

MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHY

Course: PHIL 206
Semester: Spring 2014
Professor: Peter Groff
Times: TR 2:30-3:52 pm
Location: Carnegie 109

Office: Vaughn Lit. 227
Phone: x. 73130
**Office hours: TR 11 am - 12 pm, or
by appointment**
E-mail: pgroff@bucknell.edu

Required texts:

St. Augustine, *City of God*, tr. Bettenson (Penguin Classics)
Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, tr. Marmura (Brigham Young University Press)
Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, tr. Rabin (Hackett Publishing Company)
St. Thomas Aquinas, *A Shorter Summa*, tr./ed. Kreeft (Ignatius)

Course Description:

“The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there.”
—L. P. Hartley, *The Go-Between*

The medieval period covers an enormous swath of time in the history of philosophy—roughly a thousand years or so—and it contains some of the liveliest, most interesting and most crucial philosophical insights to be found in that great conversation. Yet it is frequently overlooked or portrayed as though it were simply a very long and dark intermission between the Greeks and the moderns. This course explores some of the key figures and ideas of this rich and unjustly neglected period. Our approach will be a comparative one, focusing on various intellectual crosspollinations that were then taking place between the three major philosophical traditions in the medieval period: Christian, Islamic and Jewish.

A lot of important thinkers can emerge over the course of a millennium. Instead of trying to do justice to all of them, we will undertake a selective, guided tour through the key writings of the four biggest thinkers of the Middle Ages: St. Augustine’s *City of God*, Avicenna’s *The Healing*, Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed*, and St. Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Theologica*. Studying these texts will give us the opportunity to examine some of the most thoughtful and powerful responses to the questions that captivated medieval philosophers: the existence and nature of God, the problem of evil, free will and its relation to God’s omnipotence, omniscience and providence, the ontological status of the natural world, the soul and the intellect, the good life for human beings, the normative claims of culture, tradition and prophetic revelation, the relation between faith and reason, and the nature and meaning of history. The responses these thinkers offer to such fundamental questions helped to shape not only the intellectual world of the Middle Ages, but also of modernity.

In addition to understanding these thinkers (and by extension, one of the major periods in the history of philosophy), the general educational goals of this class are: (1) to develop the capacity to read and analyze complex, abstract philosophical texts and to explain and evaluate these texts and arguments in a critical fashion; (2) to acquire an appreciation of the fundamental ambiguities and complexities involved in the human attempt to answer questions about knowing, valuing, and living and (3) to be able to take a reasoned stand of one's own on these philosophical issues.

Requirements:

Class Attendance and Participation: In accordance with Bucknell's official attendance policy, you will be expected to attend all class periods. More than two unexcused absences will adversely affect your grade. If you have a legitimate excuse for missing class (e.g., sickness, family emergency, religious holiday) please let me know before the class period, as far in advance as possible.

Although the class will necessarily involve some amount of lecture, overall it will be structured like a seminar, with an emphasis on discussion and dialogue. Note: the philosophical texts we will be reading in this class are dense and complex, and mastering the material will require active engagement on your part. You will be expected to bring your texts to class consistently, keep up with the reading assignments (which must be completed prior to the course meeting for which they are scheduled), read carefully and critically, participate in class discussions, and complete all writing assignments in a timely manner. All late work will be marked down in accordance with the extent of lateness (1/3 grade lower for every day they are late).

Class attendance and participation are essential elements in any small, seminar-style course, and accordingly, they will constitute 20% of your final grade. In evaluating your participation in this class, I will not so much be looking at quantity, but rather quality—i.e., I'm less interested in how frequently you talk or how much you say than whether your comments, questions and suggestions reflect a thoughtful and considered engagement with the ideas and arguments we are examining. I realize not everyone is equally comfortable participating in discussion on a daily basis. While I encourage you to find your voice in class, I also count after-class discussion, office hour discussion, and email exchange as forms of participation.

Bucknell University expectations for academic engagement. Courses at Bucknell that receive one unit of academic credit have a minimum expectation of 12 hours per week of student academic engagement. Student academic engagement includes both the hours of direct faculty instruction (or its equivalent) and the hours spent on out of class student work. This class meets for a total of 2 hours and 44 minutes per week. That means you are expected to dedicate over 9 hours a week on the average outside of our meetings to reading, writing, etc for this class. Sometimes it will be less; sometimes more. As rule, expect to spend at least 2-3 hours on each class' reading assignment. The more closely

and carefully you read, and the more time you invest in writing and revising papers, the better you will do.

