

FRS 107: Happiness & Being Human in Catholic Thought

Instructor: Christopher-Marcus Gibson
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Time: Tue & Thurs 1:30-2:50 PM

Place: TBD
Office: TBD
Office Hours: TBD

Topic & Learning Goals:

Happiness is something we all seek, both for ourselves and for those we care about. Yet even as the lure of happiness guides us, we continue to contest its nature and meaning. From the Greek philosophers, to the Declaration of Independence, to the latest beguilements from Madison Avenue, different visions of happiness compete for our attention. What, then, does happiness consist in? How can the nature and pursuit of happiness illuminate what it means to be human, and vice-versa? In this seminar, we'll wrestle with these questions, and those that arise from them, by engaging with central texts from the Catholic intellectual tradition and the perspectives, proposals, and puzzles they bring to bear on them. We will read these texts, spread across a wide range of genres and centuries, with care and critical attention; we will interpret and discuss the merits and implications of their proposals; where answers remain unclear or disagreements arise, we will make the best case we can for each option available. In this way, the course will not only introduce you to the Catholic intellectual tradition and equip you to reflect on the nature of the happy human life; it will also prepare you to extend that critical reflection to your own views and your studies more generally.

Our approach will begin with the fundamental ethical question, "How should I live?" and the difference that Catholic understandings make when posing this question and proposing answers to it. We will explore these themes across a variety of genres: from dialogue, spiritual autobiography, and polemic (Augustine), to disputed question (Thomas Aquinas), to epic poetry (Dante), fragment and aphorism (Pascal), treatise (Scheeben), and catechesis (de Lubac). Major questions will include: what role does ethical conduct have in human happiness? How can reason and emotion help or hinder us in the pursuit of happiness? How do grace, freedom, good, and evil interrelate in human action? What does it mean to claim the vision of God is the end of human life? How is human self-understanding shaped by nature, fall, and grace?

Our exploration will include a visit to the Princeton Art Museum to examine how these themes are depicted in the visual arts, as well as discussions with visiting scholars. When these discussions overlap with the principal concerns of non-Catholic or non-Christian intellectual traditions, we'll examine the difference made by specifically Christian or Catholic concepts and understandings. Along the way, you will cultivate the abilities required to engage with some of the tradition's classic sources, to familiarize yourselves with the terms, questions, and methods it brings to bear on what it means to be human and seek happiness, and to participate in and extend the conversation by developing critical responses of your own.

Academic Integrity Policy:

Learning to engage with or participate in any intellectual enterprise crucially involves open discussion. For this reason, any disruption of the classroom environment (whether by talking out of turn, inappropriate use of electronics, or other means) will result in a penalty to the student's participation grade. Students should also take care to present their own honest work on assignments and avoid any form of plagiarism (including direct copying, unattributed paraphrase, etc.). So long as an assignment acknowledges any sources consulted, this shouldn't be an

issue. (See <https://odoc.princeton.edu/resources/academic-integrity> for further review of the university's academic integrity and plagiarism policies.)

Sample Reading List:

The following texts are required and have been ordered for you. If you plan to obtain copies from another source, be sure to find the correct edition. Where possible, required texts will also be made available online.

- Wilken, Robert Louis, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God* (ISBN-10: 0300105983).
- Augustine, *Trilogy on Faith & Happiness*. R. J. Teske, SJ (trans.). (ISBN-10: 1565483596).
- Augustine, *Soliloquies*. K. Paffenroth (trans.). (ISBN-10: 1565481429).
- Augustine, *Confessions*. T. Williams (trans.). (ISBN-10: 1624667821).
- Augustine, *The City of God*. R. W. Dyson (trans.). (ISBN-10: 0521468434).
- Aquinas, *The Treatise on Happiness & The Treatise on Human Acts (The Hackett Aquinas)* (ISBN-10: 1624665292).
- Dante, *The Inferno*. R. & J. Hollander (trans.). (ISBN-10: 0385496982).
- Dante, *The Purgatorio*. R. & J. Hollander (trans.). (ISBN-10: 0385497008).
- Dante, *The Paradiso*. R. & J. Hollander (trans.). (ISBN-10: 140003115X).
- Pascal, Blaise, *Pensées*. R. Ariew (trans.). (ISBN-10: 087220717X).
- Scheeben, Matthias J., *Nature & Grace*. C. Vollert, SJ (trans.). (ISBN-10: 1606089498).
- de Lubac, Henri, *A Brief Catechesis on Nature & Grace*. R. Arnandez (trans.). (ISBN-10: 0898700353).

Assignments & Grading Policy:

Graded work will include weekly reflections (300 words minimum), five short assignments (approximately 750 words each) as well as a final paper (approximately 2,000 words).

The aim of the weekly reflections is to refine your ability to think on the page about the readings and questions we explore in seminar discussion. The emphasis is on articulating your thoughts and responses to what the author of the week has been arguing, exploring or proposing. This will provide you with preparation, not only for writing the short assignments, but for extending your grappling with these issues in your life and study beyond the seminar. While each reflection should be at least 300 words, you're free to go beyond that number – within reason, of course.

