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Office hours: Monday 2:30-4:30 and by appointment

Phil 3140  
Medieval Philosophy  
M W 5:00- 6:15, Cocke Hall 115  
Spring 2017

## SYLLABUS: MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHY

(Or: “Two Saints and a Rabbi”)

### I. Required texts

Augustine, *Confessions*  
Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*  
Pegis, ed., *Introduction to St. Thomas Aquinas*

### II. Scope and Goals of the Course

If you've ever felt slighted or misunderstood, you ought to be able to empathize with medieval philosophy. Ever since the secularization of the West got up steam in the 16th and 17th centuries, the philosophers and methods of philosophizing that characterized this period received increasingly short shrift from commentators. This attitude reached its zenith early in the 19th century with Hegel who, in his vast history of philosophy, contemptuously stated he would quickly pass over the medieval period "with seven-league boots." (Speaking personally, those are just the boots I like to put on in stepping over Hegel's own philosophy!) The glories of Greek philosophy were (justly) celebrated; ditto the birth of modern philosophy as represented by Descartes, Hobbes, and their successors. But the intervening period – the philosophy of the Middle Ages – was proclaimed to be a sterile, uneventful epoch.

We can now see that this appraisal was very wide of the mark. It is true that the Middle Ages differs from what preceded and what followed, but this is precisely what makes its study important for anyone who truly wants to understand the development of philosophical thought. More than at any other time, the philosophical enterprise is an *international* exchange of ideas, one that bridges three great cultures: Arabic, Jewish, European Christian. It typically finds expression in attempts to effect a *synthesis* among diverse areas of human intellectual concern. It is simultaneously *religious* and *rationalistic*, concerned with demarcating the respective spheres of faith and reason while showing how they relate. In short, the Middle Ages are of crucial importance to the history of philosophy.

Depending on how you count, the Middle Ages add up to nearly one thousand years. Several dozen philosophers leave an important mark on the thought of this time. To give a fair overview of what's going on we would have to take a look at most of them. But that would mean that no one would receive more than a once-over-lightly, and we would find it difficult to orient ourselves – sort of like one of those eleven-European-countries-in-two-weeks tours. So we're giving up on comprehensiveness in order to gain familiarity in depth. We shall confine our reading of primary source material to three philosophers, proceeding through major books written by Augustine and Maimonides and large extracts from Aquinas. I apologize in advance for the many jewels of medieval philosophy that will not be put on display this semester. I do hope that the three gems placed in front of you will be seen to be adequate compensation.

The trio whom we shall study have several things in common. First, each is a major philosopher. Second, each exerted a profound influence within his respective religious community, not all that surprising considering that we have here two saints and a world-class rabbi! Augustine was among the last – and greatest – of the Church Fathers during the formative years of Christianity; his continuing influence cannot be overstated. Aquinas wrote a prodigious amount during a relatively brief life. Not long after his death, the great philosophical synthesis he crafted was officially recognized within Catholicism as authoritative. Maimonides' philosophical writings received only modest attention within the Jewish community, and much of that negative, but his codification of religious law won for him recognition as the premier contributor to Jewish religious thought since Talmudic times. Third, each philosopher takes as a central project the *reconciliation of reason and revelation*. More about this later. Fourth, all three of these philosophers build on the Greek intellectual heritage: Augustine taking Platonism as his point of departure, and Aquinas and Maimonides developing their work on essentially Aristotelian line. Fifth, we shall see that Aquinas is cognizant of and responds to the work of the other two. There's probably more, but that ought to do for now!

### III. Format of the Course

1. *Readings, Classroom work.* It's my intention that we shall read (nearly) all of *Confessions* and *Guide for the Perplexed* as well as big chunks from Aquinas. Section IV of this syllabus represents my envisioned timetable.

