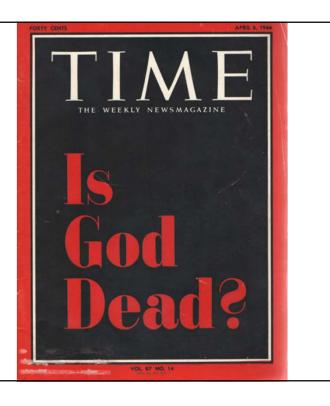
Aquinas on the Existence of God

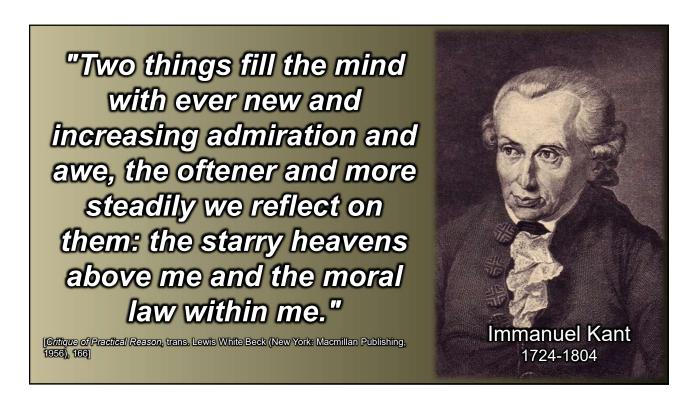
The Essence / Existence Distinction as an Argument for God

Richard G. Howe, Ph.D.

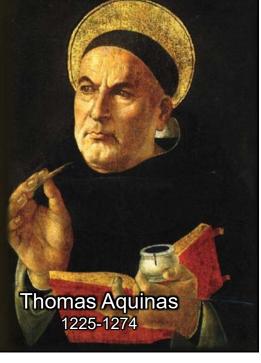
Professor Emeritus, Southern Evangelical Seminary, Charlotte, North Carolina, USA Past President, International Society of Christian Apologetics







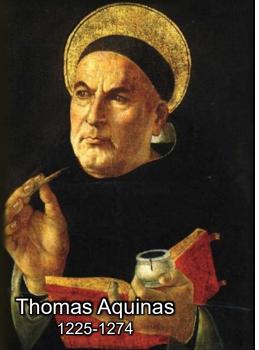
"Beginning with sensible things, our intellect is led to the point of knowing about God that He exists, and other such characteristics that must be attributed to the First Principle."



[Summa Contra Gentiles, I, 3, §3, trans. Anton C. Pegis (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975, 64]

"From every effect the existence of its proper cause can be demonstrated, so long as its effects are better known to us; because since every effect depends upon its cause, if the effect exists, the cause must preexist. Hence the existence of God ... can be demonstrated from those of His effects which are known to us..."

[Summa Theologica, I. Q2, Art. 2, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster: Christian Classics, 1948), 12]

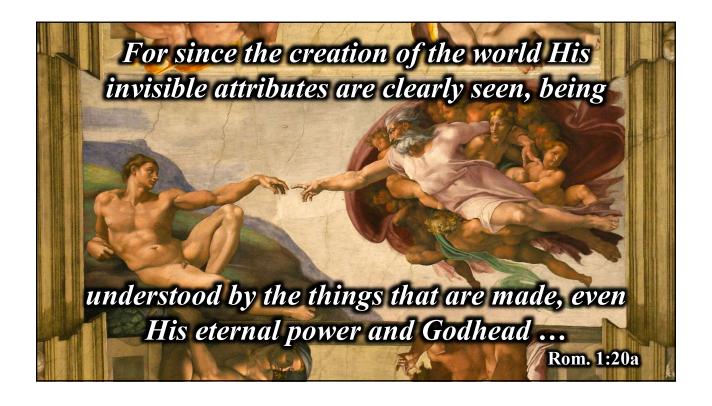


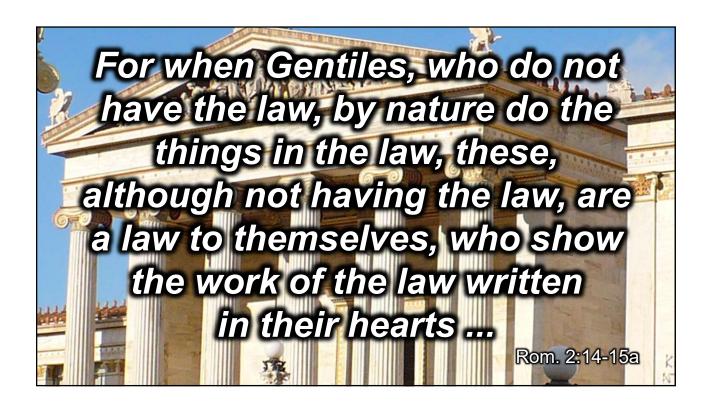
The Bible's Testimony to the Existence of God

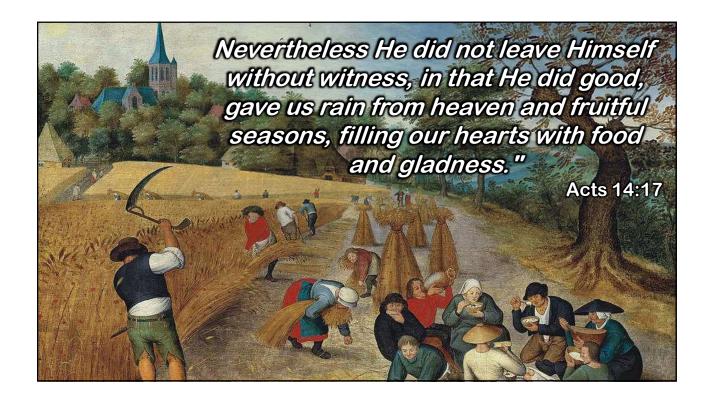
The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.

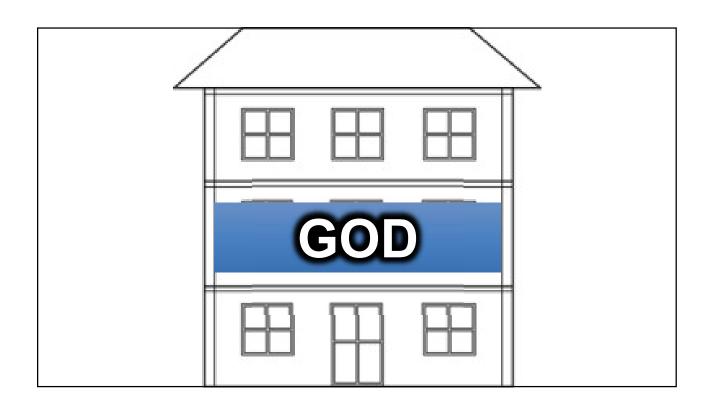
Psalm 19:1

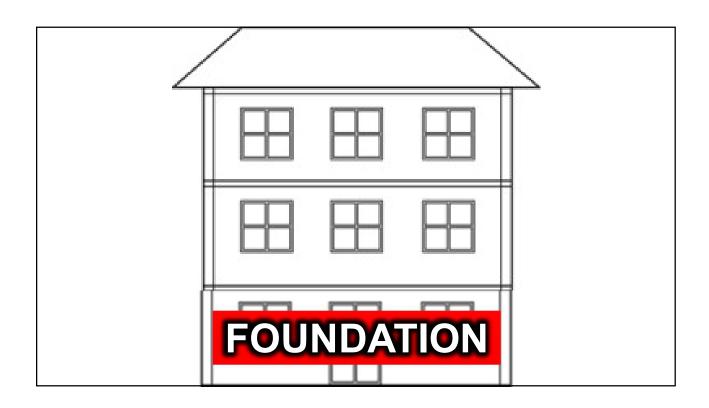
The heavens declare His righteousness, And all the peoples see His glory. Psalm 97:6



