
UNIT 2 AQUINAS

Contents

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Theory of Knowledge
- 2.3 Philosophy of World
- 2.4 Ethics
- 2.5 Philosophy of Human Soul and Goal of Human Life
- 2.6 Philosophy of God
- 2.7 Faith and Reason
- 2.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.9 Key Words
- 2.10 Further Readings and References

2.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this Unit is to analyse the philosophical thoughts of Thomas Aquinas. As true to his scholastic medieval tendency of being influenced by Divine revelation, Thomas Aquinas brought reason and faith in dialogue. As Augustine followed the Platonic thinking Aquinas was the medieval voice of Aristotle. His rational attempt to prove God's existence has been very influential in Western tradition. His voluminous writing deserves appreciation. It is said "what is written is the poem but what is not written is the poem" – in the way what he has written is not what exactly he owns or knows but what he realized and felt and is what expresses his intelligence. That's why it is said that it's not that the death that took the pen from his hand but the realization that what he wrote is nothing before the wisdom of God.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Thomistic Philosophy is inspired by the philosophical methods and principles used by Thomas Aquinas (1224/5-1274). Aquinas, who is most renowned for his Five Ways of proving the existence of God, believed that both faith and reason discover truth, a conflict between them being impossible since they both originate in God. Believing that reason can, in principle, lead the mind to God, Aquinas defended reason's legitimacy, especially in the works of Aristotle. The philosophy of Aquinas continues to offer insights into many lingering problems in Epistemology, Cosmology and Ethics. He was a masterfully skilled philosopher. Much of his work bears upon philosophical topics. Thomas' philosophical thought has exerted enormous influence on subsequent medieval scholastic period of Western culture and thought. Thomas stands as a vehicle and modifier of Aristotelianism, Augustinian Neoplatonism.

2.2 THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge, when we reflect upon it as a fact of psychic life, presents itself to us as an extension of the knower. The knower possesses both his own nature and the nature of the thing he knows. Knowledge liberates and extends the self, so that it possesses the other. Knowledge in its very actuality is liberation from the confines of matter. Knowledge is a spiritual act uniting the knower with the thing known.

Thomas Aquinas holds the Aristotelian doctrine that knowing entails some similarities between knower and the known; a human's corporeal nature therefore requires that knowledge starts with sense perception. The same limitation does not apply to beings further up the chain of being, such as angels. Though he laid the proofs of God's existence he recognises that there are doctrines such as that of the incarnation and the nature of the trinity known only through revelation. God's essence is identified with his existence as pure actuality. God is simple containing no potentiality.

The Thomistic theory of knowledge is realistic. Men obtain their knowledge of reality from the initial data of sense experience, apart from supernatural experiences that some mystics may have. Agreeing with Aristotle, Thomas limited human cognition to "sense perception" and "intellectual understanding" of it, which are intimately related to one another. He distinguishes the sources of knowledge; the first one is the sense experiences or empiricism, the second one is the intellectual or the rational knowledge. The two cognitive faculties, sense and intellect, are naturally capable of acquiring knowledge of their proper object, since both are in potency - the sense, toward the individual form; and the intellect, toward the form of the universal.

- Sense experience is acquired through the sense organs. Sense organs are stimulated by the coloured, audible, odours, gustatory and tactile qualities of extra mental bodies; and sensation is the vital response through man's five external sense powers to such stimulation.
- Aquinas assumed that man's cognitive is aware of red flowers, noisy animals, and cold air and so on. Internal sensation works to perceive, retain, associate, and judge the various impressions (the phantasm) through which things are directly known. Man's higher cognitive functions, those of understanding, judging and reasoning have as their objects the universal meanings that arise out of sense experience.

According to Thomas Aquinas, this is just what happens through the action of a special power of the intellect, i.e., the power by which the phantasm (sense image) is illuminated. Under the influence of this illumination, the form loses its materiality; that is, it becomes the essence or intelligible species. Thomas calls this faculty the *intellectus agens* (agent intellect), and it is to be noted that for Thomas the "*intellectus agens*" is not, as the Averroists held, a separate intellect which is common to all men.

For Aquinas all the data of sense knowledge and all intelligible things are essentially true. Truth consists in the equality of the intellect with its object, and such concordance is always found, both in sensitive cognition and in the idea. Error may exist in the judgment, since it can happen that a predicate may be attributed to a subject to which it does not really belong.

