Course description and goals: The issues raised in the medieval debate between nominalism and realism are still alive in contemporary metaphysics and philosophy of science; and it will repay us to keep the contemporary issues in mind as we read, in translation, the central arguments addressing medieval nominalism—the rejection of universals/abstract objects. Boethius (ca. 481-524/5) comments on the Isagoge of the neoplatonist Porphyry (234-305), affirming a version of realism that is rejected by Peter Abelard (1079-1142). John Duns Scotus (1265-1308) rehabilitates universals as ‘common natures’; and William of Ockham (1288-1348) rehabilitates nominalism with his famous razor. By writing for presentation every class period, you will become more proficient at identifying, clarifying, criticizing, and defending significant positions on fundamental philosophical issues.

Required texts:


A note on the texts: For all but Porphyry, Spade’s translations are the definitive English translations; the full edition of Porphyry is Jonathan Barnes’ translation and commentary, Porphyry’s Introduction [Isagoge], Oxford, 2003. Porphyry wrote in Greek, the rest in Latin; all are available in their original languages, but some of the original-language texts have not yet been edited; thus translations are not expected soon.

Recommended texts (for consultation and supplementation):

King, Peter, “Peter Abelard” SEP, 2010.
Spade, Paul V., “Medieval Philosophy,” SEP, 20102009.

* I will supply page-numbered pdfs of articles from the Friends of the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (SEP) and articles from the contemporary literature along the way.
Abelard (and Heloise)

Recommended for pleasure: From literature, Umberto Eco’s *The Name of the Rose* (title derives from Abelard) is a murder mystery set in an Italian monastery in 1327. Paul Spade’s website has additional suggestions <http://www.pvspade.com/Logic/index.html>.

Schedule:

May 17: from *Five Texts*: Introduction, Porphyry the Phe- nician, and Boethius (pp. vii-25); Rodriguez-Pereyra 2008 recommended: Spade 2009; Emilsson 2005; Marenbon 2010
May 24: from *Five Texts*: Peter Abelard (pp. 26-56); Klima 2008 recommended: King 2010
May 31: John Duns Scotus (pp. 57-113) recommended: Williams 2009
June 7: William of Ockham (pp. 114-147) recommended: Spade 2006
June 14: William of Ockham (pp. 148-189); Rosen 2001
June 21: William of Ockham (pp. 190-231); Baker 2010
June 28: Where have we landed in the contemporary debate be- tween nominalism and realism?

Evaluation:

1 credit hour: Attend every class meeting and participate actively in the discussion of the assigned reading. Six grades count equally.

2 credit hours: In addition to what is required for 1 credit hour, present an in-class critical presentation of the assigned reading, distributed in advance. Six grades count equally.

3 credit hours: In addition to what is required for 2 credit hours (50% of the grade), write (and rewrite as necessary) a 3,000-word term paper due during or before the time scheduled by the Registrar for the final exam or take the comprehensive final exam (50%).

4 credit hours: In addition to what is required for 2 credit hours (33% of the grade), write (and rewrite as necessary) a 3,000-word term paper due during or before the time scheduled by the Registrar for the final exam (33%) and take the comprehensive final exam (33%).