

The Universality of Scientific Knowledge: Islamicate Philosophy and Science in the Latin Middle Ages

Universidad de Córdoba

Winter semester 2021

Lecturer: Nicola Polloni
nicola.polloni@kuleuven.be

1. Office hours and contact information

Students are expected to contact me to arrange an individual remote meeting at least once during the first month of the course. For small, practical questions, students can write an email. I usually reply within 48 hours from the reception of the email. Although this is not generally the case, if no reply is received, students are suggested to contact me again, as their previous email might have been processed as spam. For bigger, content-related questions, students are encouraged to arrange for a remote meeting. The same is suggested also in relation to assignments and problems with specific aspects of the course. My email address is the following: nicola.polloni@kuleuven.be.

2. Course description

The course will allow student to explore the multicultural nature of Latin philosophy and science in the later Middle Ages, particularly on how the Islamicate tradition shaped central aspects of the Latin medieval debate. We will focus our attention on a specific theory, hylomorphism, whose development in the Latin tradition has been greatly influenced by Islamicate philosophers. A series of masterclasses on how knowledge was produced and circulated in the Middle Ages will provide the students with the coordinates to navigate the main theoretical aspects of the course. These sets of problems and theories will be engaged by:

1. a set of backward-designed activities, such as classroom debates and discussion of case-studies
2. a series of lectures commenting on the primary sources
3. a series of masterclasses given by international invited lecturers

This hands-on approach to medieval philosophy and science will allow students to independently engage with the main theories discussed by medieval practitioners of metaphysics, natural philosophy, and science, and appreciate the cross-cultural context in which these theories were debated. Upon completion of the course, students will have acquired a better critical approach to independently read and understand philosophical and scientific texts in their historical context, as well as have nurtured a personal way to creatively transform and adapt their acquired knowledge to new situations and contexts, on and off campus.

3. Goals and learning outcomes

By attending the course and actively participating in its discussions, students will attain the following learning goals:

- a. Students will understand the main tenets of the medieval philosophical debate appreciating its cross-cultural roots.
- b. Students will learn how to engage critically with case studies and medieval philosophical texts.
- c. Students will develop a set of skills through the analysis of arguments in favour and against philosophical stances, enabling them to identify explicit and implicit patterns characterising a philosophical discussion in the Middle Ages.
- d. Students will improve their critical thinking especially in consideration of the contemporary cultural debate and its connections to the history of ideas.

4. Course materials and readings

The course will use a diverse set of materials, as follows:

- a. A selection of primary texts in translations, which will be used for classroom discussions, individual study, and to write the final essay. Primary texts correspond to the most important reading material of the course. Students are expected to read them carefully, questioning the texts through the learning they will be acquiring during classroom activities and by consulting other course materials. The texts are available on the Moodle platform. The four primary sources are:
 - Thomas Aquinas, *Principles of Nature* (chapters 1 and 2)
 - Geoffrey of Aspill, *Questions on Aristotle's Physics* (excerpts)
 - Albert the Great, *Booklet on Alchemy* (excerpts)
 - Roger Bacon, *The Multiplication of Species* (bk. 1, chapter 1)
- b. Primary texts are complemented by the reading of a selection of secondary sources. The studies are available on the Moodle platform. They are the following:
 - Robert Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes 1274-1671*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. Chapters: Part I ("Matter"), chapters 2-4; Part II ("Substance"), chapters 6-7.
 - David C. Lindberg and Michael H. Shank (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Science*. Volume 2: *Medieval Science*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Chapters: 14 ("Translation and Transmission"), 16 ("Medieval Alchemy"), and 18 ("Cosmology")
- c. Students are also suggested to consult the following, non-mandatory studies:
 - Dag N. Hasse, *Avicenna's De Anima in the Latin West: The Formation of a Peripatetic Philosophy of the Soul 1160-1300*. London: The Warburg Institute, 2000. Chapters: II.4 ("Estimation and Intentions"); II.6 ("The Intellect").
 - Robert Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes 1274-1671*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. Chapters: Part IV ("Extension"), chapters 14-15.
 - Nicola Polloni, *The Twelfth-Century Renewal of Latin Metaphysics: Gundissalinus's Ontology of Matter and Form*. Toronto: PIMS, 2020.

5. Course policies

The course has been designed for both in-presence and remote attendance. For in-presence students, the course will follow an active-learning approach which includes multiple means of engagement with the discussed topics (lectures, debates, classroom discussions, etc.). Students are expected to be aware that they are the main characters of their learning journey. Remote students will be asked to critically engage with the material. Additional texts (secondary bibliography) may be very helpful to help them to navigate the course materials. Remote students are encouraged to contact me to have some guidance about specific secondary texts tailored on their individual learning path.

The final assignment will ask the students to engage directly with the topics discussed in the course by writing a short essay. Please, notice the following difference among enrolled students:

Student attending class in person	Students attending the course remotely
(A) One essay on a topic of their choice among those discussed in class.	(A) One essay on a topic of their choice among those discussed in class. + (B) One essay commenting one of the four texts examined during the course.

The topic of essay A can be one of the four case-studies we have examined, one of the themes analysed in the masterclasses, or any other topic discussed during the lectures. For students attending remotely, an additional essay (essay B) is requested and must examine one of the four texts analysed during the course. Both in-person and remote students will have to contact me promptly to assess the feasibility of the essay concerning their selected topic and have suggestions about bibliography. Evaluation of the essay will reflect the student's ability to apply creatively the knowledge acquired during the course. Assignment and grading have been designed to assess the student's capacity of synthesis, application, and creation of new knowledge from the cognitive gains acquired by attending the course. Submission deadline: 31 January 2021.

Throughout the course and especially while working on their assignments, students should always remember the honour code of the university. Hostile, non-inclusive behaviours of any forms and directed toward any attendees will not be tolerated, either in the classroom or off-campus. Essays will be checked through the university anti-plagiarism system to detect any infringement of the honour code. Plagiarise is ineffective – and senseless, too!

6. Learning toolbox

Students should engage actively with the topics discussed during the course. They are strongly encouraged to take notes during both lectures and debates. They are also suggested to read the primary related to each session before attending each class to have a better idea of the overall discussion. Primary texts should be read with a critical attitude focused on:

1. The author's claims.

2. The arguments elaborated to justify those claims.
3. The possible objections to those arguments.

Doctrines expounded by primary texts should be engaged through questioning to facilitate the students' critical thinking of the medieval philosophical debate. From this point of view, study groups are strongly encouraged, as they are extremely effective means to questioning both the historical text and its philosophical implications.

7. Learning resources

Students are encouraged to consult a wider set of resources to improve their learning process. Among the great number of available resources, I suggest the following:

- *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, encyclopaedia (<https://plato.stanford.edu/>)
- *History of Philosophy Without any Gaps*, podcast (<https://historyofphilosophy.net/>)
- *JSTOR*, article database (<https://www.jstor.org/>)
- *Regesta Imperii*, books database (<http://www.regesta-imperii.de/>)

Students can contact me via email or during office hours to have additional suggestions and feedbacks.