

Department: Philosophy

Course number: PHIL 261W

Title: Medieval Philosophy

Credits: 3

Contact Person: Donald Baxter

Catalog Copy: -PHIL 261W. Medieval Philosophy

Either semester. Three credits. Prerequisite: At least one of PHIL 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106; ENG 105 or 110 or 111 or 250. Open to sophomores or higher.

Readings from the principle philosophers between the fourth and fourteenth centuries.

Course Information: a. The goal of the course is to introduce students to some of the main philosophical issues debated during the middle ages. One theme is that in every age philosophers relatively uncritically assume certain starting points for their

discussions. Whether those starting points are religious doctrine, as in the middle ages, or science and common sense, as currently, does not detract from the philosophical interest of the arguments. Thus the current prejudice against medieval philosophy as slavishly dogmatic is unwarranted.

b. Students will write three 5-page papers, each of which will be revised after comments from the professor. In the papers students are expected to show detailed, critical understanding of an important argument or from one or more of the philosophers being read, to raise objections against the philosopher's reasoning, and to evaluate whether or not the philosopher's argument can be adequately defended against the objections. The final examination will be an objective and/or short answer test designed to reveal the extent to which students have mastered the intricacies of the generally difficult reading assignments. Reading assignments will be portions of primary sources selected to give two or more sides of important, controversial philosophical issues.

c. Issues will include most of the following: the existence of God, our knowledge of God, the nature of causation, necessity vs. contingency, time and eternity, free will and determinism, God's foreknowledge, identity and distinction, the Trinity, universals and particulars, skepticism, sin and vice, the supreme good for human beings. Authors will include many of the following: Plato and Aristotle (as background), Augustine, Boethius, Anselm, Abelard, Aquinas, Scotus, Ockham, Al-Ghazali, Averroes, Avicenna, Maimonides, etc.

W Criteria: -1) The best way to understand and appreciate a philosophical position is to engage with it. It is important for students not only to read the theories of great philosophers, but also to try to argue against those theories and to try to defend the theories against objections. Thus essays and papers in which the students work through a debate on an issue are essential to any philosophy course, including

the _W_ courses. In PHIL 261W three 5-page papers will be assigned. The papers collectively count for 75% of the course grade.

2) Early in the course the professor devotes part of two different lectures to explaining how to write a philosophy paper: how to pick a topic, how to structure the paper, how to make one's prose clear. Students are given the opportunity to discuss their topics and are required to hand in drafts before the final due date for each assignment. The professor either discusses the draft with the student in an individual conference or provides written comments, as the student prefers. Final drafts are also given extensive written comments. Comments on final drafts of earlier papers are expected to inform the student's approach to later papers.

3) Due dates are given for drafts of papers to allow time for comments or conferences and for the student to revise accordingly.

Role of Grad Students: - Graduate students are not expected to be involved in the teaching of this course.

Supplementary Information: PHIL 261, Medieval Philosophy, is an existing course. The CLAS Courses and Curriculum Committee recently approved a change in pre-requisites for it. The prior prerequisites, in effect, unnecessarily restricted the course to philosophy majors. The department, in an effort to expand its W offerings, is undertaking to add a W version.