

Aristotle vs Aquinas  
on mortality  
philosophy essay



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History has always proved to us that human beings do not always make good choice. We hate, destroy, and kill one another throughout all of recorded history. There have been many people that have attempted to reduce such behavior by way of reasoning. This reasoning produced concepts, and ideas about how we should conduct our lives. Those who have sought after answers for proper living believed in the existence of a greater being who acts upon us in way that makes us desire for our actions to be virtuous. The subject of much debate; however, is how an individual should go about living virtuously. This is due because not one individuals concept of virtue is the same, nor are their opinions on how to act in order to obtain it. Aquinas and Aristotle share the same point of view that recognizes God as the highest being. Understanding the notion of a highest being brings Aristotle and Aquinas to believe experiencing the highest life is to do all things being mindful of the highest being. This is one thing they agreed upon; however, their notions of how God exists were skewed. Aristotle was an ancient philosopher, thus his ideas of God were not religious; however, he did identify the highest being as God minus human characteristics. Aquinas believed God had characteristics and would be met after death. He also believed that attaining virtue was the core reason for living a moral life. Aquinas understood God to be a guide and that one should do what the guide says. This principle holds true for his concept of morality because he believed we are lead into morality by God we should strive to be moral. Aquinas and Aristotle disagreed on many topics; however, they both held that in order to attain happiness one must live morally sound and successful lives.

Mans ability to reason is the only thing that separates him from all other living things. Aristotle understood the human soul to be composed of three parts, the vegetative, appetite, and calculative. These three parts can be considered as virtues of the human soul. The vegetative virtue is that which pertains to animals, plants, and humans. This virtue is irrational and feeds the vessel with nutrition that helps it maintain health. The virtue of appetite controls our desires and emotional processes. This virtue also applies to animals, but appetite is a rational and irrational virtue at the same time. This means that there is a side to appetite that humans can control that animals can not. The calculative part is the real divisor between animals and humans which is completely rational. Through the calculative part we have access to the virtue of reason. It is clear that human beings are sometime ruled by their emotions which will often be the deciding factor between choices. Man has been given the virtue of reason; therefore, he must take responsibility for his choices. Responsibility forces us to make decisions that will result in mirroring the highest being. Only through our right actions can we hope to live a vitreous existence.

Aristotle held that if an individual can live better then they ought to try and live the best they can. This kind of living requires one to abandon doing things that brought them pleasure and only do those actions which were good and particular to each individual. Living a good life includes one or contentment on earth, but the only path to attaining this kind of life is through reason and the attainment of virtue. Virtue is that which the sole derivative of happiness. Happiness is attained when an individual's desire meets up with what they ought to do. Being happy then results in an

individual living a moral life. Aristotle referred to this as the “ Good Life” when he said that we will use our wisdom to seek out what are necessities of living the good life although we are lead by our egos. Although we are lead by our ego it can not be allowed to contaminate our friendships. Aristotle said, “ Without friends no one would choose to live, though he had all other goods.” He believed that in order to attain virtue in the good life one should live in a good polis, participate in government, and be a good citizen. By practicing these concepts one is able to reach the highest life which is to attain eudaimonia. Self-perfection is the requirement to apprehend eudaimonia by living the good life.

Aquinas believed that there is a supreme being and his name is God. He believed that one ought to live their life in a way that will bring him one day to meeting God. This is impossible though if one does not believe in him. Aquinas set forth five arguments for proving there is a higher being, God. His first proof was the argument of motion. This argument describes the way things move. When an object is set in motion the object was acted upon by a thing that was already in motion before it. Aristotle called the origin of motion the “ Unmoved Mover” after he discovered this fundamental observation; however, Aquinas believed the “ Unmoved Mover” was God. Aquinas believed that all of creation began because of one motion which was orchestrated by God. We all learn from a very early age that no object is capable of making itself. This problem is confronted by the argument called Causation of Existence. Aquinas thought that God was the prime creator of all that exists. Aquinas third proof is entitled the Contingent and Necessary Objects. This argument reduced all objects in the universe into one of two

types. An object was either contingent, or necessary. A necessary being must act upon a contingent being in order for the contingent being to exist. God is that being that acts upon the contingent being thus causing its existence. Aquinas held for his fourth proof by describing degrees of quality. This argument is known as the argument from Degrees and Perfection. Through degrees and perfection one is able to make a judgment about degrees by looking at the thing being measured against an object that has the perfect quality. God is that perfect quality. The last proof is known as the Argument from Intelligent Design. This proof argues that our entire universe is full of intelligence. Human beings have the ability to reason, and should expect the existence of an intelligent designer based off of the sole fact that we are part of an intelligent universe.