

THOMISTIC COUNSELING

COURSE 1 – Thomistic Perspectives on The Nature of Man

Description: This course is designed to provide basic information on St. Thomas’s teaching on the nature of man and its impact on our understanding of mental health and illness. An authentic view of man’s spiritual dimension is essential to true healing. The wisdom of St. Thomas offers a cogent, clear view of man’s faculties and acts which provides a solid framework for mental health professionals and other helping professionals such as clergy, coaches or educators. With Fr. Chad Ripperger’s seminal work, *Introduction to the Science of Mental Health*, as the source of this instruction, this four-hour class highlights key concepts and principles that can be practically applied to improve mental health care and outcomes.

The goal of this effort is to convey elementary Thomistic theoretical concepts that are relevant to counseling and to stir a desire for further study of Thomistic perspectives that are helpful in the field of mental health. Applying these concepts in the counseling process will be the focus of the second course.

Class 1: Why Thomism?

Description: The rise of mental health problems over the past decades provides evidence of treatment approaches that are lacking. Solutions with lasting impact are more readily found in the ancient wisdom of St. Thomas Aquinas who wrote extensively on the operations of the mind and soul of man. St. Thomas’s philosophical psychology provides valuable insight into how to care for those with mental and emotional struggles.

Class overview:

- Provides background on St. Thomas and the value of his philosophical understanding of the nature of man in our contemporary culture
- Presents definitions and perspectives of mental health and mental illness according to St Thomas
- Compares to foundational assumptions in modern psychological and Thomistic schools of thought

Supporting materials for students –Class Outline

Class 2 – The Ontological Structure of Man

Description: This class provides an overview of the structure of man, which lays the foundation for the more detailed discussion of the relationships that the various faculties have with one another. These Thomistic concepts provide a comprehensive and cogent understanding of the way that God designed man to operate. The primary components of our human nature are identified and broadly defined. This lays a foundation and establishes a framework for the subsequent classes.

Class overview:

- Explains the primary components of the nature of our being, which includes man as:
 - o A composite of body and soul,
 - o Comprised of faculties, potentialities, or powers,
 - o Having a disposition or inclination toward certain responses,
 - o A creature of habits which develop from disposition,
 - o Inclined to certain virtues and vices or good and bad habits,
 - o Motivated to actions based on the operation of the faculty

Supporting material for students – Class Outline; Diagram -Ontological Structure of Man

Class 3 – The Appetitive Faculties: The Appetites and Passions

Description: An understanding of man’s feelings and thinking is key in offering mental health support. This class considers the lower faculties, the appetites and passions; it defines appetites and passions in general and in particular and highlights the differences between the concupiscible and irascible appetites and passions. The class also contains an overview of the eleven passions as well as some key underlying principles that aid in helping professionals as they discern cause in mental health concerns.

Class overview:

- Reviews the categories of the faculties
- Defines the concupiscible and irascible appetites
- Describes how love serves as the primary passion
- Explains the primary eleven passions
- Illustrates how the passions becomes a window into a person, providing data and insight
- Clarifies how insight into passions gives clues into the disconnects in the faculties

Supporting material for students – Class Outline; Charts – Concupiscible and Irascible Passions

Class 4 – The Sensitive Faculties: The Exterior and Interior Senses/Passive Intellect

Description: The functioning of the sensitive faculties has a profound impact on psychological health. These cognitive faculties are material and operate through a bodily organ. Dysfunction in these faculties is often a primary source of mental problems as they can disable or disorder the functions of the higher faculties.

Overview:

- Reviews the five exterior senses (sight, hearing, taste, touch, smell)
- Explains the purpose of the four interior senses, also referred to as the passive intellect
 - o Common sense power
 - o Memory
 - o Imagination
 - o Cogitative power
- Highlights their relationship to other faculties or powers

Supporting materials for students – Class Outline; Sensitive Faculties Chart; Diagram-Ontological Structure

Class 5 – The Intellective Faculties: The Agent Intellect and the Possible Intellect

Description: The higher faculties of the agent intellect, possible intellect and will are ontologically distinct. In one sense, that passive intellect is an intellective faculty because its operations are the means by which a soul understands, but there are key differences. This class reviews the operations of the agent and possible intellect, intellective memory, and errors in judgment.

Class overview:

- Explains abstraction as the work of the agent intellect
- Discusses truth as the object of the possible intellect
- Highlights the operations of the possible intellect and its three acts:
 - o Apprehension or understanding
 - o Judgement
 - o Ratiocination or reasoning
- Discusses how errors in judgment occur

Supporting material for students – Class Outline; Diagram- - Intellective Faculties and Will

Class 6 - The Will

Description: The acts of the will are typically based on the operations in the possible intellect, as the will is a blind faculty that is directed by judgment and reasoning. However, the will has the capacity to move the intellect and the other faculties that impact the intellect. In other words, the will can move one toward a course of action that influences the intellect and one's mental health.

Overview:

- Explains the operations of the will and its object as the true good.
- Presents the concept of free will and how one chooses evil.
- Describes the relationship between the will and the passions.

Supporting materials for students – Class Outline; Diagram – Intellective Faculties and Will

Class 7– Summary and Comments on Impact of Faculties on Mental Health

Description – This class threads together the impact of the faculties and considers the nature of mental health and illness. Through a review of the operations of the faculties and their relationships, improper functioning or disorder is highlighted. These concepts are applied in a case review.

Overview:

- Reviews the operations of the faculties
- Defines mental health and illness and highlights the faculties' effect on mental health and illness.
- Presents peace and interior freedom as positive outcomes of counseling
- Considers the relationships of faculties and where disorders can occur
- Reviews common exterior and interior causes of mental illness
- Highlights interior causes of mental illness through a case review, considering disorder within:
 - o Appetites and passions
 - o Common sense power
 - o Imagination
 - o Memory
 - o Cogitative Power
 - o Will
 - o Possible Intellect

Supporting materials for students – Class Outline; Chart: Mental Health and Illness-Faculties, Acts, Causes, Remedies

Class 8 – Disposition and Habits

Description: Each person has a unique disposition, which is primarily inherited or naturally endowed, although it is influenced by environment and experiences. These inclinations become stable and an ingrained characteristic of habits. Habits are a disposed way of being. Disposition or an inclination to judge and react psychologically to circumstances establishes a pattern that is referred to as temperament. This class will further explain these inclinations and highlight the four temperaments as well as the causes of personality.

Overview:

- Defines disposition and habits and explain how they are connected.
- Highlights the impact of habits on other faculties.
- Discusses disposition as the basis for the four temperaments; the melancholic, choleric, sanguine, phlegmatic
- Presents the causes of personality

Supporting materials for students – Class Outline with Overview of the Four Temperaments

Class 9 – Habits, Virtues, Vices, and Actions

Description: Pursuit of virtue is essential to mental health. Moral virtues are acquired and can be developed, or habituated, by repeated actions. Vice can be habituated in a similar way. Virtue prompts the appetites and passions to act reasonably which quiets appetites and passions. In contrast, those who choose vice experience internal division or dysfunction within the faculties which is the source of mental illness. When one acts according to virtue, one is free because the intellect and will are not bound by passion. A clear understanding of virtue and vice provides a guide to interior freedom, peace, and happiness.

Class overview:

- Reiterates the importance of understanding habits
- Defines virtues, vices, and actions
- Clarifies the categories of virtues
 - o Acquired and infused virtues
 - o Intellectual, theological, and moral virtues
- Describes the moral virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance

Supporting materials for students – Class Outline; List of Moral, Theological and Intellectual Virtues and Vices

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