

St thomas aquinas



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ST THOMAS AQUINAS Aquinas writes that ‘ since the day of Aristotle, probably no one man has exercised such a powerful influence on the thinking world as did St Thomas Aquinas. He was born in 1225 in Italy of a noble family, thus separated by 900 years to Aristotle. He received his first education at the Abbey of Monte Cassino, going on from there to the University of Naples. In 1243, he joined the Dominican monastic order at Cologin. His most influential teacher was another Dominican, Albertus Magnis, a German who wrote extensively on theological matters and questions of natural science, especially biology. Thomas was also a highly successful lecturer, and travelled widely across Europe, particularly on the business of his order and the church. In his short and active life, Thomas produced a prodigious amount of writing: commentaries on biblical books and Aristotelian work, short essays on philosophical problems, and a lengthy compendium of Christian apologetics, the Summa Contra Gentiles, which, as Chambers et. al. writes was probably intended for Dominican missionaries working to convert heretics and infidels. St Thomas begins the Summa Contra Gentiles as writes by reaffirming what Aristotle claimed at the beginning of Metaphysics, namely, he that studies the end or purpose of the universe is rightly called a wise man. He is wise because he is studying that which is highest and most noble among the subjects of study: Truth. Truth, Aquinas claims, is the end or purpose of the universe due to the fact that the end of the universe is an intellect, and truth is the good of the intellect. God, the author and end of the universe, therefore is his own good; He is goodness itself, truth itself, intellect itself. Goodness or truth, or intelligence according to Aquinas, are not attributes of God; they are understood by us as individual things but are one in God's simplicity. Aquinas affirms at the

beginning that God is understood as being the First Being who bestows being on all others. Thus, it can be derived that everything is produced through the will of an agent which he writes, ' is directed to an end by that Agent because the good and the proper object of the will'. Using similar philosophy to that of Plato's core analogy Aquinas writes ' for some things are so produced by God that, being intelligent, they bear a resemblance to him and reflect his image. This shows that perfection, like God is unattainable and the closest we will come will only be a shadowy approximation. Aquinas continues that every agent acts for an end, and draws a distinction in claiming that every agent acts by nature or by intelligence. Therefore, those which act by intelligence he suggests, act for an end since they act with an intellectual preoccupation of what they attain by their action, and act through such preoccupation, for this is to act by intelligence. For every agent must act to some end, Aquinas elaborates to argue that every act is towards some good, as ' good is the object of every appetite and therefore all action and movement is good, and thus, claims that all things act to one end which is God. In Summa Theologica, Aquinas takes his dialectical argument further in proving the existence of God. Similarly to St Augustine who claimed that because God is good, everything he made is good, Aquinas argues against the statement that because there is evil in the world, God does not exist in suggesting that God allows evil to exist, because out of evil, produced good. The second premise which he sought to disprove was the belief that because all things can be replaced by nature and human reason, there must be no God. He responds by stating that human reason and nature can fail and therefore everything is brought back to the one immovable and self-necessary first principle. Aquinas in Summa Theologica, therefore continues

in proving the existence of God, and therefore takes it for granted in Centra Gentiles that God does exist and hence, continues in tying scholasticism with faith. Therefore, God is the first and final cause according to Aquinas.

Aquinas agreed with Augustine and Aristotle to the extent of arguing that man's happiness does not consist in (of ????) wealth. Aquinas extends his argument in making the claim that ' human happiness is not seated in goods of the sensitive faculty, for these goods are not distinct to man and other animals. He argues therefore, that intellect is superior to sense, as senses are merely external measures to attain pleasure, appreciated for their utility and knowledge. Thus, this claim can be explained in that we cannot know the substance of God or happiness or goodness since our knowledge of things depend on determining their substance, and hence, we cannot know what God is through our natural powers of reasoning by means of the senses. Aquinas concludes that man's ultimate happiness consists in contemplating God, as it does not arise in external things as regards the sensitive faculty, and not in the knowledge of God. Therefore, it is impossible for man's happiness to be in this life, a similar argument to Aristotle, who, too claimed that happiness is not attainable in its perfect form, possible to man: yet he has a certain participation thereof, in this life, and therefore must obtain ultimate happiness, his proper end, after this life.