

Medieval Philosophy
Dr. Michael Sudduth
San Francisco State University

San Francisco State University, Spring 2013
Philosophy 302.01 (29041)
MWF 11:10am–12:00noon (HUM 108)
[iLearn Resources Link](#)

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Course Description and Objectives

Medieval Philosophy: Its Western Face

Medieval philosophy courses typically cover the development of philosophy in Western Europe roughly from the time of St. Augustine (4th/5th century CE) to William of Ockham (14th Century CE). Renaissance humanists used the phrase *medium aevum* (middle age) to designate this period, as it covers the period between the decline of pagan (Greco-Roman) culture and its re-emergence during the Renaissance. The prominent philosophers of this period were adherents of the religious traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. One of their important contributions to the development of western thought was their systematic development of their respective theological traditions in the light of the ancient Greek philosophical tradition, an engagement that transformed theological inquiry and inspired philosophical insights that set the stage for the emergence of modern philosophy in the 17th century.

Medieval Philosophy: Its Eastern Face

The medieval period in Western Europe has an eastern counterpart in the development of philosophy and religion during the same time period in India and nearby geographical regions. By the time St. Augustine died in North Africa in the 5th century CE, the religious world of India was marked by a diversity of religious traditions, some rooted in the sacred scriptures of the Vedas (the so-called “Hindu” traditions) and others—Buddhism and Jainism—that were not. By the 7th century CE, a powerful revival of Indian religion and philosophy rooted in the Vedas emerged and spread throughout India. At the popular level, the revival took the form of traditions of intense religious devotion (bhakti). At the scholarly level, the revival took the form of Vedanta philosophy: the attempt to systematize the contents of the central sacred Scriptures (sastras) of India and promulgate spiritual practices rooted in the insights of the Vedic scriptural tradition.

Course Focus

In this course we will explore the western and eastern faces of the medieval period by critically examining the development of and interface between philosophy and religion during this period. We will focus specifically on questions that fall roughly into areas “metaphysics” and “epistemology” broadly construed, as well as how these questions interfaced with interests centered on religious devotion or worship. As we will see, western and eastern thinkers were each concerned with clarifying the nature of the ultimate reality, how this reality can be known, and how this knowledge relates to the nature and destiny of human persons.

Although we will discuss a large number of thinkers, our reading will focus on six significant thinkers of the time period: Shankaracarya (788–820 CE), Ramanujacarya (c. 1017–1137 CE), Pseudo-Dionysius (late 5th/early 6th Century CE), St. Anselm (c. 1033–1109), Maimonides (1138–1204 CE), and St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274 CE). Shankara and Ramanuja were Vedantin philosophers. Maimonides was a Jewish philosopher. Pseudo-Dionysius, St. Anselm, and St. Thomas Aquinas were each Christian thinkers. We will also discuss and have shorter readings from Islamic philosophers Avicenna and Al-Ghazali.

Central Course Questions

(1) In what ways, if at all, was philosophical inquiry significantly similar in the east and in the west during the medieval period? How, if at all, significantly different?

(2) Do eastern and western metaphysics in this time period have any significant shared dynamics or points of convergence? If so, what are they?

(3) Do eastern and western views of knowledge in this time period have any significant shared dynamics or points of convergence? If so, what are they?

(4) What, if anything, can we learn from the debates and insights of this time period about (i) the relationship between philosophical inquiry and religious devotion and (ii) the phenomenon of religious diversity?

Course Texts, Assignments, and Grading

Required Course Texts

- Shankara, *Sankara's Crest-Jewel of Discrimination*, trans. Swami Prabhavananda (Vedanta Press, 1970) [ISBN: 9780874810387]
- Ramanuja, *Brahma Sutras according to Ramanuja*, trans. Swami Vireswarananda and Swami Adidevananda (Advaita Ashrama—Vedanta Press distributor, [ISBN: 8175050063]
- Dionysius the Areopagite, trans. C.E. Rolt, *Mystical Theology and Divine Names* (Dover, 2004) [ISBN: 9780486434599]
- St. Anselm, *Proslogion*, trans. Thomas Williams (Hackett, 2001) [ISBN: 9780872205659]
- Moses Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Chalm Rabin (Hackett, 1995) [ISBN: 9780872203242]
- St. Thomas Aquinas, *Selected Writings*, ed. Ralph McInerny (Penguin, 1999) [ISBN: 9780140436327]

Note: While there are many different editions of all the above texts, it is necessary that students have the editions specified above for this course, especially since these editions have important supplemental commentary and page numbers are based on the above editions. Shankara and Ramanuja texts may be directly acquired through Vedanta Press, in addition to the campus bookstore.

