

**Department of Philosophy
Early Medieval Philosophy
107-356B/2019**

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Office Hours (tentatively): Tuesdays after class (17:45-18:45)

Please note: I do not allow the use of notebook computers in the classrooms.

Our department

Thomas Aquinas, Scotus, Ockham and the European Christian scholastics more generally. That means we will exclude their philosophy from our reading this winter, leaving it for some v earlier philosophers without whom Christian scholasticism would have been impossible at least in the form it was to take in the thirteenth century CE and thereafter. Our focus will be on philosophy written in Arabic in the Islamic world from roughly the ninth century to the twelfth century CE. (Note, however, that it would be a mistake to infer from this way of chopping up times and places that the twelfth century was the end of interesting philosophy written in Arabic.)

Philosophy in the Islamic world began in part as a response to a concerted effort, starting at the end of the eighth century CE, to translate works of Greek civilization into Arabic (often by way of S *Republic* and *Laws*, along with paraphrases of most of his other dialogues, were rendered into Arabic. So too pretty much the entire Aristotelian corpus; so too important works of Greek Neoplatonism, like the *Enneads* of Plotinus (under the mistaken title the *Theology of Aristotle*), that were to be very influential among the philosophers writing in Arabic. The very task of translating these (and other) works initiated significant philosophical activity. Translation is never a simple matter of reaching for an equivalent, or near equivalent, term in the target language for a term in the text you want to translate. It requires an understanding of the text in the original; it also requires an understanding of the discipline of which the text is a specimen. You cannot translate philosophical texts if you cannot do philosophy. In the nature of the case, the Arabic translation movement itself involved and subsequently inspired sustained reflection on the aims and strategies of the Greek philosophers. In the course of doing () and

) inspired, there emerged in the Islamic world a picture of philosophy as a discipline based on reason unaided by revelation. This discipline claimed to give accounts of the general principles governing bodies insofar as they are capable of motion and rest, the structure and causes of the physical world as a whole, the principles of living things, the nature of souls (rational and otherwise), and the nature of the divine. (It also offered to weigh in on ethics and politics.) It claimed, moreover, to give accounts of all these things in a way transparent to critical scrutiny. It could do this, because it included logic, an account of truth, pr