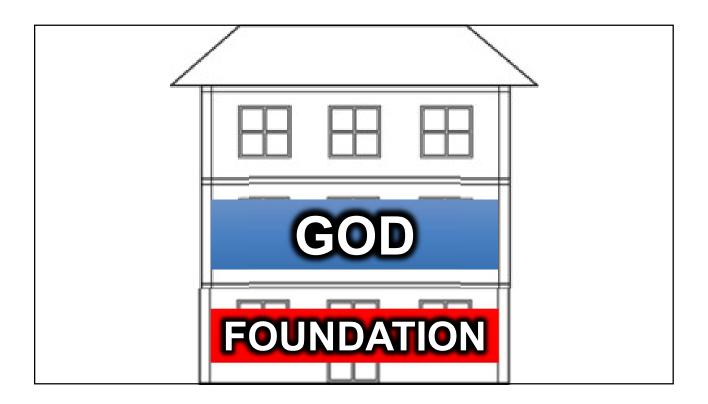


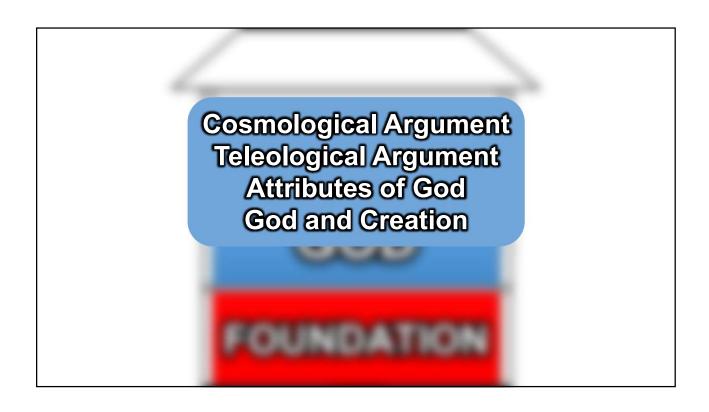


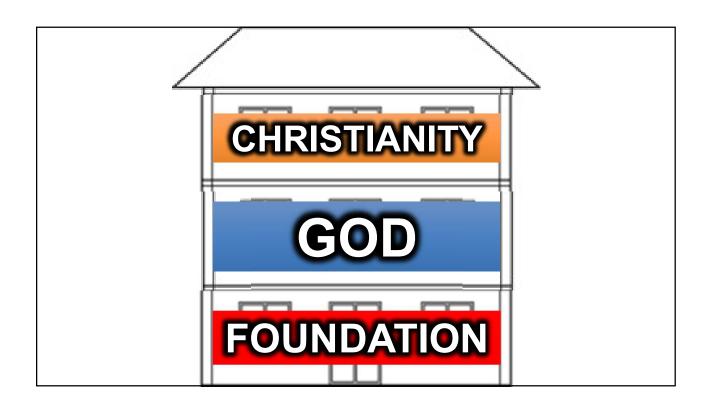


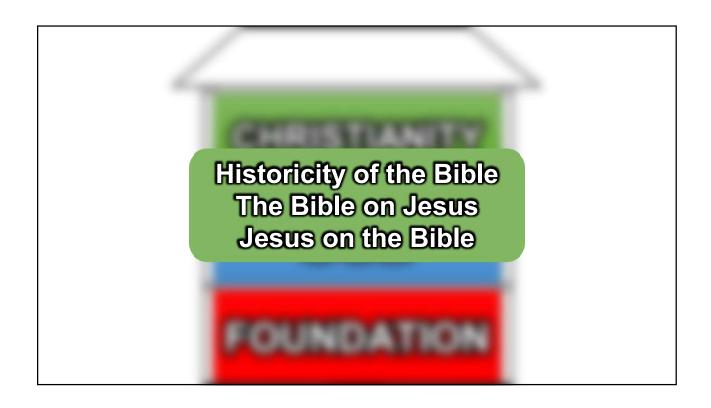


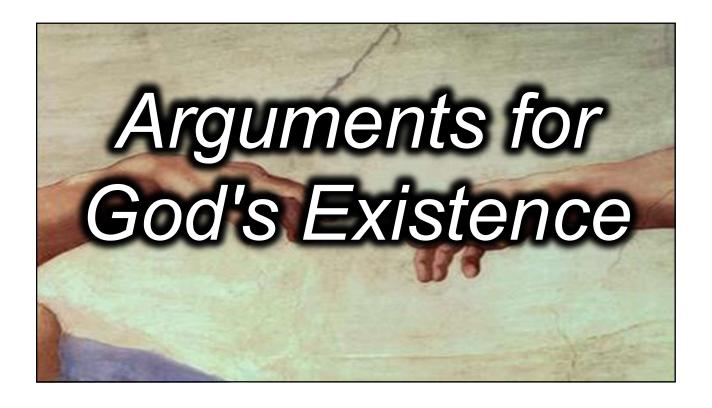
Classical Empiricism
Nature of Reality
Metaphysics
Nature of Truth
Laws of Logic
Principles of Reasoning



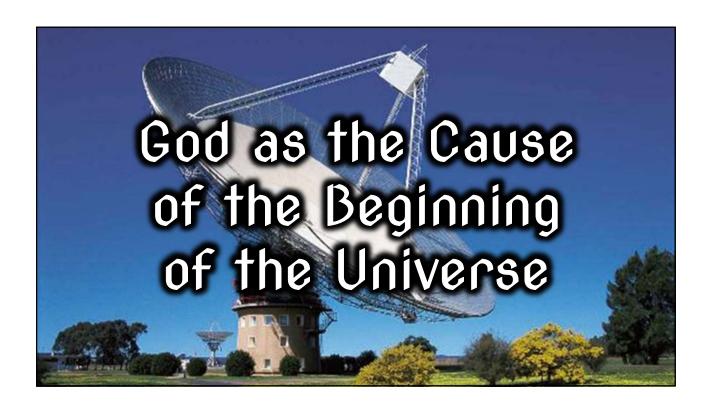










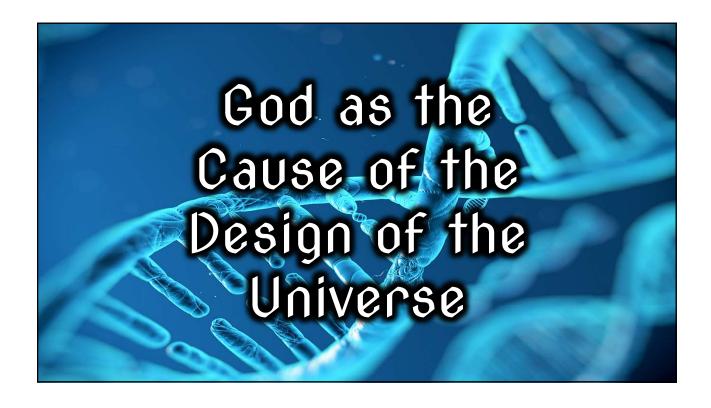


- 1. The Universe began to exist.
- 2. Whatever begins to exist has a cause of its existence.

Therefore, the universe has a cause of its existence.

The Scientific Evidence for the Beginning of the Universe

✓ Big Bang Theory
 ✓ Expanding Universe
 ✓ Second Law of Thermodynamics



The Scientific Evidence for the Design in the Universe

Extrinsic Design of the Universe as a Whole

- Design as fine tuning for life
- Design as the origin of life

Intrinsic Design of Living Systems

- Design as information
- Design as irreducible complexity
- Design as knowledge of reality



- These arguments appeal to the common sense notion that something can only begin to exist by being caused to exist.
- These arguments appeal to the common sense notion that anything that exhibits sufficient evidence of design is likely caused by an intelligence.

Strengths ←

- They often appeal to data from contemporary science (with all of science's social, etc., clout).
- They generally avoid trafficking in the technicalities of academic philosophy which are less familiar than the general categories of the sciences.

≫ Weaknesses *≪*

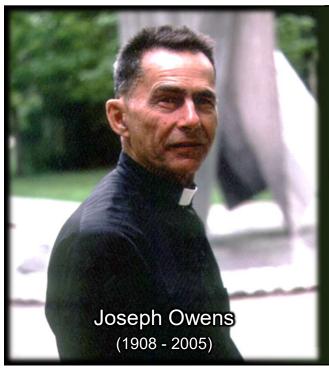
- > These arguments do not demonstrate that the cause of the universe still exists.
- These arguments do not demonstrate that the cause of the universe is God (i.e., that the cause has the attributes of classical theism).

≫ My Weaknesses ≪

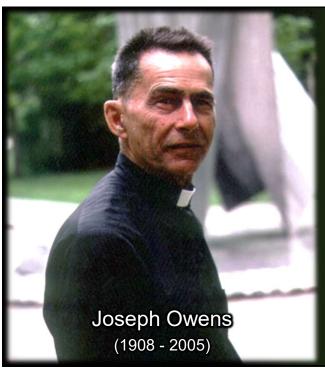
- Certain aspects of the science are disputed by some.
- Such disputes invariably get technical and, thus, are beyond the knowledge of the non-scientist.

≫ My Weaknesses ≪

- Certain aspects of the science are disputed by some.
- Such disputes invariably get technical and, thus, are beyond the knowledge of the non-scientist like me.

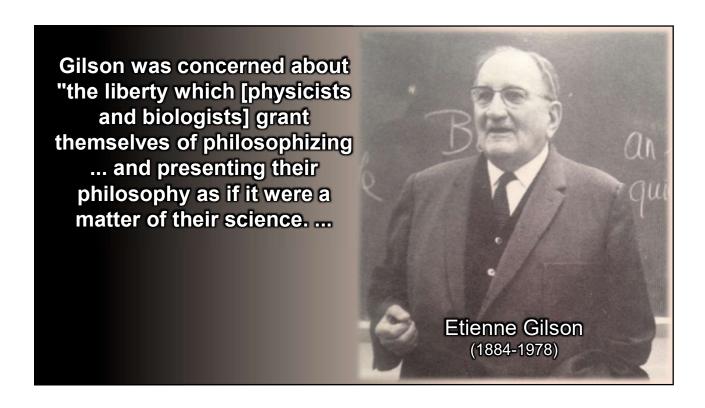


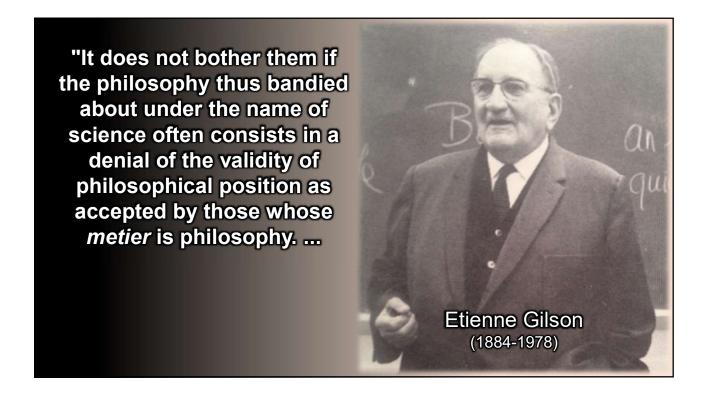
"Other arguments may vividly suggest the existence of God, press it home eloquently to human consideration, and for most people provide much greater spiritual and religious aid than difficult metaphysical demonstrations.

