

# MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHY (6AANB023 / 7AAN6018)

AUTUMN 2024

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**Course Description.** In this course, we will look at philosophy from around the 4th to the 14th centuries. We will especially consider how thinkers of the period characterized free will, whether they thought we had any, and some related philosophical and theological difficulties.

## 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. **Due: 4-11, 16:00 (11-11 for MA students).**

**Summative assessment:** A research paper on either a pre-assigned topic or a topic of your choice. Details will follow. **Due: 13-01, 16:00 (20-01 for MA students).**

**Electronic devices:** While you may use your computer to have the readings at hand, you should be aware that according to plenty of research, electronic note-taking and reading on screen adversely affects deep understanding.<sup>1</sup> 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.

**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.

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1. See, e.g., Mueller and Oppenheimer, "The Pen is Mightier than the Keyboard," *Psychological Science*, 2014; Alexander and Singer, "A new study," *Business Insider*, October 15, 2017.

**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.

**Week 1, 26/09:** Introduction; The historiography of medieval philosophy; the role of Faith and Reason in medieval philosophy.

Reading: Lewis, *The Discarded Image* (sel.); Aquinas on Faith and Reason.

**Week 2, 03/10:** Augustine: Free will and the origin of evil; the first evil choice.

Reading: Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, book 1.

**Week 3, 10/10:** Nemesius: an early Christian anthropology

Reading: *On the Nature of Man*, 29.

**Week 4, 17/10:** Anselm and the fall of the devil. The puzzle of the first evil choice continues.

Reading: Anselm, *On the Fall of the Devil* (sel.).

**Week 5, 24/10:** Free will in Arabic philosophy; Al-Ghazali on the origin of the will.

Reading: Al-Ghazali, *Incoherence* (sel.).

**31/10:** Reading week (no class)

**Week 6, 07/11:** Aquinas on free choice.

Reading: Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 83.

**Week 7, 14/11:** Henry of Ghent on the will and the intellect; the primacy of the will.

Reading: Henry of Ghent, *Quodlibet* I, q. 14.

**Week 8, 21/11:** Duns Scotus on the willing of happiness.

Reading: Scotus, *Ordinatio* IV, supp. d. 49, qq. 9–10.

**Week 9, 28/11:** Will and virtues in some medieval women thinkers.

Reading: Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls* (sel.).

**Week 10, 05/12:** Free will in Jewish philosophy: a case study of Josef Albo.

Reading: Albo, *Book of Principles*, IV.25, 27.

**Further Resources.** You are not expected to consult any additional resources for the class, but if interested in a particular issue, these would be good places to start:

- [The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#)
- *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny, Jan Pinborg (Cambridge: CUP, 1988).
- *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Robert Pasnau and Christina Van Dyke (Cambridge: CUP, 2010).
- Thomas Pink, *Free Will: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: OUP, 2004).
- Tobias Hoffmann, *Free Will and the Rebel Angels in Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: CUP, 2021).
- Christina Van Dyke, *A Hidden Wisdom: Medieval Contemplatives on Self-Knowledge, Reason, Love, Persons, and Immortality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).
- various *Cambridge Companion* volumes (to Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, etc.)