Note. Absolutely *no* electronic devices (i.e., laptops, PDAs, cellphones, etc) are permitted in this class unless you have prior written authorization from the Dean. We're going monastic here.

Assignments. Over the course of the semester, you will be expected to write four papers, one on each of the major figures we'll be studying. Because they are relatively short (5-7 pp.) they will need to be dense papers, chockfull of philosophical explication and critical analysis, with no fluff or padding. It will be your responsibility to say what needs to be said as economically, clearly and precisely as possible. Detailed instructions for these assignments will be provided on the specific topic handouts, which will be distributed roughly two weeks before they are due. You will also receive a more general set of guidelines/expectations for writing philosophy papers in this class. I will be happy to talk with you in advance about your papers, whether you need help choosing an appropriate topic, or would like feedback on a rough draft.

Grading.

Your final grade breaks down as follows:

- 20% class participation
- 20% Augustine paper; due Tuesday, February 11.
- 20% Avicenna paper; due Thursday, March 6.
- 20% Maimonides paper; due Tuesday, April 8.
- 20% Aquinas paper; due Thursday, May 6 (at 2:30 in my office or dept. mailbox).

Academic Honesty. You are expected to know what constitutes plagiarism. If you do not, please consult the following links for Bucknell's policy on the matter:

<http://www.bucknell.edu/x1341.xml> and <http://www.bucknell.edu/x1343.xml>

All cases of plagiarism will be pursued and passed on to the Board of Review on Academic Responsibility for prosecution.

Bucknell University Honor Code. You are expected to abide by the following code: "As a student and citizen of the Bucknell University community (1) I will not lie, cheat, or steal in my academic endeavors, (2) I will forthrightly admit my part in acts of academic dishonesty, (3) I will let my conscience guide my decision on reporting breaches of academic integrity to the appropriate faculty or deans, and (4) I will let my conscience guide my decision on reporting breaches of academic integrity to the appropriate faculty or deans."

(2) I will forthrightly admit my part in acts of academic dishonesty,
(3) I will let my conscience guide my decision on reporting breaches of academic integrity to the appropriate faculty or deans,

SCHEDULE ON FOLLOWING PAGE

Schedule.

Jan 16 (R): Introduction.*

I. ST. AUGUSTINE (North Africa/Rome, 4-5th c.): Bishop, Church Father, Christian Platonist.

Jan 21 (T): Augustine, *City of God*, Bk. I, Chap. 1-11, 16-30, & 35-36 (the sack of Rome; the question of suicide).

Jan 23 (R): Augustine, *City of God*, Bk. V, Chap. 1, 8-11 (God's foreknowledge and human free will), Bk. VIII, Chap. 1 & 3-12; Bk. X, Chap. 1 & 31 (Platonism and Christianity).

Jan 28 (T): Augustine, *City of God*, Bk. XI, Chap. 1-6 & 16-23; Bk. XII, Chap. 1-5, 7-9, 21-24 & 28 (time, creation, and the problem of evil).

Jan 30 (R): Augustine, *City of God*, Bk. XIII, Chap 1-4 & 14-15; Bk. XIV, Chap. 1-5, 10-13, 16-19, 25-28 (the human condition: sin, death, resurrection).

Feb 4 (T): Augustine, *City of God*, Bk. XIX, Chap. 1-13 (the supreme good for human beings).

Feb 6 (R): Augustine, *City of God*, Bk. XIX, Chap. 14-22, 24-28 (the supreme good for human beings).

II. AVICENNA (Persia, 10-11th c.): Physician, Scientist, Islamic Aristotelian.

Feb 11 (T): **FIRST PAPER DUE**; Avicenna, "Autobiography/Biography of Avicenna" in *Avicenna on Theology*, pp. 9-24; Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) excerpt from *The Cure/Healing*, "The Soul", I.1.7 and V.7.4-7, pp. 178-79 & 207-9 (PDFs on Moodle).

Feb 13 (R): Avicenna, The Metaphysics of *The Healing*, Bk I, Ch. 1, 6 & 7, pp. 1-6, 29-38 (the science of metaphysics and its subject matter; necessary and possible existence).