There will also be a number of required and recommended online readings. These will be accessible on the course page at michaelsudduth.com.

Assignments and Grading

Course Assignments

- 25%: mid-term exam (objective; T/F and multiple choice)
- 25%: final exam (objective; T/F and multiple choice)
- 20%: 10 one-page response essays (graded CR/NC)
- 30%: term paper (6 pages in length), tentatively due on Friday, April 12, 2013

Assignment Notes

Papers: All papers will be submitted online, on iLearn and with the use of Turnitin. No late papers will be accepted. Further details on paper guidelines and requirements will be made available at a later time.

In addition to 10 one-page response essays, there is a single term paper that will be 1,600 words in length, approximately five to six pages double-spaced. It is designed to demonstrate your knowledge of the content of class material and cultivate skills of critical engagement with course material in the form of well-reasoned arguments. Papers must be typed, include a word count, and conform to MLA format (including a works cited page). Papers will be submitted electronically through Turnitin on iLearn. Further details on paper assignments (including submission directions) will be posted at a later time. Failure to turn in a paper results in a zero for the assignment.

Important note on late papers: By rule, no late papers will be accepted. However, if—due to extraordinary circumstances—students wish to have consideration for turning in a late *term paper*, they must submit their request in writing to me by email no later than 24 hours before or after the paper due date. Requests should include an explanation of the circumstances that prevented the submission of the paper. All authorized late term papers are still subject to grade reduction.

Exams: For the mid-term and final exam, bring a scantron 882 form and a #2 pencil to class. Exams are closed note and closed book. Class exams consist of 50 multiple-choice questions or a combination of true/false and multiple-choice. Class exams are designed to test your knowledge of the content of readings and lectures.

Final Exam: Students who miss the final exam will be given a zero for the assignment and issued a final grade based on total accumulated points. Although students are not entitled to take the final exam at a later date, they may *request* by email an incomplete (within 24 hours before or after of the exam), but only if they have completed 75% of the written work in the class with a passing grade. Please note that the university schedules final exams. If you have a complaint about the date, please contact university administration.

All assignments have a point value, and there are 500 points possible in the class. Letter grades on papers are converted into a point value for the purposes of calculating final grades. I use the following grade scale for individual assignments and for calculating final grades.

Grade Scale	Final Grade Point Scale	Assignment Point Values
93–100% = A	465–500 = A	*Mid-term = 125 points
90–92% = A-	450–464 = A-	*Final exam = 125 points
		Term Paper = 150 points
		Short Response Essays = 100 points
87–89% = B+	435–449 = B+	
83–86% = B	415–434 = B	
80–82% = B-	400–414 = B-	
77–79% = C+	385–399 = C+	
73–76% = C	365–384 = C	
70–72% = C-	350–364 = C-	
67–69% = D+	335–349 = D+	
63–66% = D	315–334 = D	
60–62% = D-	300–314 = D-	
0–59% = F	0–299 = F	

*Exams are worth 125 points each. Since there are 50 questions on each exam, each question is worth 2.5 points. Mid-term and final exams combine for a total of 250 points (50% of the final grade). Paper grades are converted into point values for the purpose of calculating final grades on a point scale.

Other Class Details

Course Teaching Assistant

Graduate philosophy student Spencer Horne (shorne@mail.sfsu.edu) is the teaching assistant (TA) for this course. He will be responsible for grading your papers and keeping track of your grade in the class. Feel free to contact Spencer if you have questions about a grade assigned for your work. Students should also feel free to discuss their work and grades with me. Grades will be posted on iLearn.

Method of Instruction

The primary method of instruction in this class is lecture. However, I believe that student participation is of great value to the learning process. To that end I want to encourage students to ask questions and make observations

during class. Some class sessions will be discussion oriented rather than lecture format. At times I will make use of power point presentations. These power point presentations will be posted on michaelsudduth.com along with class handouts and study questions. Do not expect power point presentations and handouts for all material covered in the class, and a number of power points will not be presented in class but will be assigned for viewing outside of class.

