

When was Medieval Philosophy?

An Inaugural Lecture by John Marenbon, as Honorary Professor of Medieval Philosophy in the University of Cambridge, delivered November 30, 2011

Examiners are usually instructed to avoid setting questions that can be answered perfectly well in a short phrase. You may feel that the same injunction should apply to lecture titles, and that I have broken it. ‘When was medieval philosophy?’ During the Middle Ages! But it is precisely because I think that this obvious answer is the wrong one that I have chosen to pose the question. Here are four better answers: -

- Who cares?
- Now.
- From c. 200 to c. 1700.
- Never.

Grammatical niceties aside, each these answers is in some way right, as I hope to explain.

But I realize that, in my haste to address the subject of my lecture, I have not yet said anything about its occasion, nor, what is more important, taken the chance to thank the two bodies which have made this Honorary Professorship possible. The first is Trinity College, where I have been – forever, as it were – as an undergraduate, graduate and fellow. It has afforded me a wonderfully *ancien régime* career at Cambridge. Had I, as a student, entered any other college or university, in the UK or elsewhere, I might well have ended up as an academic, even perhaps as an historian of philosophy. But no other institution in the world would have given me the same freedom to pursue my intellectual project – one which, in considerable measure, I had in mind right from the beginning – in its own terms, rather than according to the artificial and often damaging constraints imposed by the division of teaching and research into faculties and departments.

That freedom has had its costs, since a person not squarely in one faculty is likely to wander uncomfortably between many. But my gratitude to the Philosophy Faculty is not just because I now have a home. It is also, and more importantly, because *it* is my home. The proper place for my work – for the work of anyone in my subject – is a philosophy department.

Yet, until now, and to a great extent still, medieval philosophy has not been studied as part of philosophy at Cambridge or elsewhere in Britain. My own formation, which I owe in especial to Michael Lapidge, Peter Dronke and Edouard Jeuneau, was in a sort of medieval philology conceived broadly enough to cover the study, not just of languages and manuscripts, but also of history, literature and philosophy. More typically, though, in Britain philosophy in the Middle Ages has been investigated and taught in history departments. Much as I respect the

scholarly achievements of such work, the subject, I believe, is badly placed there. Explaining why brings me straight to the first two answers I suggested to my question about ‘When was medieval philosophy?’: ‘Who cares?’ and ‘Now’. I envisage these two answers as complementary, putting forward different aspects of what might be called the ‘Philosopher’s Position’. She – imaginary philosophers are all female these days – responds ‘Who cares?’, because she thinks that facts concerning date, chronology and historical setting are of little importance; those about period boundaries of even less. ‘Does it matter’, she asks, ‘whether something was written in 400 BC, in 1300 or 1800? It is *what* the philosopher argued, and *how*, that should concern us, not *when*. Labels such as ‘ancient’, ‘medieval’ and ‘modern’ are merely convenient tools for dividing up the material, and not something to be fussed about. When we consider a text as philosophy,’ she continues, going on to justify the second answer, ‘we are, in an important sense, regarding it as if it had been written now. Of course, we know that the writer’s assumptions and aims, to say nothing of his social and intellectual context, were quite different from our own. For an intellectual historian, understanding these differences is a central task. But, as philosophers, we can disregard them. Our job is to engage with the concepts, positions and, above all, the arguments of past thinkers, and in order to engage with them we need to treat them as our own interlocutors, bringing their thinking into our own present.’

