



# DOCTORAL DISSERTATION CAPTURES THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE NICOMACHEAN ETHICS

11/26/2018



Daniel Wagner successfully defended his dissertation, “φύσις καὶ τὸ ἀνθρώπινον ἀγαθὸν (‘Nature and the Human Good’): The Aristotelian Foundations of the Human Good,” on April 27. In the dissertation, Wagner presents Aristotle’s concept of the human good in the Nicomachean Ethics as the philosopher intended for it to be understood.

Contemporary readers, Wagner explained, do not adequately attend to the Nicomachean Ethics as an Aristotelian science or to Aristotle’s appropriation of the principles of nature and soul in the text, and by doing so they miss the universality of Aristotle’s account of the human good. Wagner remedies this by presenting Aristotle’s account in the context of the foundational principles of science, nature and soul.

Due to the nature and definition of the human being, Wagner said, it is critical that the human good be the virtuous functional-exercise of humans’ animal and intellectual capacities through rational choice. Recognizing that modern humans, often struggling with depression and dissatisfaction, forget that they need to do things perfective of their naturally endowed capacities in order to achieve fulfillment, Wagner was motivated to write the dissertation to re-ground the good of the human person in nature.

“We now regularly condone and promote behaviors that are

actually harmful to us by nature and in principle incompatible with human happiness and flourishing,” he said. “Developing the work of recent Thomists on the Aristotelian philosophy of nature and bringing it to bear in ethics, I wanted to offer this dissertation as an ancient source of healing for the blight of materialist confusion that often prevents human persons from self-determined growth to their natural good or even leads them to act contrary to it.”

Wagner’s dissertation committee included Dr. Maia Larios-Sanz, associate professor of biology and associate dean of the School of Arts and Sciences; Dr. John Hittinger, professor of philosophy; Dr. R. Edward Houser, professor of philosophy; Dr. Mary Catherine Sommers, professor of philosophy; Dr. Steven Jensen, professor of philosophy; and external reader, Dr. Michael Tkacz (Bernard J. Coughlin, S.J. Professor of Christian Philosophy at Gonzaga University).

Wagner is currently chair and assistant professor of Philosophy at Aquinas College in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He plans to fulfill his calling to teach at the university level and to publish his own works for the sake of dialogue and progress in the great intellectual tradition.

*By Katie Fleming*