A Guide to Success in the Class

- (1) Attend class regularly. While I do not grade on attendance, habitual absences and/or tardiness will adversely affect your performance on course work. Students are responsible for knowing what assignments have been given or collected. Contact me by email if you have questions about this.
- (2) Respect the classroom as a learning environment. Do not speak or otherwise distract when the professor or students are speaking. This includes the disruptive use of cell phones, iPods, laptops, and other electronic devices. If any student is creating a disruption that I'm not aware of, please inform me of this and I will take action.
- (3) Students with documented disabilities should discuss with me as soon as possible any university approved academic accommodations.

I wish to make this course as accessible as possible to students with disabilities or medical conditions that may affect any aspect of course assignments or participation. You are invited to communicate with me at the outset of the course or at your discretion about any accommodations that will improve your experience of or access to the course. You can also contact the Disability Resource Center at 338-2472 (Voice/TDD).

- (4) Academic dishonesty on any assignment will result in a "zero" for the assignment. An academic dishonesty report will be submitted to the Dean for possible further academic action. Any student who is caught plagiarizing is subject to having other written work submitted in the course re-evaluated for plagiarism.

Plagiarism occurs when a student misrepresents the work of another as his or her own. Plagiarism may consist of using the ideas, sentences, paragraphs, or the whole text of another without appropriate acknowledgement, but it also includes employing or allowing another person to write or substantially alter work that a student then submits as his or her own. Any assignment found to be plagiarized will be given an "F" grade. All instances of plagiarism in the College of Humanities will be reported to the Dean of the College, and may be reported to the University Judicial Affairs Officer for further action. (Quotation taken from "College of Humanities Plagiarism Resources," www.sfsu.edu/~collhum/plagiarism.html)

- (5) It is crucial that you complete the reading assignments in a timely manner. This best prepares you for class lectures. Readings listed on a particular day are readings you should have completed for that class meeting.
- (6) Lecture notes, power point presentations, videos, assignment information, and study questions will be posted on my professional website michaelsudduth.com. The VIP Lounge in the main menu is the section of my website that is designed exclusively for my students. Go to the VIP Lounge in the main menu option and scroll down to Medieval Philosophy. A user password is required. The password is perfectbeing. While class materials will be posted on my professional site, all grades will be posted on the iLearn page and papers will also be submitted on iLearn.
- (7) For all written work, aim at clarity and organization of your ideas. Carefully follow instructions for all written work in class. This includes following MLA format (including a works cited page) and providing a word count. Properly understand the assignment prompt. Provide a clear response to the prompt. A clear response will include a thesis statement (which is the main point you wish to make in response to the assignment question) and support for this thesis statement (often involving textual support). Some prompts will ask you to compare and contrast ideas presented in the course texts. Further details on papers will be posted at a later date.

- (8) If you are having difficulties with class material or have received low grades on assignments, make an appointment with me or the course TA so we may discuss your work with you and give you suggestions for improvement. It's usually most efficient to meet first with the course TA and then, if necessary, with me.
- (9) Students are responsible for keeping track of their grades on iLearn. Please alert me or the TA as soon as possible if there is no recorded grade for a submitted assignment or any other kind of grade discrepancy.
- (10) Use msudduthsfsu@gmail.com for all correspondence with me. Subject line of emails should read: Medieval SP13. Always include your full name in correspondence. Questions about papers, exams, or grades should first be directed to the class TA, Spencer Horne, shorne@mail.sfsu.edu.

Proposed Schedule of Readings

This is a *proposed* schedule of readings. The schedule of readings is subject to change and may be adjusted as the semester moves forward. Please go to the course page at michaelsudduth.com to monitor any changes to the course calendar, as well as to see assignment details and make use of online resources for the course.

Week 1: Orientation and Introduction to Vedanta Philosophy of the Medieval Period

January 28 (M): Orientation

January 30 (W): Vedanta Philosophy: An Introduction, Part I

February 1 (F): Vedanta Philosophy: An Introduction, Part II

Reading Assignment: Shankara's *Crest-Jewel of Discrimination*, pp. 1–31.