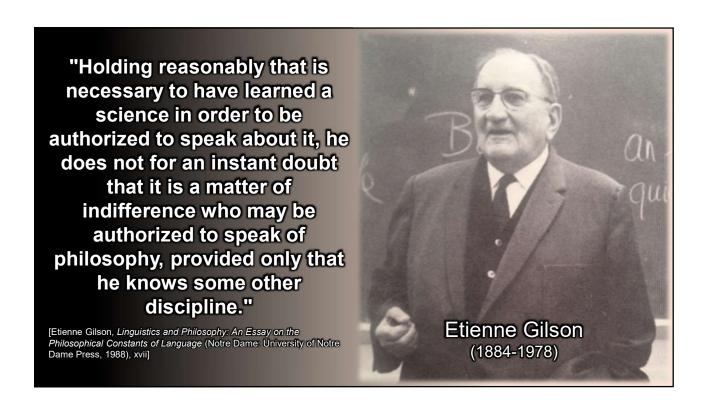


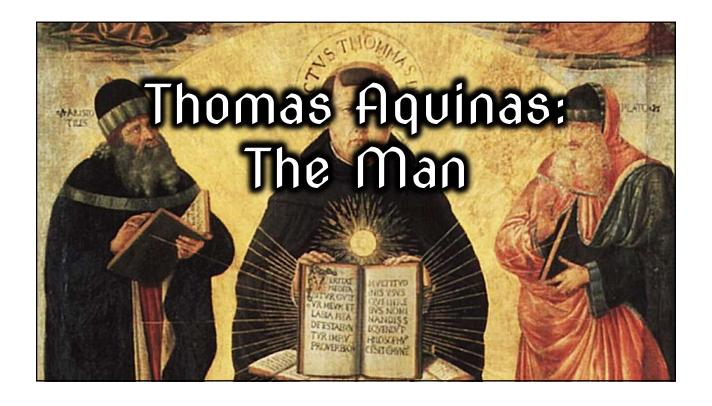
"But on the philosophical level these arguments are open to rebuttal and refutation, for they are not philosophically cogent."

[Joseph Owens, "Aquinas and the Five Ways," *Monist* 58 (Jan. 1974): 16-35. (p. 33)]

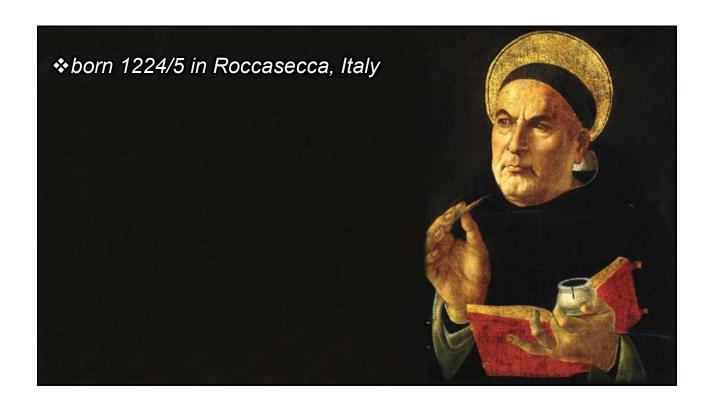


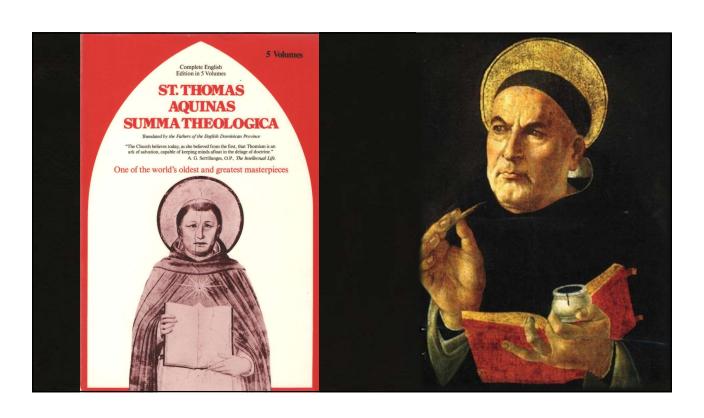


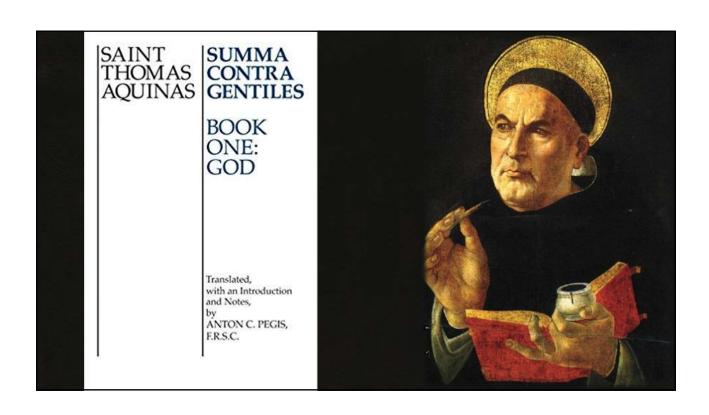


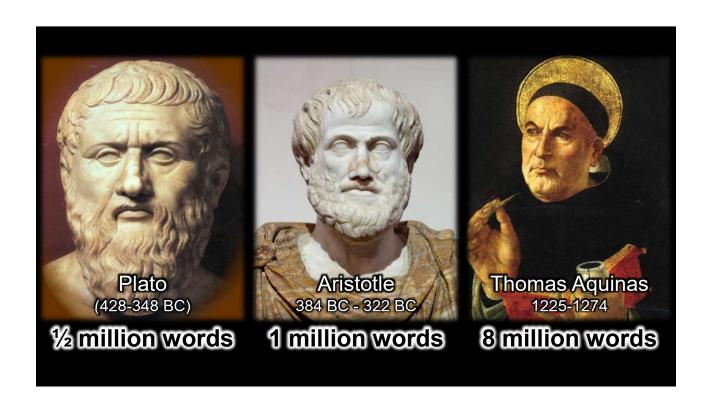


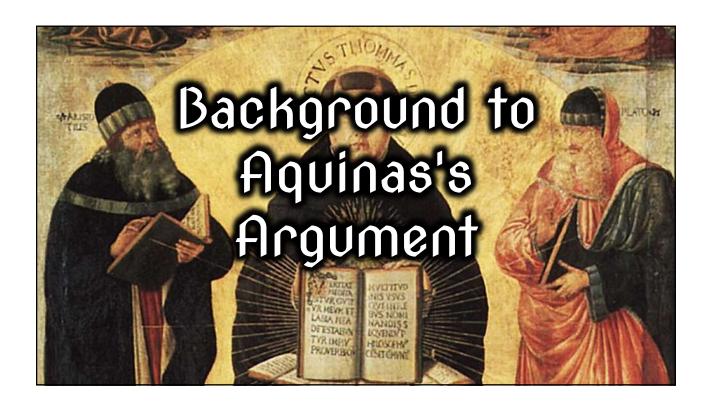
Thomas Aquinas was a 13th Century Dominican theologian.









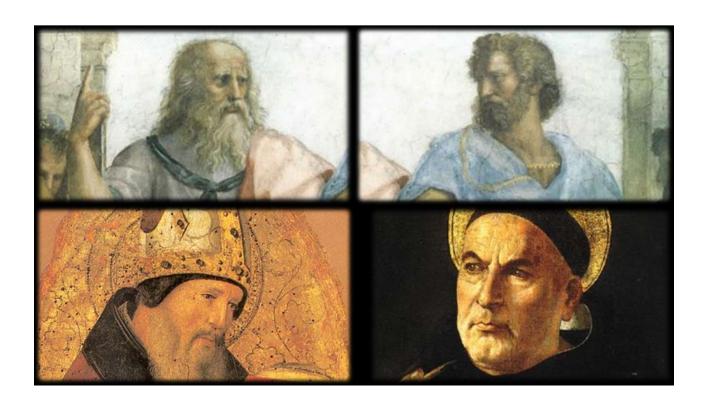


There are two great philosophical traditions in Western thought that have endured since the ancient Greeks.

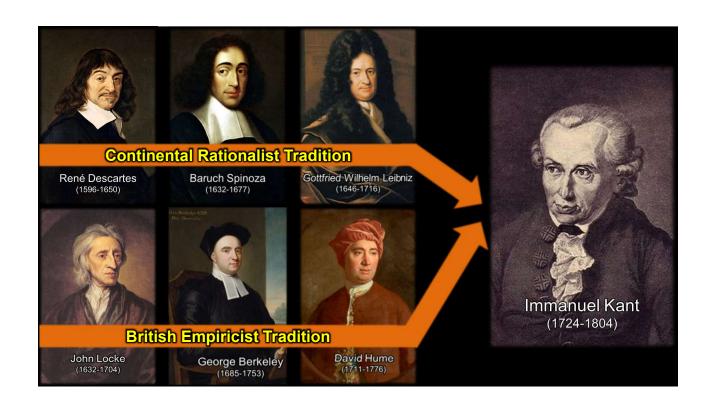


There are two great philosophical/theological traditions in Christian thought that have tracked these two Greek philosophical traditions.