The position just sketched by my imaginary philosopher captures, I believe, the *necessary* conditions for studying philosophy of the past. To read a text as philosophy requires understanding (or trying to understand) its arguments and its positions. And understanding requires a lot more than just being able to repeat or summarize or paraphrase them. We do not understand an argument until we are able to see what would be counter-arguments to it, and how they in turn might be challenged. That is to say, we must engage philosophically with the text, by doing the same sort of philosophical work we would do if we were reading a piece by a contemporary in a field to which we wanted to make an original contribution. In this sense, we make the text we study, whenever it was written, into a piece of philosophy now. But, before we are in a position to grasp arguments from old texts in this way, there is another sort of work we must do: the work of translation. I do not mean just or only literal translation. I am talking about the need to find a way of putting what the old texts say into terms we can understand – a process which may often be very complicated, because our own ordinary language or technical jargon may not fit what was being said, and so we have to explain everything step by step, reconstructing the author’s meaning in our own terms. This process of translation is unlike anything required in doing philosophy today but, like the philosophical engagement it enables, has the effect of taking a process of thought from the past and bringing it into present existence in our understandings.

Many would not agree with what I have said about translation and philosophical engagement. Some would say that it is a possible approach, but that there is another, more historical one, which sticks more closely to the texts themselves. Others would condemn my position altogether, contending that what I call translation is unfaithful to the texts, and that

philosophical engagement is unhistorical. They would say that I am sacrificing history, a regard for the facts, to philosophy. Yet my criteria aim to set out the minimal requirements, not for doing philosophy, but for doing history, where philosophy is the subject. No historian worth the name presents bare, unassimilated data: the evidence must be *understood*, and so a grasp of the area from which it is drawn is needed. The economic historian must know about the market; the military historian about the mechanics of war; the political historian about the mechanisms of government, as well as the human qualities, such as greed, deceitfulness and lust for power, which are his subject. Similarly, a historian of philosophy must work from and with a living awareness of how reason is used philosophically; otherwise he will be no historian at all but a mere antiquarian.

The problem is not about the work of intellectual historians. Philosophy has always been at once the preserve of specialists, and at the same time a part of general culture. Historians of philosophy consider the subject mainly as a specialized discipline. Intellectual historians regard it in the light of its wider connections. Although they need to practise a measure of translation and perhaps even some philosophical engagement (the difference between their methods and those of the philosophers is then not absolute, but one of degree), their main concern is not with the detailed argumentation which made a text important to other philosophers, but with the effect of ideas on a more general public.

The problem, rather, is with a way of approaching the history of philosophy, in which scholarship – competent, learned but mindless scholarship – is pursued for its own sake. Although the points I have been making are very general and apply to the history of all past philosophy, this concern is particularly relevant to my own period. In ancient philosophy and modern philosophy, a great deal of work is being done, in philosophy departments and elsewhere, that fully meets the two criteria set out in the Philosopher's Position. In medieval philosophy, the position is different. Eighty per cent of the work done fails to translate and to engage philosophically, not because it is pretentious or slapdash or ignorant, but because it follows the model of scholarship for its own sake and does not go beyond paraphrasing of texts in their own terms. And the pity is that, in general, philosophical texts from medieval times, because of their remoteness and their technicality, and also their sophistication, need translation and repay the philosophical engagement of an expert more than texts from any other periods. That is why it is so very important for the subject that it taken into Anglophone philosophy departments.

II

I therefore accept with enthusiasm what I have described as the Philosopher's Position, in so far as it sets out the necessary conditions for studying the philosophy of the past. 'Now' is one excellent answer to the question 'When was medieval philosophy?' But is it a complete answer?

I believe not. To justify this belief, I need to vindicate a particular answer to the question of *why* it is worthwhile studying philosophy from the Middle Ages or any other historical period. On the basis of some other answers, what I have called the Philosopher's Position sets out not just the necessary but also the sufficient conditions for studying the philosophy of the past.

