Several later medieval authors inquired about the limits of what can be known and the extent to which we can say we are certain of something. Are our cognitive powers sufficient to put us in a state in which we cannot possibly be wrong? Or do we need some external, i.e. superhuman, help to reach that state? And is a state of absolute certainty something we should be willing to achieve at all? What is the scope of our cognitive powers? What are their limits? And, for that matter, what does it mean to be certain of something? In this course, we will consider these and related questions in the writings of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century authors such as John Duns Scotus, Henry of Ghent, Nicholas of Autrecourt and others. While dealing with the legacy of Aristotle and Augustine and exploring the extent to which superhuman beings can deceive us, those authors laid the premises of the early modern debate on certainty and skepticism.

The course will be based on the close reading of texts in English translation and the detailed consideration of the arguments contained in those texts.