

St of the impossible stone to argue essay



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St. Thomas Aquinas was an Italian philosopher of the mid-thirteenth century. He was sometimes referred to as the “ Angelic Doctor”; he was a Dominican friar and believed to be the greatest medieval philosopher. One of his most famous works was the ‘ Summa Theologica`, Which was sadly only half completed due to a religious experience, involving a visit from two angels who granted his prayers of integrity of mind and body. Aquinas was one of many philosophers who explored the existence and plausibility behind ‘ God`.

One particular interest Aquinas had was concentrating on the concept of ‘ Gods` attributes, such as supposedly being omniscient and omnipotent; he was particularly interested in the latter. Omnipotence is part of the concept of deity, meaning that ‘ God`, if he exists is all-powerful. Omnipotence is one of the many things which philosophers, including atheists, theistic and agnostic people argue over to help prove or disprove the existence of ‘ God`. Omnipotence is sometimes argued as being paradoxical, meaning that it is logically impossible and contradicts itself. But, that depends on the different concepts of omnipotence.

Religious philosophers have interpreted omnipotence in many different ways, but I shall only be arguing and talking about two of them. One of these theories is that omnipotence means that one can do whatever one wants to do. This theory was supported by a famous French philosopher, referred to as the “ Father of Philosophy”, Rene Descartes. St. Thomas Aquinas had a slightly narrower conception of the term omnipotence. Aquinas said that omnipotence is when one can do whatever one wants to do within logical boundaries.

Aquinas's definition was more popular because people didn't like the idea of the illogical or something that went against human limitations. Despite both of these theistic definitions seemingly being quite similar they hold completely different. Descartes classification of omnipotence suggests that 'God' can do what ever 'he' wants to do, holding no boundaries to neither logic nor physical capabilities, including impossibilities like time travel. Whereas, Aquinas's definition suggests that if 'God' is omnipotent then he can only do the logically possible and not contradict the laws of logic or mathematics. Nor the impossible, such as make a spherical cube, draw a triangular square or travel in time. Both of these definitions are brought about through different thought processes.

Descartes theory came from his belief in his 'God'. He believed that 'God' could do absolutely everything, he could do the impossible, he believed this because he was a devout Christian and believed that 'God' was almighty. Descartes interpreted the word almighty as omnipotent. Therefore Descartes thought that if 'God' was omnipotent he must be able to do everything.

Descartes thought that even if something may seem impossible to us it was possible for 'God'. He justified himself by saying that if people believed 'God' wasn't able to do the impossible, i. e. Be omnipotent (using his own definition) then they were denying the very existence of their 'God'.

Despite being religious himself Thomas Aquinas was one of the many people who didn't believe Descartes interpretation of the word omnipotence. One of the examples he used was the paradigm of the dead in heaven. When in heaven you are believed to be in paradise, meaning you can do what ever

you want. Aquinas said that even though the dead, resting in heaven, can do what ever they want, it does not mean that they are omnipotent, and by saying that they are is an insult to ' God` .

Aquinas also referred to the wise men and women of his age. Saying that they limit their desires to what they are capable of doing, but not trying to exceed their boundaries. I can also relate to this side of the argument. For instance, if I want to go to college, and I want to have a sandwich, but that is all I want to do, would that not imply that I am omnipotent? So by saying that omnipotence means that God can do whatever he wants isn't really a celebration of his divinity, not in Descartes sense of the word omnipotent anyway.

Aquinas argued that if Descartes definition of omnipotence was true then why are these wise men and women not omnipotent? The most famous argument put forward by Aquinas, which refuted Descartes theory of omnipotence was ' the paradox of the impossible stone` . Aquinas said that if ' God` was all-powerful and could do everything, then ' God` could create a stone that was too heavy for ' him` to lift? Aquinas said that if ' God` couldn't then there is something that ' God` can't do, that is to say make the stone, But if ' God` could, then again there is something ' he` can't do, lifting the stone. This paradoxical analogy proves that Descartes theory cannot be correct, because it contradicts itself. Similarly to Aquinas's refusal to accept Descartes theory Rene Iso dismissed Aquinas's hypothesis. Descartes thought that Aquinas's definition of omnipotence it taking away the very essence of ' God` . This is because they were indicating that ' God` wasn't all-powerful, implying that ' God` wasn't perfect.

Descartes believed that if anyone thought that 'God' wasn't impeccable then they were contradicting the most potent attribute of 'God', his divinity. People argued with Descartes saying that making $1+2=4$ or drawing a circular square is totally impossible and logically unfeasible. All though this argument was rational Descartes said that the human lack of understanding of a spherical cube or an endless piece of rope was only highlighting the limitations of the mind of the human race. Descartes also said that by saying that the thought of a circular square was illogical was implying that 'God' had the same mental boundaries as humans, which of course is blasphemous.

Descartes said that it was impossible for mere human beings to know what is possible and impossible for the almighty. If we take Descartes interpretation of the word omnipotence then there is no logical way we can prove or disprove the existence of God. Despite the fact that the 'paradox of the impossible stone' is completely contradictory, it doesn't matter, because 'God' can do the impossible, he can do what every 'he' wants. So Descartes theory on omnipotence can be accepted without questioning 'Gods' deity.

Aquinas premise on omnipotence is also not vulnerable to 'the paradox of the impossible stone' because the very idea of a stone that 'God' can make which is too heavy to lift is nonsensical. Meaning it is impossible and illogical, which satisfies Aquinas's theory of omnipotence, saying that 'God' can do everything which is within the logical boundaries. Therefore St. Thomas Aquinas's definition doesn't compromise the divine idea of omnipotence. In my opinion both of these theories hold a lot of merit, especially when faced with this paradox.

It surfaces many unanswerable questions which open up limitless possibilities in philosophy. Despite the fact that the paradox was made redundant on both accounts it shows that both these hypotheses are plausible. My view on these two theories is that although both hold a certain element of logic and sense to them they both have holes in their hypothesis. For instance, if I followed Descartes theory I would be classed omnipotent because I can physically do all I want to do, it is humanly possible.

So because a human can do it, it completely contradicts the idea of ' God` and ' his` omnipotence. Alternatively, if I pursued Aquinas's view on omnipotence we would have to presume, following Aquinas's definition, that ' Gods` idea of logic and possibility is the same as humans. The problem with this concept is that by associating our idea of sense and reason with ' God` is quite sacrilegious, as it implies that both ' God` has the same intellectual limitations as us. This also contradicts the whole idea of omnipotence, in much the same way as Descartes does. So because of the flaws in both theories I don't think that it is possible to decide which definition is more believable considering both parties are theists. But if, like me, one party is agnostic it is easier to believe that ' God` is omnipotent in the sense of Descartes' definition.

This is because it allows a person with a doubtful faith the assurance that if there is a ' God` then that ' God` has some form of divinity and knowledge which is unimaginable to a mere mortal. . But if you are a complete theist you would follow Aquinas's theory, as it implies ' God` has some familiar characteristics that a human can associate with. But either way no matter what these philosophers say neither of these definitions don't prove nor

disprove the existence of God. They only enhance the lack of knowledge anyone has of 'him`.

So this Philosophical debate could last for eternity.