Besides the faculty of judgment, Aquinas also admits the faculty of discursive reasoning, which consists in the derivation of the knowledge of particulars from the universal. Deductive, syllogistic demonstration must be carried out according to the logical relationships which exist between two judgments. This process consists the science which the human intellect can construct by itself, without recourse either to innate ideas or to any particular illumination. Even then Thomas believed “for the knowledge of any truth whatsoever, man needs divine help, that the intellect may be moved by God to its act.” However, he believed that human beings have the natural capacity to know many things without special Divine Revelation, even though such revelation occurs from time to time, “especially in regard to [topics of] a faith.”

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

- 1) What is the difference between Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle with regard to the theory of knowledge?

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- 2) Reflect on the importance of the study of Knowledge.

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2.3 PHILOSOPHY OF THE WORLD

In determining or defining the relationship of God with the world, Aquinas departs not only from the doctrine of the Averroist Aristotelians, but also from the teaching of Aristotle himself. For Aristotle matter was uncreated and co-eternal with God, limiting the divinity itself (Greek dualism). Aquinas denies this dualism. According to Aquinas “The world was produced by God through His creative act, i.e., the world was produced from nothing.” Besides, all becoming in matter is connected with God, since He is the uncaused Cause and the immovable Mover of all that takes place in created nature. God has created the world from nothingness through a free act of His will; hence any necessity in the nature of God is excluded.

Again, we know that Aristotle did not admit providence: “the world was in motion toward God, as toward a point of attraction; but God did not know of this process of change, nor was He its ordinator.” For Aquinas, on the contrary, “God is providence: creation was a knowing act of His will; God, the cause and mover of all the perfections of beings, is also the intelligent ordinator of them all that happens in the world finds its counterpart in the wisdom of God.” Now, how the providence and the wisdom of God are to be reconciled

with the liberty of man is a problem which surpasses our understanding. It is not an absurdity, however, if we keep in mind that the action of Divine Providence is absolutely distinct and can be reconciled with the liberty of man without diminishing or minimizing this latter.

2.4 ETHICS

The ethics of Aquinas is a fusion of Aristotelian and Christian elements. Their underlying assumption is that God made everything for a purpose – for the purpose of revealing his goodness in creation – that the nature of everything points in the direction of this purpose, and that every creature will realize the divine idea and reveal the goodness of God by realizing its true being. Objectively considered, the highest good, therefore is God; subjectively considered, the good for creatures is their greatest possible perfection, or likeness to God. Aquinas dealt with the theoretical analysis of ethical activities in a long series of works. Most of his works take the approach of moral theology, viewing moral good and in terms of accord or discord with divine law, which is revealed in scriptures and developed and interpreted in Christian tradition. Thomas Aquinas follows Aristotle in asserting, “Man is by his nature a social animal,” and “Human society is the flowering of human nature.” He accepted Aristotle’s position that human’s ethical behaviour is based upon the nature of human as a social animal.

Thomas’ ethics are based on the concept of “first principles of action.” In his *Summa Theologica*, he wrote: “Virtue denotes a certain perfection of a power. Now a thing’s perfection is considered chiefly in regard to its end. But the end of power is act. Therefore power is said to be perfect, according as it is determinate to its act.” According to Aquinas “man always perceives to be good.” The ultimate good that makes man happy is contemplation of truth. And the ultimate truth, for Aquinas, is God himself. Thus, man’s ultimate end, which brings him total happiness, lies in the contemplation, in the vision of God.

Thomas defined the four cardinal virtues as prudence, temperance, justice, and fortitude. The cardinal virtues are natural and revealed in nature, and they are binding on everyone. There are, however, three theological virtues: faith, hope, and charity. These are supernatural and are distinct from other virtues in their object, namely, God. In his *Summa Theologica*, he wrote: “Now the object of the theological virtues is God Himself, Who is the last end of all, as surpassing the knowledge of our reason. On the other hand, the object of the intellectual and moral virtues is something comprehensible to human reason. Therefore the theological virtues are specifically distinct from the moral and intellectual virtues.” He says that no virtue is inborn; all virtues may be acquired by the performance of virtuous acts. Such acquired virtues lead to imperfect or incomplete happiness, which is possible in this life. To have a life of blessedness, we need to have the virtues implanted by God; as mere acquired virtues they are of no avail in this regard. According to Aquinas love is the highest of the infused virtues, the perfect form of all the virtues

Furthermore, Thomas distinguished four kinds of law: eternal, natural, human, and divine. Eternal law is the decree of God that governs all creation. Human law is positive Law; the natural law applied by governments to societies. Divine law is the specially revealed law in the scriptures. Natural Law is the human “participation” in the eternal law and is discovered by reason. Natural law, of course, is based on “first principles” “... This is the first precept of the law

that good is to be done and promoted, and evil is to be avoided. All other precepts of the natural law are based on this . . .” he further says “The morality of an act depends upon its conformity to the law of conscience and hence to the eternal law; nonconformity brings about moral evil, sin.”

