

# PHIL 3210/MEDVL 3210/RELST 3150: MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHY

Fall 2014

TR 10:10–11:25, Uris Hall G26

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**Course website:** <http://www.sydneypenner.ca/phil3210/>

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

Despite sometimes being characterized as the “Dark Ages,” the medieval period saw lively debate (often in the universities that had their origin in this period) about a wide range of philosophical issues. What is the relationship between faith and reason, between Jerusalem and Athens? Can rational proof of God’s existence be given? What is God like? What is the good life? In what is our happiness to be found? How do our languages replete with common names, e.g., ‘white’, map onto a world of particulars? Does a universal whiteness exist in the world independently of the human mind or is whiteness just a concept produced by the mind? Medieval thinkers articulated sophisticated answers to these and many other questions. In this course we will make our acquaintance with some answers to such questions by reading texts from some of the greatest philosophers of the period, including Augustine, Boethius, al-Ghazālī, Anselm, Abelard, Aquinas, and Crescas.

## REQUIRED TEXTS

- Al-Ghazālī. *Path to Sufism: His Deliverance from Error*. Translated by R. J. McCarthy. Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2000. ISBN: 1-887752-30-7.
- Anselm. *Three Philosophical Dialogues*. Translated by Thomas Williams. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002. ISBN: 978-0-87220-611-3.
- Boethius. *The Consolation of Philosophy*. Translated by P. G. Walsh. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. ISBN: 978-0199540549.
- Spade, Paul V., transl. and ed. *Five Texts on the Mediaeval Problem of Universals*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994. ISBN: 978-0-87220-249-8.
- Thomas Aquinas. *Selected Writings*. Translated by Ralph McInerny. London: Penguin Books, 1998. ISBN: 978-0-14-043632-7.

The required texts may be purchased at Buffalo Street Books. Note that this is an independent bookstore downtown, not the campus bookstore. The easiest way to get the books is to go to the bookstore’s website (see below), find the relevant course (they’re sorted by instructor’s last name), and order the books. They will then be delivered to our Thursday (August 28) class meeting. For more information, see their website, email them, or call them.

Bookstore website: <http://www.buffalostreetbooks.com/#!/cornell/c1qr5>  
email address: [firstclass@buffalostreetbooks.com](mailto:firstclass@buffalostreetbooks.com)  
phone number: 607-273-8246

Additional readings will be posted to the course website for you to print.

COURSE  
OBJECTIVES

- to start making an acquaintance with some of the best medieval philosophical writings
- to think through the philosophical issues raised in these writings
- to practice reading philosophical texts with care, both charitably and critically
- to learn how to analyze and evaluate arguments

COURSE  
REQUIREMENTS

*Attendance and participation:* Regular attendance and participation are mandatory. The mere presence of your body will not get you an A for participation. I expect you to come to class having done the readings and prepared to engage in discussion. I may, at my discretion, assign any of a variety of in-class exercises, including quizzes on the readings.

I will grant two excused absences without requiring you to provide the reason for your absence, i.e., all you have to do is email me in advance saying that you will not be able to make it to class. I strongly recommend using these two absences with caution, since a third excused absence will require a very good reason indeed. Come see me if you think you have said very good reason. I may, at my discretion, require the completion of any in-class assignments missed as a result of absence. I also strongly advise finding out from a classmate what you missed.

*Submitted questions:* I expect each student to submit one question each week sparked by the reading(s) for that week. For example, you could ask about something in the text that confuses you or you could ask how the author might respond to an objection that occurred to you. In some cases, a single sentence will suffice; in other cases, some explanation will be needed. Questions should be submitted by email and must be sent no later than the midnight before the first class in which we discuss that reading. Assuming a reasonable level of effort, you will receive full credit for each submitted question. You may skip this assignment twice without penalty.

