# History of Moral Doctrines

## Prof. Giacomo Samek Lodovici

***COURSE AIMS AND INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES***

According to Camus, «There is only one really serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Deciding whether or not life is worth living is to answer the fundamental question in philosophy». According to Nietzsche, «Here is the essence of “nihilism”: the aim is lacking; and “why?” finds no answer; what is the meaning of nihilism? – that the highest values [of the past] devalue themselves» for man, that is they are no longer capable of giving a meaning to being and to life. Furthermore, Nietzsche also accuses traditional morality to be a constellation of sacrifices that entail frustration and unhappiness. But is such morality truly a set of constrictions, obligations, refusals imposed on the individual, an apparatus of binding rules that stifle spontaneity and freedom? Or, as for example Plato already stated, do the righteous live better and are happier than the unrighteous?

With the purpose of analysing such ineluctable issues, that are always of great significance from an existential perspective, and of reflecting on other ethical issues, the course aims to undertake a historiographic reconstruction and theoretical examination of the fundamentals of the ethics of Saint Thomas Aquinas, who represents the acme of a moral tradition that asserts not the antinomy but the structural relationship between morality, happiness and ultimate meaning of life.

***COURSE CONTENT***

The course will cover Saint Thomas Aquinas by including topics such as the meaning of life and ultimate purpose, happiness, love, emotions, the relationship between psyche and corporeity, practical reason, moral reason and speculative reason, actions and their identity, their goodness/wickedness, the relationship between morality and happiness, virtues (among which wisdom, anger, courage), natural moral law and unjust civil laws, et cetera, attempting to highlight and to evaluate present day interpretations of Thomasian reflections.

Subsequently, some late Thomasian ethics texts will be read and commented on, in particular some sections of the ethics part in *Summa Theologiae*.

At the end of the course, students will be able to know and understand the main above-mentioned ethical concepts and to tackle the mentioned moral issues and other related issues.

Students will thereby be able to evaluate these concepts and insofar as they will consider them fruitful/unfruitful, to examine various aspects of contemporary ethos, some existing laws and political choices. Furthermore, students will be capable of confirming or changing some personal choices and actions, applying some of these concepts in practice in their life and cultural activities.

Moreover, at the end of the course, students will have acquired the conceptual tools in order to perfect their autonomy of judgement and critical thinking, their ability to understand moral philosophy issues and their communication skills in this field.

***READING LIST***

A. Campodonico-M. S. Vaccarezza, *La pretesa del bene. Teoria dell’azione ed etica in Tommaso d’Aquino,* Orthotes, Naples 2012, (selected parts of the text that will be specified during lessons).

G. Samek Lodovici, *La felicità del bene. Una rilettura di Tommaso d’Aquino,* Vita e Pensiero, Milan 2002, (selected parts of the text that will be specified during lessons).

N.B.: the reading list is purely indicative and will be specified during the course

***TEACHING METHOD***

Frontal lectures and seminars in the classroom.

***ASSESSMENT METHOD AND CRITERIA***

The exam consists of an oral test (marked out of thirty) aimed at assessing whether students have acquired knowledge and correctly understood course content.

Students will be asked 5-6 questions weighted very similarly and the assessment criteria will include their knowledge of the topic, presentation and analytical skills.

The final mark will particularly take into account the preciseness and completeness of students’ answers during the oral exam, and to a lesser extent their ability to argue statements, judgements, analyses, as well as their appropriate use of the specific lexicon.

***NOTES AND PREREQUISITES***

Students intending to attend the course are assumed to be interested in philosophical reflection on moral and anthropological issues.

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Further information can be found on the lecturer's webpage at http://docenti.unicatt.it/web/searchByName.do?language=ENG or on the Faculty notice board.