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Faith and Reason in Islamic Thought and Civilization **(Writing Intensive)**

Course Overview and Description

To what extent do Islamic thought and civilization constitute a dogmatic versus a critical and/or rational tradition? The Qur'an recurrently commands its followers to think, meditate and use their reason. What does this reveal about the nature of faith in Islam? Further what implications does this 'call for thinking' have for the meaning of the sacred in Islam, the human-divine relationship and the way in which the scripture should be read?

This course will address the above questions through a survey of the main schools of Islamic thought at the height of Islamic civilization in the medieval period. We will initially start with a quick survey of the relation between reason and faith during the formative years of Islam and they way in which Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, received and interpreted the Qur'an together with his companions. Subsequently, we will briefly explore the emergence and development of the four main schools or better four main approaches to understanding Islam and the Islamic worldview. We will explore how Islamic theology, Islamic law, Islamic philosophy and Sufism—or the mystical tradition of Islam—each addressed the relation between reason and faith in its own unique way.

As far as Islamic Theology is concerned, we will start with how it developed and what its main subject matter is. We will then investigate as a case study two of the key problems of Islamic theology: free will versus determinism and God's nature and attributes particularly in connection with the problem of anthropomorphism. Turning to Islamic Law, we will carefully investigate how the Muslim legal scholars defined the principles of Islamic law and the methods of approaching them. Through this investigation we will explore to what extent dogmatic acceptance of the text took priority over rational analysis, how this formula differed from one school of Islamic law to the other and more importantly how these variations affect Muslim life. We will then turn to Islamic philosophy. After a briefly exploring the emergence and historical development of the Islamic philosophical tradition, we will study the famous debate on the relation between reason and faith between two of the key figures of Muslim intellectual history: Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and Averroes. As far as mysticism is concerned we will explore the definition and role assigned to reason in connection with faith in the works of one of the key founders of Islamic mysticism: Abu al-Qasim al-Junayd and his teacher al-Harith al-Muhasibi.

Course Objectives:

1. To acquire basic knowledge of Islam as a worldview and a civilization
2. To form a good understanding of the development of Islamic thought and its main schools.
3. To develop insight into the debate between rational versus dogmatic interpretations of Islam
4. To develop an ability to think and speak critically about current issues and concerns relevant to Islam and Muslims.

All Readings are available on Blackboard

1. Richard Martin and others. *Defenders of Reason in Islam: Mu'tazilism and Rational Theology from Medieval School to Modern Symbol*. Oneworld, 1997.
2. Averroës. *The Decisive Treatise*. Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2001.
3. Selections from Ibn Khaldun. *Prolegomena*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
4. Selections from Neal Robinson. *Islam a Concise Introduction*. Washington D.C.: George Town University Press, 1999. [Available online]
5. Selections from Lings, Martin. *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources*. Inner Traditions, 2006
6. Selections form Harry A. Wolfson. *The Philosophy of the Kalam*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976. [Available online]
7. Selections from Wael B. Hallaq. *Introduction to Islamic Law*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009
8. Selection from Ibn Taymiyya. *Against the Greek Logicians* (trans. Wael B. Hallaq).
9. Selections from Bernard G. Weiss. *The Search for God's Law: Islamic Jurisprudence in the Writings of Sayf al-Dīn al-Amidī*.
10. Selections from al-Ghazālī's *Deliverance from Error* and *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*
11. Selections from Ali Hassan Abd al-Qadir. *The Life, Personality and Writings of Al-Junayd*. London: Gibbs Memorial Trust, 1976.
12. Selections from Margaret Smith. *An early Mystic of Baghdad*. Philo Press, 1974.

Course Requirements and Grading

A. Four writing assignments (85% of final grade)

1. *Project: a short essay (1000 words) based on at least three interviews with Muslim colleagues or members of the Muslim community at the mosque*
 - a. The essay is worth 15% of your grade
 - b. Your report should investigate the general perceptions of the interviewees with regards to the dogmatic versus the critical/reflective nature of their religion
 - c. If possible the interviews should be conducted with both males and females.
2. *Two midterm papers*
 - a. Each midterm paper is worth 20% of your grade
 - b. Each paper should be 1500-2000 word, double spaced pages in 12-pitch font.
3. *Final paper*
 - a. The final paper is worth 30% of your grade.
 - b. The paper should be 2500-3000 words, double spaced pages in 12-pitch font.
 - c. The topics of the papers will be handed out in class two weeks before the due date.
 - d. The due dates of the paper are listed on the class schedule.

B. Attendance and participation (15% of final grade)

1. *Class attendance and participation*
 - a. Worth 50% of your participation grade.

- b. Regular attendance and constructive class participation are both course requirements. Your participation grade will be based on your attendance as well as on the quality and quantity of your contributions to class discussion.

Important Note: Missing more than 2 classes except for valid and documented conditions may result in your loss of whole participation grade.

2. *Blackboard participation*

- a. Worth 50% of your participation grade
- b. I will be posting a discussion question/comment on blackboard every **Monday by 5 p.m.** Your Blackboard participation grade will be based on your comments/questions on the posting. You may post your comments/questions any time from the time the posting is made up till **Sunday 12:00 p.m. of that week.** (*Blackboard discussions will start Monday, January 21st*). Maria and I will be monitoring the discussions regularly.