Among philosophers, one of the commonest justifications given for reading texts from the past is that they are directly useful: that they contain arguments and positions which can contribute to contemporary discussions. It would be hard to quarrel in principle with this justification. If past texts do contribute to contemporary discussions, then surely that is valuable. And, no doubt, sometimes they do contribute. But how often and how much? There are some famous cases, such as Aristotle and contemporary virtue ethics. Not only are these few, however. It is also far from obvious that any very detailed and deep knowledge of the past philosophers concerned has been involved. Indeed, it may well be that a rather vague and general, perhaps even imprecise and anachronistic impression of some text from the past is likely to be better as a stimulus to a contemporary philosopher's creativity than a thorough and accurate knowledge of it. The same point applies to those recent and present-day analytic philosophers whose work avowedly draws inspiration from a past figure such as Kant or Hegel. Although they may, as it happens, have studied Kant or Hegel closely, there is no intrinsic link between a detailed and precise understanding of the old texts and their own philosophical positions.

I may seem to be taking an extreme view and claiming that philosophy never learns from its past. Not at all. I accept that, to some extent, philosophy is a discipline that makes progress, like one of the natural sciences, so that – to oversimplify – each generation builds on the one before. It is precisely for this reason that philosophers are unlikely to find new ideas to use in their work by looking at old texts. The best thinking of their predecessors will have been absorbed into the subject, adapted to new circumstances, improved and probably rendered almost unrecognizable. What remains of it, in the basic account of a problem that any textbook will provide, is just what is relevant to our thinking now. If the aim is to contribute to present philosophy, to insist on going back to the original would be perverse.

But perhaps there have been promising lines of argument which, by historical mischance, have been overlooked and so never absorbed into the common grounding of philosophers. Some historians of philosophy have held that it is their special job to search out these forgotten treasures, so that, at last, philosophers can benefit from them. I am sceptical, however, about how many such discoveries there are to be made, and even more about the practicability of exploiting

them, given the difference between the practice of today the terms and contexts in which the original insights occurred. Let me give an example from my own area. You could not find a better case of innovative and penetrating philosophical work which was forgotten and not taken into the on-going tradition than the aspects of logic newly developed in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, especially epistemic logic, which reached a degree of sophistication still perhaps unequalled today. I once commissioned a book on this area for a series I was editing. The writer concentrated on exactly the late medieval material that could be directly valuable for contemporary logicians and took great trouble to explain everything in contemporary terminology. When I saw the final book, I was impressed by its quality, but worried about whether it would find readers. I expressed my concerns to a colleague. 'It will make an excellent textbook for courses on medieval epistemic logic', he consoled me. When I explained that there are not, and are unlikely to be, courses on medieval epistemic logic, he suggested that it would be a good text-book for a course simply on epistemic logic itself. The extent to which this idea was taken up can be gauged by the fact that the publishers axed the series once they saw this book's sales which, indeed, still, nearly twenty years later, have scarcely climbed to double figures.

I do not blame contemporary logicians for their failure to queue up and buy this volume. Even if there are some wonderful suggestions for them to be found there, extracting and applying them would require as much energy as reaching the results from scratch. The problem (as I have already mentioned) about the sort of translation which I insist is necessary, is that it rarely results in a translated version that can be read smoothly as a contemporary argument. Translation usually involves continual explanation: given that they took it for granted that p (though we all believe now not- p), and that they distinguished As from Bs but not from Cs, whereas we distinguish As from Cs and not from Bs, and that they were trying to avoid positions J and K, we can see why they argued in this way or stated the position like that. Once the translation has been made, we can engage philosophically with the arguments, but we cannot put the arguments themselves into the mesh of our own argumentation without twists and turns that leave us hopelessly entangled.

In face of such difficulties, some seek to justify the study of past philosophy, not by direct usefulness, but in an entirely different sort of way, basing themselves on the idea of Great Minds. Rather than seeing philosophy on the model of the natural sciences, as an accumulative search for knowledge, they envisage it as nearer to the fine arts. Great philosophers, they say, are as rare as great poets or great composers. Whatever our enthusiasm for contemporary music or writing – even if we think that it has a special place, because it is of our own time – we know we must read or listen to the great masterpieces of the past if we are to enjoy more than a very small amount of poetry or music of the highest level. Similarly, we should expect only one or two really outstanding philosophers in a century, and so, if we want to read much philosophy as it is done at its best, we need to take advantage of the great minds from times past.

