



# PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT SPEAKER SERIES

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## RHETORIC AND THE EPISTEMIC STATUS OF THEOLOGY IN THE LATE THIRTEENTH CENTURY

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ROOM: MACK 230

FRIDAY, APRIL 6

11:30-1:00



In my talk, I will argue that theology in the thirteenth century experienced an epistemic crisis that was triggered by the reintroduction of Aristotelian logic in the preceding century. Medieval thinkers traditionally took it for granted that theology was the most noble of disciplines, but with the reintroduction of the *Posterior Analytics* and the *Rhetoric* into the West, along with the Arabic commentary tradition that accompanied these works, this assumption was called into question. This forced theologians to consider the question of whether theology was a demonstrative science, that is, whether it could in fact produce, from an Aristotelian perspective, knowledge or *scientia*. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) would spend considerable effort trying to prove that theology was indeed a demonstrative science. But by the late-thirteenth century several important theologians came to think that this project was futile. For example, Giles of Rome (ca. 1243/47-1316), the influential and controversial former pupil of Thomas Aquinas, went so far as to argue that theology was closer to rhetoric than to demonstration. Giles's account clearly, if unwittingly, threatened the dignity of theology, since, his critics contended, if theology was merely a type of rhetoric, then this would make it subordinate to philosophy. Out of these debates over the epistemic status of theology, I shall argue, emerged some important developments in the history of epistemology.