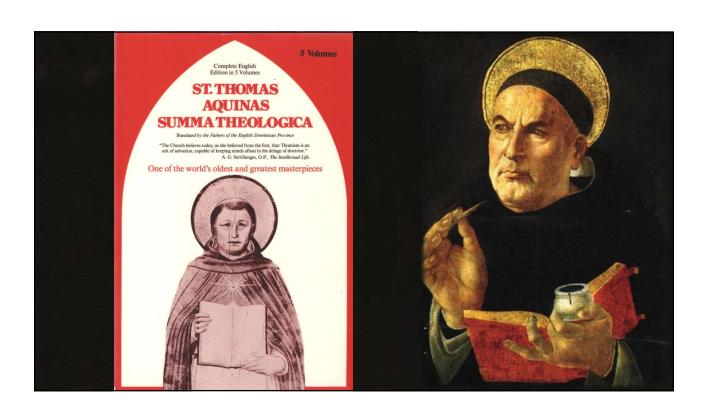


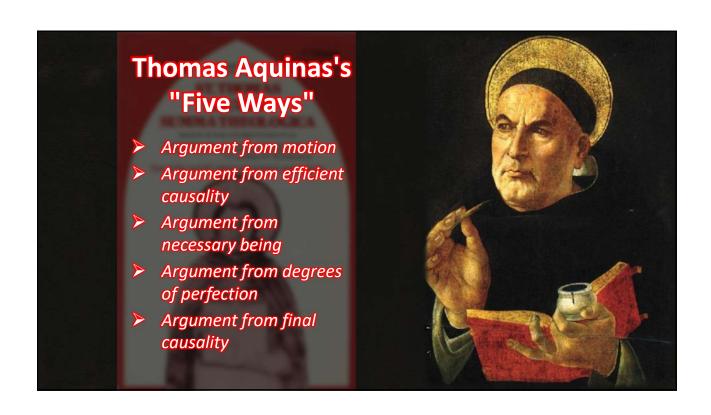




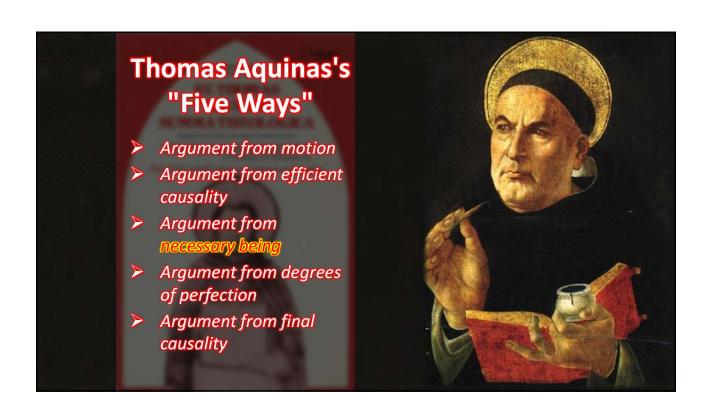


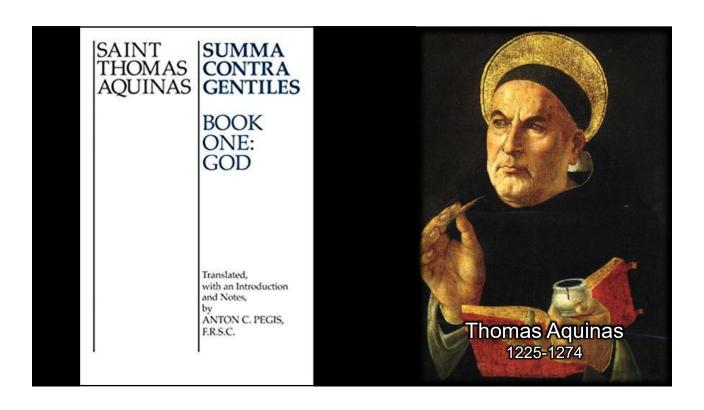
Exploring the contours of how these traditions have answered certain basic questions about the nature of reality and our knowledge of it, will enable us to position many questions and concerns we have as Christians.

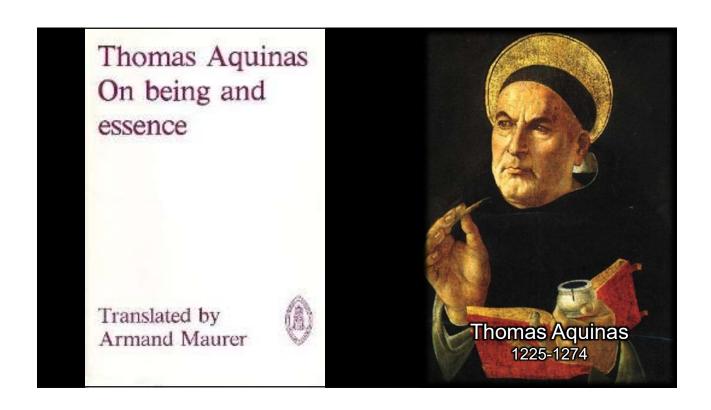


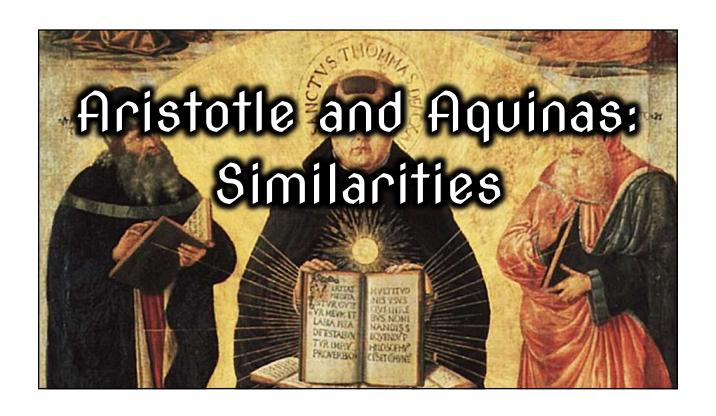


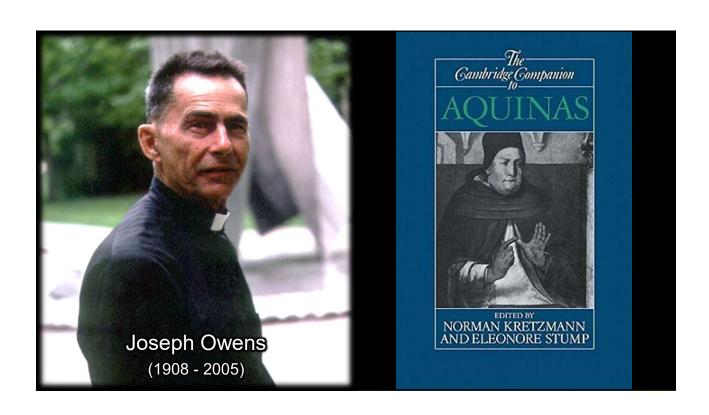
Thomas Aquinas's "Five Ways" Argument from motion Argument from efficient causality Argument from necessary being Argument from degrees of perfection Argument from final causality

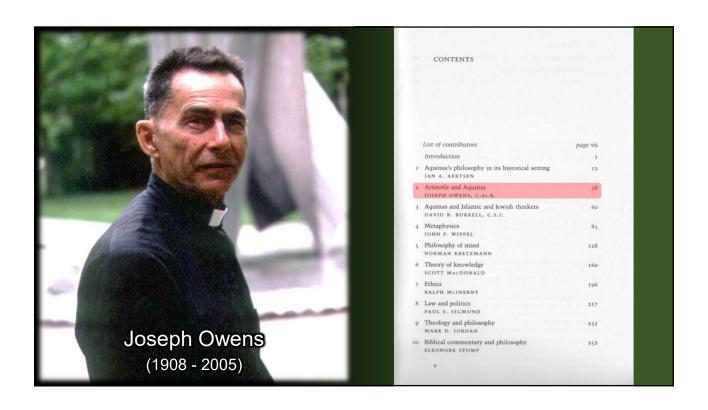


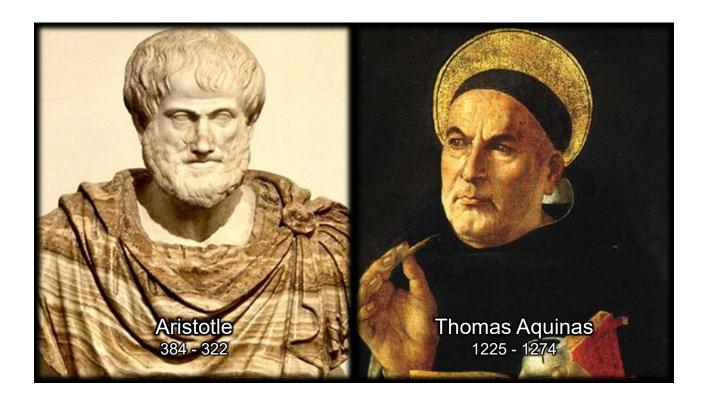












Both Reason in Terms of:

formal and material logic actuality and potentiality material, formal, efficient, and final causes

the division of the sciences into the theoretical, the practical, and the productive

Both Distinguish:

the material from the immaterial sensation from intellection the temporal from the eternal the body from the soul

Both:

