

Practical Session No. 4

Medieval Philosophy and the Renaissance

Practice-oriented slides based on the session plan and Lecture 4

Themes: theocentrism • patristics • scholasticism • Thomism • humanism • Renaissance natural philosophy • political realism

The grid displays 44 numbered slides from a presentation. The slides cover various topics in medieval philosophy and the Renaissance, including:

- 1. Medieval Philosophy and the Renaissance (Title slide)
- 2. How this lecture is organized
- 3. A historical overview: from an eternal cosmos to a created world
- 4. Creation vs. Creation
- 5. Creation ex nihilo and the "type" world
- 6. The 13th-century renaissance: from eternal cosmos to historical time
- 7. The 13th-century renaissance: from eternal cosmos to historical time
- 8. The 13th-century renaissance: from eternal cosmos to historical time
- 9. The 13th-century renaissance: from eternal cosmos to historical time
- 10. The 13th-century renaissance: from eternal cosmos to historical time
- 11. The three central problems of medieval philosophy
- 12. Faith and reason: the pulse of the medieval mind
- 13. The 13th-century renaissance: from eternal cosmos to historical time
- 14. The 13th-century renaissance: from eternal cosmos to historical time
- 15. The 13th-century renaissance: from eternal cosmos to historical time
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- 44. The 13th-century renaissance: from eternal cosmos to historical time

Session goals and working format

By the end of the class, students should be able to:

- contrast Antiquity and the Medieval worldview
- explain Augustine's philosophy of history and evil
- distinguish Patristics from Scholasticism
- summarize Aquinas's harmony of faith and reason
- describe the Renaissance shift toward anthropocentrism
- apply key terms in short analytical answers

Recommended answer pattern for each question:

State the central thesis in one sentence.

Define 1–2 key concepts precisely.

Show the philosophical contrast or problem.

Add an example, consequence, or criticism.

End with a brief evaluative conclusion.

"A strong practical answer is not a retelling of the paragraph, but a structured argument."
Class guideline

Map of the practical session

Block I

The Medieval worldview

theocentrism • creation • linear history • hierarchy of being

Block II

Patristics and Scholasticism

faith and reason • theodicy • universals

Block III

Thomas Aquinas

two truths • Five Ways • logic and theology

Block IV

The Renaissance

anthropocentrism • pantheism • Machiavelli

Block I. Ontological rupture: Cosmos vs Creation

How Christianity changed the status of the world

Dimension	Ancient / Classical view	Medieval / Christian view
World order	Cosmos is eternal, self-sufficient, rationally ordered from within.	Creation has no source of being in itself; it depends on the Creator at every moment.
Divinity	Even gods are part of a larger cosmic order or fate.	God radically transcends the world and is not one part of it.
Nature	Nature is a living totality worthy of contemplation.	Nature becomes a created reality, readable as a sign of divine wisdom.
Human role	Man is a microcosm inside a larger whole.	Man is the image of God and enters into dialogue with the Absolute.

Ex nihilo and the new meaning of nature

What changes?

Matter is not eternal; it is created by free divine will.

The world is contingent: it might not have existed at all.

Nature is no longer sacred in itself, but meaningful as created order.

Philosophy turns toward interpretation, not only contemplation.

Key formula

**Creation
out of
nothing**

ex nihilo

How to answer the seminar question

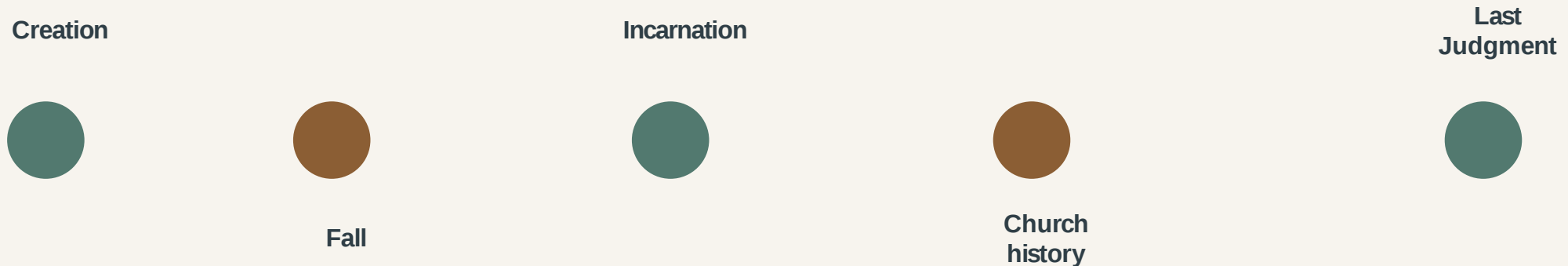
Begin with the contrast between self-sufficient cosmos and dependent creation.

