

PHIL 4I03 (6I03): MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHY (TERM 1 (FALL), 2017-18)¹

THOMAS AQUINAS ON HUMAN NATURE

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Office: UH 307

Office hours: TBA, or by appointment

Class meets Mondays 8:30-11:20am in KTH 107

Course Description

In this course we will examine Thomas Aquinas' views on human nature. Our main text will be the section of Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* concerned with the nature of human beings (ST 1a QQ 75-89), roughly the first half of what has traditionally been known as the "Treatise on Man." This is arguably the most philosophically rich section of Aquinas' entire masterwork. We will consider Aquinas' views, as expressed in this section of the *Summa*, on such topics as: the nature of the soul and its relation to the body, the capacities of the soul, desire and voluntary action, emotion, freedom of the will, sense perception and its relation to thought, the acquisition of knowledge, self-knowledge, and life after death.

We will read the entire text in a modern English translation, with accompanying commentary and notes. You will be expected to read around 20 pages of the primary text each week and to be prepared to discuss this material in a seminar format. We will occasionally dip into other, related works by Aquinas (some are included in appendices to our edition of the text; others are available online). This is an (upper-level) introduction: no prior familiarity with Aquinas, or with medieval philosophy in general, will be presupposed.

Objectives

By the end of this course, you should be familiar with Thomas Aquinas' views on human nature, and on a range of related philosophical topics. You will have read substantial selections from the *Summa Theologiae*, one of the greatest and most important works in the history of philosophy. In addition, you should have developed your ability to:

- Read and understand difficult and challenging texts
- Critically assess the strengths and weaknesses of arguments
- Appreciate unfamiliar ideas and points of view
- Formulate and defend your own positions
- Express yourself clearly in discussion
- Write clearly, concisely and effectively in support of your claims

Required Text

This will be available at the campus store. It is modestly priced.

- *The Treatise on Human Nature: Summa Theologiae 1a 75-89*. Translated, with introduction and commentary, by Robert Pasnau. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002.

¹ This course is also open to graduate students, under course code PHIL 6I03. Graduate students will meet most of the same requirements, but will complete slightly different assessment. For example, their final essays will be longer, due slightly later, and worth more.

Course Website

I will be using the course website on Avenue to Learn (<http://avenue.mcmaster.ca/>) to post regular updates and information about the course, copies of material distributed in class, lists of supplementary readings, additional resources, and information and advice about assessment (including essay questions). I encourage you to check in regularly.

Assessment

Assessment will be based on four short critical reflections, an in-class presentation, and a final essay. Attendance will be expected, not rewarded. However, a small bonus will be available (to undergraduates only) for excellent participation. There is no final exam.

1. **Reflective summaries:** You will be asked to complete four (4) “reflective summaries” (short discussion papers). You may submit up to five: in that case, the best four will count towards your final grade. Each reflective summary should be 1.5-2.5 pages in length (12 pt. font, double-spaced). In these assignments, you will be asked to succinctly summarize Aquinas’ main claims/arguments in a section of the text, and to offer brief critical reflections on them. You will have considerable freedom to select which sections of the text you write about. See schedule below for due dates. I will provide further information about these assignments, and my expectations, in class and on the website.
2. **Oral presentation:** You will be asked to give one in-class oral presentation. This should be roughly 10 minutes in length and will be followed by 10-15 minutes of questions and discussion. Topics will be allocated at the start of the semester. You will have the opportunity to meet with me to discuss the material and your plans for approaching it in advance of your presentation. I will provide further information about the presentations, and my expectations for them, in class and on the course website.
3. **Final essay:** You will be asked to write a single longer essay on a topic of your choosing (I will provide suggestions and advice concerning topics). The essay should be 7-10 pages in length. See below for due date. You will be invited and encouraged (not required) to meet with me to discuss your paper before the end of term. I will provide further information about the essays, and my expectations, in class and on the website.
4. **Attendance and Participation:** Attendance in class is expected. More than two unexcused absences will constitute adequate grounds for failing the course. To be clear, I don’t want anyone to fail, and am generally flexible and understanding. If you are unable to attend class for any reason, please simply let me know (by email), in advance of class if you can. In most such cases, so long as you provide an explanation, this will not count as an unexcused absence (I will let you know). There is no need to provide medical documentation for missed classes unless I specifically request it. Although there is no dedicated participation grade, students who participate regularly in discussion will receive a bonus of up to +2% on their final grade at the end of the term.

Weights:

Reflective summaries (4 x 10% each)	40%
Oral presentation	20%
Final essay (due 11:59pm on Sunday, December 10)	40%

Instructions for Submitting Essays

- All written assignments (reflective summaries and final essays) should be submitted electronically, using the “Dropbox” tool on Avenue to Learn. Please include your name on all submissions, and also number your pages (this sometimes makes commenting on your work easier). Please submit in only one of the following two file formats: MS Word or pdf. There is no need to submit a hard copy in addition to the electronic copy.