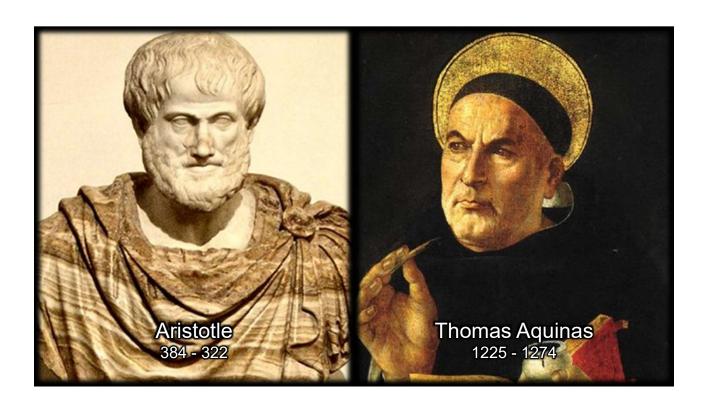
regard intellectual contemplation as the supreme goal of human striving

look upon free choice as the source of moral action

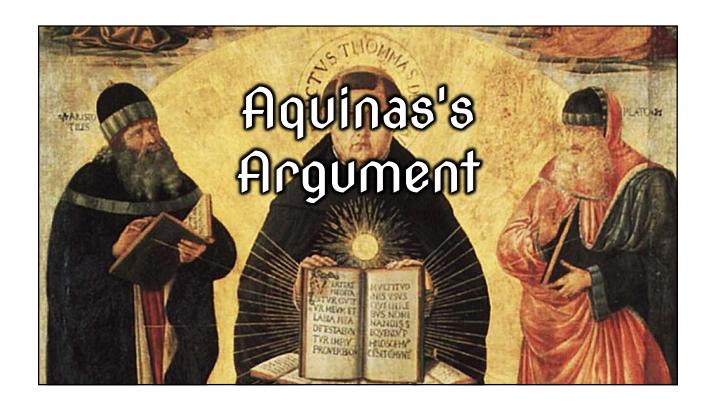
ground all naturally attainable human knowledge on external sensible things, instead of on sensations, ideas, or language

look upon cognition as a way of being in which knower and thing known are one and the same in the actuality of the cognition



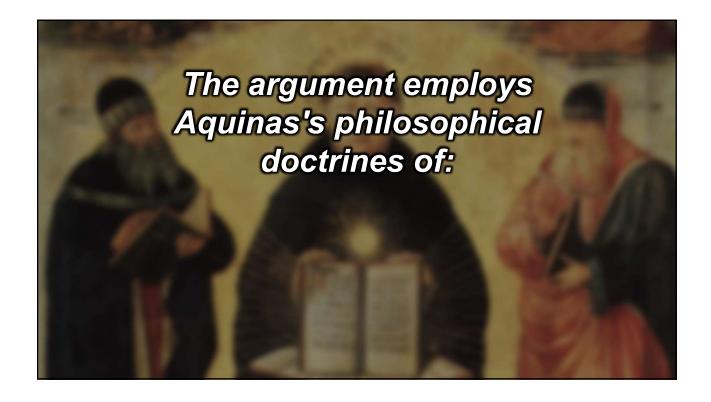


no metaphysical category of existence is the actuality of all existence as such (only a actualities and the perfection logical distinction) of all perfections highest element in highest element in metaphysics is Form metaphysics is existence for every being, to be existence is distinct from is to be a Form essence in sensible creatures existence and essence are known existence and essence are known through the same intellectual act by different intellectual acts no connection between ultimate **Ultimate category in metaphysics** is being; God is infinite being reality in metaphysics and ultimate reality in religion itself (ipsum esse subsistens)

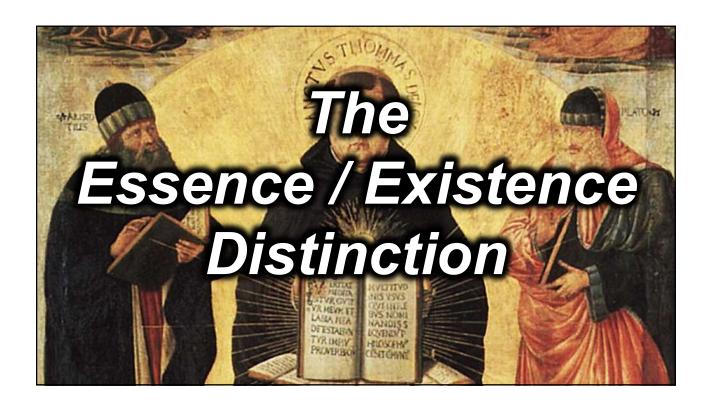


All of Aquinas's arguments demonstrate, not that there is a cause of the universe's beginning to exist, but that there is a cause of the universe's current existing.

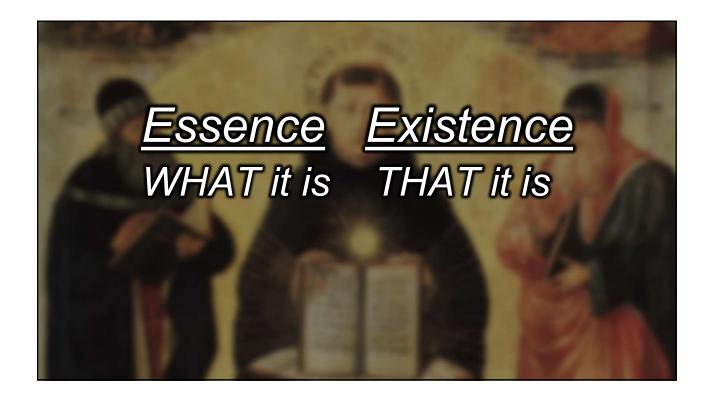
His arguments are indifferent as to whether the universe began to exist a finite time ago or has existed from all eternity.



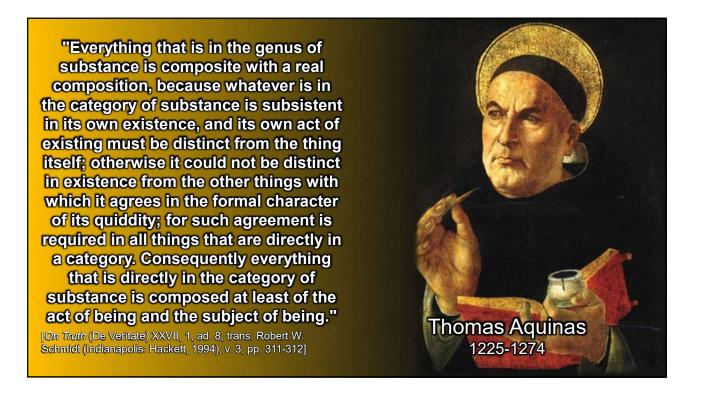


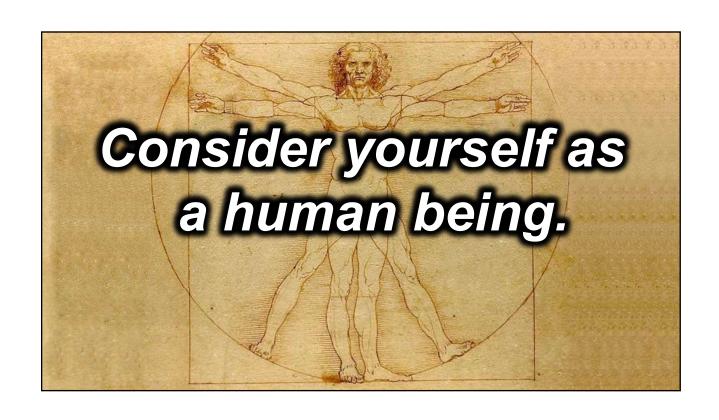


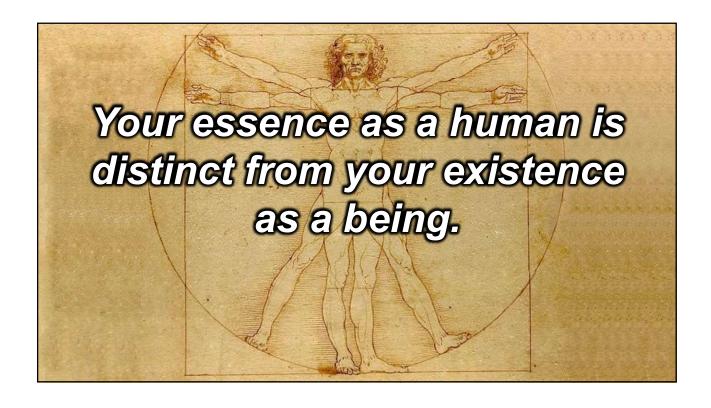
The essence / existence distinction maintains that there is a real difference in a created thing between its essence and its existence.

