

Saint Thomas Aquinas

was a theologian and philosopher of 13th century. He was taught by Albert the Great and is known for many contributions to Christian theology such as the Natural Law ethics theory.



Birth & Early Life

- Aquinas was born around 1225, somewhere closer to Aquino.
- He studied philosophy as a student of Saint Albert the Great.
- Aquinas' teacher, Albert, believed that Christian theology should inherit elements from Greek & Islamic philosophy.
- Aquinas agreed with Albert and concluded that Christianity can benefit greatly thought engagement with science & philosophy.



Influences



1. **Albert Magnus:** A key influence for Aquinas has to be his teacher who inspired him to meld Greek & Arab philosophy into Christian theology.
2. **Aristotle:** Many of Aquinas' works analyse Aristotle's philosophies. Aquinas also tries to incorporate Aristotle's Greek philosophy into Christian theology. For example: Aquinas asserted that our choices must be directed towards an ultimate goal called telos. Years ago, Aristotle also claimed this.
3. **Ghazali:** Aquinas is known for the Natural Law theory. Do you know that an Islamic scholar, Ghazali, also had a concept similar to Natural Law? Yes, Ghazali's works inspired Aquinas to develop the Natural Law. **We will look into this a bit more in detail later.**



Key Contributions to Theology

- Aquinas contributed works of over **7 million words** to Christian theology & philosophy.
- If we were to multiply Aristotle's surviving works by 6, the result would still be lower than Aquinas' contributions.
- According to Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: His works can be divided into 5 categories:
 1. Encyclopedic treatises - for example 'Summa Theologica'
 2. Disputed questions - for example 'Questions on Truth'
 3. Short texts like 'On Being and Essence'
 4. Commentaries on Aristotle or philosophical texts
 5. Biblical commentaries

Magnus Opus: Summa Theologica

- Summa Theologica is Aquinas' magnus opus. Aquinas started to compose this in Rome and continued working on it till the end of his life.
- Many of Aquinas's famous arguments and theories can be found in Summa Theologica. Especially the Natural Law and Cosmological Argument for God's existence
- For your course, you need to understand Natural Law only thus the following slides will cover that in detail.



Natural Law

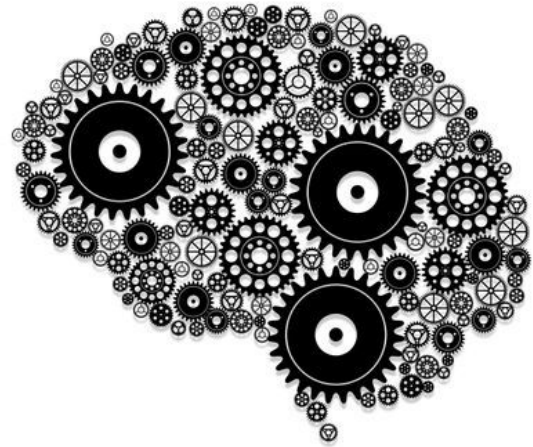
- Natural Law is a teleological ethics theory.
- Aristotle claimed that everything is directed towards an end (telos).
- This was Christianised by Aquinas into: God creating every object with a telos.
- Hence God gave humans the ability to reason in order to distinguish between moral & immoral
- In addition to this: Aquinas' natural law also inherits elements from Ghazali's work. Let's look at the next slide to find it out!

Primary Precepts

Ghazali asserted that law has 5 aims: to preserve life “nafs”, lineage “nasal”, mind “aqa”, property “maal” and religion “deen”.

Aquinas incorporated these principles into Christian theology in his Natural Law theory. He labelled these as primary precepts:

1. Preservation of Life
2. Reproduction
3. Orderly society
4. Worship of God
5. Learning



Secondary Precepts

Aquinas said that primary precepts can lead to creation of secondary precepts.

Take a look at image on right to figure out how secondary precepts are made.

EXERCISE: MAKE GROUPS OF 3. EACH GROUP SHOULD CHOSE 1 PRIMARY PRECEPT THEN COME UP WITH 5 SECONDARY PRECEPTS RELATED TO THE CHOSEN PRIMARY PRECEPT

Possible secondary precepts are;

Preservation of life



Do not kill
No Capital Punishment

Reproduction



No Contraception
Permit IVF and Surrogacy

Order in Society



Do not steal
Build more homes

Worship God



Hold school assemblies
Set one day a week aside for worship -eg Sunday.