Week 2: Shankara and Advaita Vedanta

February 4 (M): Shankara, *Crest Jewel of Discrimination*, pp. 32–45

February 6 (W): Shankara, *Crest Jewel of Discrimination*, pp. 45–67

February 8 (F): Shankara, *Crest Jewel of Discrimination*, pp. 67–76

Week 3: Shankara and Advaita Vedanta

February 11 (M): Shankara, *Crest Jewel of Discrimination*, pp. 77–99

February 13 (W): Shankara, *Crest Jewel of Discrimination*, pp. 99–119

February 15 (F): Shankara, *Crest Jewel of Discrimination*, pp. 119–128

Week 4: Ramanuja and Bhakti Vedanta

February 18 (M): Ramanuja, *Brahma Sutra Bhasya*, pp. 8–41

February 20 (W): Ramanuja, *Brahma Sutra Bhasya*, pp. 41–71

February 22 (F): Ramanuja, *Brahma Sutra Bhasya*, pp. 71–81

Week 5: Ramanuja and Bhakti Vedanta

February 25 (M): Ramanuja, *Brahma Sutra Bhasya*, pp. 83–101, 115–118

February 27 (W): Ramanuja, *Brahma Sutra Bhasya*, pp. 119–127

March 1 (F): Ramanuja, *Brahma Sutra Bhasya*, pp. 357–368, 377–382, 395–404

Week 6: Ramanuja and Bhakti Vedanta

March 4 (M): Ramanuja, *Brahma Sutra Bhasya*, pp. 436–446, 450–459

March 6 (W): Ramanuja, *Brahma Sutra Bhasya*, pp. 459–461, 465–477

March 8 (F): Ramanuja, *Brahma Sutra Bhasya*, pp. 478–496

Week 7: Mid-Term Exam Week

March 11 (M): Other Bhakti Vedantins: Madhvacharya [Lecture]

Reading Assignment: Edwin Bryant, "Inside the Vedanta Tradition" [online reading]

March 13 (W): Other Bhakti Vedantins: Nimbarka and Caitanya [Lecture]

March 15 (F): Mid-Term Exam

[Recommended Reading Assignment as a review for mid-term exam: *Brahma Sutra Bhasya*, pp. xxvii–lxxix.]

Week 8: Early Western Medieval Philosophy

March 18 (M): Dionysius the Areopagite, *Mystical Theology and the Divine Names*, pp. 51-81
March 20 (W): Dionysius the Areopagite, *Mystical Theology and the Divine Names*, pp. 86-130
March 22 (F): Dionysius the Areopagite, *Mystical Theology and the Divine Names*, pp. 131-154

Week 9: Spring Break

March 25 (M): NO CLASS
March 27 (W): NO CLASS
March 29 (F): NO CLASS

Week 10: From Dionysius to Anselm: Apophatic vs. Cataphatic Theology

April 1 (M): NO CLASS
April 3 (W): Dionysius the Areopagite, *Mystical Theology and the Divine Names*, pp. 184–190, 191–201
April 5 (F): Anselm, *Proslogion*, pp. vii–xi, 1–9

Week 11: St. Anselm: Perfect Being Theology

April 8 (M): Anselm, “Replies of Gaunilo and Anselm” pp. 28–33, 36–46
April 10 (W): Anselm, continued discussion of Gaunilo-Anselm debate
April 12 (F): Anselm, *Proslogion*, pp. 9–25

Term Paper Due, online submission due by 11:50pm.

Week 12: Maimonides: Jewish Apophatic Theology

April 15 (M): Islamic Philosophy: Avicenna and Al-Ghazali [Online Reading, TBA]
April 17 (W): Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, “Introduction” (Maimonides), pp. 41–58
Recommended Reading: “Introduction” (Daniel Frank), pp. 1–36
April 19 (F): Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, pp. 58–71

Week 13: Maimonides: Jewish Apophatic Theology

April 22 (M): Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, pp. 71–101
April 24 (W): Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, pp. 101–106
April 26 (F): Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, pp. 106–118

Week 14: St. Thomas Aquinas: Proofs for God’s existence

April 29 (M): Aquinas, *Selected Writings*, “The Nature of Theology,” pp. 50–57
May 1 (W): Aquinas, *Selected Writings*, “Proofs of God’s Existence,” pp. 244–256
May 3 (F): Aquinas: proofs of God’s existence continued

Week 15: St. Thomas Aquinas: God’s Nature and Attributes

May 6 (M): Aquinas, *Selected Writings*, “On the Divine Simplicity,” pp. 291–343
May 8 (W): Aquinas, *Selected Writings*: divine simplicity continued, and the doctrine of analogy
May 10 (F): Aquinas, *Selected Writings*, “On Goodness and the Goodness of God,” pp. 343–359

Week 16: Conclusion to Course

May 13 (M): Aquinas, *Selected Writings*, “On Creation,” pp. 360–362; “On the Eternity of the World,” pp. 710–717
May 15 (W): Aquinas concluded
May 17 (F): Course Summary – Last Day of Class

Week 17: Finals Week

May 20 (M): Final Exam at 10:45am–1:15pm