

# Thomas aquinas impact on western thought through time philosophy essay



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St. Thomas Aquinas was an Italian philosopher and theologian living between 1225 -1274 of the medieval period. Aquinas began his education at Montecassino, a monastery which became his first battle site. Thomas was later transferred to the University of Naples in France; this is where he came into contact with a newly found mendicant order of Preachers or Dominicans, and Aristotle's philosophy. Aquinas became a Dominican, against the will of his family and eventually went to Paris to study, before going to Cologne with Albert the Great, a philosopher whose interest in Aristotle reinforced Aquinas's own predilections[1]. Aquinas was a classical proponent of the natural theology at the onset of European Scholasticism, and is regarded as the founder of the Thomism school of philosophy and theology. Aquinas's philosophy significantly influenced subsequent Christian theology, particularly that of the Roman Catholic Church, as well as Western philosophy in general. Thomas's most significant and enduring works include the " Summa Theologica[2]", an article that systematically expounds his mysticism of the " quinquae viae" and the " Summa Contra Gentiles".

Aquinas was well known for his contribution to Christian theology, but he was also a classical Aristotelian as well as an Empiricist, and he significantly influenced these two ideas of Western thought. Aquinas believed that truth is well revealed through both natural revelation and supernatural revelation- through faith as in the scripture, for these two elements, Aquinas was careful enough to separate them in a complementary rather than contradictory manner. He argued that, although God's existence and His attributes may be easily deduced, specific aspects such as the Trinity and Incarnation may only be revealed through special revelation. As mentioned above, His two

outstanding works are the “ Summa Contra Gentiles” translated and published in English as the “ On the Truth of the Catholic Faith”, and the “ Summa Theologica” known as the “ Compendium of Theology”. The former piece was broadly intended for non-Christians; while the latter significantly addresses Christians and is more of a philosophical work on Christian theology.

Aquinas utilized scriptures and traditions of the Catholic Church as the raw material data of his theology. He believed that these materials were produced by God’s revelation to humans throughout history. In addition, faith and reason are the two fundamental tools, which are necessary for processing and interpreting this raw data of theology with an aim of obtaining the true knowledge of God. Aquinas blends Aristotelian philosophy with Christian theology to argue that God reveals himself to humans through nature. This implies that God’s nature can be studied through rational thinking as well as through the study of nature[3].

Aquinas proposed five statements regarding God’s divine qualities from his classical consideration of what God is not. This include: God is simple, He is devoid of matter or form or even body and soul; God is perfect, deficient of nothing; God is infinite, He is unlimited as He created all things, but humans are limited being, physically, rationally, and emotionally; God is immutable, inept of change with regard to His in nature and character; and God is one, His essence is the same as His existence. Aquinas also pioneered the “ Principle of Double Effect” when it comes to ethical decisions. According to this principle, when an otherwise justifiable act such as self-defense is likely

to cause an effect, then one may basically be obliged to avoid it for example if it results to the death of another[4].

Modern philosophy is a reaction in favor or against Aquinas's views

As outlined above, Thomas Aquinas has shaped modern world's philosophy especially when it comes to theology and ethical philosophy. At large, modern world's philosophy began in the sixteenth century; but nobody's system of philosophy has entirely corresponded to everybody's perception of certainty; bit to what, if set aside for men's perception, common men may not agree on what is common sense. Against all this, St. Thomas's philosophy distinctively stands based on the universal common conviction that supports brotherhood of men, in their common consciousness that, all things attested by the ability of the senses originate from God[5].

Rene Descartes's argument

Rene Descartes is regarded as the " Father of Modern Philosophy."

Descartes's system of thought depicts a major break away from all previous philosophical systems, mainly, away from Aristotle and Aquinas philosophy. For example, unlike Aquinas, a proponent for the tabula rasa model of the human mind (At birth, the human mind resembles a blank recording device and as one grows it records data from sensory experience), Descartes posited that human beings are born with innate thoughts and ideas, these ideas exist in their minds even at birth[6]. Further, Thomas Aquinas argued that if humans had innate ideas of God's existence, then proof of His existence would be inappropriate and faith would be irrelevant as human

beings would have direct knowledge and experience of God's essence and <https://assignbuster.com/thomas-aquinas-impact-on-western-thought-through-time-philosophy-essay/>

nature. Thus, Descartes was trying to offer the world a philosophy which he thought was compatible with both the new world of science and the convention of Christian faith. However, his philosophy was hideous to the Church. As a result, in the same way the Roman Catholic Church had condemned Galileo in 1633, thirty years later, it added Descartes' work on its Index of proscribed reading material.

