

Philosophy and Theology in the Medieval Islamic World (HIST 2122/REL 214)

Credit Hours: 4

Pre-Req: None

Instructor Name: Baqar Hassan Syed

Schedule: Monday to Friday (10:00 AM – 12:50 PM)

This course introduces students to some of the most important philosophers and theologians living in the Islamic world up until the twelfth century C.E., with an emphasis on understanding how their ideas responded to their “ideological” contexts. “Ideology” here refers broadly to commitments and beliefs in ideas and ideals, including those that may be considered intellectual, political or religious. We will discuss how Jewish, Christian and Muslim thinkers developed ideas that addressed questions peculiar to the concerns of their time, place and community. Students will also be encouraged to reflect on the limitations and compromises involved in intellectual projects and how relevant ideas remain beyond their original contexts to the concerns of the present.

We shall begin with a discussion on early theological disputes among Muslims which gradually developed into traditions of kalām, systematic Islamic theology. Next we shall discuss the reception of Greek thought into Arabic and the incorporation of Greek ideas into the intellectual framework of revealed religions. With this background, we shall move to discuss particular thinkers. These include the kalām -inspired Jewish thinker Saadia Gaon, Christian and Muslim Aristotelians in Baghdad, Muslim philosophers such as Abu Bakr al-Rāzī, Avicenna and Averroes, theologians such as Qā ḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, al-Ash‘arī and al-Ghazālī, and Jewish thinkers in al-Andalus, represented most notably by Maimonides.