Feb 18 (T): Avicenna, The Metaphysics of *The Healing*, Bk VI, Ch. 1-2, pp. 194-205 and Bk VIII, Ch. 1 & 3, pp. 257-61 & 270-73 (how to think about causality; a cosmological proof of the existence of God).

Feb 20 (R): Avicenna, The Metaphysics of *The Healing*, Bk VIII, Ch. 6-7, pp. 283-98 (God's knowledge: can the Necessary Existent know temporal particulars?)

Feb 25 (T): Avicenna, The Metaphysics of *The Healing*, Bk IX, Ch. 6, pp. 339-47; Ibn Sīnā, *al-Isharāt wa'l-tanbīhāt (Remarks and Admonitions)*, in *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia*, pp. 237-41 [PDF on Moodle] (divine providence and the problem of evil).

Feb 27 (R): Avicenna, The Metaphysics of *The Healing*, Bk IX, Ch. 7, pp. 347-57 (the "return," or hereafter).

* PDFs of supplementary/secondary readings may occasionally provided via Moodle.

Mar 4 (T): Avicenna, *The Healing*, Bk X, Ch. 1-3, pp. 358-70 (prophecy and religious law).

Mar 6 (R): **SECOND PAPER DUE**. Reading: TBA. Film: *The Andalusian Epic: Islamic Spain*.

Mar 11 (T): SPRING BREAK.

Mar 13 (R): SPRING BREAK.

III. MAIMONIDES (Andalusia/North Africa, 12-13th c.): Rabbi, Physician, Jewish Aristotelian.

Mar 18 (T): Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Maimonides' Introduction & Bk I, Ch.

I, XXXV, and L-LVIII, pp. 41-49, 51-53 and 63-82 (how to interpret the Torah: Biblical language suggesting the corporeality and multiplicity of God).

Mar 20 (R): Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Bk II, Intro, Ch. I-XXVII & XXIX-

XXXI, pp. 89-118, bottom of 125 -26 (demonstration of God's existence, unity and incorporeality; creation vs. eternity of the world).

Mar 25 (T): Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Bk II, Ch. XXXII-end, pp. 126-47 (prophecy).

Mar 27 (R): Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Bk III, Ch. XII-XXIII, pp. 149-73 (providence: divine omniscience and the problem of evil).

Apr 1 (T): Maimonides, *RAMBAM: Readings in the Philosophy of Moses Maimonides* [PDF on

Moodle], pp. 404-29 (excerpts from *The Guide of the Perplexed* Bk III on the revealed Law).

Apr 3 (R): Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Bk III, Ch. LI-end, pp. 184-202 (summary: human perfectability and God's providence redux).

IV. ST. THOMAS AQUINAS (Italy/France, 13th c.): Schoolman, Universal Doctor of the Catholic Church, Christian Aristotelian.

Apr 8 (T): **THIRD PAPER DUE**; Timothy B. Noone, "Scholasticism," (PDF on Moodle), Aquinas, *A Shorter Summa*, Editor's Introduction, pp. 17-22 & "Methodology: Theology as a Science," pp. 37-44.

Apr 10 (R): Aquinas, *A Shorter Summa*, "God's Existence," pp. 45-64.

Apr 15 (T): Aquinas, *A Shorter Summa*, "God's Nature," pp. 65-89.

Apr 17 (R): Aquinas, *A Shorter Summa*, "Cosmology and Anthropology," pp. 91-105.

Apr 22 (T): Aquinas, *A Shorter Summa*, "Epistemology and Psychology," pp. 107-29.

Apr 24 (R): Aquinas, *A Shorter Summa*, "Ethics" (Happiness), pp. 131-49.

Apr 29 (T): Aquinas, *A Shorter Summa*, "Ethics" (Goodness, Virtue, Law), pp. 150-62.

*Supplementary readings providing overviews of each figure will be provided on Moodle as the semester proceeds. These will be optional but may help in consolidating and refining your understanding of their thought.

FINAL PAPER DUE: May 6 (R) @ 2:30 pm. The deadline for the final paper is based on the final exam hour established by the registrar for this course (note: although a final

exam time is scheduled, there is no final exam in this course, only the final take-home paper). Please drop your paper off by this deadline at Vaughn Lit 227 (if I am not there, or you want to hand in the paper before this deadline, please slide it under my office door or leave it in my departmental mailbox in Vaughn Lit 243).