Thomas denied that human beings have any duty of charity to animals because they are not persons. Otherwise, it would be unlawful to use them for food. But this does not give us license to be cruel to them, for “cruel habits might carry over into our treatment of human beings.” The desires to live and to procreate are counted by Thomas among those basic (natural) human values on which all human values are based. However, Thomas was vehemently opposed to non-procreative sexual activity. This led him to view masturbation, oral sex and even coitus interruptus, as being worse than incest and rape when the act itself is considered (apart from the abuse suffered by the violated party). He also objected to sexual positions other than the missionary position, on the assumption that they made conception more difficult.

Thomas contributed to the economic thought as an aspect of ethics and justice. He dealt with the concept of a just price, normally its market price or a regulated price sufficient to cover seller costs of production. He argued it was immoral for sellers to raise their prices simply because buyers were in pressing need for a product.

2.5 PHILOSOPHY OF HUMAN SOUL AND GOAL OF HUMAN LIFE

Besides God, the spiritual substances are the angels and human souls. Angels are not destined to inform any matter; the human soul, on the contrary, is ordered to be the form of the body. Hence the question arises as to the nature of the soul and its relations with the body. A human being is an animated body in which the psychic principle (*anima*) is distinctive of the species and determines that the material is known. In other words, man’s soul is his substantial form. Some of man’s activities are obviously very like to those of brutes, but the intellectual and volitional functions transcend materiality by virtue of their universal and abstracted character.

The soul is a real part of man and, it is spiritual. The intellect and the will are the faculties of the soul, the means through which it operates. The intellect has for its object the knowledge of the universe, and operates by judging and reasoning. The will is free; that is, it is not determined by any particular good, but it determines itself.

From an analysis of the intellect and the will, Aquinas proves the spirituality, the simplicity, and the immortality of the soul. The intellect has, in fact, for its proportionate object the universal, the understanding of which is a simple and spiritual act. Hence the soul from which the act of understanding proceeds is itself simple and spiritual. Since it is simple and spiritual, it is by nature also immortal. The will also is free, i.e., not determined by any cause outside itself. In the physical world everything is determined by causal necessity, and hence there is no liberty. The faculty which is not determined by causal motives declares its independence of these causes and hence is an immaterial faculty. The soul upon which such a faculty depends must be of the same nature as the faculty; that is, the soul must be immaterial.

The human soul since it is immaterial and performs acts which are not absolutely dependent upon the bodily organs, does not perish with the body — although, as Aquinas says, the soul separated from the body is not entirely complete but has an inclination to the body as the necessary instrument for its complete and full activity.

The doctrine of Aquinas concerning the soul in general and the human soul in particular, may be summed as follows: When the form in matter is the origin of immanent actions, it gives origin to life and as such is more particularly called the “soul.” There is a vegetative soul, such as the principle of plants, whose activity is fulfilled in nutrition, growth, and reproduction. Superior to the vegetative is the sensitive soul, which is present in animals; besides the processes of nutrition, growth and reproduction the sensitive soul is capable of sensitive knowledge and appetite. Superior still to the sensitive soul is the rational soul.

The rational soul is created directly by God; it is distinct for each man; it is the true form of the body. The human soul performs the functions of the vegetative and sensitive life, but besides these functions it has activities which do not depend upon the body, i.e., understanding and volition.

Goal of Human Life

In Thomas’s thought, the goal of human existence is union and eternal fellowship with God. Specifically, this goal is achieved through the beatific vision, an event in which a person experiences perfect, unending happiness by seeing the very essence of God. This vision, which occurs after death, is a gift from God given to those who have experienced salvation and redemption through Christ while living on earth.

