

PHIL 361
Early Medieval Philosophy
Course Outline

Classroom & Times: Mon 3:45-5:00 NH20, Thurs. 3:45-5:00 NH20

Instructor: Doug Al-Maini

Office & Office Hours: NH 518 Mon.11:15-12:00, 2:15-3:00; Wed. 10:15-11:00; Fri. 9:15-11:00

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Course Description:

This course is an analysis of the philosophy of the early medieval period. The word “medieval” comes from the Latin for “middle”, and in the past medieval philosophy has been approached as the bridge in time, if not in thought, between antiquity and the Renaissance. Within that period, we shall concentrate on the thought of some major figures spanning roughly from Plotinus to Abelard. Topics will include proofs of the existence and nature of God, the problem of evil, the relationship between reason and revelation, human freedom, the problem of universals, and the intentional quality of morality.

Schedule:

Week	Topic	Readings	
1	The One, the Many	Plotinus	<i>Enneads</i> VI.9.1-11; I.8.1-10
2	Emanation and Return	Plotinus	<i>Enneads</i> V.4; V.9.1-9; I.6.1-9
3	Universals (Plotinus Asgn. due Mon)	Porphyry	<i>Isagoge</i>
4	Evil (Porphyry Asgn. due Mon)	Augustine	Bk. 1
5	Free will	Augustine	Bk. 2
6	Happiness (Augustine Asgn. due Mon)	Boethius	Bks. 1, 2
7	Eternity	Boethius	Bks. 2, 5
8	Universals	Boethius	Bk.5 <i>Second Commentary</i>
9	Divine nature (Boethius Asgn. due Mon)	Anselm	<i>Proslogion</i>
10	Nominalism	Abelard	<i>Glosses on Porphyry</i>
11	Intentional Ethics	Abelard	<i>Ethics</i> Bk. 1
12	Mysticism (Final Essay due Fri.)	Abelard	<i>Ethics</i> Bk. 1

Assignments:

Students will be responsible for:

- 1) 4 two-page (~600 words) responses to the weekly readings covering the broad topics of the course. Responses will be due at the beginning of the week. Worth 10% each.
- 2) A final essay, roughly 10 pages in length (~3000 words), due on the last day of classes. Worth 30 %.
- 3) A final exam. The exam will cover the material of the entire semester, but it will focus on the thought of Anselm and Abelard. Worth 30%.

Plotinus Assignment:

How would Plotinus evaluate the phenomenon of religious faith?

Porphyry Assignment:

According to Porphyry, is the pattern of the veins in the leaf of an oak tree a “specific” difference, or just a plain difference? Is it a separable or inseparable difference? If inseparable, does it belong by itself, or is it accidental? Explain.

Augustine Assignment:

Would Augustine consider stealing in order to feed one’s family to be an evil deed? Why?

Boethius Assignment:

In *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Boethius portrays himself as sick and philosophy is personified as a healer. What is the nature of Boethius' illness? What course of treatment does Philosophy prescribe? Is the treatment successful? By writing of this experience, Boethius obviously thought it would be relevant to others; how is it that the hallucinations of a raving medieval bureaucrat on death row can pretend to be universal in appeal?

Essay Questions:

- 1) In a rhetorical flourish at the very beginning of our period, Tertullian famously demanded, "But what has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" Is it possible to be both a devoutly religious person committed to faith and a philosopher? Can God, even in part, be comprehended by the human mind? In answering these questions, you must make use of at least two of the authors we have studied this semester.
- 2) It is clear that Augustine has been influenced by Plotinus; how does this influence show itself in Augustine's understanding of the nature of evil? Are there any ways in which Augustine differs from Plotinus on this subject?
- 3) For the medievals, how are we able to acquire knowledge of universals when the world is populated by objects constantly subject to change?
- 4) Judging by what you know of their ethical thought from the material covered in this course, how would Abelard and Augustine compare in their moral assessment of the crusades?

Required Texts:

Paul Vincent Spade, ed. *Five Texts on the Medieval Problem of Universals* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994).

Peter Abelard, *Ethical Writings: Ethics and Dialogue between a Philosopher, a Jew, and a Christian* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1995).

Plotinus, *Enneads* <http://john-uebersax.com/plato/enneads.htm>

Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2001).

Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993).

Technical Considerations for Written Assignments:

- 1) All written assignments must be typed (black ink, please) and double-spaced on pages with at most 1 inch margins. No extra line spaces between paragraphs. Indent the first line of a paragraph. Printing on both sides of a sheet of paper is quite acceptable.
- 2) Please no title pages. Also no "Works Cited" or "Bibliography" pages referring to one work; do bibliographic references in a footnote if you must. Please no enormously large-fonted things like titles, names, dates, course numbers, student numbers, phone numbers, or due dates that take up half a page of space. Your title, name, and student number at the top of the first page is quite sufficient. Please visibly number any multiple-page assignments. If for some reason you must hand in the assignment to the office, please include my name at the top of the assignment as well.
- 3) No duo-tangs, folders, binders, or paperclips. Loose sheets are acceptable, but do remember to number them.
- 4) Under no circumstances will emailed assignments be accepted. Please hand in your assignments at the start of class on the day they are due.
- 5) For help on writing humanities papers, please consult the website <http://www.princeton.edu/~jimpryor/general/writing.html>
This site gives an excellent overview on what a philosophy paper is all about and how to write it.

6) The final page of this outline is the evaluation form that will be used in the assessment of your writing. This evaluation form provides the clearest explanation of my requirements for an essay. Please, study it carefully before you write your work.

7) The late policy is a deduction of 3% per day that the assignment is handed in late. This course outline lets you know when assignments are due, and you have been given plenty of time to complete them. Consequently last minute excuses for not completing assignments on time will be met with marked skepticism, not to say cynicism.

8) Many of the above requirements are arbitrary demands on my part, but they really do facilitate the assessment of your work. If you do not follow these guidelines, **YOUR MARK FOR ORGANIZATION ON THE EVALUATION FORM WILL SUFFER DRASTICALLY.**

9) Plagiarism is completely unacceptable. If you make use of an idea that is not of your own devising, you must cite the source of that idea. Failure to properly cite sources may result from removal from the course and expulsion from the school. Students are obliged to keep a copy of their assignments.

EVALUATION FORM

Style:

Grammar: Are the sentences understandable? Are there any spelling mistakes? Is the diction clear and concise? Can the thought behind each sentence easily be grasped?

/10

Organization: Do the ideas logically follow each other, or were they haphazardly strewn together? Do the ideas flow from each other, with explicit premises deductively producing conclusions? Are the arguments connected at all, showing a chain of reasoning?

/10

Content:

Argument Outline:

/10

Thesis: Do the assignment give an answer to a question or problem put forward? Is the answer more than a simple “yes” or “no”? Is the answer insightful, being an interpretive idea itself? Is the thesis explicitly stated?

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Arguments: Are the arguments interesting or banal? Are the arguments incisive or off-topic? Are there fallacies committed? Are there reasonable objections that should have been considered?

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Originality: Does the student provide input into the conceptual debates the text engages in? Is there evidence of insight on the student’s part into the topic? Are there any new ideas being explored in the assignment? Is the student able to go beyond ideas raised in class discussion?

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Evaluation: Does the student give a fair summation of the ideas contained in the texts used? Does the use of these ideas meaningfully contribute to the thesis of the essay, or is the use of material a mere addenda to the main arguments of the paper?

/20

TOTAL /100