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

Instructor fr. John Hilary Martin, O.P.
Class Time: Tues 2:00-5:00
Office Hours: Mon 4:10-5:10 pm (DSPT)
Telephone: Office 510-883-2078, at home 510-596-1864 (not after 8:30)

Course Description:
After its recovery in the 13th century the Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle became a key text for the study of human moral behavior and is referred to even to this day. What is human happiness, is happiness the same for everyone and for every human community, what does happiness consist in and can perfect happiness ever be acquired in this life? These are questions that are universal and timeless. In this course we will undertake a careful reading of Thomas’s Commentary on Aristotle’s Ethics not merely to understand Aristotle, but to compare him with Thomas’s appreciation of the good and evil inherent in human acts and to contrast his views with current answers to the same problems. Aristotle’s text and the Commentary are quite long so only selected issues can be covered. As well as happiness, we will examine the formation and function of virtue in Aristotle and Thomas and relations to contemporary Virtue Ethics

Method:
The lecture-seminar method will be used. Students will read an assigned portion of the Commentary each week, write a brief reflection paper (2-4 pages) on the passage to bring to class in order to facilitate discussion. Discussions can be far ranging and involve current issues.

Expectations
Students will take an active part in the discussions, paying special attention the 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 or interested in Latin. Knowledge of Latin, however, is not essential to take this course. Good translations are readily available.

Students may be asked to make a short presentation of their reflection paper at one of the sessions. An overview of the proposal for their final paper will be discussed in class and a final paper (20 pgs.) with appropriate bibliography.
1. Primary Sources:

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

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


2. Secondary Sources (for this course)


_____________, *Virtue Ethics in the Middle Ages*, 2013 (on order)


Many of these books would be quite expensive and are now out of print. The GTU or UCB Library is a better bet. Some material is online.

**Requirements**

**Reading**

1. Each week there will be a reading assigned which should be read before class to facilitate discussion.

2. Short papers (2-4 pages) outlining the meaning of the text to be handed at the end of class or on the following week. (15%)

3. Active, informed participation in the discussions (15%)

**Written Work and Assessment**

1. Short weekly papers on assigned readings. (15%) of final grade

2. Class discussions (10%)

3. A short written proposal for the final paper to be presented in class 4-6 weeks before the end of term for discussion, criticism and support. (10%)

4. A final term paper (20 pages) (65%) 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 moral behavior as found in classical Greek and a medieval moral philosopher. To expose the main lines of Thomas’s epistemological theory that supported his ethical theories.

1. To achieve an understanding of how choices were arrived at by an ancient philosopher and a medieval theologian using weekly 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 (e.g., 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 papers, class discussion of their proposal for the final paper and the final paper itself will encourage students to look beyond reporting about particular text books say, but to see the success and failures of significant thinkers to develop a sense of self-direction.

4. No paper should be written by a student entirely on their own. The discussion of papers at the beginning of 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 the genre of medieval commentary with a critical understanding of what they meant at the time 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 at least present values that address contemporary problems.

4. To show how an objective ethics conflict contrasts with contemporary ethical systems.

5. To remind students that the European philosophic tradition has always borrowed ideas from outside, even from non-Christian Arabic authors.

Grading Rubrics

“A” Demonstrates ability to read texts and to relate the arguments given in one question to another. To know how the university texts were formed. To show that these texts present a philosophic unity concerning human actions, search for an end and prepare for 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 bibliography.

“A-“ The ability to read a text. To know how such tests were formed. To be aware that one question flows into another to form an intellectual whole. Faithfulness to class discussion and weekly papers. The ability to write a clear and concise final paper on the topic chosen and prepare a bibliography.
“B+” Unclarity about the use and meaning of important text questions. To read articles and questions without grasping their unity as a whole. Show little evidence of having read any secondary material. Lack of faithfulness to class discussion and weekly papers. The final paper although good, lacking a clear statement of the problem chosen for discussion.

“B” Lacking of understanding of the texts that we have been reading. Notable gaps and mistakes about the whole enterprise. Too much discussion in class of contemporary viewpoints with no corresponding awareness of medieval ideas, or else, too much medieval discussion with no awareness of modern times. Lack of faithfulness to class discussion and weekly papers. The final paper not on the topic we had agreed on. A paper that was largely journalism, or an exchange of unsupported opinions without an awareness of the issues involved.

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, you will be assumed to be guilty. 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.

Remember if you 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.