Let me give you fair warning: you will almost certainly find much of the material difficult to understand, at least on first encounter. That's both because of the inherent complexity of the issues addressed and also because the way in which these philosophers write is distant from contemporary genres. (If some medieval figure came back to life he probably would find contemporary hip-hop, not to mention Washington bureaucratise, virtually inscrutable.) Although I don't expect you to sail through these readings effortlessly, I do expect you to give them your best shot. That includes your having carefully read assigned material *in advance of the class in which it will be discussed*, and

also your willingness to *reread* sections that initially prove elusive. Our job in class will be to work together to understand the problems addressed by these philosophers. I think of this as being very much a joint enterprise. My role is one of exploring with you points of special interest, helping to clarify complexities, raising questions implied by the material. Correlatively, your responsibilities are to read and think conscientiously about all texts and to be prepared to tell me what you find perplexing or challenging or worthy of deeper pursuit. Within that context, we shall strive for a maximum of discussion. Personally, I can think of nothing duller than a class in which one person (me) does all the talking. I hope you agree. Although I don't grade on the basis of classroom participation as such, contributions to the flow of the course will be duly kept in mind as I assign course grades. If a grade is otherwise borderline, this is what will tip the balance.

2. *Tests.* A midterm and final exam will be given. The former will count for approximately 25% of your course grade and the latter approximately 40%. Each test will involve some form of essay questions. A warning: Only under the most exigent circumstances can I be persuaded to give a makeup exam for one that has been missed, and then only if I have been informed in advance concerning the reason for your absence. Moreover, when I do give a makeup, it's more, ahem, "challenging" than the original. The moral? Don't miss either test!
3. *Papers.* I shall ask you at irregular intervals to write short (4-7 pages) papers in response to particular questions I'll toss your way. You are required to write any 2 of them, and you may submit 3, with the 2 best counting toward your course grade. Thus, if one (or perhaps two) of the assignment topics or times doesn't suit you, then you should feel free to skip it. There will be at least one such paper assigned for each of the three philosophers, a minimum of four in total. Unless you have received explicit permission to the contrary, all submissions must be hard copy. Please retain the digital file just in case something goes awry. Cumulatively, they will determine some 30% of your Phil 3140 grade.

All paper assignments will involve working through some problem in the assigned readings. Although you are entirely at liberty to consult any sources written or human that you think might help you write a better paper, it is imperative that any borrowings of ideas or language be credited via a citation. You may use whatever style of footnote or endnote you please just so long as full attribution information is provided. Failures to do so, even if not malicious, risk putting you on the wrong side of the plagiarism divide. That is definitely *not* a place you want to be!

Paper grades will be based on "content" rather than style or grammatical correctness (although it should be noted that your ability to express yourself accurately in written English prose very definitely affects the content as it appears to your reader). However, any paper that comes to me with more than a very few errors in spelling, grammar, etc. will either be rejected as failing to meet minimal standards of acceptability or, if I'm

feeling especially generous, handed back to you for revision and resubmission. This means that you ought to proofread carefully anything you will be submitting to me. I very much care about the quality of your writing - and so should you! One final caution: *Late papers will not be accepted.* Thus, if for some reason you must miss a class, it's a good idea to check and see if there has been an assignment.

