

Foundations of Virtue: Aristotle & Aquinas

Summer 2022

Davenant Hall • July 4 – August 26

Course Description

Modern moral philosophy and theology have been fractured since the Enlightenment. The contemporary virtue ethics movement rightly points to virtue as the proper focus of ethics, but is usually just as fractured and individualistic as other theories, often intentionally distancing itself from its own rich tradition. Part of the problem is divorcing ethics from the natural essences of what things are. It is time to recover the Aristotelian tradition appropriated and developed by Christians throughout history, most notably Thomas Aquinas. This is an ethic rooted in the natural law, how God designed humans to function and reflect his character. Ethics is based on physics. What things are determines what they ought to do.

We will first form a foundation in the natural law with short excerpts from various works of Plato and Aristotle. Next, we'll delve into an analysis of key texts in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Next, we will study Aquinas's explanations of the natural law, happiness, the beatific vision, and virtue in his *Summa Theologiae* with some short excerpts from other works.

This course will be followed by a later course on **Reforming Virtue: Vermigli & Edwards**.

Syllabus Note

The master syllabus is an online Google Doc that will reflect live updates when changes are announced to the students. For the Google Doc, go to www.tljacobs.com. To be clear, this means that the syllabus is subject to minor changes as the instructor sees fit. If changes are made, it will be to make things easier & announcements to students will be given with plenty of advanced notice.

Required Texts

Other editions are permissible, but they must have **line numbers**. Some other excerpts will be included in the readings that are also present in the books below or may be obtained from the instructor.

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. W. D. Ross

- [The Basic Works of Aristotle](#)
- [Complete Works, vol. 2](#)

Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*

- Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Benziger Bros, 1947), (Latin & English), found at isidore.co/aquinas or aquinas.cc/la/en/~ST.I or Aquinas Institute.2012.



Requirements



Readings

Each week, read the texts listed on the course calendar before the meeting.



Attendance^{5%}

Attendance is required. Meeting times will be established at the start of the course to allow for maximum participation.



Discussion Questions^{15%}

Each week, submit 5 thoughtful questions based on the readings. Questions must be submitted by the end of the day on the day before our meeting.



Outlines^{40%}

For each reading, create a detailed outline of the numbered sections/chapters. Clearly mention essential points of every numbered section, article, or chapter. Include important quotes. This will be submitted midway through the course and at the end of the course. This outline can be as extensive or comprehensive as you like, may include notes, relevant excerpts from other works, etc. **The goal** is to produce a reference for your own later use

1. Submit a rough draft before our second meeting, so I can give early feedback. This is not for a grade.
2. Submit all outlines in a single .DOCX or .PDF by the Friday of the final week for a grade.

The purpose is to create a quick reference resource that you will use far into the future. Make it your own, and make it useful to yourself. Don't include so much you drown out the essentials. Don't be so minimalist that you always have to refer back to the text. I have found this to be one of the most useful tools I myself learned from grad school. Here is a [recent example](#) or [another \(which also includes sample exam questions\)](#).



Oral Exam^{40%}

At the end of the course, each student will schedule a 15–30 minute oral exam covering essential points of the course. In order to score 100%, students must correctly explain 10 of 12 answers to questions. The format will be conversational and try to discover what you remember rather than asking “gotcha” or “what’s in my pocket” trick questions. More details will be given in class.

Course Calendar



week of...



Readings

I. Aristotle

MONDAY

JULY

4

1. Foundations

- 1.1. Aristotle, *Categories* 1–5.
- 1.2. Aristotle, *Topics* I.4–5, 8–9.
- 1.3. Porphyry, *Introduction* [or *Isagoge*] to the *Logical Categories of Aristotle*, I–IX. ([Click here](#)).
- 1.4. Watch “[Aristotle’s Logic: Categories & Porphyry’s Tree](#)” by me. (It may be more helpful to watch this before reading the texts).
- 1.5. **Of “Nature”:** Aristotle, *Physics* II.1, 8 (198b10–199a19)
- 1.6. **Four Causes:** Aristotle, *Physics* II.3 (194b16–195a3) & *Metaphysics* I.3 (98.3a24–b5).
- 1.7. Aristotle, *De Anima* (*On the Soul*) II.1.

*NOTE: The goal for this week is to lay a foundation for the natural law. It is sufficient to observe the main point of each of these readings by **skimming** as we will not be dissecting details.

MONDAY

JULY

11

2. The Good for Man

- 2.1. *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I.

MONDAY

JULY

18

3. Moral Virtue

- 3.1. *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II.

MONDAY

JULY

25

4. Intellectual Virtue & Continence

- 4.1. *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VI–VII.

MONDAY

AUGUST

1

5. Ultimate End: Virtue, Contemplation, The Common Good

- 5.1. *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book X
- 5.2. *Politics* I.1–2, III.9
- 5.3. Bonus: Watch “[Aristotle’s Politics](#)” by me. Lengthy discussion of the common good, esp. as a bridge between ethics & politics.

II. Thomas Aquinas

MONDAY

AUGUST

8

6. Man’s Last End

- 6.1. [Summa Theologica](#) (ST) I-II.1–7, 18.

MONDAY

AUGUST

15

7. Virtue

- 7.1. ST I-II.55–67.



8. Law & Conscience (if we have time)
 - 8.1. Natural Law: ST I-II.90–91, 94.
 - 8.2. Conscience: ST I-II.19.5; [*De Veritate*](#) 16–17