

Module Outline

Title

Introduction to the Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas

Lecturer

Fr Matthew Boland OP (doctoral candidate at University of Fribourg, Switzerland)

Description

This course prepares students to read Aquinas's theological texts by providing an introduction to the main philosophical notions employed by him in these texts. The course will begin with an introduction to the nature of philosophy itself, from a Aristotelian-Thomistic perspective, followed by an overview of the importance of Aristotelian philosophy for Aquinas's thought, and its historical transmission to 13th century scholastic thought. This course will then turn to a study of some broad themes in classical philosophy which acted as a catalyst for the development of Aristotle's own philosophy. This will lead to an examination of some of the fundamental notions in Aristotle's philosophy, which were then adopted by Aquinas for use in his theology. This course is a prerequisite for, and intended to be taken with the next course, *Introduction to the Metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas*.

Mode of Delivery

The module will be taught in four sessions, with two one-hour lectures on the Tuesday evenings, February 25, March 4, 11, and 18. Classes will be face-to-face only. Readings will be available on the website (<https://mti.op.org.au/module-2>) before each class. Short assignments will be posted on the website to be completed in the week *following* the class by students enrolled for assessment.

Learning Outcomes

1. Understanding of the nature of philosophy from an Aristotelian-Thomistic perspective and its relationship to theology from the same perspective.
2. Ability to describe the transmission of Aristotle's works to Aquinas's milieu.
3. Obtain insight into the historical provenance of Aquinas's philosophical thought.
4. Show a basic grasp of the main Aristotelian philosophical notions employed by Aquinas in his theological works.

Proposed Lecture Outline

Session 1

The nature of philosophy. The relationship between philosophy and theology. The significance of Aristotle for Aquinas's thought. The historical reception of Aristotle's thought in the West.

Session 2

Divisions of Aristotle's philosophy. Key philosophical terms. Early Greek philosophy as an introduction to the problems of change and the one and the many.

Session 3

Plato's cave and Ideas. Substance and accidents as a solution to the problem of change. Universal and particular as a solution to the problem of the one and the many.

Session 4

Predication according to substance, accident, universal, and particular. Five predicables. Definitions. Change. Form and matter (hylomorphism). Act and potency.

Assessment

This module can be undertaken for audit or with assessment. It should be noted that this module is not currently accredited towards any recognised academic award. The assessment is solely an opportunity for students to explore the material more deeply and receive feedback on their learning.

Task 1

After each of the first three sessions, students should submit a 300 word response to one of the tasks given for the readings for that session.

Task 2

On Thursday, March 25, students should write, in one hour under exam conditions, a 1,000 word essay in response to one of the following tasks:

1. Outline in some detail the transmission of Aristotle's works to 13th century Europe.
2. Describe Aristotle's doctrine of the categories, giving examples and differentiating between the types of substance. Critically evaluate whether the Aristotelian categories correctly and exhaustively describe reality.
3. Employing the notions of genus, species, and difference (*differentia*), describe the Aristotelian notion of definition, particularly as presented in Porphyry's Tree. Make reference to the *Categories*.
4. Describe the Aristotelian notions of form and matter, and then explain how these notions solve a particular philosophical problem.
5. Giving examples, describe the different types of change as presented by Aristotle. Include an explanation as to why there are less types of accidental change than there are accidents.
6. Focusing on the notion of nature, explain how Aristotle attempts to resolve the difficulties regarding change faced by his predecessors (i.e., Parmenides, Heraclitus, Democritus etc.).
7. Another topic of interest proposed to the lecturer.