



# Philosophers of the Middle Ages

Psychology 390

Psychology of Learning

Steven E. Meier, Ph.D.

Listen to the audio lecture while viewing these slides  
or view the video presentation available through  
Blackboard

## Dark or Early Middle Ages Begin (475-1000)

---

- Formerly called the Dark Ages.
- Today called the Early Middle Ages.
- Creative thinking declines.
- General reduction of knowledge and writing in Western Civilization.

## Christianity

---

- Helped people turn away from the observable world that was full of pain and turmoil.
- Concentrated on heaven and the soul.
- Used introspection to know the soul.
- By seeking within oneself, you came to know that divine illumination came from God.
- So, to know the soul was to know God.

## Christianity

---

- Since the soul was the representative of God, spiritual truth could be found in all things.
- Thus, every thing, and every event symbolized something supernatural that was beyond human experience.
- Medieval people found symbols in everyday life.
- Medieval thinkers did not want to understand the mind or world in its own terms, but only as clues to the reality of God in heaven.

## Problem

---

- Science and philosophy were impossible to reconcile.
- However, most thinkers were devout, and worked within a religious framework.
- If accused of heresy the person concluded they had erred.
- However, as the middle ages progresses, religious dogma became more rigid and oppressive.

## Generally

---

- The middle ages sought a grand synthesis of knowledge.
- But all knowledge was of God, the Soul and the Spiritual world
- It was believed that knowledge, tradition, and truth could be synthesized into a grand, authoritarian picture of the universe.

## Result

---

- Most thinkers emphasized the mystical aspects of Neoplatonism.
- Rejected natural reasoning as unnecessary or dangerous.
- Fundamentalism and mysticism were important elements.
- Also happened within Islam and Judaism.

## In Contrast to Christianity

---

- Islamic and Jewish scholars preserved and translated the works of ancient Greeks.
- Problem: Judaism and Islam failed to escape the fate of Latin Christendom.
- Conservatives among both religions found free inquiry too dangerous.
  - Revealed truth was the way. Works were prohibited.
- Ultimately western thinkers in later middle ages differentiated between faith and ideas of reasoning and observation.



## Islamic Contributions

---

- In the Christian world, people used introspection to understand the self as a unique human being.
- Based on Neoplatonism.
- In the Islamic World, a naturalistic psychology developed based on writings of Aristotle.
- Was a combination of Aristotle's Psychology with late Roman and Islamic medicine.

## Islamic Contributions

---

- Islamic thinkers changed the ideas of Neoplatonism into a more physiological context.
- Islamic medicine carried on the classical medical traditions.
- Islamic Physicians looked for brain structures that hosted various aspects of the mind discussed by Philosophers.

## Husayn Ibn Sina

---

- Was a great Islamic physician and thinker.
- People had several souls

Rational Soul

Contemplative intellect - knows universals  
Practical intellect - manages daily affairs

Appetite

Avoid Pain (irascible appetite)  
Approach Pleasure (concupiscible appetite)

Interior

Recollection - Recalls intuitions from memory  
Memory - Stores intuitions from estimation  
Estimation - Intuitions about benefit and harm  
Compositional Human Imagination - Creative imagination

Sensitive Soul

Senses

Composite Animal Imagination - Combines images  
Retentive Imagination - Image - Copies of objects  
Common Sense - Combines the five exterior senses

Exterior Senses

Vision  
Hearing  
Touch  
Taste  
Smell

Vegetative Soul

Reproduction  
Growth  
Nourishment

The Soul

## Overall

---

- Tried to combine the Aristotle's philosophical psychology with the traditional though erroneous Roman medical tradition stemming from Galen.
- He and other Islamic physicians located the internal senses in different parts of the brain (e.g., Ventricles).
- His teachings became standard medical teaching until the 16th century when Vesalius again practiced dissection and proved him wrong.

## Major Contribution of Islamic Philosophers

---

- They placed Aristotle's philosophy into a physiological context.