Explain that dependence on God changes both ontology and epistemology.

Conclude that nature becomes secondary, contingent, and interpretable.

Linearity of time: Augustine's philosophy of history

Unlike the Greek idea of cyclical recurrence, Christian history has a unique beginning, a moral drama, and a final consummation. Augustine interprets time as a meaningful path of salvation rather than an endless natural circle.



Why reject “eternal return”?

Because revelation presents a unique creation, a unique fall, and a unique final judgment.

Seminar tip

Use Augustine's “City of God” to show that history is not neutral chronology but a struggle of loves and loyalties.

Hierarchy of being: the medieval ladder of perfection

Being is not flat but graded.
The more form, life, intellect, and nearness to God, the higher the rank. Human beings occupy a mediating position: bodily yet rational and free. The ladder gives moral meaning to self-perfection.



Useful conclusion

The ladder of being explains why medieval man experienced the world as ordered, meaningful, and hierarchically transparent.

Block II. Faith and reason: Tertullian vs Anselm

Tertullian

“I believe because it is absurd.”

Formula associated with Tertullian

Stresses the radical transcendence of God.
Reason has limits and must not dissolve mystery.
Faith appears as a leap beyond logic.
Useful as a defense of revelation against reductionism.

Anselm of Canterbury

“I believe so that I may understand.”

Anselm's formula

Faith is the starting point, not the end of inquiry.
Reason clarifies, orders, and defends what faith already accepts.
Logic becomes a legitimate instrument inside theology.
This approach nourishes scholastic method and academic debate.

Which formula founded the future university?

Answer: Anselm's model

Credo ut intelligam

It legitimizes rational investigation within a religious worldview.
It encourages definitions, distinctions, objections, and proofs.
It turns theology into a teachable, discussable discipline.
It opens the path from monastery culture to university culture.

Why not Tertullian as the main academic model?

Because radical distrust of reason cannot generate sustained scholastic method.

Because universities depend on disputation, commentary, and logical demonstration.

Because intellectual institutions require the belief that truth can be articulated systematically.

Seminar conclusion

European universities grow where reason is not abolished, but disciplined and placed in service of truth.

Augustine's theodicy: evil as privatio boni

Core thesis

Evil is not a substance. It is a lack, distortion, or deprivation of good.

Examples

darkness = absence of light
disease = absence of health
moral evil = misdirected will
turning away from higher good

Philosophical effect

protects God from being the positive source of evil
grounds moral responsibility in free will
still leaves a difficult question:
why was such freedom permitted?

Answer strategy: explain the concept, show the analogy, then evaluate whether it fully absolves the Creator.

The dispute over universals: what is the reality of names?

The question: when we say “humanity,” “goodness,” or “circle,” do we name a real universal entity, or only use a convenient word?

Dimension	Ancient / Classical view	Medieval / Christian view
Realism	Universals are real and grounded in the divine intellect or in the essence of things.	Protects objectivity and metaphysical order.
Nominalism	Only individual things exist; universals are names or verbal labels.	Strengthens attention to concrete particulars.
Conceptualism	Universals do not exist as separate entities, but the mind forms concepts from real similarities.	Offers a mediating solution between realism and nominalism.

Peter Abelard's conceptualism: the "middle ground"

Extreme realism

A circle exists as an eternal ideal reality.

Why it matters in class discussion

Abelard saves thinking from empty verbalism without turning concepts into separate mystical substances.

Nominalism

"Circle" is only a word applied to many separate round things.

Conceptualism

The mind notices real similarity and constructs a concept for classification.

Block III. Thomas Aquinas: harmony of faith and reason

Philosophy / reason

starts from sensory and rational knowledge of the created world
moves “bottom-up” toward causes and first principles
can demonstrate some truths about God, such as existence

Theology / revelation

starts from truths given in Scripture and Church teaching
moves “top-down” from divine authority to understanding
contains mysteries inaccessible to unaided reason, e.g. Trinity



Unity of truth

Since both come from the same God, they cannot finally contradict one another.

