

# Example of augustine's vs thomas aquinas' ethical principles essay

[Sociology](#), [Ethics](#)



Augustine (354-430 AD) and Thomas Aquinas (1225 - 1274 AD) were both Christian philosophers who focused on God and what God expected of humanity. An application of their philosophies to decisions made in modern times reveal how much more rigid the lives of people were during the Roman Empire and the medieval period. However, there are still arguments to be made using these philosophical concepts of ethics. In the case of the newspaper columnist who signed a contract and then decided to break the contract because she wanted to accept a better job Augustine's ethical principles, though rigid, do not classify her actions as lying. To Augustine, "A lie consists in speaking a falsehood with the intention of deceiving" (SparkNotes Editors 2005). The columnist did not lie when she committed to the job and signed the contract. When she signed the contract and promised to work for the newspaper for a designated period, she did not intend to deceive them. The columnist was forthright when she received the new job offer and told the newspaper she needed to break their contract. The closest example that is readily found and deals with the idea of a broken contract is that of broken promises. Augustine's describes a situation in which a woman who has taken a vow of perpetual celibacy later decides to marry. She has sinned, according to Augustine, however her new marriage is valid (Doull 2005). Based on this, the columnist has broken her promise (her vow) and sinned but her relationship with her new employer will not be negatively impacted. Looking at it from the point of view of a Thomist, someone who ascribes to the ethical philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, one might ask if it was ethical of her to accept the contract. Certainly it was, she accepted the contract with no evil intention. She did not attempt to break the contract

through lies and subterfuge. Thomists consider making correct judgments a matter of conscience. Knowing what to do in the present and doing it a matter of “is” and “ought.” It is the difference between knowing something to be true in the present versus knowing something in the future. People make decisions in the now without the foreknowledge of what they ought to do in the future or ought to have done in the past. In the case of the doctor and the pilot, if the doctor decides to withhold information about the physical health of the pilot she is behaving unethically on many levels. Thomas Aquinas’ discussions about ethics apply directly to this case. Omitting the fact that the pilot has health problems could endanger the lives of all the passengers and crews under his care until he retires. Additionally the doctor would be knowingly and deliberately telling a lie. Besides this, she is considering lying based on what the airlines should do (Miller 2011). Because the airline might discharge the pilot within a month of his retirement does not give the doctor justification to lie about the pilot's condition. In Augustine’s philosophy of good and evil he blames evil on freewill. He wrote, “evil exists because we have free will” that being the freewill to choose do something wrong instead of what is right (SparkNotes Editors 2005). The doctor could very well be accused of evil if she chooses to lie about the pilot’s condition. Aquinas wrote, “Truthfulness in statements which cannot be avoided is the formal duty of an individual to everyone, however great may be the disadvantage accruing to himself or to another” (Drefcinski 2013). In this case the pilot may be disadvantaged but the doctor’s conscience tells her what is morally right To Aquinas “practical wisdom” is the act of determining the right reason for doing something (Drefcinski

2013). It is not right that the airline might use the pilot's heart condition as a reason to discharge him one month before his retirement. However, after deliberation it is to be hoped that the doctor would make a "correct judgment about what is to be done" and conduct herself accordingly (Drefcinski 2013). To a Thomist knowing what is right and yet not doing what is right is evil. Thomas Aquinas was very much influenced by and a follower of Aquinas. They both concerned themselves with the notion of original sin and sin against God's laws.

## **Works Cited**

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