

Medieval philosophy: from the 10th to the 14th century

Course description

This course provides an introduction to medieval thought from the beginning of the classical period of Islam through the mysticism and scholasticism of the fourteenth century west. The central development of this period, common to Islamic, Jewish, and Christian thought, is the rise of scholasticism. It is this development which provides the medieval period with both its distinct character and its rough chronological boundaries.

Scholasticism is characterized by two central undertakings: i) that of harmonizing natural philosophy with revealed doctrine; and ii) that of providing a relatively complete codification of the latter, by way of a reconciliation of authorities. The first of these endeavors appears to have first arisen in the Islamic world; the second is emblematic of developments in the twelfth century west, particularly those spurred on by Peter Abelard and Peter Lombard. Though earlier Christian figures like Tertullian and Justin Martyr engaged with philosophy, they tended to either dismiss philosophy as unauthoritative or see philosophy and religion as one and the same thing. In the world of classical Islam, philosophy appears for the first time as both authoritative, as it generally was not for the Latin western fathers, and distinct or even foreign, as it generally was not for the Greek-speaking east. And though figures like John of Damascus attempted compendia of sacred doctrine, they did not conceive of their doing so as a reconciliation of apparently conflicting authorities; though figures like Maximus the Confessor wrote clarifications of passages from earlier authorities, they did not do so as part of a constructive, complete synthesis of these authorities. The contributions of scholasticism, in turn, condition both i) the possible reactions to it, as with Al-Ghazali and Bernard of Clairvaux; and ii) the manner in which earlier figures are taken up by later historiography – either as rational figures belonging to philosophy or as religious thinkers belonging not to philosophy, but theology.

This course introduces the student to the full range of medieval intellectual life across centuries and civilizations, to philosophers and those not belonging to philosophy. By the end of the course, the student shall have attained an understanding of the main currents in medieval intellectual thought and their relations to each other, along with a grasp of their continued ramifications for thinking today.

Course requirements

Homework (50%) – Questions are assigned for each reading, to be completed prior to discussion of the text. Assignments are collected periodically and on random days at the beginning of class, and graded for quality and comprehension.

Final paper (50%)– The student will write a paper on a figure or theme discussed during the course. 3000 words or fewer.

Required texts

Hyman, Arthur, James J. Walsh, and Thomas Williams (eds.) *Philosophy in the Middle Ages: The Christian, Islamic, and Jewish Traditions*. Third Edition. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2010.

Additional texts will be provided.

Syllabus

Week of	Monday	Wednesday	Friday
Week 1	Introduction	Al-Farabi, <i>The Principles of Existing Things</i> .	Ibn Sina, <i>The Cure</i> , 6.1-6.2.
Week 2	Ibn Gabirol, <i>The Fountain of Life</i> , selections.	Anselm, <i>Proslogion</i> , 1-5.	Anselm, <i>Proslogion</i> , 6-13.
Week 3	Anselm, <i>Proslogion</i> , 14-21.	Anselm, <i>Proslogion</i> , 22-26.	Gaunilo, <i>On Behalf of the Fool</i> .
Week 4	Anselm, <i>Response</i> .	Peter Abelard, <i>Ethics</i> , selections.	Bernard of Clairvaux, <i>Sermons on the Song of Songs</i> , 1.
Week 5	Richard of St. Victor, <i>On the Trinity I</i> , 1-10.	Richard of St. Victor, <i>On the Trinity I</i> , 11-25.	Hildegard of Bingen, <i>Book of Divine Works</i> , part 1, vision 1.
Week 6	Ibn Rushd, <i>The Decisive Treatise</i> .	Moshe ben Maimon, <i>Guide for the Perplexed I</i> , 31-36.	Roger Bacon, <i>Compendium of the Study of Theology II</i> , 1-2.
Week 7	Bonaventure, <i>Journey of the Mind to God</i> , prologue, 1	Bonaventure, <i>Journey of the Mind to God</i> , 2.	Bonaventure, <i>Journey of the Mind to God</i> , 3.
Week 8	Bonaventure, <i>Journey of the Mind to God</i> , 4-5.	Bonaventure, <i>Journey of the Mind to God</i> , 6-7.	Siger of Brabant, <i>Question on the Eternity of the World</i> .
Week 9	Thomas Aquinas, <i>ST Ia</i> , q. 2, art. 1.	Thomas Aquinas, <i>ST Ia</i> , q. 2, art. 3.	Thomas Aquinas, <i>ST Ia</i> , q. 5, art. 1.
Week 10	Thomas Aquinas, <i>ST Ia</i> , q. 11, art. 1.	Thomas Aquinas, <i>ST Ia</i> , q. 13, art. 5.	Thomas Aquinas, <i>ST Ia</i> , q. 75, art. 1.
Week 11	John Duns Scotus, <i>A Treatise on God as First Principle</i> , sect. 1.	John Duns Scotus, <i>A Treatise on God as First Principle</i> , sec. 2.	John Duns Scotus, <i>A Treatise on God as First Principle</i> , sec. 3.
Week 12	John Duns Scotus, <i>A Treatise on God as First Principle</i> , sec. 4.	William of Ockham, <i>Predestination, God's Foreknowledge, and Future Contingents</i> , q. 1	William of Ockham, <i>Predestination, God's Foreknowledge, and Future Contingents</i> , q. 2, art. 1-2.
Week 13	William of Ockham, <i>Predestination, God's Foreknowledge, and Future Contingents</i> , q. 2, art. 3-4.	Catherine of Siena, <i>Dialogue</i> , 'The Way of Perfection.'	Semester wrap-up.