

# Philosophy in the Islamic World

## A Very Short Introduction

By Peter Adamson

### Questions for Thought and Discussion

- To what extent is philosophy in the Islamic world a matter of influence from the Greeks, as opposed to an indigenous cultural development?
- What was the relationship between Islamic philosophy and Islamic theology (*kalam*)? Can the ideas of theologians like the Mutazilites and Asharites be considered as genuinely 'philosophical'?
- Should medieval Jewish philosophy, and the contribution of Christians living in the Islamic world, be considered alongside philosophy by Muslims under the rubric of "philosophy in the Islamic world" or should one treat Jewish thought separately?
- How do developments in the past century of Islam show the influence of earlier thinkers and movements?
- Can reason be used to establish a basis for religious belief, or must belief in revelation be independent of reasoning? Could reason even establish the same beliefs as a revealed religion?
- Was Avicenna successful in his attempt to establish God as a Necessary Existent? How strong is his proof, and what are its possibly unwelcome implications?
- How does Mulla Sadra's conception of being depart from earlier ideas about being?
- To what extent can philosophy, and especially Avicenna's ideas, be seen as fitting with the mysticism of Sufis like Ibn Arabi and Rumi?
- Who has the better of the debate over the eternity of the world?
- And why did philosophers in this tradition spend so much effort arguing over the eternity of the world in the first place?
- Is Suhrawardi's idea of 'knowledge by presence' an improvement over the traditional Aristotelian ideas about knowledge?
- Can doing philosophy make you a better person, serving as a 'medicine for the soul' like normal medicine treats the body?
- What did Muslim thinkers understand to be the difference between humans and other animals? Did this understanding give them a reason to treat animals benevolently?
- Does al-Farabi make a convincing case that the ideal political ruler must also be a prophet?
- What role have women played in Islamic intellectual history?

### Other publications by Peter Adamson

*A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Classical Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

*A History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps: Philosophy in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

*Studies in Early Arabic Philosophy* (Aldershot: Variorum, 2015).

*Studies on Plotinus and al-Kindī* (Aldershot: Variorum, 2014).

[with P.E. Pormann] *The Philosophical Works of al-Kindī* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2012).

*Al-Kindī* (Great Medieval Thinkers) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

*The Arabic Plotinus: a Philosophical Study of the "Theology of Aristotle"* (London: Duckworth, 2002).

[co-edited with R.C Taylor] *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[edited volume] *Interpreting Avicenna: Critical Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).