C. Letter/Number Grade Conversion Table for This Course:

	B+ 80-84	C+ 65-69	D+ 54-56
A 90-100	B 75-79	C 60-64	D 50-53
A- 85-89	B- 70-74	C- 57-59	

D. A Final Word about Grades

You must complete all of the course requirements by the end of the semester in order to receive a passing grade. Incompletes will be granted only in cases of actual emergency.

Course Policies

1. Paper Submission: You should plan to submit a print out of your report/paper in class on the day it is due. However, if for any reason you can not print out either of them, you may email it to me before class. I will correct, comment on and grade electronically submitted reports/papers electronically as well and email them back to you.
2. Academic Honesty and Plagiarism: The Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the Policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about instructor and general academic expectations with regard to proper citation of sources in written work. The policy also governs the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments as well as the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class activities. Serious sanctions can result from academic dishonesty of any sort.
For more information and the complete policy, see <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu> . Students found to cheat will receive an F for that assignment. Students have a right to appeal.
3. Disability: Students who are in need of disability-related academic accommodations must register with the Office of Disability Services (ODS), 804 University Avenue, Room 309, 315-443-4498. Students with authorized disability-related accommodations should provide a current Accommodation Authorization Letter from ODS to the instructor and review those accommodations with the instructor. Accommodations, such as exam administration, are not provided retroactively; therefore, planning for accommodations as

early as possible is necessary. For further information, see the ODS website, Office of Disability Services <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu/>

4. **New Policy Regarding Faith Tradition Observances:** This fall is the first semester in which SU will not have non-instructional days for any religious holiday and the first semester in which students must notify instructors by the end of the second week of classes when they will be observing their religious holiday(s). SU's religious observances policy, found at http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.htm recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holy days according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes. Students will have access to a notification form through MySlice for two weeks beginning the first day of class. On Monday, September 12, instructors will have continuous access via a religious observances icon in Faculty Services/Faculty Center to a list of students in each class they are teaching who have provided notification.

Weekly Reading Schedule

Tuesday January 15th through Tuesday January 22nd

1. General Introduction to the course, its structure and its objectives
2. General Introduction to the emergence of Islamic history and the evolution of Islamic civilization.
3. Muhammad and his companions and the dialectical approach to the Qur'an

Tuesday January 22nd through Tuesday January 29th

1. Islamic Theology: Islamic metaphysics, its subject matter and its development
2. Islamic Theology: The Mu'tazilites and the rise rational theology—*Defenders of Reason in Islam*

Tuesday January 29th through Tuesday February 5th

1. Islamic Theology: The Mu'tazilites and the rise rational theology—*Defenders of Reason in Islam*

Tuesday February 5th through Tuesday February 12th

1. Islamic Theology: Between traditionalism and rationalism--Ash'arite responses to the Mu'tazilite on the question of God's Attributes and the problem of anthropomorphism

Tuesday February 12th through February 19th

1. Islamic Theology: Between traditionalism and rationalism--Ash'arite responses to the Mu'tazilite on the question of God's Attributes and the problem of anthropomorphism **Plus** the problem of freedom of will versus determinism

Tuesday February 19th through Tuesday February 26th

1. Islamic Theology: Between traditionalism and rationalism--Ash'arite responses to the Mu'tazilite on the problem of freedom of will versus determinism

Plus First Midterm Paper (due on February 21st)

Tuesday February 26th through Tuesday March 5th

1. Islamic Law: Its emergence, its principles and the development of the schools of Islamic law—selections from Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddima* **plus** selections from Wael Hallaq's *Introduction to Islamic Law*

Tuesday March 5th through Tuesday March 12th

1. Islamic Law: Its emergence, its principles and the development of the schools of Islamic law-- selections from Wael Hallaq's *Introduction to Islamic Law*
2. Islamic Law: Logical analogy in Amidi's Shafi'ite school—selections from Bernard's Weiss's *God's Law*

Tuesday March 12th through Tuesday March 19st

SPRING BREAK

Tuesday March 19th through March 26th

1. Islamic Law: Logical analogy in Amidi's Shafi'ite school—selections from Bernard's Weiss's *God's Law*
2. Islamic Law: Ibn Taymiyya, the traditionalist approach to Islamic law and the attempt to refute Logic—selections from the *Refutation of Logic*

Plus Project Paper (due on March 21st)

Tuesday March 26th though Tuesday April 2nd

1. Islamic Law: Ibn Taymiyya, the traditionalist approach to Islamic law and the attempt to refute Logic—selections from the *Refutation of Logic*
2. Islamic Philosophy: Overview of the emergence and history of Islamic Philosophy—selections from Henry Corbin's *History of Islamic Philosophy*

Plus Second Midterm Paper (due on March 28th)

Tuesday April 2nd through Tuesday April 9th

1. Islamic Philosophy: al-Ghazali and the critique of philosophy—selections from the *Incoherence of the Philosophers*

Tuesday April 9th through Tuesday April 16th

1. Islamic Philosophy: Averroes's response to al-Ghazali—*Decisive Treatise*

Tuesday April 16th through Tuesday April 23rd

1. Islamic Mysticism (al-Muhasibi)—selections from *An Early Mystic of Baghdad*

Tuesday April 23rd through April 30th

1. Islamic Mysticism (al-Junayd)—selections from *The Life, Personality and Writings of Al-Junayd*

Final Paper Due on May 10th

Good Luck!