

A Brief History of Western Philosophy

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5th lesson

*Thomas Aquinas and
the idea of God*

1. Prior knowledge
Q&A

Which one of the three schools of Athens in Hellenic times seeks to conform with the world in order to obtain tranquility and peace of mind?

- A. Epicureism
- B. Stoicism
- C. Skepticism

Which one of the three schools of Athens in Hellenic times doubt every truth, for every argument can be proved wrong?

- A. Epicureism*
- B. Stoicism*
- C. Skepticism*

What is the happy life for Epicurus and his followers ?

A. A life in which pleasure and pain make us feel alive

B. A life in which prevails pain and pleasure is minimized

C. A life in which prevails pleasure and pain is minimized

Epicurus distinguished two types of pleasure: one inferior and another superior, what is the superior pleasure about?

A. It is attained when all desires are fulfilled

B. It is attained when satisfying a particular desire or need

C. It is a sort of mental pleasure about remembering and anticipating satisfaction of desires

What is the lesson Epicurus taught to his students about death ?

A. I am afraid like you, but I know that I am

B. Don't be afraid of pain: when death comes, you are not.

C. Don't be afraid of pain: death is a pleasure

*2. Middle Ages.
Philosophy and Culture.*

Relevant Philosophers in the Middle Ages (5th -15th AD)

- ◆ The source of medieval theological doctrine was the Bible and the Church Fathers. The problem presented to medieval thinkers was how to reconcile beliefs from these sources with the beliefs and logical arguments derived from Plato and Aristotle.
- ◆ **St. Augustine** (354-430 AD) adopted, but profoundly modified, Platonism in the service of Christianity, to which he converted in AD 386 at the age of thirty-two. He became the Bishop of Hippo. For Augustine there is no fundamental distinction between truth of reason and truth of faith because **reason depends on divine help to grasp eternal truths**. He refuted skepticism. And he wrote a very influential book *Confessions*, which will inspire many philosophers and writers time after.

Relevant philosophers in the Middle Ages (5th -15th AD)

- ◆ William Ockham, a Franciscan friar, came from the village of Ockham in Surrey. He was born about 1285 and studied at Oxford.

His most famous claim was against universal definitions. He rejected outright the idea that there was a common nature existing in the many individuals we call by a common name. No universal exists outside the mind; everything in the world is singular. Ockham's view of universals is often called nominalism. Only names (concepts) are universal, which we apply to a group of individuals because we perceive similarities in the individuating characteristics of them.

Ockham is best known for something which he never said, namely 'Entities are not to be multiplied beyond necessity'. This principle is commonly called 'Ockham's Razor'. God doesn't need humanity. Truth of faith goes beyond reason.

3. Aquinas' Life and Relevance

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS (1225-1274)

He was born into a noble family who resided in southern Italy about halfway between Rome and Naples. Aquinas was groomed by his family for a career of service in the Church. Around age 14 Aquinas was sent to the University of Naples and then to that of Paris. He joined the Dominican Order in 1244.

Aquinas spent the remainder of his life lecturing and writing. He was an astoundingly prolific writer; his works fill some 25 volumes. Although his philosophy is considered the official model for Catholic thought, Aquinas has influenced Protestant philosophers and other religious thinkers as well. Aquinas died at age 49, on his way to attend the Council of Lyons to carry out a diplomatic mission.



Aquinas's Relevance in Western Philosophy

- ◆ *General relevance.* Together with St. Augustine and other religious philosophers of the Islam at that time (for example, Maimonides), Thomas Aquinas attempted to combine reason and faith to explain the existence of God: truth of faith and truth of reason were not to be separated and opposite to each other.
- ◆ *Reason vs. Faith debate.* The separation between reason and faith was stated by Tertulianus' sentence "Credo quia absurdum". And in 19th century a famous philosopher from Denmark named Kierkegaard would also support this separation against Aquinas rational proofs of religious truth.

4. Aquinas' Theology.
The existence of God

Aquinas' Theology

- ◆ Aquinas' most influential contribution was his account of the relationship between faith and reason, and his defence of the independence of philosophy from theology. The conclusions of faith cannot contradict those of philosophy, but they are neither derived from philosophical reasoning nor are they the necessary basis of philosophical argument.
- ◆ Aquinas believes that there are some theological truths which can be reached by the unaided use of reason (e.g., the existence of God). Others can be grasped either by reason or by faith (e.g., goodness). Others can be known only by revelation (e.g. Trinity, the creation of the world).
- ◆ The most valuable part of Aquinas' philosophy of religion is his examination of the traditional attributes of God, such as eternity, omnipotence, omniscience, benevolence.

Aquinas' Arguments for the Existence of God : The five ways.

