Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology
Philosophy M.A. Program

Course Title: PH 4230, Aristotle’s Politics and its Medieval Commentators

Semester/Year: Fall 2015

Professor: Christopher Caruana OP – christopher.caruana@kcl.ac.uk

Course Description: This course intends to offer (a) an analysis of the arguments in Aristotle’s Politics while also looking at (b) the major themes developed by his medieval commentators (Albert and Thomas in particular). Important criticisms of contemporary liberalism turn to this work for support, especially because it advocates participatory democracy as well as because it is sympathetic to the rule of a virtuous or philosophic elite. However, is this the only correct hermeneutical platform behind his theory of the state? Themes from Albert’s and Aquinas’s political commentaries, such as the ruling function of practical reason and the elaboration on the concept of a common good will help provide a more complete and possibly fairer reading of this work.

Textbooks:


Or:


Student Learning Goals: a. Students will acquire a detailed knowledge of the main concepts and theories that are developed in Aristotle’s Politics as well as critical insight into the interpretative methods adopted by medieval Aristotelian commentators.
b. Apart from situating Aristotle’s Politics within its philosophical milieu and identifying its most influential ideas, a further important goal will be to understand the philosophical priorities that guided Albert and Thomas in their reading of Aristotle’s political thought.
c. A primary goal will be to read Aristotle’s text (in English translation) in a critical and analytic way. Specific texts will therefore be carefully discussed during lectures.

d. This course aligns itself with the academic spirit of DSPT which underlines the importance of the Aristotelian tradition and its reception and development by Dominican philosophers Albert and Thomas.

Student Learning Outcomes: 

a. Students will obtain a clear grasp of the salient topics in Aristotle’s Politics. Moreover, they will also acquire familiarity with selected passages from the medieval Commentaries on this major work. At Master’s Level, students will be expected to display a disposition for systematic organisation of concepts and interpretative skills. Lectures and class discussions about the text will be an immediate way of measuring the intellectual maturity acquired across the course-unit.

b. This course will be particularly enriching to students since it engages with the medieval commentaries of Albert and Thomas thus bringing to the program a vast array of themes that continue to excite the philosophical mind even today. Students must be able to provide an account of the major arguments of the Politics as well as of a number of selected topics from the medieval commentaries.

Methodology: Lectures followed by discussion. Time will be allowed for presentations by students related to their assignment which will be a long research paper.

Requirements: Students will be expected to attend lectures regularly in line with the policies stated in the Student Handbook at DSPT.

Credit weight: 4000

Course schedule:

Week 1: Introduction to the main themes and overall presentation

Among the many good introductions the following are recommended:
Hall, Pamela M. Narrative and the Natural Law: An Interpretation of Thomistic Ethics. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press. 1994
Week 2: The natural origin of the state in Aristotle
Suggested reading:

Week 3: Augustinian influence on the concept of the state
Suggested reading:

Week 4: Aquinas’s definition of politics
Suggested reading:
The Introduction (*Proemium*) to his Commentary on Aristotle’s Politics:

Week 5: The origins of the state in Aquinas
Suggested reading:

Week 6: Authority and law
Suggested reading:
Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae* II-II, Q. 95

Week 7: The end of the state: the common good
Suggested reading:
Aquinas. *Summa Contra Gentiles*. I, C. 86
Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae*. II-II Q. 47, a. 10
Aquinas. *Commentary on the Politics*. I, Lect. 1
Week 8: Forms of government
Suggested reading:

Week 9: Private property in Aquinas
Suggested reading:
Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae.* II-II Q. 66, a. 2-7
Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae.* II-II Q. 118. a. 4

Week 10: The political virtues in Albert and Aquinas (I)
Suggested reading:
Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologiae* II-II, Q. 47

Week 11: The political virtues in Albert and Aquinas (II)
Suggested reading:
Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologiae,* II-II, Q. 58

Week 12: Aquinas’s philosophy of law I
Suggested reading:
Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologiae,* II-II Qq. 98-105

Week 13: Aquinas on the relationship between church and state

Week 14: Contemporary debates on natural law
Suggested Reading:
Finnis, J. *Natural Law and Natural Rights.* Oxford University Press. 1980
General Bibliography (Aristotle)


(*Albert and Aquinas*)