Policies on Late Work, Extensions and Accommodations

- **Late assignments** (both reflective summaries and final essays) will be penalized at a rate of 3% for every day or part of a day late (this includes weekend days). Assignments submitted more than one week late will not be accepted at all (i.e. they will receive a grade of zero), unless you have obtained special permission from me to submit that late.
- I understand that students are sometimes unable to complete a piece of assessment on time (or at all) for **legitimate medical or personal/compassionate reasons**. If you find yourself in such a situation, please contact me (by email) as soon as possible to let me know – ideally, before the due date of the assignment in question. Once I have been made aware of the situation, I can grant an extension or take other steps to ensure that you are not unduly penalized for the late or missed work.
- The final essays are due at the end of the term, a time that will be very busy for many of you. I encourage you to start them early if you can. For those of you with several pieces of assessment due at the same time, I will usually be happy to grant short **extensions** (say, 2-3 days), so long as you make a request (by email) prior to the due date. This does not apply to the reflective summaries.
- Completion of a **McMaster Student Absence Form (MSAF)** counts as the equivalent of a doctor’s note for a minor illness. You should contact me by email immediately after submitting the form. I will usually grant (at most) a one-week extension, based on the original due date. Use these forms wisely (and honestly!), as you only get one/semester. Note that you cannot use an MSAF for your final essay.
- Students registered with **SAS**: please do come and see me as soon as possible after the start of the semester. I like to know who you are, in case you encounter difficulties during the term, and also need to know of any special assistance you might require.

Supplementary readings:

- A list of suggested supplementary readings has been placed on the course website. Many of these resources are available online or will be made available on the course website; some others will be placed on course reserve in Mills Library. Although not required, you will probably find these readings helpful for understanding, or thinking in more depth about, what Aquinas wrote. Do not forget about the detailed commentary included in the back of the course text. One book you may find especially useful is Robert Pasnau’s *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), available electronically through the library website. This book was written as a companion piece to the edition and translation of Aquinas’ text we will be working with in class, and explores several interesting and related philosophical issues.

Schedule of Classes, Topics and Readings

	Date	Topic and Required ² Reading	Assessment
<i>Week 1</i>		<i>No class. Classes begin on Tuesday.</i>	
Class 1	Sep 11	Introduction and overview	
Class 2	Sep 18	The nature of the soul in general <i>ST 1a Q75 (plus Pasnau's commentary)</i>	
Class 3	Sep 25	The relationship between body and soul Q76 (plus commentary)	
Class 4	Oct 2	The soul and its capacities in general Q77 (plus commentary)	RS 1 (QQ 75-77), due 11:59pm Oct 7
	Oct 9	<i>No class (mid-term recess)</i>	
Class 5	Oct 16	Sense perception, imagination and memory Q78 (plus commentary)	
Class 6	Oct 23	The nature of intellect Q79 (plus commentary)	RS 2 (QQ 78-79), due 11:59pm Oct 28
Class 7	Oct 30	Appetite, sensuality and will QQ 80-2 (plus commentary)	
Class 8	Nov 6	Free will Q83 (plus commentary)	RS 3 (QQ 80-83), due 11:59pm Nov 11
Class 9	Nov 13	Acquiring knowledge of the material world QQ 84 (plus commentary)	
Class 10	Nov 20	Intellectual cognition and its limits QQ 85-6 (plus commentary)	RS 4 (QQ 84-86), due 11:59pm Nov 25
Class 11	Nov 27	Knowledge of ourselves and of other minds QQ 87-8 (plus commentary)	
Class 12	Dec 4	Life after death Q89 (plus commentary)	RS 5 (optional) (QQ 87-89), due 11:59pm Thu, Dec 7
			Final essay due by 11:59pm on Sunday, Dec 10

² See also comments on supplementary readings above

Additional Notes:

1. The scale used by the Registrar's Office will be used to convert number grades to final letter grades: <http://registrar.mcmaster.ca/calendar/2012-13/pg145.html>
2. You will have the opportunity to evaluate my teaching and the course as a whole towards the end of the term.
3. You may find the Student Success Centre of assistance in developing your writing and study skills: <http://studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca/>
4. *E-mail policy*: In accordance with university policy, you should use your own McMaster e-mail account for all e-mail correspondence with me. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student.
5. *Academic integrity policy*: You are expected to exhibit honesty and to behave ethically in all aspects of the learning process. Academic dishonesty consists of misrepresentation by deception or by other fraudulent means and can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. The following list illustrates only three forms: plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained; improper collaboration in group work; copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations. For complete information please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, available at http://www.mcmaster.ca/senate/academic/ac_integrity.htm.

Final note:

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check their McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.