

Ethics Institute Newsletter

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Upcoming Films in the Ethics Series

All films are scheduled to begin at 6pm.

- Monday, Nov. 16, "Whose Life Is It Anyway?"
- Monday, Feb. 15, "Crash"
- Monday, Mar, 15, "Glengarry Glen Ross"
- Monday, Apr. 19, "Dr. Doolittle 2"
- Look for an addition to the series.

Goetting Brown Bag: Worth of Persons in Law

Prof. Nathan Goetting will present the next Institute for Ethics Brownbag, **Thursday, November 5**, at 12:10 – 12:45 in Knight Auditorium in Valade Hall. Prof. Goetting is switching dates with Dr. Sheri Bleam.

Nathan's presentation is the first in several Brown bags which will discuss ethical issues related to specific academic disciplines. He will focus on ethical issues related to Law and, more specifically, various Supreme Court decisions focusing on the moral worth of persons. The other fields that will be addressed in future sessions are Business Ethics (Prof. Bill Bachman) and Communication Ethics (Dr. Sheri Bleam). A question and answer session will follow Nathan's formal remarks.

In describing his session, Prof. Goetting writes:

"A few times each century, it

seems, The Supreme Court transcends its role as a judicial tribunal and, by dint of the extraordinary constitutional issues present in the cases before it, finds itself ruling on whether a particular kind of person is fully human for purposes of protection under our constitution. These can be dangerous moments for our republic."

Prof. Goetting's presentation will explore the legal and moral consequences of some of these cases.

A packed house attended the previous Brownbag led by Dr. Tony Coumoundouros. Coumoundouros introduced three main ethical positions that have historically dominated the field of ethics in the West: 1. Aristotle's "eudaemonistic" focusing on moral character with the end of living a good life as defined by happiness; 2. "Mon-consequentialism" focusing on "moral duty" as developed by Immanuel Kant.



Prof. Nathan Goetting, Assistant Professor of Constitutional Law and Civil Rights

3. "Utilitarianism" or "consequentialism" focusing on the moral consequences of actions only.

The Brownbag series is designed to begin conversations about ethics on campus and integrate that conversation into courses and capstone experiences.

The Brown Bag sessions are open to the public.

Ethics Film Series Details

A packed house viewed the showing of "V for Vendetta" in the Institute for Ethics Film Series. A lively open discussion followed the movie.

The next film in the series is "Who's Life Is It Anyway?". Richard Dreyfuss stars in this

riveting serious film about a sculptor (Dreyfuss) who becomes a quadriplegic as a result of a tragic automobile accident. The sculptor Ken Harrison, deprived of the use of his hands, is forced to face the question of whether his life can be meaningful in any

true sense of the word. Once he makes his decision, his is forced by the hospital staff to fight to retain his autonomy. The movie should be of great interest to those wishing to pursue a career in the health professions. As a powerful drama, is it ideal for movie

Brown Bag Schedule:

- Sept. 24, Dr. James Spence
- Oct. 22, Dr. Tony Coumoundouros
- Nov. 5, Prof. Nathan Goetting*
- Dec. 1, Dr. Fritz Detwiler
- Jan. 28, Prof. Bill Bachman
- Feb. 25, Dr. Sheri Bleam*
- Mar. 18, Rev. Dr. Chris Momany
- Apr. 22, Dr. Melissa Stewart

* Denotes change in schedule

Times and Location:

- Knight Auditorium, Valade Hall
- 12:10—12:45. Twenty-

Ethics Film Series cont.

goers.

Marcia Boynton, director of the Institute for Health Studies, and Fritz Detwiler, director of the Institute for Ethics, will lead the discussion after the film.

"Whose Life Is It Anyway" will be shown on Monday, November 16, at 6:00 pm in Knight Auditorium in Valade Hall.

Get there early to get a good seat!

* **February 15,** "Crash" (Scott Elliott and Idali Feliciano)

* **March 15,** "Glengarry Glen Ross" (James Spence and Bill Bachman)

* **April 19,** "Dr. Doolittle 2" (Melissa Stewart and Janet Salzwedel)



Due to copyright issues, the film series is open only to the Adrian College community.

Please contact Dr. Scott Elliott at sellott@adrian.edu if you would like a formal part in the discussion.