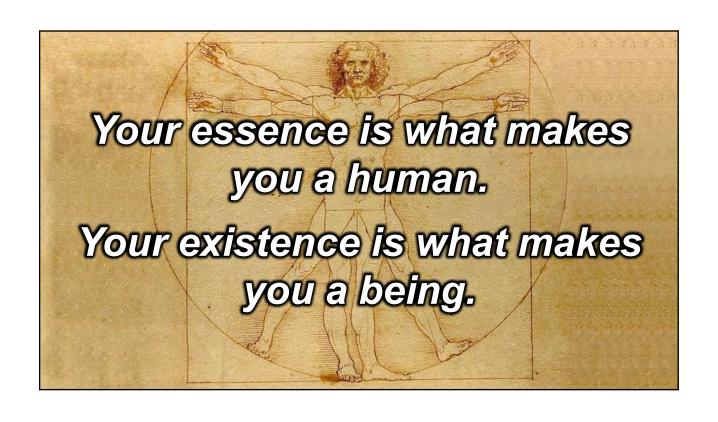


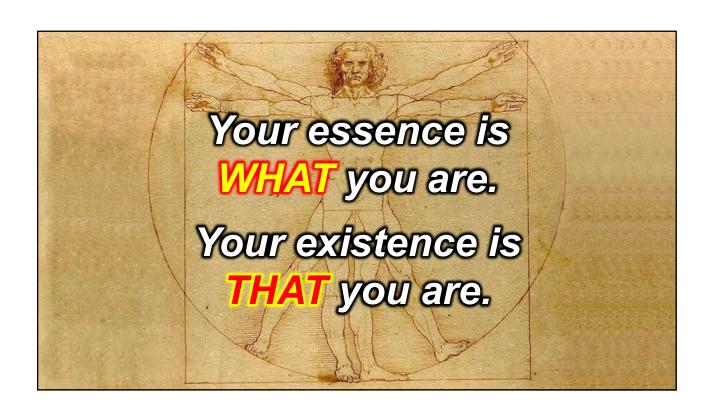
"What-ness" with respect to a thing's operations: With respect to a thing's matter: Form with respect to a thing's accidents: Substance with respect to a thing's intellect: Quiddity with respect to a thing's existence: Essence

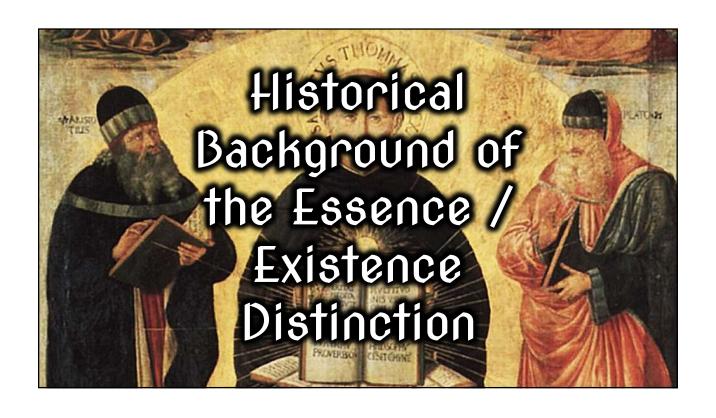


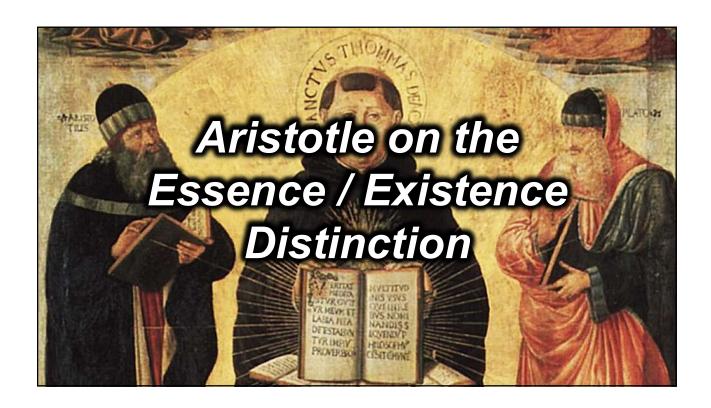






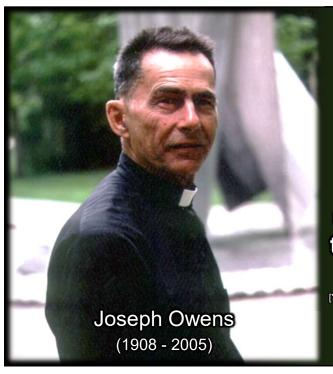






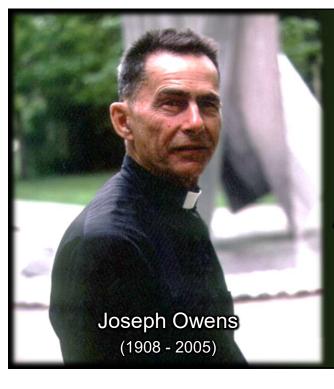
Aquinas's doctrine of existence together with his doctrine of the distinction of essence and existence serve as the most radical break he has with Aristotle.

For Aristotle, to be is to be a form.
As such, there is no philosophical notion of existence as such in Aristotle's philosophy.

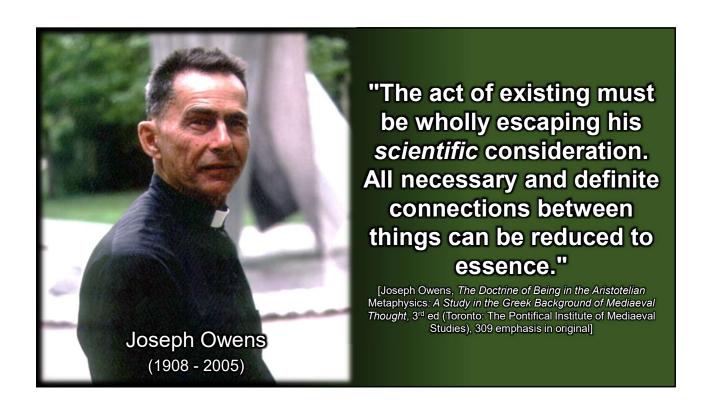


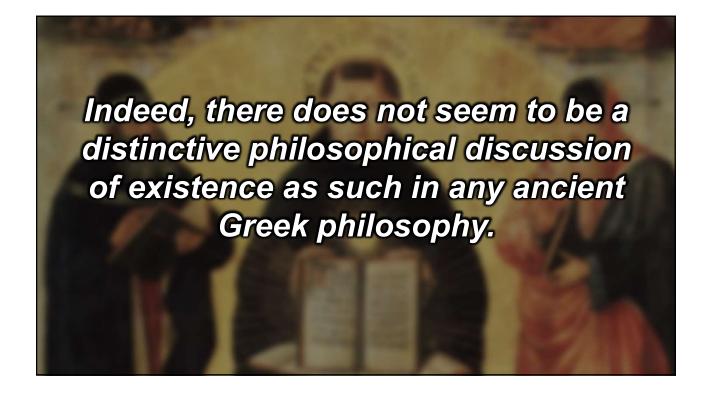
"For Aristotle, to be actualized meant to acquire form. For Aquinas, it meant to be brought into existence, since for him existence is the actuality of every form or nature."

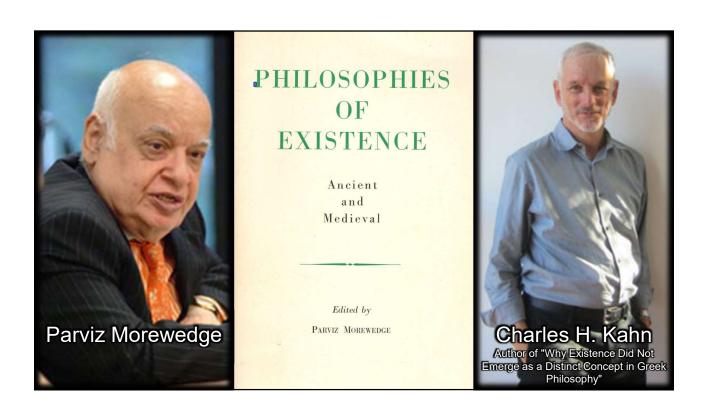
["Aquinas and the Five Ways," Monist 58 (January 1974): 21]

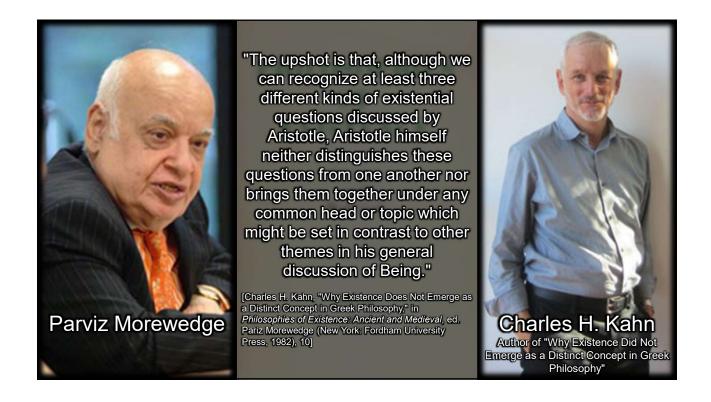


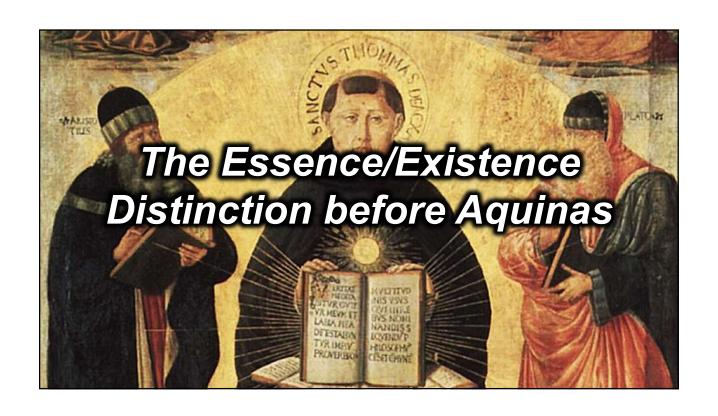
"From the viewpoint of the much later distinction between essence and the act of existing, this treatment must mean that Aristotle is leaving the act of existing, entirely outside the scope of his philosophy.