4. *Study hint.* Philosophy, as you'll soon find out, is very much a *dialogic* business. That is, philosophical inquiry involves putting questions, trying out answers, criticizing those answers, and moving on to yet better answers – and better questions. It's possible to replicate this dialogic process in your own head: possible but not easy. Far better to conduct actual dialogue with another person who has his or her own ideas to contribute. In the classroom I'll be one such person. But outside the classroom I'll be just a memory. (A pleasant one I hope!) I strongly encourage you to get together on a regular basis with one or more other Medieval Philosophy students to study together. Students who do so tend to perform conspicuously better than those who don't. I encourage you to find compatible study partners and make this a genuinely cooperative enterprise.
5. *Computers, Phones, etc.* 21<sup>st</sup> Century electronics are wonderful! I love them as much as you do – well, almost as much. I must tell you, however, that they don't have a place in Phil 3140. If you're carrying a phone, please make sure you turn it off and put it out of sight (and possibly out of mind) before the start of class. If your ringer goes off, or if you are observed staring intently into a display, you owe a 500-word essay on the topic of the day, due at the next class meeting. If it happens a second time you will be asked to withdraw from the course. With some reluctance I also ask you not to open a computer during class. These machines have wonderful utility, but they also offer powerful temptations for distraction, both for you and for the person next to you glancing over to see what treats may be on your screen. Try taking notes the old-fashioned way: pen in hand. Or you may record class sessions for later review and transcription.
6. *Other* I retain the right to base up to 10% of your course grade on intangible but nonetheless real ways in which you have contributed to the class. For example: Do you routinely come to class well-prepared? Do you take an active role in discussions? Do you raise questions either in real or virtual space? Do you show respect for other students (and tolerance for the befuddled instructor when he *still* hasn't quite remembered your name correctly)? Or do you snooze in the back row, ask only questions like "Will this be on the final exam?"

You deserve fair warning concerning some of my pet peeves: (1) Students arriving late to class constitute distractions both to me and to the other students. I realize that lateness sometimes can't be helped, but I won't put up with it becoming the rule rather than the exception. (2) Holding side conversations is distracting. Please direct your remarks to the whole class. (3) Rudeness toward other students or even the instructor isn't tolerated.

#### IV. Readings

What follows is written on paper (actually, electronic bits), not stone. We may speed up from the itinerary provided below (unlikely), slow down (more likely), or alter the reading list. If there are any substantial changes in the reading schedule I will announce them in class/online. For slight blips in our pace, all you need to do is remember where we left off in the last session and make sure that you stay at least one day ahead.

##### WEEK 1

Jan. 18 Introduction

##### WEEK 2

Jan 23 *Confessions*, Bk I  
Jan. 25 *Confessions*, Bk II, III

##### WEEK 3

Jan. 30 *Confessions*, Bk IV  
Feb. 1 *Confessions*, Bks V, VI

##### WEEK 4

Feb. 6 *Confessions*, Bks VII, VIII, IX  
Feb. 8 *Confessions* Bk X

##### WEEK 5

Feb. 13 *Confessions*, Bks XI, Bk XII  
Feb. 15 *Confessions*, Bk XIII

##### WEEK 6

Feb. 20 *Guide*, Part 1, Intro, Chs 1-30 (pp. 1-40)  
Feb. 22 *Guide*, Part 1, Chs 31-60 (pp. 40-89)

##### WEEK 7

Feb. 27 *Guide*, Part 1, Chs 61-76 (pp. 89-144)  
March 1 Probable date for MIDTERM

March 4 - 12: Spring Break!

##### WEEK 8

March 13 *Guide*, Part II, Intro; Chs 1-29 (pp. 145-212)  
March 15 *Guide*, Part III, Intro; Chs 1-21 (pp. 251-296) Chs 30-48 (pp. 212 -250)

**WEEK 9**

March 20 *Guide*, Part III, Intro; Chs 1-21 (pp. 251-296)  
March 22 *Guide*, Part III, Chs 23-35 (pp. 296-331)

**WEEK 10**

March 27 *Guide*, Part III, Chs 36-50 (pp. 331-384)  
March 29 *Guide*, Part III, Chs 51-54 (pp. 384-397)

**WEEK 11**

April 3 *Introduction to St. Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 1-23  
April 5 *Introduction to St. Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 23-33

**WEEK 12**

April 10 *Introduction to St. Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 70-96  
April 12 *Introduction to St. Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 97-125

**WEEK 13**

April 17 *Introduction to St. Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 126-144  
April 19 *Introduction to St. Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 144-160

**WEEK 14**

April 24 *Introduction to St. Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 192-213  
April 26 *Introduction to St. Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 214-232

**WEEK 16**

May 1 Loose ends, review, final thoughts

FINAL EXAM: TBA