This ultimate goal carries implications for one’s present life on earth. Thomas stated that an individual’s will must be ordered toward right things, such as charity, peace, and holiness. He sees this as the way to happiness. Thomas orders his treatment of the moral life around the idea of happiness. The relationship between will and goal is antecedent in nature “because rectitude of the will consists in being duly ordered to the last end [that is, the beatific vision].” Those who truly seek to understand and see God will necessarily love what God loves. Such love requires morality and bears fruit in everyday human choices.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) Do you accept the immortality of soul? Why?

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2.6 PHILOSOPHY OF GOD

The proofs for the existence of God are also means of knowing something of God's essence. This knowledge, however, remains always essentially inadequate and incomplete. One way of knowing God is the way of negative theology, that is, by removing from the concept of God all that implies imperfection, potentiality, and materiality. In other words, by this method we arrive at the knowledge of God through considering what He is not.

A second method is that of analogy. God is the cause of the world. Now every object reflects some perfection of the cause from which it proceeds. Hence it is possible for the human mind to rise to the perfections of God from the consideration of the perfection it finds in creatures. This it does, naturally, by removing all imperfection and potentiality from the creatures considered. The resultant idea of the nature of God is thus had through analogy with the perfections of the created universe.

But, according to Aquinas, any natural intuitive knowledge of God is precluded to man. For us, only the visible world, which is capable of impressing our senses, is the object of natural intuitive knowledge. Thus any argument a priori for the existence of God is devoid of validity. For him, the existence of God needs to be demonstrated, and demonstration must start from the sensible world without any prejudice. Such demonstrations are possible and are accommodated to anyone who is simply capable of reflecting.

There are five ways in which the human intellect can prove the existence of God. All have a common point of resemblance. The starting point is a consideration of the sensible world known by immediate experience. Such a consideration of the sensible world would remain incomprehensible unless it was related to God as author of the world. All his proofs for the existence of God bring two distinct elements into play:

1. The existence of a sensible reality whose existence requires a cause;
2. The demonstration of the fact that its existence requires a finite series of causes and consequently a prime cause, which is what we call God.

The Five Ways to Prove the Existence of God

- **Movement:** Movement is any transit, any change from one state of being to another. According to Aristotle "Movement is a passage from potency to act." According to Aquinas "whatever is moved is moved by another (*"quidquid movetur ab alio movetur"*). Thus, if there is a movement ultimately there should be a mover; as we know there is a movement. Therefore, there is an ultimate mover whom we call God.
- **Causality:** A cause is anything that contributes to the producing of a thing. That which is produced by cause is effect. God alone can be attributed as creator because He creates everything out of nothing. Thus, if there is an effect, there should be a cause and ultimately the First Cause; as we know already, the creation of the world itself is an effect. Therefore, there is a cause, ultimately the First Cause whom we call God.
- **Contingency:** Contingency means dependency. Our existence is not of our own. We have received it from the one who has existence on his own;

He is God alone. So we are contingent (dependent) beings. But God is self sufficient; such self sufficient being is necessary. If there are contingent beings, there should be a necessary being; as we know there are contingent beings. Therefore, there should be a necessary being whom we call God.

- **Grades of perfection:** We see in the life on the world some things are more perfect, better; at the same time some are not like that; thus the grades of perfection (e.g. stone, vegetation, animal kingdom, human kingdom, and god). If there are grades of perfection, there should be a higher perfection; as we know there exists grades of perfection. Therefore, there exists the higher perfection whom we call God.
- **Teleological (order and purpose):** This is an argument from the design. William Paley (1743-1805) in his "*Natural Theology: or Evidence of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity Collected from the Appearance of the Nature*" (1802) talks about the order and purpose of the created world. Paley argues that the natural world is as complex a mechanism, and as manifestly designed as any watch. The rotation of the planets in the solar system and, on earth, the regular procession of the seasons and the complex structure and mutual adaptation of the parts of a living organism, all suggest design. In a human brain, for example, thousands of millions of cells functions together in a coordinated system. The eye is a superb movie camera, with self-adjusting lenses, a high degree of accuracy, colour sensitivity, and the capacity to operate continuously for many hours at a time. Thus according to him nothing is created by chance but well planned and with a purpose.

Is there an order in the created universe? Yes. If there is an order, there is an intelligent/wise organiser; as we know through the words of Paley, there is an order. Therefore, there is an intelligent organiser who is called God.

