

Medieval & Early Modern Philosophy

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Student Hours: Thursday, 1-3 pm, Stuart 222, or other times by request.

Summary: The (impossibly large) task of this course is to consider the history of philosophy from the end of the Roman Empire until the Scottish Enlightenment. This period can be divided chronologically into two rough groups: the medieval philosophers, and the early modern philosophers. The medieval philosophers can be seen as united around a concern to make philosophy in some (extremely broad) sense accountable to certain core elements of religious doctrine. The early modern philosophers add a concern with accountability to certain core discoveries of the scientific revolution, although they do not give up an interest in religious doctrine entirely. For the most part, the early moderns also orient themselves around rejecting a certain, scholastic strand in medieval philosophy. However, medieval philosophy is a much richer and more diverse field than the early modern caricature of it.

This course is divided into four parts. The constraints of the quarter system will force us to focus primarily on the early modern tradition. In the first part, we will study the medieval philosophers Aquinas and Ockham. These can be seen as two representatives of the so-called scholastic tradition which the early moderns took themselves to be rejecting. In the next three parts, we will consider three alternative early modern approaches to philosophy—the method of doubt, the principle of sufficient reason, and empiricism—as well as medieval antecedents for each of these three approaches.

Texts: No texts are required for purchase for this course. We will study all texts in translations to be made available through Canvas.

Course Requirements:

1. 15%: Course Participation and Attendance: Attendance in both class and section is mandatory, and unexcused absences will significantly harm your participation grade. Participation is expected in section and welcomed in class. Good participation is a matter of both making positive contributions in class and serving as a good classroom citizen.
2. 25%: 5–6 page midterm paper: A 5–6 page midterm paper, double spaced, on your choice of topics to be distributed on Canvas, due Feb 10 at 5 pm.
3. 30%: 6–7 page final paper: A 6–7 page final paper, double spaced, on your choice of topics to be distributed on Canvas, due Mar 13 at 5 pm.
4. 30%: Final exam.

Policy Statements:

1. Late Papers and Extensions: For each day that a paper is late, it will be penalized 2/3rds of a letter grade. Late papers will only be accepted up to four days after the assignment is due. For reasons of fairness, extensions will only be granted in cases of clear need. Please contact me as soon as you think that you may need an extension so we can work out an appropriate plan.
2. Plagiarism and Academic Integrity: You must document all of your source material. If you take any text from somebody else, you must make it clear the text is being quoted and where the text comes from. You must also cite any sources from which you obtain numbers, ideas, or other material. If you

have any questions about what does or does not constitute plagiarism, ask! Plagiarism is a serious offense and will be treated according to university policy. It is also your responsibility to make sure you have turned in a readable pdf or docx for all paper assignments.

3. Disabilities: Any student with a documented disability needing academic adjustments or accommodations is requested to speak with me or email me by the end of the first week of class. All discussions will remain confidential.
4. Laptops: Laptops and tablets will be permitted in class so you can have access to our readings. However, note that electronics use has been shown to decrease class performance (cf. Ravizza et al, "Logged in and Zoned Out," Psychol Sci. 2017 Feb, 28(2):171-180). You should feel free to use a laptop or tablet to look up a section of our reading, but I encourage students to take notes with pencil and paper.

Tentative Schedule: (subject to change)

1. Jan 7: Intro, no reading.

The Scholastic Background

2. Jan 9: Form and Matter: Ockham, *Summula philosophiae naturalis*, Book 1, Chapters 1–2, 9–10, 15–19
3. Jan 14: Theory of Mind: Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Part I, Questions 75.1–2, 76.1, 84.6, 85.1

The Method of Doubt

4. Jan 16: Descartes, *Meditations*: Letter, Preface, Synopsis, *Meditation 1*
5. Jan 21: Descartes, *Meditation 2*; Augustine, *De trinitate* 15.12.21
6. Jan 23: Descartes, *Meditation 3–5*; Aquinas, "The Five Ways": *Summa theologiae* Part I, Question 2.3
7. Jan 28: Descartes, *Meditation 6*; Correspondence between Descartes and Princess Elisabeth
8. Jan 30: Malebranche, *Search After Truth* 6.2.3; Cavendish, Letter 30

The Principle of Sufficient Reason

9. Feb 4: Du Châtelet, *Foundations of Physics*, Chapter 1; Abelard, *Theologica scholarium* III.27–56
10. Feb 6: Leibniz, *Discourse Concerning Metaphysics* 1–14, 22, 30-31; Voltaire, "Poem on the Lisbon Disaster"

Feb 10, 5 pm: Midterm paper due.

11. Feb 11: Leibniz, *Monadology*
12. Feb 13: Spinoza, *Ethics* 1def1–1p14
13. Feb 18: Spinoza, *Ethics* 1p15–1app
14. Feb 20: Spinoza, *Ethics* 2def1–2p13s

Empiricism

15. Feb 25: Locke, *Essay*, Book 1.2; Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* 2–3 (Hume's *Enquiry* is available here: <https://davidhume.org/texts/e/full.>)
16. Feb 27: Locke, *Essay*, 2.8; Berkeley, *Dialogue* 1
17. Mar 3: Berkeley, *Dialogue* 2–3
18. Mar 5: Hume, *Enquiry* 4; al-Ghazālī, *Incoherence* Discussion 17
19. Mar 10: Hume, *Enquiry* 5, 7

March 13, 5 pm: Term paper due

March 19, 10:30-12:30: Final exam