Although this Great Minds view does not capture all of what philosophers seek from their work, it makes a powerful case for reading a range of texts from the past. Yet this approach, whatever its value, is ineffective as a way of encouraging people to study medieval philosophers. It is not that the best medieval philosophers are less great than those before or since, but they present special difficulties of understanding, both because they thought in a context so different from ours, and because they tended to be highly professional, sophisticated thinkers, working within specialists subjects with their own technical jargon and procedures. The Great Minds approach assumes that we want to be able to read as much great philosophy as we can, and that it is a matter of indifference when it was written. But there is enough great ancient and modern and nineteenth and twentieth-century philosophy to occupy most people for a lifetime, and almost all of it is far more accessible than medieval work.

Fortunately, there is another, better way of justifying study of past philosophy. On the one side, studying the history of their subject is of benefit to philosophers, not because it offers ready-made first-order arguments and ideas to consider in their discussion, but because it is the only way of tackling many of the second-order questions about philosophy: what sort of a discipline it is, to what extent does it make progress, what are its relations to other areas of intellectual life and culture. To a large extent, these are empirical questions, without simple answers, the material for which is provided by investigating the history of philosophy (and also by comparative studies of different traditions of philosophy). And, whereas natural scientists can afford to pass on second-order questions to independent specialists, philosophy, as a discipline that deals with ultimate questions, cannot afford to ignore questions about itself. So, by learning about the history of their subject, philosophers stand to benefit, not so much in tackling this or that question, but in how they approach their work as a whole.

Moreover, from the history of the relevant parts of their subject they can see how the questions they tackle came to be set, the concepts they use reached, the patterns of argument elaborated. They can, so to speak, take apart the sort of basic contemporary textbook I mentioned a few minutes ago, by understanding the genealogy of the elements which constitute it. Doing so will not solve their problems, but, by allowing them to be seen with distance and detachment, it will help to show what sort of problems they are.

On the other side, the history of philosophy has more than a merely instrumental value in promoting good philosophizing. Its results are valuable in themselves as much as either other sorts of history or as first-order philosophy, since they do all that these other disciplines can, and should aim, to do: they satisfy a harmless curiosity, which is one of the few human characteristics both common and admirable. It is true, though, that given the degree of philosophical engagement needed to study philosophy of the past, there is a tension for historians of philosophy between a desire to make their work available to a wider public, and the need for detailed, technical analysis if they are to do justice to the arguments and positions of their authors.

This two-sided justification for studying philosophy of the past differs from those I reviewed before it in one very important way. Neither the direct usefulness nor the Great Minds approach finds any importance in the chronology of past thinkers, or in their historical context. The first seizes on this or that argument or idea in isolation from its setting; the second puts us round the seminar table with Aristotle, Locke and Hegel. By contrast, the justification I have given sees past philosophy as worth studying only if it is regarded as the product of a certain period, at a certain moment both in the history of the subject, but also within broader intellectual, cultural and political history. For this reason, although we are right, in a way, to say that medieval philosophy is now – and there is even some reason (as I shall explain) to say that it doesn't matter when it was, these answers are incomplete.

III

I come, therefore, to my third and fourth answers. With Number 3, you may feel that at last we have reached *terra firma*. Here, at last, you have some dates: 'from c. 200 to c. 1700'. But I want this third answer to be taken along with the fourth: 'Never'. I would be aghast if you came away from this lecture thinking that its main point was to argue that medieval philosophy runs from c.200 to c. 1700 – aghast for two reasons.

First, it would sound as if I were trying to engage in an absurd sort of imperialism, extending the boundaries of my own special subject forward and backwards at the expense of its neighbours. On the contrary, my aim is just to promote the free flow of the study of ideas and remove damaging temporal border controls – Schengen rather than May 1940. In one sense, the reply 'Never' indicates that, if we follow the chronological divisions I favour, we should be prepared to drop the description 'Medieval Philosophy' and find another label – after all, one can hardly call Porphyry or Proclus, or Descartes or Spinoza 'medieval'.

