

Foundations of the Catholic Worldview

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"We have now sunk to a depth at which restatement of the obvious is the first duty of intelligent men."
—George Orwell

"There are only two kinds of people, those who accept dogmas and know it, and those who accept dogmas and don't know it."
—G. K. Chesterton

Course Objective:

The objective of this class is to attempt to recover, understand and critically evaluate the foundational beliefs of an authentically Catholic worldview. To accomplish this, we will examine the major philosophers and philosophical system that provided that foundation, and consider how early Christian thinkers who shared that foundation built a coherent system of thought upon it. Along the way we will also consider the following:

- How does the Premodern Catholic worldview compare and contrast with the Western worldviews that have succeeded it?
- How might this worldview address/critique/inform the cultural condition of the contemporary West? In other words, is the Premodern worldview still relevant?

To accomplish this, we will briefly examine the three major periods of Western intellectual history (Premodernism, Modernism, Postmodernism), outline the Worldviews that developed within them and consider some of the key thinkers who both influenced and responded to them. But our main focus will be on the thought of the Greek philosophers Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. We will consider the extent to which their worldview (and the subsequent ones) adequately addresses the perennial issues in philosophy and theology, such as:

- **Epistemology:** *What can we know, and how do we know it? What is truth? Does Logic/Reasoning reliably reveal it? How does historical/social/cultural context shape our perception of reality?*
- **Ontology:** *What is 'being,' or existence, or ultimate reality? Does God exist? What constitutes evidence in the case of metaphysical questions such as this one? How is "God" defined? What does the existence/nonexistence of God say about the nature of humanity and the universe?*
- **Morality/Ethics:** *Is morality objective or subjective? If objective, does it point to the existence of God? If subjective, is there a valid motivation for being moral?*
- **Anthropology:** *What is 'Man'? What, if anything, is the significance of the difference between humanity and other animals? Do we possess free will, or are our actions predetermined?*
- **Theodicy, or The Problem of Evil:** *What is "evil," and, more importantly, why is it? Does the objective existence of evil constitute an obstacle to belief in the existence of God, or even a refutation of belief in God's existence? Or might God's existence be a necessary prerequisite for understanding evil?*

Texts & Materials:

- There is one required textbook:
 - Plato, *Republic*, C.D.C. Reeve, trans. (Hackett, 2004)
- There is one text we will use in class on occasion:
 - Machuga, Ric, *Life, the Universe, and Everything: An Aristotelian Philosophy for a Scientific Age* (Cascade Books, 2011)
- There will also be a series of required photocopied handouts that will be distributed throughout the semester.
- A binder. I suggest one that is no more than 1 inch thick; it can be either hard- or soft-bound. You will need to bring it to class every day.
- You'll always need a pen, often need a pencil, and sometimes need loose-leaf paper. Have them every day and you'll be covered.
- **Honors:** Students who opt to take this class for Honors credit will be issued a copy of C.S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity* and *Screwtape Letters* which must be returned upon completion of the course.

Evaluation:

There are 4 or 5 components to your final grade in this class, depending on whether or not you choose to take the class for Honors credit:

• The Papers

There are two papers required for completion of this class, one due towards the end of each quarter.

- For the first paper, you will offer an explanation of a particular aspect of Platonic thought that is of interest to you on the basis of class discussion or your reading of the *Republic*. You will then apply your understanding of the concept to some aspect of contemporary Western culture to which you consider it relevant, offering your own thoughts on how Plato might understand or approach it. (minimum 3 pages non-honors; 5 pages honors) A more detailed rubric will follow.
- For the second paper, you will examine the life and thought of a philosopher of your choosing, and offer a critique of your philosopher's thought from a Classical Realist perspective (minimum 3 pages non-honors; 5 pages honors) A more detailed rubric will follow.

• Tests & Quizzes

There are two tests, one at the end of each quarter. The tests are typically short essay (although I reserve the right to change this format), and each one covers class notes and readings for that quarter. I will give you a list of questions in advance of each test, and you may choose the questions you wish to answer and prepare your answers prior to the test day. However, you may not bring any notes into class on the day of the test- you must answer the questions from memory. I will also periodically quiz you on recently covered material. The quizzes are usually open-note, but you may only use the hand-written notes you've taken in class. YOU MAY NOT USE A PRINTED COPY OF MY NOTES, NOR MAY YOU USE ANY DEVICE TO ACCESS THE NOTES POSTED ONLINE DURING A QUIZ.

