



METAPHYSICS: DISCOVERY OF *ENS INQUANTUM ENS*

SEMINAR SYLLABUS

[WINTER 2021]

DESCRIPTION

What is “being”, and how do we discover it? The term presents ambiguities; as Aristotle says, it is said in many ways. And as Aquinas, following Avicenna says many times over, it is the first conceived by the intellect, and that into which all other conceptions are resolved. This, too, may be taken ambiguously; and, moreover, it may be conflated and confused with *ens inquantum ens* as the subject matter of metaphysics. Indeed, resolution is said to be the mode of inquiry which belongs to the science of metaphysics most of all! Yet what this means, and in what manner one resolves, requires clarification. Thus, in this seminar, we will examine some seminal texts of Aristotle and of Thomas Aquinas himself, as well as important contributions and questions which have arisen in the Thomistic tradition, as the first of four seminars in a series on metaphysics.



The discovery of being—something implicit in all our cognitive lives, from the very first until the very last—requires a careful process of consideration. Various Thomists, over the centuries, have interpreted Aquinas’ approach to the unveiling of *ens inquantum ens* and how we situate this science. No small part of the difficulty comes from the principal text in the tradition, Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. Together with Aquinas’ commentary, this will form the core of our reading, along with texts from Aquinas’ *Super Boetium de Trinitate*, often considered one of the most important texts for understanding Aquinas’ whole approach toward science.

METHOD

The seminar is 8 weeks long, with one recorded lecture and one discussion session each week. Each discussion session is structured around a reading from Aristotle or St. Thomas Aquinas. Participants are expected to have read the assigned reading and listened to the lecture prior to the session, so that they may engage in a semi-structured discussion directed and moderated by the instructor. As this is an

advanced seminar, one *cannot* participate well without a *deep engagement* with the assigned reading. Moreover, *continual discussion* will foster that participation and engagement throughout the week. Participants will be expected to partake in these discussions on a regular basis, and will be challenged to do so directly.

READING

The primary texts for this seminar are all available online, primarily from the i.348-30BC *Metaphysics* of Aristotle and Aquinas' 1270/71 [commentary](#) on it (which includes a suboptimal text of Aristotle). Preferred translations for Aristotle are that of [Joe Sachs](#) and W.D. Ross (available in the McKeon-edited [Basic Works](#)). Readings will also be taken from the 1257-59 [Super Boetium de Trinitate](#), the [De Substanti Separatis](#), and book two of the [Summa contra Gentiles](#). Secondary readings, as supplemental to those primary will be *suggested* but not required, drawing upon the works of various Thomists. Additional required and supplemental readings may be provided via Teams. **Readings are subject to change.**

LECTURE

Each week there will also be a 20-40+ minute audio lecture, posted to Teams at the beginning of the week. This lecture will be based upon the assigned reading, but will also stray into related topics, or may use the reading as a launching point for addressing some related issue (perhaps one more general, or perhaps one more specific). The primary (but not sole) purpose of these lectures is to help clarify some of the more difficult concepts and arguments contained within the reading, as well as to raise specific questions that should help structure and guide our discussion sessions.

There *may* be accompanying visual aids (not necessarily) in order to provide some clarity as to textual points, but one *should* be able, in most cases, to simply listen to the lecture (and perhaps consult the visual aids later). This should allow more flexibility: making the lectures suitable accompaniment for a commute, while doing chores, going for a run, etc.

DISCUSSION

The heart of the seminar is the discussion session (**Saturdays at 1:15-2:15pm ET**): where all the thoughts emergent and encountered throughout the week—via the reading, lecture, and on-going conversations in the Teams channel—are brought into explicit conversation. This allows us to attempt a concerted effort at bringing resolution to our difficulties, and—failing such a resolution—to direct our inquiry further.

Each discussion session will begin with a brief synopsis of the week's material and a focusing on whichever aspects of that material seem most pressing. Beyond the direction provided by the instructor, participants are encouraged to bring their own concerns explicitly into view and to engage with the instructor and one another in civil debate and collective inquiry.

CONTRIBUTION

It is hoped and expected that each participant in the seminar will provide a contribution: a piece of writing, recorded presentation, or something else, within one month of the seminar's conclusion, as a way of

coalescing what has been learned in a demonstrative manner. Topics are suggested, and the instructor is available for discussions and assistance in composing your contribution.

SESSION SCHEDULE

January 16	<p>The Question of Being</p> <p>Lecture 1: The Meaning of the Word</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Primary] Kemple: <i>Being and Metaphysics</i> • [Secondary] Blanchette 2003: <i>The Philosophy of Being</i>, 3-42.
January 23	<p>Metaphysics as Wisdom</p> <p>Lecture 2: Understanding from Principles</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Primary] Aristotle i.348-30BC: <i>Metaphysics</i> I.1-3; Aquinas 1270/1: <i>Super Sententiam Metaphysicae</i> lib.1, lec.1-3. • [Secondary] Ashley 2006: <i>The Way Toward Wisdom</i>, 3-21.
January 30	<p>Metaphysics as Science, Part I</p> <p>Lecture 3: Discovery of Principles</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Primary] Aquinas c.1257-59: <i>Super Boetium de Trinitate</i>, q.5. • [Secondary] Aristotle i.348-30BC: <i>Metaphysics</i> II.1-3; Aquinas 1270/1: <i>Super Sententiam Metaphysicae</i>, lib.2, lec.1-5.
February 6	<p>Metaphysics as Science, Part II</p> <p>Lecture 4: The Mode of Intellect</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Primary] Aquinas c.1257-59: <i>Super Boetium de Trinitate</i>, q.6. • [Secondary] Wippel 2000: <i>The Metaphysics Thought of Thomas Aquinas</i>, c.23-62.
February 13	<p>Principles of Being as Being</p> <p>Lecture 5: Defining the Subject</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Primary] Aristotle i.348-30BC: <i>Metaphysics</i> IV.1-5; Aquinas 1270/1: <i>Super Sententiam Metaphysicae</i>, lib.4, lec.1-3, 6-7, 11-13. • [Secondary] Aristotle i.348-30BC: <i>Metaphysics</i> IV.6-8; Aquinas 1270/1: <i>Super Sententiam Metaphysicae</i>, lib.4, lec.4-5, 8-10, 14-17.
February 20	<p>Science of Being as Being</p> <p>Lecture 6: Demonstrating the Subject</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Primary] Aristotle i.348-30BC: <i>Metaphysics</i> VI.1-4; Aquinas 1270/1: <i>Super Sententiam Metaphysicae</i>, lib.6, lec.1-4. • [Secondary] Ashley 2006: <i>The Way Toward Wisdom</i>, 132-71.
February 27	<p>Being as Substance</p> <p>Lecture 7: The Centrality of Substance</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Primary] Aristotle i.348-30BC: <i>Metaphysics</i> VII.1-4; Aquinas 1270/1: <i>Super Sententiam Metaphysicae</i>, lib.7, lec.1-3. • [Secondary] Blanchette 2003: <i>The Philosophy of Being</i>, 264-84.
March 6	<p>Being as Actus Essendi</p> <p>Lecture 8: Toward a Deeper Center: Existence</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [Primary] Aquinas: <i>De substantiis separatis</i>, c.9; <i>Summa contra Gentiles</i>, c.52.

- [Secondary] Blanchette 2003: *The Philosophy of Being*, 334-64.