

syllabus draft

INTRODUCTION TO VIRTUE ETHICS

THEO60642-01

6/16/2014 – 7/3/2014

M/T/W/H/F 8:30-11:10

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The framework for this course is a rich strand in the Christian ethics tradition called virtue ethics. Virtue ethics begins with the common human question: in what does our happiness consist? Christianity offers a distinctive answer. In class we'll begin with questions about the good life, move to the role of 'passions' in making us happy, and finally focus on the diverse activities called 'virtues' that constitute happiness. Our readings draw from a range of authors – from Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, and contemporary theologians. We will use part of our time together to engage extended examples correlated with these themes. The point of the course is to familiarize you with this intellectual tradition and to help you become articulate in order to share what you know with others.

REQUIRED READINGS

All readings are available through Sakai as PDFs or through external links. **YOU MUST HAVE ACCESS TO THEM WHILE WE ARE IN CLASS TOGETHER** – either in hardcopy or electronic form.

OUTLINE

I. Happiness

William C. Mattison, *Introducing Moral Theology*, Ch. 1; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II 2, 4, 5 [“Treatise on Happiness”]

Optional: TED Podcast “Framing the Story”; CCC 1699-1729.

II. The Passions

Herbert McCabe, *On Aquinas*, “Emotions and Inclinations;” Augustine, *City of God*, IX.4-5, XVI 8-9; Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II 22-25 [“Treatise on the Passions”]

Optional: CCC 1762-1775.

III. The Virtues

Virtues in General

Mattison, *Introducing Moral Theology*, Ch. 3; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II; Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II 55, 59, 61-63 [“Treatise on the Virtues”].

Optional: CCC 1803-1845.

Fortitude

Mattison, *Introducing Moral Theology*, Ch. 9; Josef Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, “Fortitude”; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* III.6-9; Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II 123-128 [“Treatise on Fortitude”]

Optional: *Veritatis Splendor*, 90-94.

Justice

Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues*, “Justice”; Augustine, *City of God*, XIX.21-28; Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II 57, 58, (83), & 104 [“Treatise on Justice”]

Optional: *Veritatis Splendor*, 98-101.

Charity

Mattison, *Introducing Moral Theology*, Chapter 15; Augustine, *Of the Morals of the Catholic Church* 15, 19-20, 22-24, 26-28; Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II 23-25, 28 [“Treatise on Charity”]

IV. Prayer

Mattison, Epilogue; Aquinas, “Before Study,” “To Acquire the Virtues,” and “For Ordering a Life Wisely.”

Optional: CCC 2759-2865.

SCHEDULE

June 16	Introduction – Happiness
June 17	Happiness
June 18	The Passions
June 19	The Passions
June 20	Virtues in General

June 23	Paper #1 due; Fortitude
June 24	Fortitude
June 25	Justice
June 26	Justice
June 27	Review
June 30	Paper #2 due; Charity Readings
July 1	Charity Readings
July 2	The Bible and Morality
July 3	Oral Exams

GRADING

30% writing assignments; 25% participation; 25% presentation; 20% final oral exam = 100%

Writing Assignments. This course will involve two critical writing exercises, each approximately 1000 words (double spaced, 12 pt font, the usual = 5 pages). I grade on content and style as well as the extent to which you answer the prompt and the extent to which you engage our texts. The prompts and detailed instructions for the papers are available on Sakai.

Participation. Your participation grade has several components: (1) your attendance, (2) your preparedness for class, and (3) your contributions to small group and class discussions.

1. Attendance. If you decide to take this class, you should commit to coming to all of our meetings. In return, I commit to making class interesting enough for you to bother to come. In light of the compressed schedule, where each class is equivalent to a week of a semester, you are only allowed one unexcused absence for the class. I wish there were more flexibility, but each class is crucial. Any use of your phone during class will count as an absence. When you are absent, I do not need to know the vagaries of your personal life (e.g., you have a flat tire, or have developed a rash) except if it will have a serious impact on your future performance in the class for weeks to come, however in that case, you ought to talk to the Dean. Get any notes you missed from a classmate.
2. Preparedness for class. Your participation includes actually coming to class with your texts, arriving on time (lateness will penalize your grade – each late is 1/2 an absence), staying awake and alert, not disturbing others around you including not eating/ not using your phone/not using the internet, contributing to class in small groups and in common discussion, and asking questions during class and outside of class. You'll cause unnecessary disruption if you excuse yourself randomly during class and undermine my practice of giving generous, regular class-wide breaks.

3. Small Group Discussions. Some class discussions will be generated from questions and conversations that emerge from small groups.

Presentation. At least once this course, you will be responsible for doing extra preparation on our primary text readings: Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, or Scripture. This will involve coming to class with exegetical questions for your classmates. (I will give some examples of how to do so the first class.) You will be evaluated on your preparedness, your thoughtfulness, and your effectiveness in engaging your peers. You are not required, though you are welcome, to submit written material to me as a part of your presentation.

Oral Exam. Your final exam consists in a fifteen minute oral exam with me in my office. I will give you a list of potential questions in our first meeting.

HELPFUL INFO

Work done for this course must honor the University Honor Code (“As a member of the Notre Dame community, I will not participate in or tolerate academic dishonesty.”) and its spelling out in the [University of Notre Dame Graduate School Academic Code](#). Do not use outside sources to write your papers unless I give you written approval. If you have *any* questions about this policy, please contact me as I am very happy to help.

If you have an illness or personal situation that has a serious affect on your attendance, report it to the Dean of the Graduate School who will in turn let me know about your excused absences. If you have a physical or learning disability, come talk to me as soon as possible so we can be on the same page. Our conversation is confidential.

It's most efficient to ask any questions you have directly to me. Second, I prefer email. I will answer your email well within twenty-four hours of your sending it.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

You do not need to order any of these books for the class proper, or even to cite them fully in your papers (as abbreviated citations are welcomed in the prompts). But some day there might be occasion for you to consult these texts further, or even want to own a copy yourself, and you may want a bibliography on hand.

Aquinas. *The Aquinas Prayer Book: The Prayers and Hymns of St. Thomas Aquinas.* Trans. and ed. Robert Anderson and Johann Moser. Sophia, 2000.

_____. *Summa Theologiae.* Trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province. 5 Volumes. Benzinger, 1948.

Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics.* Trans. Irwin. Hackett, 1999.

Augustine. *City of God Against the Pagans.* Trans. Henry Bettenson. Penguin, 1984.

_____. *On the Morals of the Catholic Church.* Trans. Richard Stothert. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 4. Ed. Philip Schaff. Christian Literature Publishing

Company, 1887.
William C. Mattison. *Introducing Moral Theology: True Happiness and the Virtues*. Brazos, 2008.
Herbert McCabe. *On Aquinas*. Burns & Oates, 2008.
Josef Pieper. *Four Cardinal Virtues*. University of Notre Dame Press, 1966.