Short assignments will respond to prompts which focus on key passages or claims made in a given text. These responses will be evaluated on the basis of three criteria: (i) articulating the view proposed, (ii) reconstruction of the argument or reasons given for the view, and (iii) further contribution to the discussion. A good assignment will (i) clearly and concisely present the view described in the prompt and (ii) will show the reasoning or considerations provided by the author in question in support of the view. An assignment

which receives highest marks will also (iii) further the discussion in some way that extends beyond the points made in classroom discussion. This can take several forms: for instance, by describing a potential difficulty with the claims reconstructed, identifying an ambiguity, or proposing a further implication of the discussion. Sample assignment options include: the nature of evil in *Confessions* Book II; the account of happiness developed in *Summa Theologiae* I-II.1-5; Pascal's understanding of human nature.

The weekly reflections will contribute 30% to the course grade; each short assignment will be worth 10%, with the lowest short assignment grade being dropped. The final paper will be worth 20% of the course grade, and the remaining 10% will be based on students' participation in discussion. This yields the following course grade breakdown:

10% Participation;
 30% Weekly Reflections;
 40% Short Assignments;
 20% Final Paper.

Absences & Late Work:

Regular class attendance does not directly impact the course grade but is required to succeed in this class, and participation in seminar discussions will make up 10% of the course grade (see above).

If you need an assignment extension, you may email me in advance of the deadline to request a one-day extension on the paper, no questions asked. A late paper will receive a one point penalty for each day late, unless you have an excusing circumstance for which you are able to provide appropriate documentation (e.g. a doctor's note).

Schedule (subject to revision):

The reading for each day should be completed before the day of class on which it will be discussed.

Section 1 – Happiness, Greek & Roman Ethical Traditions, & Early Christian Thought

1 Tuesday (Sept 1): Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*

Section 2 – Augustine on Wisdom & the Happy Life

2 Thursday (Sept 3): Augustine, *On the Happy Life*

3 Tuesday (Sept 8): Augustine, the *Soliloquies*

Section 3 – Evil, Grace, Freedom, & Human Action

4 Thursday (Sept 10): Augustine, *Confessions* (Books I-VII)

5 Tuesday (Sept 15): Augustine, *Confessions* (Books I-VII)

Assignment 1

Section 4 – Evil, Grace, Freedom, & Human Action, Continued

6 Thursday (Sept 17): Augustine, *Confessions* (Books VIII-XIII)

7 Tuesday (Sept 22): Augustine, *Confessions* (Books VIII-XIII)

Section 5 – The Ordering of Love & Human Community

8 Thursday (Sept 24): Augustine, *On the City of God* (Books I, II)

9 Tuesday (Sept 29): Augustine, *On the City of God* (Books IV, XIX)

Section 6 – Happiness, Habit, & Virtue

10 Thursday (Oct 1): Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II.1-5 (on happiness)

11 Tuesday (Oct 6): Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II.49-54 (on habits), I-II.55-60 (on virtues)

Assignment 2

Section 7 – The Beatitudes, Spirituality, & Theological Virtue

12 Thursday (Oct 8): Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II.61-67 (on the cardinal and theological virtues)

No Class – Fall Break (Sat Oct 10 – Tues Oct 13)

13 Thursday (Oct 15): Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-II.68-70 (on the gifts of the Spirit, the beatitudes, & the fruits of the Spirit), II-II.1 (on faith), II-II.17 (on hope), II-II.23 (on charity)

Section 8 - Happiness in the *Divine Comedy*

14 Tuesday (Oct 20): Dante, Selections from the *Inferno*

15 Thursday (Oct 22): Dante, Selections from the *Purgatorio*

Assignment 3

Section 9 – Happiness in the *Divine Comedy*, Continued

16 Tuesday (Oct 27): Dante, Selections from the *Paradiso*

17 Thursday (Oct 29): Dante, Selections from the *Paradiso*

Section 10 – Dethroned Royalty: Pascal on Human Nature

18 Tuesday (Nov 3): Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (The “Project of June 1658”, part one)

19 Thursday (Nov 5): Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (The “Project of June 1658”, part two, & the “Discourse on the Machine”)

Assignment 4

Section 11 – Scheeben on Nature & Grace

20 Tuesday (Nov 10): Matthias Scheeben, *Nature & Grace* (through Part Two)

21 Thursday (Nov 12): Matthias Scheeben, *Nature & Grace* (Part Three to end)

Section 12 – De Lubac on Nature & Grace

22 Tuesday (Nov 17): Henri de Lubac, *A Brief Catechesis on Nature & Grace* (through Part Two, “Consequences”)

23 Thursday (Nov 19): Henri de Lubac, *A Brief Catechesis on Nature & Grace* (through “Conclusion”)

Section 13 – Recapitulation

24 Tuesday (Nov 24): Recapitulation

Assignment 5

Final Paper (Due Dec 8, Dean’s Date)

Suggested Resources:

Jim Pryor's guidelines for reading philosophy:

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html>

Jim Pryor's guidelines for writing philosophy:

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

David Chalmers' guidelines for philosophical discussion:

<http://consc.net/norms.html>