In another sense, though, 'Never' expresses a reserve with regard to any sectioning at all of philosophy into large periods. On the face of it, dividing up philosophy into periods, such as medieval philosophy or modern philosophy, is an acknowledgement that philosophy takes place in time, in a chronological order and within the social and intellectual framework of a particular period. But the effect can be almost the converse. Within a given period – sometimes nearly a millennium – chronology is all but ignored: ideas and arguments are allowed to float freely in the timeless space of, for instance, 'medieval' or 'modern' philosophy. Moreover, however carefully the boundaries are chosen, it will always be necessary to cross them. This is why the first response to my question, 'Who cares?', was not altogether wrong. We should care about chronology and context, but, in an ideal world, not waste time trying to label periods.

I should be happiest, then, if we could agree to drop big period-labels for philosophy altogether. Indeed, I should love to see a *History of Philosophy* in 25 volumes, with a volume for each century – the effect would be a little like looking at a photograph of the earth from space after being used to two-dimensional maps and their distortive projections.

But I try to live in the real world – at times. Employers, publishers and students, alas, demand meaningful labels, and there is little I can do to prevent many of the centuries of philosophy which interest me from being bundled together. In the usual bundling, historians start in the eighth or ninth century, perhaps including some Christians, such as Augustine and Boethius, from the ancient world, but not their pagan coevals, and continue until 1450 or 1500, though also gathering up some supposedly medieval philosophers who lived after the Middle Ages, such as Suárez, who did not die until 1617, when Descartes was already over 20. This bundling of, roughly, seven centuries to form ‘Medieval Philosophy’ did not originate from an attempt to cut the History of Philosophy at its joints, but from antagonism and misguided opportunism. Philosophers from Descartes on achieved a wonderful propaganda victory in presenting their own thinking, most inaccurately, as new, entirely opposed and unindebted to the scholastic tradition. A strong interest in this reviled way of philosophizing grew only with Neoscholasticism in the nineteenth century, when medieval philosophy, and Aquinas in particular – or rather, deformed versions of them – were deliberately chosen by the Church to combat the modern philosophical movements it feared. That battle has passed, but specialists are happy to take the place it has left for them; and they are content that, in a few Anglophone universities, mostly Catholic, and rather more on the Continent, there is the chance to study and teach a special area, Medieval Philosophy, which is usually circumscribed according to the priorities of the Neoscholastic view, even though no one is a Neoscholastic any more. They do not realize that the price of their area’s being accepted as a speciality subject –respected like other specialities – is acceptance of the part-myth of a new beginning on which modern philosophy was founded and to which ‘Medieval Philosophy’, as a separate subject, owes its identity.

We need not follow the division of history imposed by seventeenth-century propaganda and nineteenth-century triumphalism. We can both follow the flow of intellectual and cultural history, and make immediate didactic gains, if we start at about 200AD and go on to about 1700.

200 AD, because only by starting then can we see philosophy in the West for the next 1500 years for what it was: four traditions, Greek, Arabic, Jewish and Latin. In about 205, Plotinus was born. He established the Platonism which became the dominant philosophical school in the late Roman Empire, and his pupil, Porphyry, gave the late ancient curriculum its characteristic form, by recognizing Aristotle along with Plato as the two fundamental philosophers, whose thought is complementary and concordant. The Aristotelian-Platonic curriculum in the great Platonic schools of Athens and Alexandria shaped the four traditions of philosophy that grew from it like branches from a trunk. (When historians make medieval

philosophy begin sometime in the early Middle Ages, they in effect cut off the branches from their trunk.)

