

# MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHY

(6AANB023)

SPRING 2026

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In this module, we will look at philosophy from around the 4th to the 14th centuries. We will be especially concerned with how philosophers understood the basic metaphysical constituents of the material world, particularly of matter itself. Is matter necessarily extended? Is it composed of atoms? Is the doctrine of Aristotelian matter-form composition compatible with the doctrine of creation, as it was understood by medieval Jewish, Islamic, and Christian thinkers? While most of the course will be concerned primarily with metaphysical issues, we will have occasions to digress into related fields in the history of science and even in ethics.

**Required Texts.** There is no required textbook. Readings will be made available for the students, once enrolled.

## Expectations and Assignments.

**Attendance and in-class participation:** Conversation is essential to philosophy.

Everyone will be expected to come to class having done the assigned mandatory readings, *and* having written down at least two questions concerning those readings. These questions may be clarificatory, or put forward objections, or engage with any part of the reading in an incisive manner.

**Formative assessment:** An argument reconstruction paper on one of the first few topics of the class. Details will follow.

**Summative assessment:** Details will follow; see also the Student Handbook.

**Electronic devices:** According to plenty of research, electronic note-taking and reading on screen adversely affects deep understanding. Thus, students are strongly encouraged to use analog means instead.

**Plagiarism:** If you use or copy a source without properly citing it, whether this act is intentional or not, you commit plagiarism. Please refer to the Student Handbook for more details.

**Generative AI:** you are permitted to use spell check and grammar check tools, but you are not permitted to use AI to generate either whole or parts of the essay you are going to turn in. See the Student Handbook for more details.

**Lateness:** For the department's policy on late summative assessment, please see the Student Handbook. If you have any concerns regarding the formative assessment, please ask me directly and as soon as possible.

**Special Accommodations:** Students with special needs requiring accommodations should please get in touch with Student Services Disability Support ([disability@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:disability@kcl.ac.uk)) as soon as possible.

**Tentative Schedule of Readings.** The schedule is tentative, but we will make every reasonable effort to stick to it unless major reasons dictate otherwise. All the readings will be made accessible to students once enrolled. ★ denotes optional readings, which may help you to understand the issue at hand better, but are not required for the seminar.

**Week 1, 16/01:** Introduction; the historiography of medieval philosophy; Aristotle, hylomorphism, and the problem of change

- C.S. Lewis, “On the reading of old books”; Aristotle, *Physics* (sel.).
- ★ Gill, *Substance in Aristotle*, ch. 3.

**Week 2, 23/01:** Augustine and the problem of creation *tota simul*

- Augustine, *On Genesis* (sel.); Mechthild of Magdeburg, *The Flowing Light* (sel.)
- ★ Brady, “St Augustine’s Theory of Seminal Reasons”; Toth, “Creation”.

**Week 3, 30/01:** Gregory of Nyssa’s idealism

- Gregory of Nyssa, *Heraclaeon* (sel.)
- ★ Marmodoro, “Gregory of Nyssa on Creation”; Greig, “The Bundle Theory”

**Week 4, 6/02:** Avicenna on creation from nothing

- Avicenna, *Fons vitae* V (sel.)
- ★ Laumakis, “Avicenna on Creation *ex nihilo*”

**Week 5, 13/02:** Al-Ghazali on the eternity of the world

- Al-Ghazali, *Incoherence of the Philosophers* (sel.)
- ★ Moad, “Al-Ghazali’s Position”

**20/02:** Reading week (no class)

**Week 6, 27/02:** Prime matter, potency, and actuality

- Scotus, *Metaphysics commentary* VII.5
- ★ Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes*, ch. 3

**Week 7, 6/03:** The problem of seminal reasons

- Henry of Ghent and Roger Marston on seminal reasons
- ★ Etzkorn, “The Grades of the Form according to Roger Marston”

**Week 8, 13/03:** The problem of elemental mixture

- Aquinas, *On the mixture of the elements*
- ★ Wood & Weisberg, “Interpreting Aristotle on Mixture”

**Week 9, 20/03:** The problem of atomism

- Autrecourt, *Universal Treatise* (sel.)
- ★ Grellard, “Nicholas of Autrecourt’s Atomistic Physics”

**Week 10, 27/03:** Some borderline cases: celestial matter

- Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I.66.2; Auriol on the matter of the stars and planets
- ★ Grant, *Planets, Stars, and Orbs*, ch. 12.