

Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology
PH4220 Aquinas and Platonism

Spring 2020

Instructor: John Thomas Mellein, O.P.

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Course Description

Thomas owes much to Platonic and Neo-Platonic sources. This seminar-style reading course will look at some of Thomas's commentaries on Neo-Platonic works, including his commentary on 'De Hebdomadibus', and will make use of secondary literature to locate and examine Platonic themes in Thomas's major works, including themes such as participation, and Divine Ideas. Reading knowledge of Latin recommended; some texts not available in translation. Format: Seminar. Evaluation: 2 student class presentations, 15-20 page research paper. Intended audience: Phil. and Theo. MA students. [Faculty Consent required; 12 max enrollment; Auditors Excluded]

This course meets on Thursdays, 3:40 p.m.–6:30 p.m., DSPT Room 2.

Grade:

Class Presentation 1: 25%

Class Presentation 2: 25%

Paper: 50%

Students are to abide by the the DSPT's policies regarding academic honesty as found in the *DSPT Student Handbook*. The grading policy as found in the student handbook, as well as the institutional assessment rubrics, will serve as the guideline for grading. We will review the policies at the beginning of the course.

Course Requirements

This seminar course will focus on close reading and in-class discussion of primary text passages. Students will take turns presenting on course readings and secondary sources. Each student will be required to give two in-class presentations. The student, in consultation with the professor, will select materials and make them available to the class the week before the presentation is to be given. Grading for the course will be based on in-class presentations and the research paper. Class participation should give evidence of careful reading of primary and secondary sources. During discussion, students will be expected to use the assigned readings support their interpretation. Students are to listen attentively to fellow students and to engage in genuine conversation. Papers will be evaluated based on support of a clear thesis statement, coherence of argument, and on effective use of primary and secondary sources.

Course and Institutional Learning Goals

The main goal of this course is to gain familiarity with Thomas's integration of Platonic principles, especially with regard to participation and divine ideas. A secondary goal is to improve critical skills in reading and discussing medieval philosophical texts and secondary literature. Students are encouraged to relate the topics to contemporary issues, especially in their papers.

The format of the course, especially the in-class discussions, will give students the opportunity to work toward the institutional learning goals: integrative thinking, intellectual humility, self-direction, and ability to collaborate. We will have a brief in-class discussion regarding the institutional learning goals, available here: <https://www.dspt.edu/our-mission>

Outcomes

By the end of the course, students should have familiarity with the main philosophical issues concerning Thomas's account of participation and divine ideas, and some of the contemporary scholarly discussion regarding the strengths and areas for improvement of Thomas's account. Students should be able to speak and write intelligently about some aspect of Thomas and Platonism. Students will demonstrate subject-appropriate critical thinking skills by comparing passages from different Thomistic writings, and by assessing contemporary scholarship on Thomas's work. Students will demonstrate mastery of the material in class discussion and presentations, and in the 15-20 page research paper.

Required Texts:

Thomas Aquinas. *Commentary on the Book of Causes*. Translated by Vincent A. Guagliardo, Charles Hess, and Richard C. Taylor. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996. ISBN: 0813208440. MSRP: \$22.95.

Thomas Aquinas. *De ente et essentia*.

Available at: <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/aquinas-esse.asp>

Also available in print in:

Thomas Aquinas, *Aquinas: Selected Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas*. Translated by Robert P. Goodwin. New York: Macmillan, 1965. Available used.

Thomas Aquinas. *An Exposition of the "On the Hebdomads" of Boethius*. Translated by Janice L. Schultz and Edward A. Synan. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001. ISBN: 0813209951. MSRP: \$22.95.

Doolan, Gregory T. *Aquinas on the Divine Ideas as Exemplar Causes*. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2014 (paperback reprint). ISBN: 081322716X. MSRP: \$34.95.

Recommended texts:

Thomas Aquinas. *On Spiritual Creatures*. Translated by Mary C. FitzPatrick. Milwaukee, Marquette University Press, 1949. ISBN: 0874622050. Available new: \$15.00. Also available used, or as print-on-demand.

Wippel, John F. *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being*. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000. ISBN: 0813209838. \$39.95.

Other course materials will be available online, or will be posted on Moodle during the week of the assigned reading.

Class Outline

- 2/6 Introduction to the course
- 2/13 *De ente et essentia*: a benchmark for Thomistic metaphysics
- 2/20 Plotinus and Aquinas on Beauty: a sample text study
- 2/27 *De hebdomadibus*
- 3/5 *De hebdomadibus*
- 3/12 Thomas on Participation, selected passages
- 3/19 *Liber de causis*
- 3/26 Spring Recess
- 4/2 *Liber de causis*
- 4/9 *Liber de causis*
- 4/16 Thomas on Divine Ideas, selected passages, Doolan
- 4/23 Thomas on Divine Ideas, selected passages, Doolan
- 4/30 Thomas on Divine Ideas, selected passages, Doolan
- 5/7 *De spiritualibus creaturis*, selections
- 5/14 Summary and conclusions