

Thomas Aquinas 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. 9:30-11:00am (DSPT)

Telephone: Office 510-883-2078, at home 510-596-1895 (not after 8:30pm)

Course Description:

After the *Nicomachean Ethics* of Aristotle was recovered in the thirteenth century it became a key text for the study of moral behavior. What is happiness? Is happiness the same for everyone and for every human community? Are only the virtuous happy? Can perfect happiness ever be acquired in this life? Questions such as these are universal and timeless. We will undertake a careful reading of Thomas's *Commentary* on Aristotle's *Ethics* not only to understand Aristotle, but to see Thomas's appreciation of the good life and to contrast it with current attitudes toward human flourishing. As well as happiness, we will examine the importance and formation of moral and intellectual virtues in Aristotle and in Thomas and relations to contemporary Virtue Ethics. Aristotle's text and Thomas's *Commentary* on it are quite long so only key issues raised by the text can be covered.

Method:

The lecture-seminar method will be used. A passage from Thomas's *Commentary* will be assigned for exposition and discussion each week. Discussions can be far ranging and involve current issues. Students are to write three reflection papers (2-4 pages) to be turned after being used in class to lead discussion.

Expectations:

Students will take an active part in the discussions, paying special attention to 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 are interested in Latin. Knowledge of Latin, however, is not essential to take this course. Good translations are readily available. The translation by C.J. Litzinger is recommended. Students may be asked to make a short presentation of their reflection paper at one of the sessions. Four or five weeks before the end the course students will present a proposal for their final paper to be discussed in class. A final paper of 18 pgs. with appropriate bibliography will be due on the last day of class.

Bibliography PHHS

1. Primary Sources:

Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Nicomachean*, Leonine ed., vols. 47.1 & 47.2.
The Latin Leonine text can be downloaded from the internet. The Leonine edition is the text that will be preferred.

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

Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics by Thomas Aquinas, trans. C.J. Litzinger, O.P. Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1964 (2 vols.).

2. Secondary Sources (for this course)

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

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

Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics: Thomas Aquinas, NA: St. Augustine's Press, Inc., 1993

The Ethics of Aquinas, ed. Stephen J. Pope, Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University 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., *Morality The Catholic View*, trans., Michael Sherwin, O.P., South Bend, Ind.: St. Augustine's Press, 2001

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

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

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 on line.

Requirements

Reading

1. Each week there will be a reading assigned which should be read before class to facilitate discussion.
2. 3 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 (10%)

Written Work and Assessment

1. 3 Short papers on assigned readings. (15%) of final grade
2. Class discussions (10%)
3. A 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 (18 pages) (65%) of the final grade

Purpose, Outcomes and Grading rubrics for the course.

Course Goals:

The aim is two-fold. First to teach students how to read a medieval university text; 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 papers as evidence of the students' **intellectual integration** using material they have been studying.

2. Promote a realization by students that ancient and medieval thinkers dealt with problems that are still of concern to help the students acquire **intellectual humility** as they look into the masters from the past.
3. The papers, class discussions and presentation of a proposal for their final paper and the final paper itself will encourage students to look beyond what “experts” say and develop a sense of **self-direction**.
4. No paper major should be written by a student entirely on their own. The discussion of papers and the discussion of proposals 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 a medieval commentary with a **critical understanding** of what the process meant at the time and what it might mean for us now.
2. To **communicate** the fruits of their reading with own 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 contrasts with many **contemporary ethical systems**
5. To remind students that the European philosophic tradition has always borrowed ideas from other cultures, even from Arabic and Indian

Grading Rubrics

“A” Demonstrates ability to read texts and to see the continuity argument from one question to another. To know how the university texts were formed. To show that these texts present a philosophic unity concerning human actions.

The search for an end and prepare for virtue. Faithfulness to class discussion and 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 others to form a unified argument. Faithfulness to class discussion and papers. The ability to write a clear and concise final paper on the topic chosen and to prepare a proper bibliography.

“B+” Unclearly about the use and meaning of important questions in the texts and some inability to see how articles and questions formed a unity. Shows little evidence of having read any

secondary sources. Lack of faithfulness to class discussion and papers. The final paper although good, lacking a clear statement of the problem chosen for discussion

“B” Lack of understanding of the texts that we have been reading. Notable gaps and mistakes about the purpose of the course. Too much discussion of contemporary views with no corresponding awareness of medieval ideas, or else, too much medieval discussion with no awareness of contemporary issues. Lack of faithfulness to class discussion or papers. The final paper not on the topic we had agreed on. The paper 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 his/her 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 or an 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.