Aquinas's Five Ways at a glance

1

From motion

change implies a Prime Mover

2

From efficient cause

causal chains imply a First Cause

3

From contingency

dependent beings imply necessary being

4

From gradation

degrees imply supreme perfection

5

From governance

order implies directing intelligence

Practical use: choose one proof, reconstruct its logical sequence, then show where a modern critic might challenge it.

How to analyze a proof critically: example of the Prime Mover

Logical chain

Whatever moves is moved by another.
An infinite regress of movers is rejected.
Therefore, a first unmoved mover must exist.

Possible modern objections

Why must every change require an external mover in the same sense?
Why is an infinite regress impossible rather than simply difficult to imagine?
Even if a first cause exists, why identify it with the personal God of theology?
Modern physics complicates medieval intuitions about motion and causality.

Good seminar move: criticize the proof respectfully without treating medieval reasoning as naive; show its inner logic first.

Block IV. The Renaissance: from theocentrism to anthropocentrism

Medieval orientation

main concern = salvation
ideal = humility before divine order
nature = symbolic creation
culture = subordinate to theology



Shift

Renaissance orientation

main concern = dignity and creative capacity of man
ideal = active, talented, universal personality
nature = living field for exploration and admiration
culture = autonomous sphere of art, politics, and science

The Renaissance does not simply reject God; it relocates philosophical attention toward human freedom, talent, and worldly activity.

Pico della Mirandola: the indeterminacy of human nature

Key thesis

Man has no fixed place in the hierarchy of being and therefore must shape himself through choice.

Why “more glorious than the angels”?

Angels have a determined nature; man has open-ended self-formation.

Human dignity lies in freedom, creativity, and self-transcendence.

This idea grounds Renaissance humanism and the cult of talent.

It also introduces a new burden: one is responsible for what one becomes.

Seminar formula: dignity is rooted not in a ready-made rank, but in the power of self-fashioning.

Pantheism and the opening of the universe

Nicholas of Cusa

weakens rigid medieval finitude
emphasizes the inadequacy of fixed finite measures before God
prepares more dynamic thinking about cosmos and knowledge

Giordano Bruno

links divine infinity with cosmic infinity
rejects the closed, geocentric universe
imagines innumerable worlds in an unbounded cosmos

Historical consequence

nature becomes worthy of direct investigation
the old division between earthly and heavenly realms weakens
this intellectual climate supports the scientific revolution

Machiavelli and the secularization of politics

Before Machiavelli

the state is judged through moral-theological ideals
politics is tied to salvation, justice, and divine order
a ruler should mirror a sacred ethical model

Machiavelli's overturn

politics has its own logic and laws of effectiveness
the state is an earthly mechanism, not the City of God
success, stability, and preservation of power become central criteria
thus political thinking becomes secular and analytical

Why it matters: Machiavelli helps found modern political science by separating description of power from moral sermon.

Exercise: connection of concepts

1. Ancient cosmocentrism → Medieval _____

2. Pagan fatalism → Christian _____

3. Universals debate: _____ vs _____

4. Aquinas “Christianized” _____

5. The Renaissance proclaimed _____

6. Nature and God identified in _____

Self-check key: Theocentrism • Providentialism • Realism / Nominalism • Aristotle • Anthropocentrism • Pantheism

Core vocabulary for philosophical discourse

Theocentrism

God as the center of being and value

Providentialism

history directed by divine providence

Universals

general concepts at the center of medieval debate

Pantheism

identification of God and nature

Creationism

creation of the world ex nihilo

Theodicy

justification of God despite evil

Anthropocentrism

man as the center of Renaissance culture

Scholasticism

rational justification of faith through logic

Discussion prompts and final takeaway

Prompts for stronger student answers

Which medieval idea remains influential in European culture today?

Does Augustine's theodicy solve the problem of evil or only reformulate it?

Can Thomism still speak to modern science and philosophy?

Did the Renaissance liberate man, or also make him more anxious and alone?

Final takeaway

The practical session is built around one grand transition: from a God-centered, hierarchical, and symbolic world to a human-centered culture of creativity, inquiry, and political realism.

Use contrasts, concepts, and short arguments — not only retelling.