Thomas Aquinas on Truth, PH 4211

Studies in the classical tradition

Syllabus for 2015

Prof. J. Hilary Martin, O.P.
PH 4213 fall 2015
Fri. 11:10am – 2:00pm
DSPT 2
Office Hours Thurs. 1:30-2:30

Course Description

Truth, like religion, culture or morality, is a general term in constant use and seems to be part of the eternal furniture of the mind, but upon closer examination what truth consists in is not so clear and the use of the word has changed over time. For many contemporaries spin, reshaping meaning so as to fit the audience, is as important as the truth of what is being said. We will examine the basis for truth in Thomas Aquinas, a thinker whose thought still shapes much of what is said today. We will undertake a careful and a critical reading of Aquinas’ text in order to understand his meaning but also as a springboard for our own thought. Important locations for Thomas’s view of truth are in the Summa Theologica and the QD, De Veritate. Attention will be paid to authors with other views up to William of Occam.

Method and Expectations

The seminar method will be employed. A section of the text will be assigned for study each week and will then be read and commented on in class. Students will have read the text beforehand and will be prepared to discuss in class its meaning and place in Thomas's philosophic system. We will read De Veritate, a seminal work that covers a wide range of topics. Only selected Quaestiones will be read since the text is are too large to be handled in a semester. Discussion can be far ranging and involve contemporary issues such as relativism and skepticism. Copies of the Latin Leonine text of Thomas are available for students who are fluent in Latin although knowledge of Latin is not essential to take this course. Good translations into English are available and will be used.

Assessment

Class participation in class discussion is essential and will help form the basis for final assessment. Short, informal papers (2-4 pages) will be turned in at each class summarizing the text under discussion (25%). There will be a final paper (75%).

Class Meetings

Class will meet Fri 11:10am -2:00pm

Course Purpose and Goals

The goal of this course is two fold. It aims first to instruct students about how to read a university texts by significant medieval philosopher-theologians and, secondly, to analyze the concept of truth as Thomas understood it and to expose the main lines of Thomas’s epistemological theory in support of his argument.

1. To achieve understanding of the grounding of truth in reality as a major medieval philosopher-theologian saw it using the weekly papers as evidence of an intellectual integration of the material
2. Promote a realization by students that the medieval community, represented by Thomas, was quite aware, as we are today, of the difficulty of finding objective truth and so help the students acquire an intellectual humility as they look into the past.

3. The weekly papers, and the final paper will encourage students to look beyond merely reporting about a particular text but to seek out its overt and/or covert influence on contemporary thinkers and so develop a sense of self-direction.

4. No paper should be written by a student entirely in isolation. The discussion of weekly papers during each 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.

Course outcomes
1. The ability to read and construe a medieval academic philosophical text. To read a text with a critical understanding of what it meant at the time it was written and what it might mean for us now.

2. To communicate the fruits of their reading with scholarly writing.

3. The ability to see a medieval text as offering solutions, or a least values for contemporary epistemological problems.

4. To remind students that Thomas and other medieval authors derived many of their ideas from non-Christian sources, particularly philosophers of the Muslim Near East.
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J.H. Martin, O.P.

Bibliography

1. Primary Source: (we will use)
   Thomas Aquinas, *The Disputed Questions on Truth*, Trans., R.W. Mulligan,
   Chicago: Henry Regneri, 1952) 3 vols. (We will use vol. 1).

   Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate*, (editio Leonina) either download this or use of a xeroxed text of
   the Leonine edition will be expected.

   Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II selected questions, Leonine ed. or
   Blackfriars ed. vols 31 & 32.

2. Secondary Sources
   Aertsen, Ian A., *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals. The Case of Thomas Aquinas*, Leiden,


   The *Cambridge Translations of Medieval Philosophical Texts*. Vol. 3 ed. R. Pasnau, Cambridge Univ.

   Dewan, Lawrence, "St. Thomas, Ideas and Immediate Knowledge," *Dialogue* 18 (1979) pp. 392-
   404.

   183-222.

   LaNave, Gregory, “God, Creation and the Possibility of Philosophical Wisdom: Perspectives of

   397.

   1997.

   Soskice, Janet M., “Creatio ex nihilo: Its Jewish and Christian foundations,” *Creation and the

   (Catholic University of America Press, 1996) [from *Initiation à Saint Thomas d'Aquin* by Jean-

   Weisheipl, Athenatius, O.P., *Friar Thomas d'Aquino, His Life, Thought and Work*, New York:

   Wippel, John F. “Thomas Aquinas and Participation,” *Studies in Medieval Philosophy*, v. 17, pp. 117,

Some of these materials are expensive. Consult, GTU or UCB Library or the GTU reserve Some material can
be downloaded
Reading
1. Each week there will be a reading assigned which should be read before class to facilitate discussion of Thomas text and its meaning.
2. A short paper (2/4 pages) outlining the meaning of the text to be handed in at the beginning of class on the following week.
3. Active, informed participation in the discussions & papers 25% of final grade.
4. A final paper on an approved topic discussed in class 75% of grade.

Written Work
1. Short weekly papers on assigned readings.
2. A Final Paper 20 pages. A short written proposal for the final paper will be presented in class 7-9 weeks before the end of term for discussion, criticism and peer support.

Grading Rubrics
“A” Shows ability to read medieval philosophical texts, knows how they were constructed and the position they held in medieval universities. To know what St. Thomas had to say about truth, about the way the mind comes to know universal truth abstracted from particular sense data. Awareness of how the mind can organize sense and intellectual data, the possible relations of reason to faith. The ability to relate these ideas to our contemporary philosophic scene. To be aware of the secondary literature in the bibliography. Faithfulness to class discussion and the weekly papers. The ability to write a clear and concise final paper on the topic chosen.

“A-“ Shows ability to read a medieval philosophical text, knows what St. Thomas had to say about truth, about major issues such as, the possibility of universal truth, how the mind comes to know, possible relation of faith and reason, but with some gaps in understanding him. To fail to recognize contacts with contemporary philosophy. Faithfulness to class discussion and weekly papers. The ability to write a clear and concise final paper on the topic chosen.

“B+” Ability to read and use medieval texts. Some lack of clarity about what St. Thomas has to say about the transfer of sense data to intellectual awareness. Gaps in relating Thomas’s thought to modern considerations. Missing class discussions and/or weekly papers. The final paper lacking a clear statement of the problem chosen, nor very clear conclusions.

“B” Lacking of understanding the medieval texts we had been reading. Unclarity and/or mistakes about what St. Thomas had to say about how truth can emerge from knowledge of the physical world. Uninformed discussion of contemporary viewpoints with no awareness of medieval ideas or, on the other hand, a narrow discussion of medieval ideas with no awareness of modern challenges. Lack of faithfulness to class discussion and weekly papers. The final paper not on the topic we had agreed on. The paper largely journalistic, or an exchange of opinions without an awareness of the issues involved.

Gaining a “B” in the first semester indicates the student shows 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.

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, you will be assumed to be guilty if you use someone else’s material without attribution. Plagiarism includes, paraphrasing texts, lifting ideas from another without citing your source. The academic penalties for plagiarism are severe. Zero or an F for a grade is common.

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