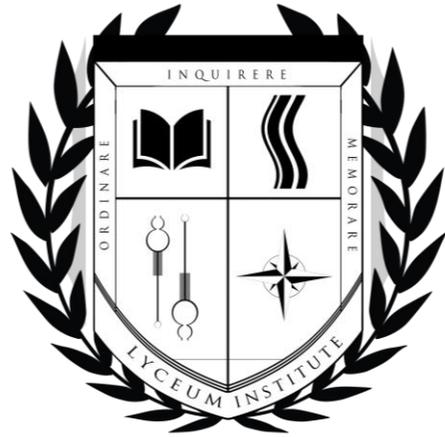


METAPHYSICS: THE EXISTENCE, NATURE, AND INTELLIGIBILITY OF GOD

SEMINAR SYLLABUS

[FALL 2021]



DESCRIPTION

“In my opinion,” Umberto Eco once said, “it’s religion that produces God, not the other way around.”¹ Once the sentiment of the purportedly rebellious thinker, today such is a commonplace. But for all Eco’s learning, for as much as he may have read St. Thomas Aquinas (and even admired his mind), it seems that the novelist did not understand the doctor: for having seized the truths of the divine so articulately explicated by Aquinas, one could not help but wish to create a religion around the being thereby revealed, were the Divine not to have already revealed itself and given us the right means for worship.



The fourteen questions which we will read in this seminar, comprising eighty-five articles, will explore the existence, nature, and intelligibility of God. The existential demonstration—the famous “five ways” of Aquinas—will be covered quickly: for their intelligibility grows the better we understand the rest of the questions, and we will be better equipped for grasping their significance in light of the divine nature and its intelligibility to us. In addition to the divine **attributes** (simplicity, perfection, goodness, infinity, omnipresence, immutability, eternity, and unity), we will take recurrent interest in the topics of **analogy**, **significance**, **knowledge**, and the relation of **act** and **potency** which cuts across all **being**.

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 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,

¹ Quoted in the Guardian 12 October 2002:

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/oct/12/fiction.academicexperts>.

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 entirely from the 1266-68: *Summa theologiae, prima pars*. Supplemental texts to the primary readings will be posted on Teams, drawing from any of the following: Garrigou-Lagrange 1938: *The One God*; Wippel 2000: *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*; Blanchette 2003: *Philosophy of Being*; and White, *Wisdom in the Face of Modernity*. **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 3:15-4:15pm 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

October 2	<p>Divine Existence</p> <p>Lecture: Demonstration and Understanding</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aquinas 1266-68: <i>ST</i> Ia, q.2. • [Secondary] Selections to be made from Garrigou-Lagrange 1938: <i>The One God</i>; Wippel 2000: <i>The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas</i>; Blanchette 2003: <i>Philosophy of Being</i>; and White, <i>Wisdom in the Face of Modernity</i>.
October 9	<p>Divine Simplicity & Perfection</p> <p>Lecture: Attributes Inferred from Existence</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aquinas 1266-68: <i>ST</i> Ia, q.3-4. • [Secondary] Selections from above.
October 16	<p>Divine Goodness</p> <p>Lecture: The Fruits of Divine Goodness</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aquinas 1266-68: <i>ST</i> Ia, q.5-6. • [Secondary] Selections from above.
October 23	<p>Divine Omnipresence & Omnipotence</p> <p>Lecture: Infinity and Power</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aquinas 1266-68: <i>ST</i> Ia, q.7-9. • [Secondary] Selections from above.
October 30	<p>Divine Eternality & Unity</p> <p>Lecture: Negation of Time and Division</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aquinas 1266-68: <i>ST</i> Ia, q.10-11. • [Secondary] Selections from above.
November 6	<p>Intelligibility of God</p> <p>Lecture: Analogy and the Light of Intelligibility</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aquinas 1266-68: <i>ST</i> Ia, q.12. • [Secondary] Selections from above.
November 13	<p>Signification of God</p> <p>Lecture: The Signification of Divine Names</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aquinas 1266-68: <i>ST</i> Ia, q.13. • [Secondary] Selections from above.
November 20	<p>Divine Knowledge</p> <p>Lecture: Human and Divine Knowledge</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aquinas 1266-68: <i>ST</i> Ia, q.14. • [Secondary] Selections from above.