

THOMISTIC PSYCHOLOGY

ACTION THEORY

SEMINAR SYLLABUS

[WINTER 2020 | WEDNESDAYS 7:30-8:30PM ET]

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DESCRIPTION

Beginning in the Fall of 2019, the Continuum Philosophical Insight Lyceum began a project of “Retrieving Thomistic Psychology” with an eight-week seminar that laid the foundations of an understanding that avoids the pitfalls of modern psychology. Now, in the Winter of 2020, a following “Thomistic Psychology - Action Theory” seminar will investigate the various operations Thomas Aquinas details as part of the process of human action in the *Summa theologiae, prima secundae pars*, qq.6-18. That is, here we will focus upon **what makes our acts specifically human**.

One should be familiar with a general Thomistic psychology (as given in the previous seminar, or from other education) before beginning the study of action theory. Here, we will look closely at the nature of voluntary action, the dynamism between the intellect and the will, and the specific procession of acts whereby we move from thinking to doing.



METHOD

The seminar is 8 weeks long, with one recorded lecture and one discussion sessions each week. Each discussion session is structured around a reading from 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. Understandably, given how busy we may all easily become, sometimes this may not be feasible. Try to get through as much as you can.

READING

Each week includes (scheduled below) an assigned reading, primarily from the *Summa theologiae, prima secundae pars*, and specifically from the *Treatise on Human Acts*. This portion of the *Summa theologiae* is available in English translation on Amazon in two acceptable translations, one by [John Oesterle](#) (titled *The Treatise on Happiness*) and one by [Thomas Williams](#) (*The Treatise on Happiness • The Treatise on Human Acts*). They may be found used for lower costs (I also recommend checking [Bookfinder.com](#)). I highly recommend purchasing these books, as the reading is a central part of participation in the seminar, and while the text is available online (along with many other works of Aquinas, on the Teams platform as well as thanks to this [GitHub mirror](#) and the [Aquinas Institute](#)), nothing beats a physical book. There are many other options for purchasing the *Summa* in translation, so please ask me if you'd like to consider some other options.

Additionally, a number of supplemental readings are available through the Files tab on Teams (where one may also find all the recordings and other supplemental materials). Primarily, these consist in interpretations of Thomistic psychology by the contemporary tradition. These materials are not essential to the course but are suggestions for anyone wishing to look further into the topic.

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 purpose of these lectures is to help clarify some of the more difficult concepts and arguments about the nature of human action and especially as addressed by Thomistic thought (though considerations will extend beyond what is found in Thomas himself), as well as to raise specific questions that should help structure and guide our discussion sessions.

There may be accompanying PowerPoints or other visual aids, 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, etc.

DISCUSSION

The heart of the seminar is the discussion session: 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. Sessions are Wednesday nights from 7:30-8:30PM ET.

SESSION SCHEDULE

Discussion: January 29	Fulfilling Human Nature Recording – Lecture 1: Thinking to Acting Reading – Happiness and Human Nature
February 5	Voluntariness Recording – Lecture 2: Habits and the Will Reading – <i>Summa theologiae, prima secundae pars (ST Ia-IIae), q.6-7.</i>
February 12	Movement of the Will Recording – Lecture 3: Specification and Self-Reduction Reading – <i>ST Ia-IIae, q.8-10.</i>
February 19	First Principles Recording – Lecture 4: Enjoyment and Intention Reading – <i>ST Ia-IIae, q.11-12.</i>
February 26	The Meaning of Choice Recording – Lecture 5: Discerning the Means to an End Reading – <i>ST Ia-IIae, q.13-14.</i>
March 4	Consent and Use Recording – Lecture 6: Applying the Will to the Present Reading – <i>ST Ia-IIae, q.15-16</i>
March 11	Command Recording – Lecture 7: The Why and the Doing Reading – <i>ST Ia-IIae, q.17</i>
March 18	Good and Evil of Action Recording – Lecture 8: The Truth about the Good Reading – <i>ST Ia-IIae, q.18, a.1-4.</i>