The Greek tradition was most fortunate in its access to a wide variety of ancient texts but, at least after the seventh century, less philosophically productive than the others. Philosophically, the most direct heirs of the ancient schools were the philosophers in Islam. The School of Alexandria was still functioning at the time of the Muslim conquest in 641, and large quantities of the philosophical and scientific texts from it were put into Arabic. Up to about 1000, the time of Avicenna, many aspects of Arabic philosophy can be seen as direct continuations of the Greek schools. The Latin tradition, too, drew especially from these schools, but indirectly, through, in particular, Augustine, Boethius and pseudo-Dionysius. Meanwhile, Jewish philosophers, fully assimilated into Arabic culture, developed their own Platonism and Aristotelianism, using the same sources as the Muslims. From the thirteenth century, the centre of Jewish philosophy moved to France and the Mediterranean, and Hebrew became its language; but the thinkers continued to draw both on their greatest Jewish predecessor, Maimonides, and on Islamic writers.

These branches did not only share the same trunk. In their twisting growth they met, supporting and sustaining each other. Jewish philosophy, as I have just explained, lent heavily on Islamic thought. Greek developments from the fifth to seventh centuries strongly influenced Latin philosophy in the period following. From the mid-twelfth century, Arabic material, by Islamic and Jewish authors, began to be translated into Latin, and the way thirteenth and fourteenth-century Latin thinkers understood Aristotle and thought about the relation between revelation and reason was profoundly affected by their reading of Avicenna, Averroes and Maimonides. Philosophy in Byzantium was deeply influenced, from the thirteenth century, by the Latin scholastic tradition, and from the fourteenth century onwards Jewish philosophers in Latin Europe began looking, not just to their own and the Islamic tradition, but to the scholasticism of the Christian universities. The collapse of Byzantium in the fifteenth century brought Greek scholars, with their texts and ideas, to Latin intellectuals, especially in Italy. And, even in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Latin translations were being made of previously unknown philosophical works in Arabic.

The beginning of the third century AD can, then, be justified as the common starting-point for a group of philosophical traditions which continue to be closely interrelated, but my insistence on going up to 1700 might seem harder to argue. The Greek tradition, I admit, fades rather earlier, after the Turkish conquest. With regard to Islam, the problem is perhaps the opposite. It used to be thought that philosophy in Islam ended with Averroes, at the end of the twelfth century. Scholars today realize that, in the Islamic East, not only logic at a high level, but a consideration of philosophical questions within the study of theology (close, in fact, to the manner of Latin scholasticism) went on to the seventeenth century and even later. 1700 is certainly not too late a borderline, but it might be too early. From the fifteenth century onwards, Jewish philosophy became more and more closely linked with the Latin Christian tradition, with

some of the outstanding Jewish philosophers writing in Latin – most strikingly in the case of Spinoza. And so the period boundary for Jewish philosophy will depend on what is decided about the Latin tradition. And it is here that it seems at first hardest to justify going on to 1700. In *Histories* of philosophy, conventionally, after Medieval Philosophy there comes Renaissance Philosophy, and then follows Modern Philosophy beginning around 1600 and stretching on into the eighteenth century. Why ignore these period distinctions?

But ‘Renaissance Philosophy’ does not, in fact, usually designate a period at all. Look again at the usual *Histories*. There will be one chapter, starting c. 1350 and going to 1500 or 1550, usually called something like ‘Late Medieval Philosophy’. And there will be another chapter – or often a set of chapters, or a whole volume – also starting c. 1350, if not earlier, and going on to 1550, or perhaps 1600, which will be called ‘Renaissance Philosophy’. Although the historians may talk about humanism, usually the distinguishing criterion is brutally geographic: Italians (and Greeks who came to Italy) belong to the Renaissance, their contemporaries elsewhere in Europe are medieval.