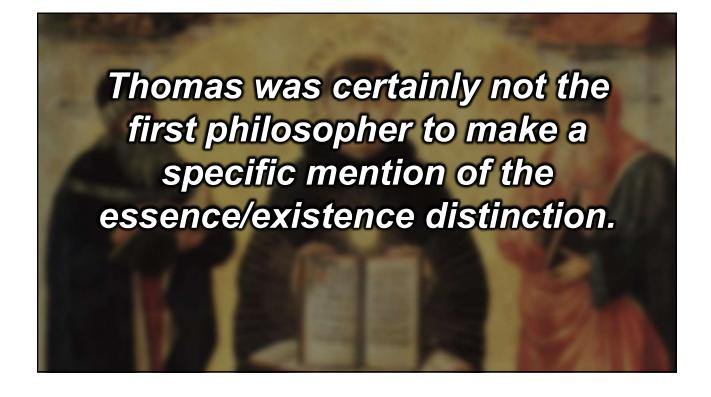


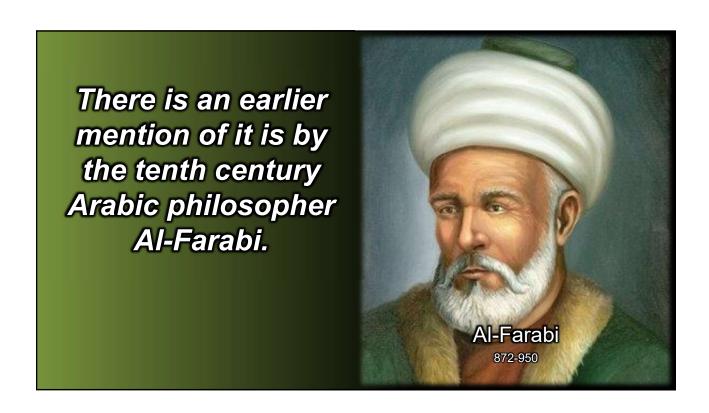


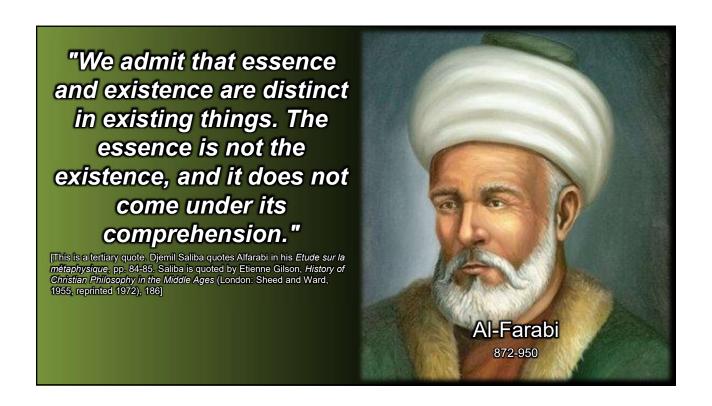




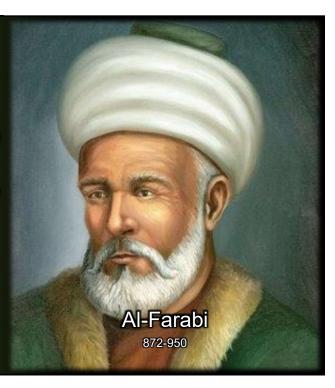




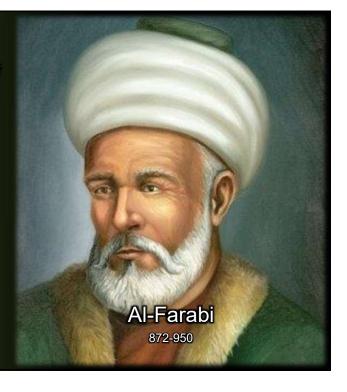




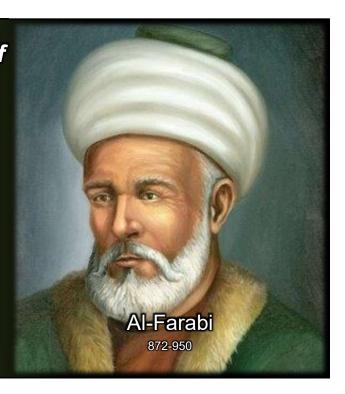
"If the essence of man implied his existence, to conceive his essence would also be to conceive his existence, and it would be enough to know what a man is, in order to know that man exists, so that every representation would entail an affirmation.



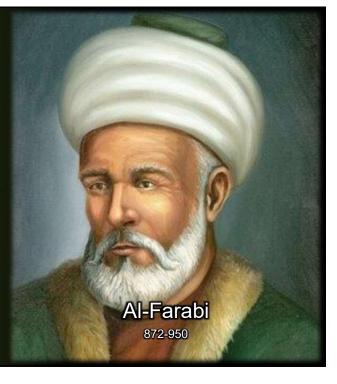
"But the same token, existence is not included in the essence of things; otherwise it could become one of their constitutive characters,



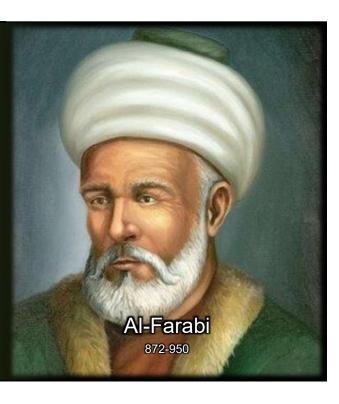
"and the representation of what essence is would remain incomplete without the representation of its existence. And what is more, it would be impossible for us to separate them by the imagination.

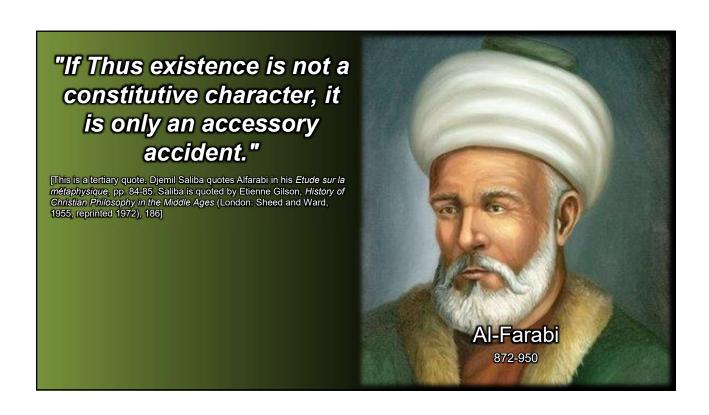


"If man's existence coincided with his corporeal and animal nature, there would be nobody who, having an exact idea of what man is, and knowing is corporeal and animal nature,

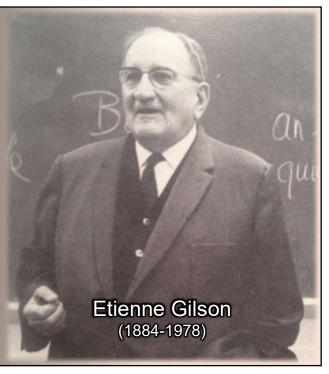


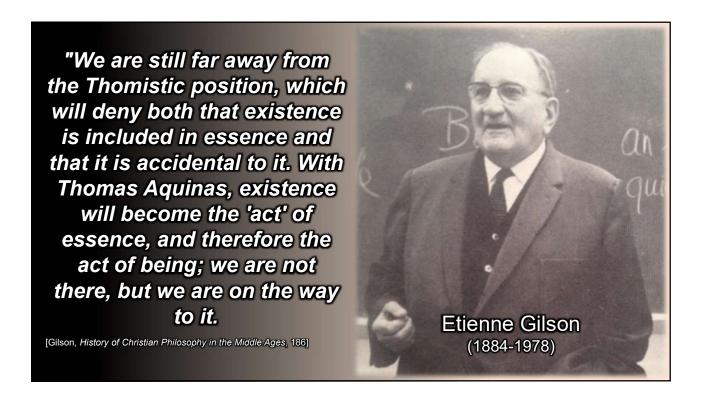
"could question man's existence. But that is not the way it is, and we doubt the existence of things until we have direct perception of them through the senses, or mediate perception through a proof.

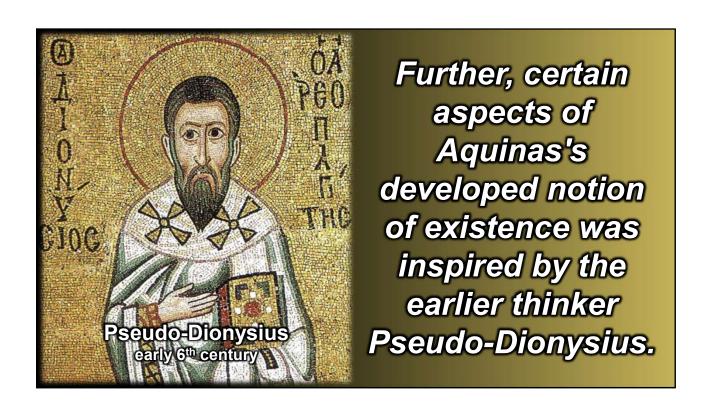


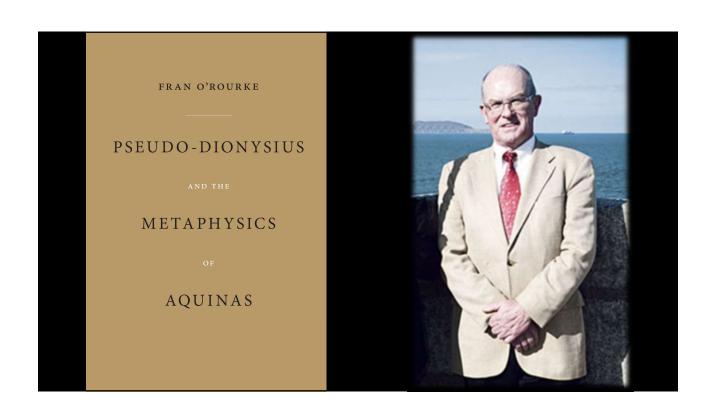


"In order not to confuse this important metaphysical move [in Alfarabi] with later ones, it should be noted that the primacy of essence dominates the whole argumentation. Not for an instant is there any doubt that existence is a predicate of essence, and because it is not essentially included in it, it is considered an 'accident.'