- **Class Participation**

You are, of course, expected to participate in all class discussions. If you do not engage the material or if you are a distraction rather than a contributor, you are not participating in class. Additionally, you are expected to take notes. While I will not collect your notebook or grade you on it, I will give assignments or quizzes that are open-note, and if you don't have notes, you're out of luck.

- **Text/Article Questions and other assignments**

You are expected to come to class having done any assigned reading by the date it is due. On the due date, I will often give you essay questions which you will be expected to answer in class covering the reading. If you are unprepared you will most likely not be able to find the answers in the text in the class period. Although I may sometimes allow you to take the work home to complete, I will do so at my discretion. My advice: Come to class prepared. I may also give open-note pop quizzes or crosswords from time to time. You will be allowed to use your HANDWRITTEN notes on these quizzes/crosswords, but not printouts of the notes from the website. If you're not taking notes, that's your problem.

The Honors Component:

If you wish to take this class for honors credit, you must do the following:

- Indicate your interest by registering for Honors Credit by **Monday, January 12.**
- Meet the Honors requirements for the two required papers (see above).
- Read the additional honors (Lewis) texts, and write two papers on the content of the text, each one responding to the text in a way that demonstrates your comprehension of the content. Each reflection paper must be a minimum of 4 pages, double spaced, spell-checked, with references.

The "Fine Print" That I Would Rather Not Spend Class Time Discussing, But You Are Nevertheless Responsible For Knowing

Late & missed homework assignments, tests and quizzes:

- Officially, late work receives a zero unless prior arrangements have been made. However, I reserve the right to determine the acceptance of late work on a case-by-case basis. The decision I make for any one student does not set precedent for the class. Assume the official policy.
- It is your responsibility to find out what you have missed when you are absent, and to be prepared when you return to class. If you miss a test, be prepared to make it up on the day you return. **YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR TELLING ME WHEN YOU HAVE MISSED SOMETHING.** If you fail to do so, and sit quietly in class every day hoping I will overlook your missing grade, you will receive a zero on the assignment/test/quiz, and no amount of complaining will change this.
- Remember: **THE ACCEPTANCE OF LATE WORK IS ALWAYS AT MY DISCRETION.** There is no "rule" to which you can appeal if your work is late because of your own laziness.
- **Failure to complete an adequate amount of work in the class will NOT result in an F, it WILL result in an I, which means incomplete, which means your transcript is withheld until the work is completed and the grade is changed. Do the colleges to which you have applied or been accepted require a final transcript? Blow off your theology class, and they won't get it. Please also note that completion of the work necessary to change the I does not guarantee a passing grade.**
- **Oh- also, Theology is a graduation requirement.**

Rules:

- *Focus.* Observe the school's rules regarding discipline and attendance. Turn off and put away your cell phone and MP3 player. Eat your lunch during your lunch period, not in this class.
- *Respect.* Treat fellow students and your teacher with the appropriate respect. Do not disrupt the class by talking out of turn or behaving in ways that are distracting; do not make bigoted or otherwise offensive comments; do not derail the class for the sake of the trivial; respect the rules of the school.
- *Honesty.* Have the courage to face the truth about yourself and your abilities and do not compromise your integrity by cheating, either by giving or receiving unauthorized assistance on tests, quizzes, or assignments.
- *Reciprocity.* If you waste my time, expect me to reciprocate by wasting yours as well. Don't expect "instructive" punishment from me. Enjoy your detention.
- *Parity.* If you decide that you are above my rules, do not expect me to adhere to your own. In other words, if you break a rule and get caught, do not complain about your own abstract concept of "fairness" being violated. It concerns me about as much as my rules concerned you.

How to Succeed in This Class:

- **Take thorough notes.**
- **Do the readings.**
- **Turn in your completed assignments on time.**
- **Control yourself in the classroom.**
- **Do not assume that I will have a last minute safety net.**