*Tests:* There will be six tests over the course of the semester of varying formats, ranging from true/false questions to short essay questions. I will try to design them such that it will be possible to do reasonably well on them without extensive preparation of the sort expected for final exams. They will not be cumulative.

*Analytic reading responses:* I will ask you to submit two reading responses over the course of the term. Think of these as short papers based on the readings. You can select any two of the required readings as long as (i) the first one is handed in no later than October 2, (ii) the second one is handed in no later than November 25, and (iii) each reading is from a different week. A reading response is due by the class period during which we start discussing the reading on which it is based.

*Term paper:* This assignment will involve several stages. First, you will write a paper (around 2,500–3,000 words) as you usually would. Second, you will read two of your classmates' papers and write comments on them. You will then revise your paper in light of the comments received from your two peer reviewers. Your grade will be based primarily on the quality of your final paper, but a half-baked first draft or unresponsiveness to peer comments can lower your grade significantly. We all have blind spots so philosophical arguments and the expression thereof can almost always be improved in response to critical comments from others—this paper will provide an opportunity to practice the dialogical aspect of intellectual activity.

GRADING	<p>Submitted questions — 10%</p> <p>Analytic reading responses — 16%</p> <p>Class attendance and participation — 15%</p> <p>Tests — 24%</p> <p>Term paper — 35%</p>
ACADEMIC INTEGRITY	<p>Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. The default penalty for plagiarism will be failure in the course. Make sure that you know what constitutes plagiarism. If in doubt, cite your source. Or ask me for guidance. There are genuine grey areas and I am happy to help you learn where the boundaries are. I do not, however, have any inclination to leniency in clearcut cases. If you are not already familiar with it, I urge you to work through Cornell's tutorial on plagiarism:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><a href="https://plagiarism.arts.cornell.edu/tutorial/index.cfm">https://plagiarism.arts.cornell.edu/tutorial/index.cfm</a></p>
EXTENSIONS AND LATE PENALTIES	<p>Given the nature of the assignments, there is little place for extensions. For example, I cannot grant an extension for the first draft of the term paper because that will cause problems for the peer review component. But if there is a case where you think an extension makes sense and is warranted, talk to me (the sooner, the better). Failing an extension, an assignment will have a third of a letter grade deducted if received later in the day on which it is due, a full letter grade if received the following day, and an additional third of a letter grade for each additional day it is late.</p>
SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS	<p>If you require any special accommodations for reasons related to disabilities, religious observance, athletics, and the like, do not hesitate to let me know. I will be happy to work with you in arranging appropriate accommodations for those requirements. Letting me know sooner is better than later.</p>
MISCELLANEOUS POLICIES	<p><i>Please refrain from using electronic devices in class.</i> I want the classroom to be a place where we engage in genuine, thoughtful discussion—electronic devices by and large do not contribute to that goal. Note that this policy includes laptops.<sup>1</sup> As for cellphones, I do not own one—I will leave it to you to imagine my attitude towards them.</p> <p><i>Unexpected class cancellations will be announced by email.</i> In other words, it wouldn't hurt to check your email before heading to class.</p> <p><i>Do not try to find my telephone number and call me—by far the best way to contact me is by email.</i> I will try to respond to emails within 24 hours.</p>

### The Knight Institute Writing Walk-In Service

The Writing Walk-In Service operates out of five campus locations on Central, North, and West campuses. During the academic year, the WWIS is open Sunday through Thursday from 3:30–5:30pm and from 7:00–10:00pm. Writers can schedule appointments or they can drop in at a convenient time. Please consult their website for more detailed information:

[http://www.arts.cornell.edu/knight\\_institute/walkin/walkin.htm](http://www.arts.cornell.edu/knight_institute/walkin/walkin.htm)

<sup>1</sup> If you are interested in seeing a justification for keeping laptops out of classrooms, see the following piece: Kevin Yamamoto, "Banning Laptops in the Classroom: Is It Worth the Hassle?", *Journal of Legal Education* 57 (2008): 1–46.