"Not for Sale" Anti-Trafficking Campaign

Adrian College is one of America's original "abolitionist" colleges, and the "Not for Sale" anti-trafficking organization continues to express this institutional identity.

It is hard to get one's head around the idea, but according to widely-accepted estimates, about 27 million people are held as slaves throughout today's world. An estimated 600,000 to 800,000 men, women, and children are trafficked across international borders each year. Approximately 70 percent of these people are female, and about 50 percent

are children. Michigan is not immune to this horror. It is happening in our northern resort areas, in the cities, and in the suburbs.

One of the best known scholars and activists fighting this abuse is Dr. David Batstone. His book, *Not for Sale: The Return of the Global Slave Trade – and How We Can Fight It* was read by over 200 of Adrian College's first year students during the fall of 2007. David has visited Adrian three times, and on April 17-19, 2009 Adrian College hosted the first "Not for Sale Abolitionist Academy" of

leaders from around the nation and world. The local chapter of "Not for Sale" is busy raising awareness and is working on legislative initiatives for the State of Michigan.

The orange paper chain ("Freedom Chain") is a visual reminder of the people who are held as slaves in TODAY'S WORLD. Right now there are 27 million. The freedom chain has 2,700 links. Each link represents 10,000 people, and the chain is 522 feet long!

"It is requisite for the relaxation of the mind that we make use, from time to time, of playful deeds and jokes."

— Thomas Aquinas



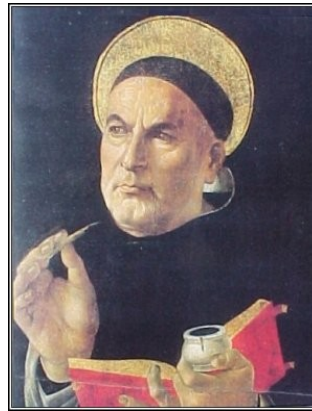
A Profile in Ethics: Thomas Aquinas and Natural Law

St. Thomas Aquinas was the most influential of the medieval natural law theorists, and his moral thinking influences us to this day. He was born near Naples, Italy in 1225. Upon learning of his intention to join the Dominican Order, his family imprisoned him for a year and pressured him to change his mind. After a year however, they gave up and Thomas became a Dominican. He studied under Albert the Great in Paris, where he acquired the nick name "Dumb Ox" because he listened more than he spoke, and because of his slow, deliberate temperament. He eventually wrote a tremendous amount, sometimes dictating to four different secretaries at once. His works include extensive commentaries on Aristotle's works, though he is most famous for his *Summa Theologica* and *Summa Contra Gentiles*.

St. Thomas subscribed to something now referred to as natural religion - the belief that moral and religious truths and could be known through our ability to reason about the world. Like other medieval natural law theorists, his views were heavily influenced by Aristotle. These theorists believed that human beings share a common rational nature and that choosing well involves choosing to act in a way that helps fulfill our potential as rational creatures. From the Stoics they borrowed the view that the natural world is rationally ordered and that virtue is a matter of conforming to that natural order. Natural Law theorists also taught that there is a divine plan for the universe in the mind of God, and that right action is conformity to that plan.

Aquinas believed that human beings had a rational intellect to understand God's plan (at

least in part) and free will to choose to live according to that plan or reject it. Central to Aquinas' analysis of morality was the concept of law. His notion of law, however, was significantly different from our own. Aquinas defines law as an ordinance of reason directed toward the common good, promulgated



by an authority responsible for the good of the entire community. By definition, then, a law is reasonable, and a rational person can understand why the law exists. To the extent that something deviates from what is reasonable, it is more a perversion of law than a true law. Aquinas believed that we could distinguish four types of law. First, there is eternal law which is God's plan for the universe. This was conceived by medievals as a sort of divine wisdom that directed all things to their ultimate good. Second, there is divine law, which is the part of eternal law that is known through revelation such as the Bible. Third, there is natural law, which is the part of eternal law that can be known through our ability to reason about the world. Finally, there is human law, which is necessary for us to live together in society, and which must be compatible with God's law. These laws were not mutually exclusive -

some moral rules, such as the prohibition against killing, are known both through divine law and natural law.