Surely, though, you will object, there is an important break in the seventeenth century, with the rejection of much of Aristotelian science and, along with it, many of the metaphysical principles that had been generally accepted. Indeed – and that is why, a few minutes ago, I referred to the *part*-myth of a new beginning on which modern philosophy was founded. Many scholastic tenets were rejected in the seventeenth century. What is mythical – the enduring effect of seventeenth-century propaganda – is that the modern philosophers simply turned their backs on an outworn tradition. Where they reject scholastic views, there are usually profound implications for the shape of their own thinking; and then, in many cases, they do not reject, but adapt or take over completely ideas and arguments from the rich philosophical tradition that some of them pretended to ignore. But, whatever the case, we are in no position to understand their thinking without knowing their philosophical background, and that is one reason why we would gain so much from thinking of a continuous period up until about 1700. Of course, I am not suggesting that we ignore links between, say, Locke and Hume. But, even if we put a period boundary at about 1700, there will be no danger of this happening, whereas it is common, indeed the norm, for seventeenth-century philosophy to be studied with hardly glance backwards.

I realize that this part of my proposal, to consider as a whole a period that stretches not just back to Plotinus, but forward to Spinoza and Leibniz (and perhaps even later in Islam), will be the most controversial. But it is also the most important, because its benefits reach beyond so-called medieval philosophy, and it can help to transform our understanding of seventeenth-century thinking and, ultimately, of the whole philosophical tradition.

It is mainly since, recently, medievalists by training have started to ignore the supposed limits of the Middle Ages and write about a period stretching from the thirteenth century to nearly 1700 that it has become so clear how each important new move in seventeenth-century philosophy takes place against within a context set by earlier, usually scholastic, philosophy.

Look at the recent books by Martin Lenz, Robert Pasnau and Dominik Perler, for instance.¹ From them one sees that to read seventeenth-century philosophy without their deep knowledge of preceding centuries is like beginning *Hamlet* at Act 5. But I would go further. Heeding the continuity from Plotinus to Leibniz guards against an even more drastic but common error about early modern philosophy, which renders it altogether unintelligible.

Medieval philosophy has often been considered as Christian philosophy. Clearly, the longer and culturally wider tradition I have been describing is not just a Christian one. But it is strikingly a tradition in which philosophy is closely tied to monotheistic religions – not just Judaism, Christianity and Islam, but also the monotheism (or henotheism) of the Platonists. It continued to be a philosophy of monotheism in this sense right up to the early 1700s – indeed, perhaps no philosopher was more obsessed with this centuries-old agenda of questions about how a finite universe relates to an omnipotent God than Leibniz. It is not as the result of any seventeenth-century thinkers’ own propaganda that the God-centred character of philosophy at the time is frequently overlooked or side-lined, but from an idea that grew up later, of philosophy as the triumph of reason. It has been on the basis of that idea, antithetical to any honest history, that what still remains the normal way of presenting philosophy’s past was established, skipping happily, over the abyss of medieval superstition, from Aristotle to Descartes.

To plug a little of that gaping hole with ‘Medieval Philosophy’ is an advance, but I should like to do more. Introducing the very influential *Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy* in 1982, Normann Kretzmann wrote that he hoped to ‘help end the era during which [medieval philosophy] has been studied in a philosophical ghetto.’ He intended to do so by applying the tools and questions of contemporary philosophy to medieval thought. As I made clear in the earlier part of this lecture, his initiative was valuable, indeed necessary. But you do not free yourself from a ghetto just by starting to wear the same clothes and behave in the same way as the people outside.

You free yourself by tearing down its walls.

¹ Martin Lenz, *Lockes Sprachkonzeption*, Berlin and New York; De Gruyter, 2010 (Quellen und Studien zur Philosophie 96); Robert Pasnau; *Metaphysical Themes, 1274-1671*. New York;Oxford University Press, 2011; Domink Perler, *Transformationen der Gefühle. Philosophische Emotionstheorien, 1270-1670*, Frankfurt am Main; Fischer, 2011. These three authors gave the papers in English at a recent British Academy Dawes Hicks symposium (‘Continuity and Innovation in Medieval and Modern Philosophy of Knowledge, Mind and Language’) which will be published, and made available on the British Academy web-site, in the near future.