

Medieval Theories of Science (Berlin, 27–28 Sep 22)

Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin, Sep 27–28, 2022

Deadline: Feb 14, 2022

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Philosophical Perspectives on Medieval Theories of Science

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‘Medieval science’ is a fascinating object of study, both when viewed as a historical precondition of the rise of ‘modern science’, and when studied because its instances provide important examples of significantly different, yet highly sophisticated ways of thinking. However, those who wish to study particular instances of ‘medieval science’ in light of general philosophical reflections on science from the Middle Ages will not find much help in the recent literature: no general history of developments and shifts in medieval ‘theories of science’ is available, a state of affairs lamented already more than 50 years ago by Laurens Laudan, and again recently by Ana María Mora-Márquez.

Detailed and systematic studies on medieval ‘theories of science’ are, thus, scarce. This is regrettable as a robust evaluation of ‘medieval science’ will, at least in its details, depend on the precise shape which ‘theories of science’ took in the Middle Ages. We adopt here a very broad and inclusive working definition of a theory of science as a combination of both ‘scientific methods’ and of the ways in which these ‘methods’ relate to philosophical background assumptions (stemming, for instance, from metaphysics or natural philosophy). Moreover, we understand scientific methods as ‘the different ways in which it was possible for [medieval scholars] to produce knowledge that is rational, objective, and based on evidence’, following a working definition proposed by Mora-Márquez. Such scientific methods clearly include logical tools and mathematical techniques, but also those procedural rules and practical guidelines that were upheld as rational.

We want to bring together scholars with an interest in these kinds of theories of science in the Middle Ages. Our perspective is philosophical: we focus on the (epistemological and ontological) reasons behind, the arguments for, and the rational concepts within particular methodological views. While our focus is narrow in this sense, we do not want to impose restrictions on the material studied. In particular, our ‘Middle Ages’ include the Arabic, Greek, Hebrew, and Latin traditions of medieval philosophy. Moreover, case studies need not be limited to the canon of the history of philosophy and logic, and we also welcome and encourage contributions from a wide range of disciplines, including theology, intellectual history, the history of science, and the history of art.

Contributing papers will consider medieval theories of science and its philosophical implications, and might consist in particular case studies, or reflect more broadly on theoretical issues. Ques-

tions addressed by the papers might include but are not restricted to:

- Where can explicit discussions of theories of science be found? Are these limited to logical writings? Which issues were particularly scrutinized in the medieval philosophical debate?
- What is the place of methodologies that were constructed analogically, i.e., practices (e.g., artistic practices) structured in analogy to philosophical or scientific methods?
- Can the interpretation of philosophical, (proto-)scientific, religious, or artistic practices in the Middle Ages benefit from a better understanding of medieval theories of science? Do such practices, in turn, illuminate the ideals behind the methods themselves?
- Are medieval theories of science abstract catchalls, or is there room for domain-specificity? Is the notion of 'domain' itself part of discussions in the Middle Ages? If so, can the concept of 'domain' be fruitfully applied to other branches of medieval culture such as art?
- Are medieval theories of science valuable interlocutors for more recent philosophy of science? To what extent can they provide transformative contrasts to contemporary philosophical assumptions?
- To what extent do answers to all these questions depend on the methodologies employed by us (as philosophers, theologians, intellectual historians, historians of science, or historians of art)? Can our answers benefit from a critique of these (historiographical or exegetical) methodologies?

Over the course of two days, we aim to hold several panels with two to three twenty-minute papers each, as well as keynote lectures of forty minutes each.

Submission:

We are inviting proposals for papers of twenty-minute length. Please send abstracts of up to 500 words with CVs (as well as any inquiries) to medieval.theories.of.science@gmail.com by 14 February 2022.

Organisers:

Yael Barash (Cohn Institute for the History of Science and Ideas, Tel Aviv)
Dominic Dold (Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin)
Gerd Micheluzzi (Department of Art History, University of Hamburg)

Updates and confirmed speakers:

For updates and a list of confirmed speakers, please consult the event website: <https://www.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/event/philosophical-perspectives-medieval-theories-science>

Reference:

CFP: Medieval Theories of Science (Berlin, 27–28 Sep 22). In: ArtHist.net, Jan 16, 2022 (accessed Sep 17, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/35678>>.