

Thomas on the Nicomachean Ethics
Prof, John Hilary Martin, O.P.
Syllabus PHHS 4011

Instructor fr. John Hilary Martin, O.P.

Class Time: ~~Fri. 9:40-12:40~~ *Thursdays 11:10am to 2pm*

Office Hours: Fri. 2:00-4:00 pm (at DSPT)

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Course Description:

What is happiness, is happiness the same for everyone and in every human community, can perfect happiness ever be acquired? These questions are asked in every generation. We will undertake a careful reading of Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary* on Aristotle's *Ethics* not merely to see his appreciation of Aristotle, but to examine Thomas's understanding of moral good and evil of all human acts. Aristotle's text and the *Commentary* are quite long so only selected texts will be analyzed. We will focus on happiness, the formation of virtue in Aristotle and Thomas and the need of friendship for human flourishing

Method:

The lecture-seminar method will be used. Students will read assigned portions of the *Commentary* to bring to class to facilitate discussion. Discussions can be far ranging and involve current issues about the difficulty of framing cross-cultural moral laws, and a relation to contemporary Virtue Ethics. Four weeks before the end of term students will present in class their proposal for a final paper (18 pages) to be discussed in class for peer support and evaluation.

Expectations

Students will be expected to take an active part in the discussions of issues raised in the text. Copies of Thomas's *Commentary* have been edited by the Leonine Commission and are available for students who are fluent and/or interested in Latin. Knowledge of Latin, however, is not essential for this course. Good translations are readily available on line. I will use C.J. Litzinger, op with the forward by Ralph McInerny

Bibliography

1. Primary Sources

Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*, Leonine edn. Vols. 47.1 & 47.2. The Latin Leonine text of can be downloaded from the internet. The Leonine edition the text we will use. (Xeroxed texts of the Leonine can be acquired.)

Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II selected questions. Use the Leonine edn. or Blackfriars edn. in conjunction with Eyre & Spottswood et al).

Commentary on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* by Thomas Aquinas, trans. C.J. Litzinger, O.P. Dumb Ox Books, Notre /Dame Ind. 1964

2. Secondary Sources (for this course)

Bejczy, Istvan P. *The Cardinal Virtues in the Middle Ages*, Leiden Boston: Brill. 2011
_____, *Virtue Ethics in the Middle Ages*, 2013.

The Cambridge Translation of Medieval Philosophical Texts. Vol. 3 ed. R. Pasnau, Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002

MacIntyre, A., *Beyond Virtue*, London: Duckworth, 1985

OSV Encyclopedia of Catholic Doctrine, ed. R. Shaw, Huntington In.: Our Sunday Visitor, 1997, entries, *Modes of Responsibility, Moral Principles, Virtue Ethics*.

Pinckaers, Servais, O.P., *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, translated from the 3rd edition by Sr. Mary Noble, Washington, D.C.: Catholic Univ. of America Press, 1995.

_____, *Morality The Catholic View*, trans, Michael Sherwin, OP, South Bend, Ind. : St. Augustine's Press, 2001

Torrell, Jean-Pierre, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*: vol. 1, *The Person and His Work*, trans. Robert Royal, (Catholic University of America, 1996) [from *Initiation à saint Thomas d'Aquin* by Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P. (Edition du cerf) 1993];
Thomas Aquinas Spiritual Master, vol. 2, 2003

Weisheipl, Athenatius, O.P., *Friar Thomas d'Aquino, His Life, Thought and Work*, (Doubleday, 1974).

Reading

1. Each week there will be a portion of the text assigned which should be read before class to facilitate discussion.
2. 2 short papers (2-4 pages) outlining the meaning of a chosen text.
3. Active, informed participation in the discussions.

Written Work and Assessment

1. 2 Short papers on how to read a medieval text. (10%) of final grade
2. Class discussions (15%)
3. A short proposal for the final paper to be presented in class 3-4 weeks before the end of term for discussion, criticism and class support.
4. A final term paper (15-18 pages) (75%) of the final grade

Purpose, Outcomes and Grading rubrics for the course.

Course Goals

The aim of this course is two fold. First it aims to instruct students about how to read a university text by a significant medieval philosopher-theologian; secondly, to examine the process of forming moral actions as presented by Thomas . To expose the main lines of Thomas's epistemological theory which supported his ethical theories and current relevance

1. To achieve an understanding of how choices were arrived at by an ancient philosopher and a medieval theologian using papers as evidence of the students making **intellectual integration** of the material they have been studying.
2. Promote a realization by students that the ancient and medieval thinkers dealt with problems (finding the good, finding virtue) that are still being argued and so help the students acquire an **intellectual humility** as they look into the past.
3. The weekly class discussions are designed to encourage students to look beyond simply reporting what a text says, but to see the success and failures of significant thinker and so develop a sense of **self-direction** and **intellectual cooperation**.

4. No paper should be written by a student entirely on their own. The discussion of papers in class and particularly the discussion of the proposal for their final paper in the presence of friendly classmates is designed to foster a sense of **intellectual collaboration**.
5. Students will be encouraged to see the disparate answers given by modern and ancient thinkers to basic ethical issues to venture a **prophetic challenge** to our own day .

Course outcomes

1. The ability to read the genre of medieval commentary with a **critical understanding** of what they meant at the time what it might mean for us now.
2. To **communicate** the fruits of their reading with scholarly writing.
3. To show how an objective ethics contrasts with **contemporary ethical approach**
4. To remind students that the European philosophic tradition has always borrowed ideas from outside, even from non-Christian Arabic authors.

Grading Rubrics

“A” Students has shown ability to read texts, to relate one question to another. To know how the university texts were formed. To see that texts present a philosophical unity concerning human actions, search for an end and preparation for living a virtuous virtue. Faithfulness to class discussion and the weekly papers. The ability to write a clear and concise final paper on the topic chosen and to prepare a proper bibliography.

“A-“ The ability to read a text. To know how such tests were formed. Faithfulness to class discussion and papers. The ability to write a clear and concise final paper on the topic chosen and prepare a proper bibliography.

“B+” The student showed a lack of clarity about the meaning of significant texts. Shows little evidence of having read any secondary material. Lack of faithfulness to class discussion and papers. The final paper although good, needing a better statement of the problem chosen. Weak bibliography

“B” Lacking an understanding of the texts that we have been reading. Lack of faithfulness to class discussion and 2 short papers. The final paper not on the topic we had agreed upon. The final paper that was largely journalism, or an exchange of unsupported opinions without an awareness of the issues involved. Weak or no bibliography

A “B” in the first semester indicates the student shows some promise , but needs to see the advisor for basic instructions about what is expected.

“C” You will get three credits for this course on your transcript, but the work is below graduate level. It fails to meet the standards set above for A and B.

Plagiarism

This is taking credit for the work of another without giving credit to your source. Sometimes this is *unintentional*, but you will have to prove that. Plagiarism includes, paraphrasing texts, lifting ideas from another without citing where you got them. The academic penalties for plagiarism are severe. An F, a O for the grade is not uncommon.

But remember if you simply quote the full name of the author and the title of the work you are not committing plagiarism. Your paper may be a long string of quotes and little more, but at the end all you can be accused of is not being very original.