Learning

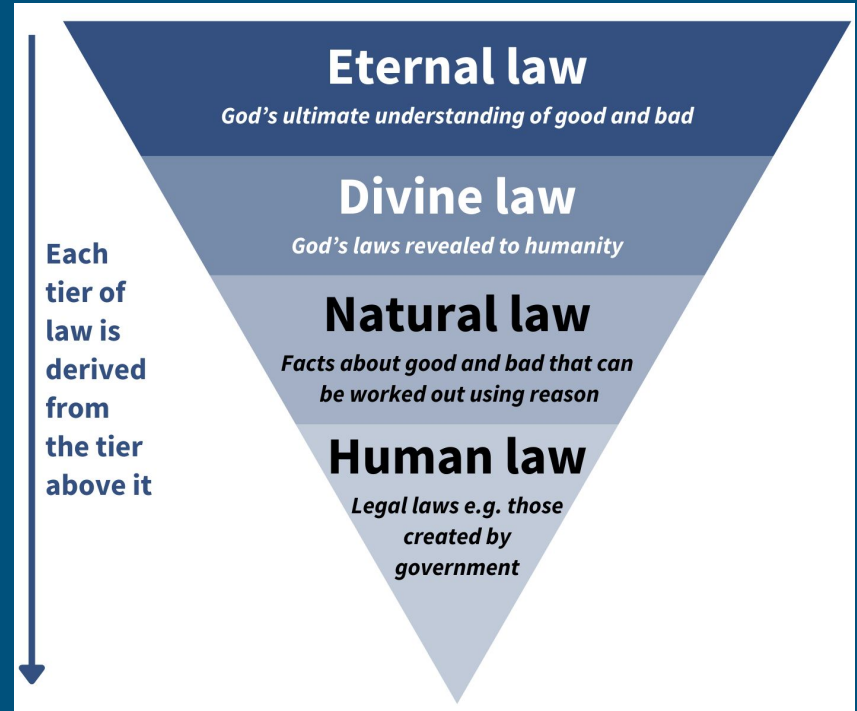


Free education for children and university students
Make schooling compulsory

Four Layers of Law

Aquinas claims that there are four layers of law. Beginning with the omnibenevolent God's law named Eternal Law and ending with Human Law.

- **Eternal Law:** Definition of good & evil according to God's wisdom.
- **Divine Law:** Definition of good & evil according to revelations, for example in Bible.
- **Natural Law:** Definition of good & evil according to human reason.
- **Human Law:** Definition of good & evil according to the rules created by human organisations such as governments.

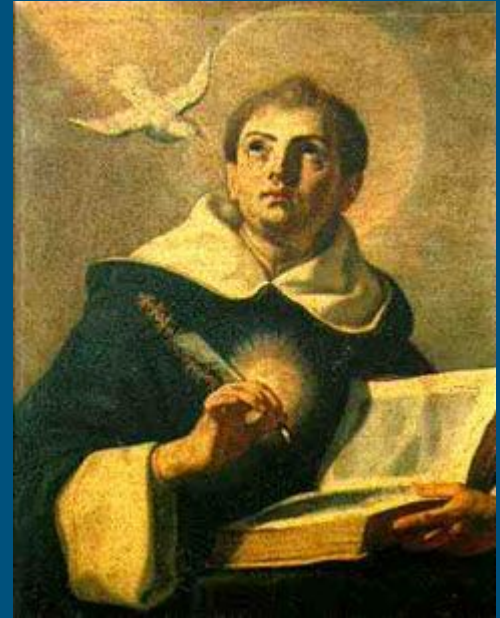


Other Important Contributions

Aquinas made significant contributions to Christian theology. Some of them are:

Cosmological Argument: Aquinas incorporates Aristotle's prime mover concept into Christian theology and argues that: we observe motion; if an object is moving it is because a force (mover) moved it; this mover must exist; everything in motion must have been moved by a mover; nothing would be in motion if there was no first mover; thus there must be an unmoved mover who put into motion the universe; **this unmoved mover is God.**

Virtue Ethics: Around a quarter of Summa Theologica is regarding Aquinas' virtue ethics. This is because he thinks it's impossible to act righteously without virtues. He mainly highlights these four 'cardinal' virtues: bravery, justice, wisdom and temperance. Aquinas believed cardinal virtues offer a framework of moral actions for example: providing food to needy (**justice**), controlling anger (**temperance**), gaining education (**wisdom**) and protesting against war/cruel governments (**bravery**)



References

- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy - article on Thomas Aquinas by Robert Pasnau (2024)
- Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy - article on Thomas Aquinas by Shawn Floyd (no date given)
- Natural Law in Islam by Anver Emon (2019)
- The Aristotelian Commentaries of St Thomas Aquinas by Leo Elders (2009)