheating. See www.inform.edu/CampusInfo/Departments/po/code_acinteg.html.
2. Students with disabilities should see the instructor. Their needs will be accommodated.
3. The UMD policy of respecting the religious observances of students will be followed.

I strongly encourage students to take advantage of office hours and make contact outside of class with me, both to become acquainted with me and to discuss any problems they may have. In addition to posted hours, I will be happy to make special appointments.

READING SCHEDULE

CLASS 1, August 31	INTRODUCTION
CLASS 2, September 7	Alfarabi, <i>Attainment of Happiness</i> , Part One, Sections 1-21
CLASS 3, September 12	Alfarabi, <i>Attainment of Happiness</i> , Part Two, Sections 22-37
CLASS 4, September 14	Alfarabi, <i>Attainment of Happiness</i> , Part Three, Sections 38-49
CLASS 5, September 19	Alfarabi, <i>Attainment of Happiness</i> , Part Four, Sections 50-64
CLASS 6, September 21	Alfarabi, <i>Attainment of Happiness</i> , over-view
CLASS 7, September 26	Alfarabi, <i>Philosophy of Plato</i> , Parts One-Five, Sections 1-18
CLASS 8, September 28	Alfarabi, <i>Philosophy of Plato</i> , Parts Six-Ten, Sections 19-36
CLASS 9, October 3	Alfarabi, <i>Philosophy of Aristotle</i> , Part One, Sections 1-4
CLASS 10, October 5	Alfarabi, <i>Philosophy of Aristotle</i> , Part One, Sections 5-14
CLASS 11, October 10	Alfarabi, <i>Philosophy of Aristotle</i> , Parts Two-Four, Sections 15-33
CLASS 12, October 12	Alfarabi, <i>Philosophy of Aristotle</i> , Parts Five-Nine, Sections 34-73
CLASS 13, October 17	Alfarabi, <i>Philosophy of Aristotle</i> , Parts Ten-Thirteen, Sections 74-90
CLASS 14, October 19	Alfarabi, <i>Philosophy of Aristotle</i> , Parts Fourteen-Nineteen, Sections 91-99
October 21, First paper due	
CLASS 15, October 24	Alfarabi, <i>Philosophy of Aristotle</i> , over-view
CLASS 16, October 26	Ibn Tufayl, <i>Hayy Ibn Yaqzan</i> , pp. 95-103
CLASS 17, October 31	Ibn Tufayl, <i>Hayy Ibn Yaqzan</i> , pp. 103-129
CLASS 18, November 2	Ibn Tufayl, <i>Hayy Ibn Yaqzan</i> , pp. 129-156
CLASS 19, November 7	Ibn Tufayl, <i>Hayy Ibn Yaqzan</i> , pp. 156-166
CLASS 20, November 9	Ibn Tufayl, <i>Hayy Ibn Yaqzan</i> , over-view
November 11, Second paper due	
CLASS 21, November 14	Averroes, <i>The Decisive Treatise</i> , sections 1-10
CLASS 22, November 16	Averroes, <i>The Decisive Treatise</i> , sections 11-37
CLASS 23, November 21	Averroes, <i>The Decisive Treatise</i> , sections 38-58
THANKSGIVING, NO CLASS	
CLASS 24, November 28	Averroes, <i>The Decisive Treatise</i> , over-view
CLASS 25, November 30	Alfarabi, <i>Enumeration of the Sciences</i>
CLASS 26, December 5	Alfarabi, <i>Book of Religion</i> , sections 1-10
CLASS 27, December 7	Averroes, <i>The Decisive Treatise</i> , sections 11-27
CLASS 28, December 12	CONCLUSION

December 17, Third paper due

BOOKS TO ORDER

Alfarabi, Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, trans. Muhsin Mahdi (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001) ISBN 0-8014-9716-1. \$14.00

Alfarabi, The Political Writings: "Selected Aphorisms" and Other Texts, trans. Charles E. Butterworth (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001) ISBN 0-8014-8913-X. \$19.95

Ibn Tufayl, *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*, trans. Lenn Evan Goodman (New York: Gee Tee Bee, 1995); reprinted. ISBN 0-917232-30-9. \$18.00

Averroes, The Book of the Decisive Treatise, Determining the Connection Between the Law and Wisdom, and Epistle Dedicatory, trans. Charles E. Butterworth (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2001), ISBN 0-8425-2479-7. Distributed by University of Chicago Press; \$24.95.