- ◆ *The motion argument.* Motion in the world, Aquinas argues, is only explicable if there is a first unmoved mover.
- ◆ *The first Cause Argument (cosmological).* the series of efficient causes in the world must lead to an uncaused cause.
- ◆ *The necessity argument.* Contingent beings must depend on an independent and necessary being for their existence.
- ◆ *The degrees of perfection argument (ontological).* the varying degrees of reality and goodness in the world must be approximations to a subsistent maximum of reality and goodness (absolute standard): that perfect being must exist.
- ◆ *The purpose argument (teleological).* The existence of an intelligent universal designer who gives and organize the end or purpose of every inanimate thing (intelligent design).

4. Text from *Summa Theologica* (First Cause Argument)

One version of the cosmological argument is sometimes called the “First Cause argument.” It argues that because the world contains things whose existence was caused, there necessarily had to be a First Cause of the entire series. Aquinas produced a famous version of this argument. Actually, he offered five arguments for the existence of God (or “the five ways,” as he called them). The argument that is based on the notion of causation is his “second way”.

“The second way is from the nature of efficient cause.* In the world of sensible things we find there is an order of efficient causes. There is no case known (neither is it, indeed, possible) in which a thing is found to be the efficient cause of itself; for so it would be prior to itself, which is impossible. Now in efficient causes it is not possible to go on to infinity, because in all efficient causes following in order, the first is the cause of the intermediate cause, and the intermediate is the cause of the ultimate cause, whether the intermediate cause be several, or one only. Now to take away the cause is to take away the effect. Therefore, if there be no first cause among efficient causes, there will be no ultimate, nor any intermediate, cause. But if in efficient causes it is possible to go to infinity, there will be no first efficient cause, neither will there be an ultimate effect, nor any intermediate efficient causes; all of which is plainly false. Therefore it is necessary to admit a first efficient cause, to which everyone gives the name of God”.

The first cause argument that Aquinas uses could be formulated in this way:

1. The world contains things whose existence depends upon some cause.
2. Everything that exists is either uncaused or caused to exist by another.
3. There cannot be an infinite regress of causes.
4. So there must be an uncaused first cause.
5. An uncaused first cause is (in part) what we mean by God.
6. Therefore, God exists.

*When Aquinas uses the term efficient cause, he is speaking about one of the four kinds of causes described by Aristotle. Basically, "efficient cause" refers to the same thing that we refer to as simply a cause. The "first cause" is a cause beyond which there is no further cause. It is the original cause that brought about all the subsidiary causes and effects. When he refers to the "ultimate cause" he is referring to the very last cause in a series that actually brings about a certain effect. By "sensible things" he simply means physical things, or those things that can be perceived by the senses.

6. Questions for text comprehension

1. According to Aquinas, why a thing cannot be the efficient cause of itself?

Answer A

Because being the cause of itself implies to be able to create itself from its own material and with the same identity as to be two identical things.

Answer B

Because being the cause of itself implies to be prior to itself, and it is impossible to be and not to be at the same time, and that the thing has to be prior to its existence in order to cause itself into existence.

Answer C

Because being the cause of itself implies that the thing has the reproduction power and, in terms of animals, it means that an animal is its own father and mother.

2. According to Aquinas, why cannot be there an infinity regress of efficient causes?

Answer A

Because if there is always a cause of the cause ad infinitum then there is no point in reason and science.

Answer B

Because there must be a last one that is the effect of the intermediate as well as the latter is the effect of the first cause. If there is no ultimate effects neither there would be first cause.

Answer C

Because there must be a first one that is the cause of the intermediate as well as the latter is the cause of the ultimate cause. If there is no first cause neither there would be ultimate effects.

3. How does Aquinas say that we name the first efficient cause?

Answer A

He says that it can be named God.

Answer B

He says that it can be named ultimate cause.

Answer C

He says that it can be named intermediary cause.

Summary

Relevant philosophers of Middle Ages

In the Middle Ages, the main philosophical debate was that of the **possibility of combination between religious truth and truth of reason**. St. **Augustine**, who adopted Plato's fundamental system for Christian purposes, thought that faith and reason are complementary. William **Ockham**, believed that truth of faith and truth of reason are irreconcilable, universals are but names (Ockham's razor).

Aquinas theology and the "five ways"

Aquinas conceived of **reason and faith as autonomous and independent ways of attaining truth** but with common objects. However, **there were truth that only could be revealed through faith** and not by reason. The existence of God was a truth that could be known by faith and by reason. He attempted to prove it by the **"five ways"** (arguments): motion, cause, necessity, perfection, and intelligent design

Thanks!

Any questions?

See you next week

History of Western Philosophy

*This presentation and the program of the subject
can be found at this website:*

[*https://www.danigareses.wixsite.com/pensarenespanol*](https://www.danigareses.wixsite.com/pensarenespanol)