How exactly is the natural moral law known? Aquinas believed that we have an ability (medievals called it *synderesis*) to know basic moral truths. These basic moral truths are known immediately upon turning our attention towards them in a way similar to becoming aware of a sound or a color in front of us. When we turn our attention to these basic moral principles, we immediately recognize them and know they are true, just as when we hear or see something. We have this ability because we are rational creatures, and because moral principles known by way of *synderesis* are necessarily true. The most important of these "first principles of morality" is this: do good and avoid evil. These moral principles, in conjunction with facts about the world, enable us to reason towards particular moral conclusions about how to act.

In this way Aquinas was able to provide a theoretical foundation for particular moral conclusions. With respect to sexual behavior, for example, the natural end was believed to be reproduction. From this he concludes that "it is evident that the upbringing of a human child requires not only the mother's care for his nourishment, but much more the care of his father as guide and guardian, and under whom he progresses in goods both internal and external. Hence human nature rebels against an indeterminate union of the sexes and demands that a man should be united to a determinate woman and should abide with her a long time or even for a whole lifetime."

(continued on next page)

"Perfection of moral virtue does not wholly take away the passions, but regulates them."

—St. Thomas Aquinas

The Institute for Ethics welcomes stories related to ethical reflection and application of ethics by students, faculty, and staff

Aquinas continued....

Sexual activity outside of marriage, or sexual activity which cannot lead to reproduction (such as homosexual activity, masturbation, or the use of contraception) was believed immoral: "that every emission of semen, in such a way that generation cannot follow, is contrary to man. And if this be done deliberately, it must be a sin". Similarly, the natural end of eating is to provide nourishment. To eat too much is contrary to our natural good and is to commit the sin of gluttony. More generally, material goods exist to satisfy our material needs. To acquire more than necessary to provide for these needs amounts to a sin when this "excludes others indiscriminately from using" the goods. Aquinas states that "just as theft consists in taking another's property, so does it consist in keeping it back." For Aquinas, this is a matter of justice, not charity.

In determining whether or not a person has deviated from the natural moral law, we need to know the person's intention. This is because for Aquinas the intention determines the "moral species" of the action. He quotes with approval Aristotle's claim that a person who

steals so that they may commit adultery is more adulterer than thief. This can lead to interesting results. A hunter who shoots and kills a person, intending to shoot a deer, is not guilty of murder. A hunter who mistakenly shoots a deer, believing that it is a person and intending murder, is a murderer. This is important when it comes to understanding the morality of self defense. He points out that "Nothing hinders one act from having two effects, only one of which is intended, while the other is beside the intention" and that "the act of self defense may have two effects: one, the saving of one's life; the other, the slaying of the aggressor." In other words, if the intention is to save oneself, then we may engage in an action that results in death.

This emphasis on intention was developed by later theorists, and became known as the doctrine of double effect (DDE). According to DDE, a person may engage in a harmful activity, so long as the person does not intend the harm. This doctrine has been highly influential in both medical and military ethics. It provides, for example, a means of distinguishing risky surgery from euthanasia. It also provides a means of

distinguishing acts of terrorism, which intentionally target civilians, from legitimate acts of war which result in civilian casualties.

For Aquinas, then, part of God's plan (the natural moral law) is known to us through our ability to reason about the world. This natural moral law is directed toward the common good sets boundaries of proper action and human law. Because God created the world in perfect order, there is a harmony between our individual perfection, the perfection of others, and the natural moral law. For this reason Aquinas firmly believed that "God is not offended by us except by what we do against our own good". What is our real good? Aquinas maintains that the ultimate goal and source of true happiness for a human being is direct knowledge of God. This is not, however, "knowledge of God which is possessed generally by the majority." Nor is it knowledge of God by logical argumentation, or faith. It is knowledge "of God in his essence", and that is not attainable in this life.

Thanks to Cleary Murphy, Adrian College Philosophy major and Dr. James Spence for the content of this article.

Adrian College Students Preparing for the "Ethics Bowl"

Adrian College students are shown here preparing for the *Upper Midwest Regional Ethics Bowl* which will be held at Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago, Illinois, November 21, 2009.

From the Center for the Study of Ethics in the Professions webpage: "The Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl (IEB) combines

the excitement and fun of a competitive tournament with a valuable educational experience for undergraduate students. Show here are Creedence

Hoffman, Cleary Murphy, Ken Warren, and Nolan Gillespie along with their coach Dr. James Spence (Philosophy and Religion) studying cases and reviewing strategies for the Ethics Bowl.

