

DO 841 Philosophy for Understanding Theology

This course takes in a broad view of philosophy from the ancient Greek philosophers all the way to philosophers of our own time. The elements of philosophy with which we are specifically concerned are those that have influenced the development of Catholic theology. We will open the course with assigned readings from Pope John Paul II's encyclical, *Fides et ratio (Faith and reason)*; we will do sections of that encyclical over a period of several weeks.

In addition, the course draws on the encyclopedic nine-volume work *A History of Philosophy* by Frederick Copleston, S.J. Fr. Copleston taught at Oxford University for a number of years. We will also have readings from *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*, by Diogenes Allen and Eric Springsted.

You will need a bible to refer to certain scripture passages that are relevant; and you will need access to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. As you may already know, both the Scriptures and the Catechism can be accessed for free from the website of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and Papal Encyclicals are available for free (and in English!) from the Vatican website. Copleston and Allen & Springsted you will have to obtain on your own. Copleston is available in most libraries, whether public or academic, and Allen & Springsted can be purchased from Amazon.com or a similar vendor. I should note that Allen & Springsted was written by a couple of Protestant theologians, and their perspective often shows in their assessment of certain theological views (for example, they are rather dismissive of the work of St. Thomas Aquinas). It will be a good exercise for you, I think, to keep this in mind as you read their book—philosophy is, by and large, nothing more than an engagement with *reasons*, and one must be prepared to answer one's critics as well as to defend one's own views!

Module 1

- Understand and discuss the distinction between philosophy and theology
- Understand and discuss the relationship between philosophy and theology
- Discuss the value of philosophy to Catholic theology and the Catholic Church

Module 2

- Describe similarities between Plato's concept of the relationship of earthly existence to eternity and the Christian concept of life on earth and eternal life
- Discuss the differences between Plato's concepts (per above) and Christian doctrine.
- Discuss Plato's concept of the human soul and Catholic teaching on the soul.

Module 3

- Discuss the scriptural concept of "wisdom"
- Identify and describe some of the ways in which the theological works of St Augustine were influenced by Plato and the Platonic Tradition.

- Discuss the differences between Platonic thought and Christian theology.
- Discuss the impact of the Stoics, Plotinus and Pseudo-Dionysius of Catholic Theology.

Module 4

- Identify and describe some of the ways in which the works of Aristotle influence Christian theology
- Discuss Aristotle's categories
- Discuss differences between Aristotelian philosophy and Christian theology.

Module 5

- Discuss similarities and differences between Aristotelian philosophy and Scholastic Theology. Discuss Aristotle's "Unmoved Mover" as evidence for the existence of God.
- Discuss the on-going interaction between faith and reason.
- Discuss the doctrine of the Trinity.

Module 6

- Discuss the natural theology of Aquinas and his five proofs for the existence of God.
- Discuss Pope John Paul II's analysis of Aquinas from *Fides et ratio*
- You should also be able to discuss God as revealed in the Scripture readings assigned, and as highlighted in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* paragraphs assigned.

Module 7

- Distinguish Moderate Realism vs. Nominalism (Conceptualism) and Humanism
- Discuss the philosophical shift leading up to the Scientific Revolution

Module 8

- Identify features of modern philosophy
- Discuss the world and the mind from the perspective of modern philosophy
- Compare Rationalism and Empiricism
- Discuss characteristics of the Enlightenment
- Integrate these philosophical approaches with Christianity

Module 9

- Identify features of modern philosophy
- Discuss the mind from the perspective of Emmanuel Kant
- Discuss the limits of knowledge as described by Kant.

- Discuss Kant's position with respect to God, Jesus Christ.
- Discuss Kant's explanation of moral law
- Understand Kant's impact on philosophy and on Catholic Theology.

Module 10

- Identify features of Hegel's philosophy
- Discuss Hegel's epistemology
- Discuss Hegel's Master-Slave concept
- Discuss Hegel's Absolute Spirit
- Discuss theological implications of Hegel's philosophy

Module 11

- Identify features of contemporary philosophy
- Discuss the world and the mind from the perspective of modern philosophy
- Compare *existentialism*, *phenomenology* and *hermeneutics*
- Compare these philosophical approaches with Christianity

Module 12

- Identify features of postmodern philosophy
- Discuss the standards of truth and certainty sought in postmodern philosophy
- Discuss characteristics of the moral relativism of postmodern philosophy
- Discuss special challenges to the Catholic faith by moral relativism; articulate responses to that relativism.