2.7 FAITH AND REASON

From the beginning Thomistic philosophy we can notice a steady exploration of the relation between faith and reason, with systematic and complete analysis of this relation. He filled his writings with reason, especially in his *Summa Theologica*. He had no fear about appealing to Greek and Arab philosophers, despite the resistance of so many of his contemporaries. His vision about the relation between faith and reason can be summarized under three points.

Faith and reason are two different modes of knowing. Reason accepts a truth as known by the light of reason. Faith accepts a truth as known by the light of divine revelation. Therefore, there are two types of wisdom, philosophical and theological distinction between philosophical wisdom and theological wisdom and with the implicit affirmation of the autonomy of philosophy with respect to theology, Thomas Aquinas paved the way for the secularization of human wisdom.

The distinction between theology and philosophy does not consist in the fact that theology treats of God, for philosophy also treats of God and divine truths. The distinction consists rather in this, that theology views truth in the light of divine revelation, while philosophy views truth in the light of human reason. Thus faith (*fides*) and scientific knowledge (*scientia*) are sharply distinguished not by object but by method.

Faith and reason do not contradict. They have their respective juridical boundaries. Truths of faith and truths of reason derive from the same origin, god who is the Truth. They are related like the gifts of nature and grace. Grace does not do away with the light of reason, but it reveals truth beyond the reach of reason itself.

God is the source of all truth. He communicates it to us directly by revelation and indirectly by giving us the power by which we acquire it. Science acquired in the former manner would be divine and it is through experience and reason is human. It is impossible that there should exist a contradiction between truths of natural order and truths of the supernatural order.

Faith and reason are complementary. Faith renders valuable service to reason by elevating the mind on its natural functioning. Reason, in turn renders a valuable service to faith by the role it plays in theology. Reason can come to the aid of faith in various ways. For example, it can establish certain preambles of faith, such as the existence and unity of God, and it can prove many truths about creatures which faith presupposes. Reason can also use philosophy to refute doctrines contrary to the faith.

For Aquinas, philosophy helps theology in as much as it enables the theologian to deduce scientific conclusions from articles of faith. Theology serves philosophy in as much as it acts as a guide or as a light upon that of the philosopher showing him fields of research and making him convinced of the limitations of his powers. He insisted that reason and faith are not contrary but are two distinct sources of knowledge, both ultimately from god. Some Truth comes through man's reason, some through God's revelation.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1) What is the difference between faith and reason?

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2.8 LET US SUM UP

The two cognitive faculties, sense and intellect, are naturally capable of acquiring knowledge of their proper object. Sense experience is acquired through the sense organs. Man's cognitive is aware of red flowers, noisy animals, and cold air and so on. Internal sensation works to perceive, retain, associate, and judge the various impressions (the phantasm) through which things are directly known. God has created the world from nothingness through a free act of His will. God is providence to the world and all creation was a knowing act of God's will. God made everything for a purpose – for the purpose of revealing his goodness in creation. According to Aquinas “man always perceives to be good.” The ultimate good that makes man happy is contemplation of truth. He further speaks about eternal law, human law, natural law, and divine law. The soul is

a real part of man and, it is spiritual. The *intellect* and the *will* are the faculties of the soul, the means through which it operates. The rational soul is created directly by God. The goal of human existence is union and eternal fellowship with God.

Aquinas derives five ways to affirm of the existence of God from statements of facts about ordinary experiences.

1. From the fact of motion to Prime Mover
2. From efficient cause to a First Cause
3. From contingent beings to a Necessary Being
4. From degrees of value to an Absolute Value
5. From evidences of purposiveness in nature to a Divine Designer.

Philosophy, according to Thomas Aquinas, passes from facts to God; theology from God to facts. Dogmas, which are not the objects of philosophy, but matters of faith, revealed truths, are beyond reason, but not contrary to reason. Reason and faith are not contrary but are two distinct sources of knowledge, both ultimately from god. Some Truth comes through man's reason, some through God's revelation.

2.9 KEY WORDS

Potentiality	: a power or a quality that exists and is capable of being developed.
Revelation	: something that is considered to be sign or message from God.
Determinate	: fixed and definite.
Teleology	: the theory that events and developments are meant to achieve a purpose and happen because of that.
Cognition	: the process by which knowledge and understanding is developed in the mind.
Concordance	: the state of being similar to something or consistent with it.
Preambles	: an introduction to something.

2.10 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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