### John Locke's argument

John Locke, an advanced philosopher of the seventeenth-century, effectively presents his argument against Descartes' innate ideas, in a manner that is similar to that of Aquinas. Locke criticize Descartes' claim that God must exist based on Descartes idea of God in his mind even though he (Descartes) has disconnected his mind from his senses. Locke argued that, holding such a claim is the same as believing that millions of gods must exist just because millions of different minds have ideas of millions of different gods.

However, Locke used Descartes argument that in order to have a clear and distinctive idea of something one must have a clear understanding of that which they are having an idea about. Locke uses scripture to argue that in the Bible, no other belief clearly distinguishes a believer from an unbeliever except the belief that, Jesus is the Messiah, and He (Jesus), is able to " save" everyone who formed this belief with no requirement of other beliefs whatsoever[7].

### Immanuel Kant argument

From research, it is clear that St. Thomas Aquinas and Immanuel Kant were born almost half a millennium apart and, on the exterior, the styles of argumentation of the two philosopher and their broad approaches to philosophy emerge as being equally distinct from each other; nevertheless, both philosophers aimed to congeal the essential knowledge of God. Kant's metaphysics legitimately attempted to develop a kind of critical science that would guarantee the truth of knowledge. Similarly, Aquinas succeeded in arguing that some of the world's most closely held beliefs can be justified in the course of rational thinking; exclusively, he tried to generate a wide-ranging argument in favor of the God's existence, which supports the most central doctrines of the Catholic Church. Comparing Thomas Aquinas to Kant, one can argue that Thomas was more ensconced in the conventional hierarchy of the Catholic Church and interpretations of God's existence than Immanuel Kant. Thomas' main focus was placed upon the issues and concerns regarding the relationship between God and man, in as well as the relationship between God and the natural world. Basically, he aimed at investigating the various aspects of the world that casts doubt to the existence of God, and as a result, why God's existence is questioned so often. Ultimately, Aquinas' writings would then be adopted as the accepted books of theology for the Catholic Church, and consequently, would strongly possess a kind of stigma for either those who were not Christians or not Catholics, especially after the protestant reorganization. Indisputably, in as much as, Aquinas' arguments were definitely rational. This implies that, he purposed to draw an abstract of claims regarding the nature of God and mankind by examining physical anomalies. This distinguished him strongly from most of the modern philosophers, particularly with regard to the fact <https://assignbuster.com/thomas-aquinas-impact-on-western-thought-through-time-philosophy-essay/>

that he supposed that true faith required rational investigation; however, it made him similar to Immanuel Kant, who also believed that faith in God and salvation require critical analysis.

### Aquinas's impact on the Catholic Church's philosophy

Aquinas believed that God's existence is neither patently obvious nor is it beyond proof. In the "Summa Theologica", Aquinas outlines five rational proofs ("quinquae viae") for the existence of God, these include:

God is an unmoved mover (ex motu), as everything that is moved is moved by God, the source of all motion.

God is the cause of all things; this is argued through the argument of the first cause (ex causa), where everything that is caused is caused by God.

Through the argument from contingency, Aquinas argues that God's existence is not contingent of any other being. But the universe contains contingent beings as something cannot come of nothing.

God is the pinnacle of perfection; it is from this lesser degrees of perfection derive their meaning. This is outlined in the argument from degree.

The final argument is the teleological argument, also known as the argument from design (ex fine). According to this argument, all natural bodies in the world are in themselves unintelligent, and are guided by God to act towards ends rationally.

Aquinas understood that Jesus Christ was ultimately divine and He (Jesus Christ) is not simply a human being or merely God in humanly inhabiting the body of Christ. Nonetheless, Aquinas posited that Christ also had a justly cogent human soul, resulting in a duality of natures that endured even after Incarnation. In essence, these two natures existed concurrently yet distinctively in a single existent human body.

Aquinas is also credited for defining the four cardinal virtues: “prudence, temperance, justice and fortitude”. For these values, Aquinas held that they are revealed by nature and are and necessary for everyone. Further, he highlighted three theological virtues; faith, hope and charity, which are the ‘chiefest’, supernatural and distinctive from other virtues as their object is God. Furthermore, Aquinas distinguished four kinds of law: natural law- discovered by reason, eternal law- God’s decree that governs all creation), human law-natural law as applied by governments and institutions and divine law-this is specifically revealed in the scriptures[8].

According to St. Thomas Aquinas, the ultimate goal of human existence is to find eternal union and fellowship with God. He believes in life after death for those who have experienced Christ’s salvation and redemption while living on earth. The Incarnation is an adorable vision which will be granted to Christians as a perfect and everlasting happiness through understanding of the very quintessence of God. Thus, during an individual’s existence on the earth, their life must be inclined toward right things such as peace, holiness and charity.