## High Middle Ages: 12 - 13 Centuries

---

- Islamic powers nearly engulfed Europe. Crusades have occurred, etc.
- Muslims and Jews retained the writings of Aristotle.
- Greek works are rediscovered in the west.

## In the West

---

- Philosophical thinking resumes.
- Romanesque and Gothic churches are reconstructed.
- By 1200, most of Plato and Aristotle's writings were available to Christian scholars.
- People are becoming more educated.
- Islamic philosophers begin to be known in the west.



Psyc 390 – Psychology of Learning

## Two Major Models Develop

---

## St. Bonaventure ( 1221 - 1274)

---

- Resisted the introduction of Aristotle into Christian thinking.
- Took a dualist/Platonic view of the body.
- The soul and body are two separate and distinct substances.
  - Soul. The soul was merely using the mortal body for its earthly existence.
  - The essence of the person was the soul.
  - The soul was capable of two types of knowledge.

## Knowledge of the External World

---

- Because it was united with the body, it could have the knowledge of the external world.
- But ideas were not innate, you had to learn the concepts.

## Knowledge of the Soul Alone

---

- Was the knowledge of spiritual world.
- Source of this knowledge came through introspection.
- Ultimately, Bonaventure's Platoism remained in Protestantism.

## Second Model

---

- St. Thomas Aquinas (1225 - 1274)

## History

---

- Many thinkers are struggling to reconcile the writings of Aristotle's scientific naturalism with the teachings of the church.
- Aquinas adopted Aristotle's system and showed it was not incompatible with Christianity.
- However, while Aristotle stayed close to Nature and was silent on God,
- Aquinas reoriented everything to depend on and reveal God

## Overall

---

- Aquinas's resolution was to make Aristotle the final authority concerning logical thinking and natural laws.
- But also recognized that faith goes beyond reason in arriving at ultimate truths.
- Began a split that would ultimately shatter theological metaphysics while simultaneously giving birth to science.

## Late Middle Ages

---

- Cities grow
- Capitalism
- Nation States develop and finished feudal life.
- Severe economic depression begins
- Population declined
- Crime and violence increased
- Black Death (1348) Kills one third of the European population.
- Result - People became cynical and pessimistic



## 1453 Renaissance Begins

---

- Constantinople falls
- Greek speaking scholars fled to a west that knew only Latin.
- Major achievements occur in art and politics.
- Also, major social dislocation, misery anxiety, and superstition occur.
- 100 years war, then 30 years war occur.
  - Brings destruction to France and Germany.
- Black death by 1400 has devastated the population of Europe.

## 1453 Renaissance Begins

---

- Famines and various diseases struck year after year
- Life reflected death
- Grim Reaper
- Scapegoats sought (Witches and Jews)
- Human mortality and suffering reaches new levels of bestiality.
- The Dark Side of human nature was everywhere.

## Result

---

- No room for science - Seen as of little value.
- Humanism begins: Thinking becomes more human centered and less God centered.

## Some Philosophers

---

- Filelfo
- Taught that girls as well as boy could learn the classics.

## Strum

---

- Placed great emphasis on formal methods of learning.
- Drill work and practice.
- Examinations to measure achievement
- Immediate correction of errors.
- Classified pupils on the basis of age and academic progress.

## Loyola

---

- Founded the Jesuit order in 1540.
- Insisted on rigid disciplinary teaching, drill, and memorization of theological doctrines.
- Also included formalized study of classical languages and literature history, math rhetoric, logic, philosophy, and science.
- Used systematic repetition and practice, examinations, and closely supervised drill work being advocated by Strum.

## Mulcaster (1530 - 1611)

---

- Head of Merchant Taylors' School in London
- Adhered to humanist views and implemented educational policies different from the Jesuits
- Advocated that instruction be adapted to the interests and mental abilities of pupils.
- Advocated that universal education be provided for girls as well as boys.
- Advocated that the study of specialized subjects be restricted only to pupils adequately prepared to take them