

Patristic and early medieval philosophy: from the 4th to the 9th century

Dr. Jacob Archambault

Course description

A survey of philosophical developments in the intellectual context of eastern and western Christianity from the fourth to the ninth century. In this course, we look at the main thinkers of Byzantine and Latin Christendom from Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine to John of Damascus and John Scotus Eriugena. Though elements of the period covered here are sometimes handled in surveys of the medieval period as a whole, it is common for the greater part of such surveys to be devoted to the 11th to 14th centuries, roughly from Anselm of Canterbury to William of Ockham. This contextualization, however, unintentionally obscures the differences between the earlier and later periods, ordering the study of earlier figures to medieval scholasticism, or even early modernity, as its end.

To remedy this, the present course offers a sustained look at this earlier, nearly 600-year period. To provide reasonable internal contextualization, our readings are self-contained, complete or near-complete texts; to retain relevant connections to later periods, our authors are those having exercised a strong influence on later philosophers or philosophically-inclined theologians – an influence that continues to shape our understanding of the relation of these texts to philosophy as such. By the end of the course, the student shall have garnered a deeper understanding of this rich period of western religious thought and its influence on later developments, along with an appreciation of the ways patristic and early medieval figures understood the connections between sacred doctrine and philosophical reflection.

Course requirements

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

Texts

Augustine. *On Free Choice of the Will*. Translated, with Introduction, by Thomas Williams. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1993.

Boethius. *Consolation of Philosophy*. Translated, with Introduction and Notes, by Joel C. Relihan. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2001.

Pseudo-Dionysius. *The Divine Names and the Mystical Theology*. Translated from the Greek with an Introductory Study by John D. Jones. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980.

John of Damascus. *Writings*. Fathers of the Church Patristic Series, Book 37. Washington, D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 1999.

Additional texts will be provided.

Syllabus

Week of	Monday	Thursday
Week 1	Introduction	Gregory of Nyssa, <i>On the Making of Man</i> , 1-15.
Week 2	Gregory of Nyssa, <i>On the Making of Man</i> , 16-30.	Augustine, <i>On Free Choice of the Will</i> , 1.
Week 3	Augustine, <i>On Free Choice of the Will</i> , 2.	Augustine, <i>On Free Choice of the Will</i> , 3.
Week 4	Augustine, <i>The Teacher</i> .	Pseudo-Dionysius, <i>The Divine Names</i> , 1-3.
Week 5	Pseudo-Dionysius, <i>The Divine Names</i> , 4-5.	Pseudo-Dionysius, <i>The Divine Names</i> , 6-9.
Week 6	Pseudo-Dionysius, <i>The Divine Names</i> , 10-11.	Pseudo-Dionysius, <i>The Divine Names</i> , 12-13.
Week 7	Pseudo-Dionysius, <i>The Mystical Theology</i> .	Boethius, <i>The Consolation of Philosophy</i> , 1.
Week 8	Boethius, <i>The Consolation of Philosophy</i> , 2.	Boethius, <i>The Consolation of Philosophy</i> , 3.
Week 9	Boethius, <i>The Consolation of Philosophy</i> 4.	Boethius, <i>The Consolation of Philosophy</i> , 5.
Week 10	Maximus the Confessor, <i>Ambiguum</i> 7.	John of Damascus, <i>Fount of Knowledge</i> , I, 1-7.
Week 11	John of Damascus, <i>Fount of Knowledge</i> , I, 8-17.	John of Damascus, <i>Fount of Knowledge</i> , I, 29-48.
Week 12	John of Damascus, <i>Fount of Knowledge</i> , I, 49-68.	John of Damascus, <i>Fount of Knowledge</i> , III, Bk. 1, 1-8.
Week 13	John of Damascus, <i>Fount of Knowledge</i> , III, Bk. 1, 9-14.	John Scotus Eriugena, <i>On the Division of Nature</i> , selections.