

MATTER, ELEMENTS, AND MIXTURES: CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

Lecturer: Nicola Polloni

Course MUPRG-1-631006-1-1 (4 ECTS), *The Universality of Scientific Knowledge: Islamicate Philosophy and Science in the Latin Middle Ages*. Master in Religious Pluralism: Jews, Greeks, and Arabs from the Post-Classical Era to the Early Modern Period. University of Cordoba, Winter Semester 2022.

1. Office hours and contact information

Students are expected to contact me to arrange an individual remote meeting at least once during 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: npolloni@uco.es.

2. Course description

The course will allow student to explore the multicultural nature of philosophy and science in the Middle Ages, particularly the cross-linguistic settings of the Aristotelian tradition. We will focus our attention on a specific set of theories, hylomorphism and the theory of elements, whose development has been a defining feature of premodern philosophy and science in Europe. 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 premodern philosophical debate appreciating its cross-cultural roots.
- b. Students will learn how to engage critically with case studies and philosophical and scientific texts written before the scientific revolution.
- 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 defining a philosophical discussion.
- d. Students will improve their critical thinking especially in consideration of the intercultural philosophy and dialogue across traditions and linguistic settings.

4. Course materials and readings

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

1. A selection of primary texts in translations composing the *Classroom Reader*, which can be downloaded from the Moodle platform. The reader 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 browse the reader and choose the texts most aligned with their interests, expanding their study through the sets of bibliographical references that complement each text in the reader.
2. Primary texts are complemented by the reading of a selection of secondary sources directly related to the texts chosen individually by the student. These studies are listed at the end of each text included in the *Classroom Reader* and will constitute the bases of the students' final assignment, i.e., the essay commenting on the primary sources from the reader.
3. To successfully complete the study required by this course, students are required to read a manual guiding them throughout their first engagement with the topics of the course. Students can choose between two options, one mostly focused on medieval philosophy, the other mostly centred on medieval science. The two options are the following:
 - a. John Marenbon, *Medieval Philosophy: An Historical and Philosophical Introduction*. London: Routledge, 2006 (only the chapters dedicated to Arabic philosophy and Scholasticism).
 - b. Edward Grant, *A History of Natural Philosophy from the Ancient World to the Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

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. The essay will comment on the primary texts included in the *Classroom Reader* using the suggested secondary literature (yet students are free to expand their exploration of secondary literature on the topic). A detailed description of the task is available in the assignment file on Moodle. Evaluation of the essay will reflect the student's ability to apply creatively the knowledge acquired during the course and their understanding of both primary and secondary sources.

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 2023.

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 sources 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 premodern 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.