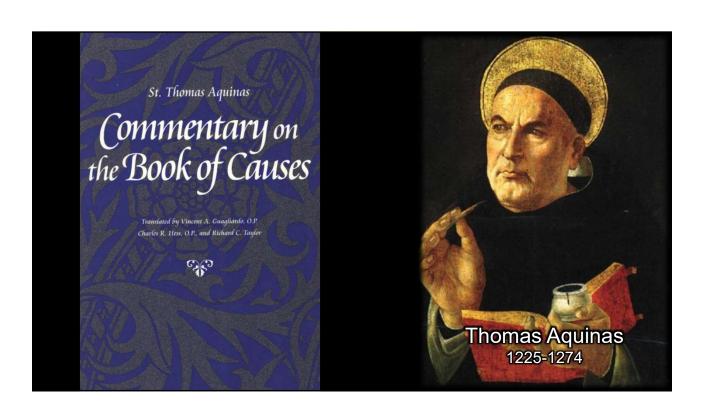


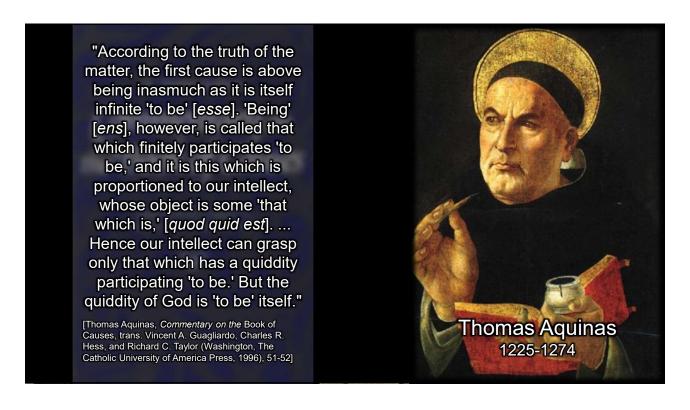


Probably the biggest influence that suggested the essence/existence distinction was Avicenna, though Aquinas will significantly change the meanings of the terms.

Avicenna (Ibn Sina)
980-1037

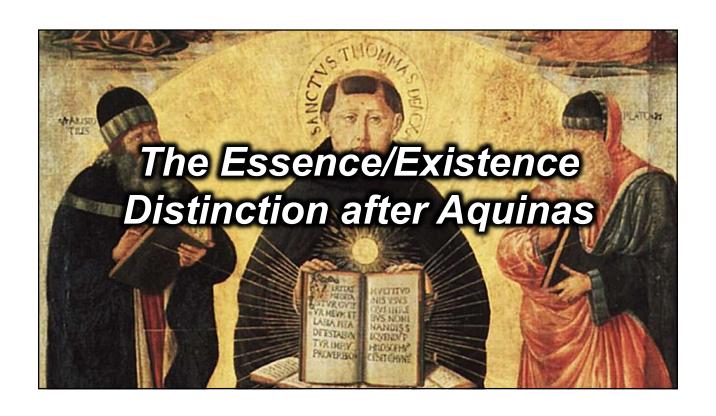
The language of the distinction between form and being (essence and existence) is also found in the Liber de Causis (Book of Causes, dated late 1000s to early 1100s) and was accommodated by Aquinas for his own purposes.

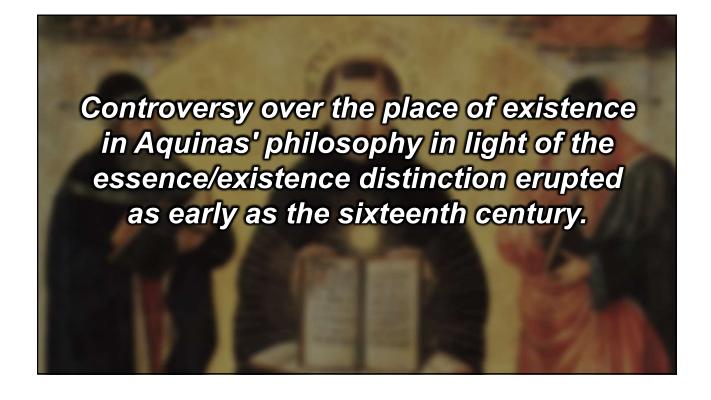




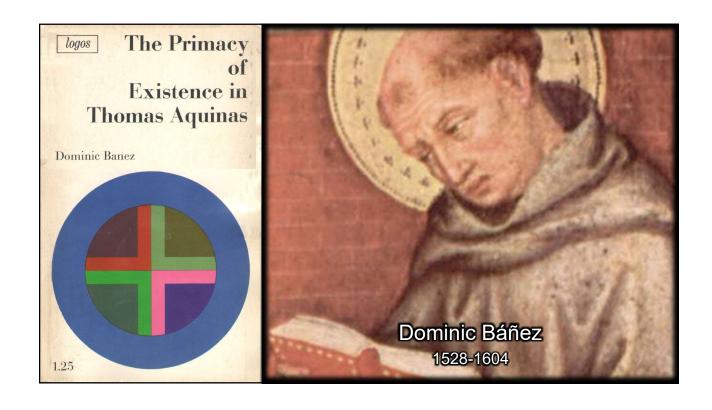
Aquinas is the first for whom his notion of existence and the essence / existence distinction will figure so prominently in his own philosophy.

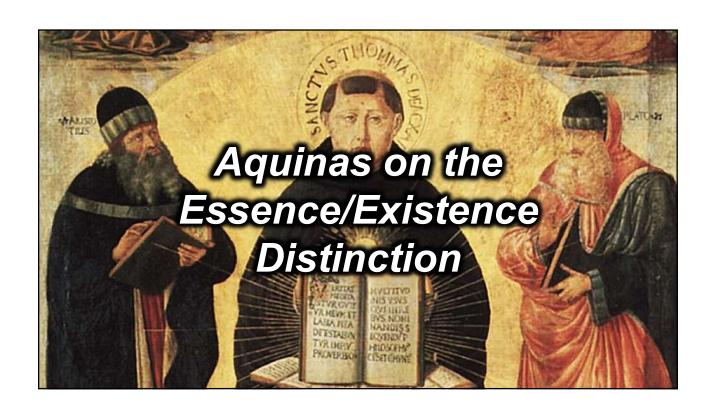
His thinking will go on to play a significant role in subsequent Christian philosophical theology.

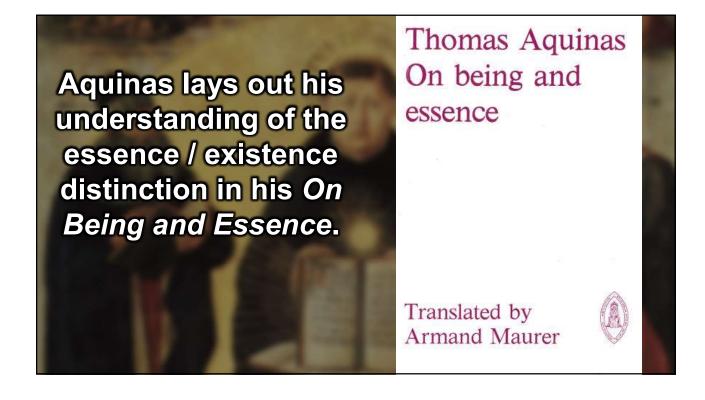




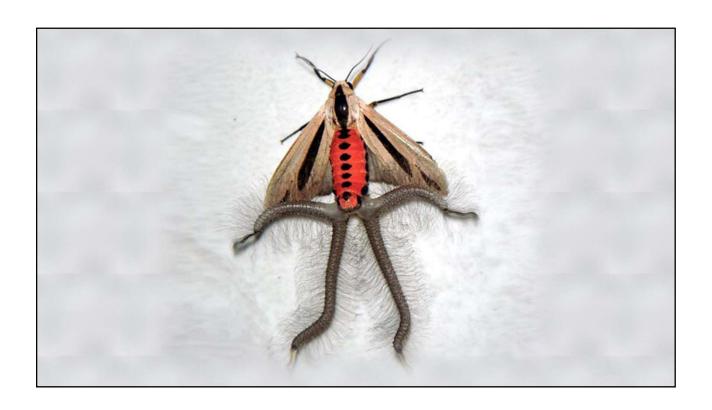
The 16th Century Thomist philosopher
Dominic Báñez (in his The Primacy of
Existence in Thomas Aquinas) defended
the notion that in the philosophy of
Thomas Aquinas, existence is the
primary metaphysical notion.

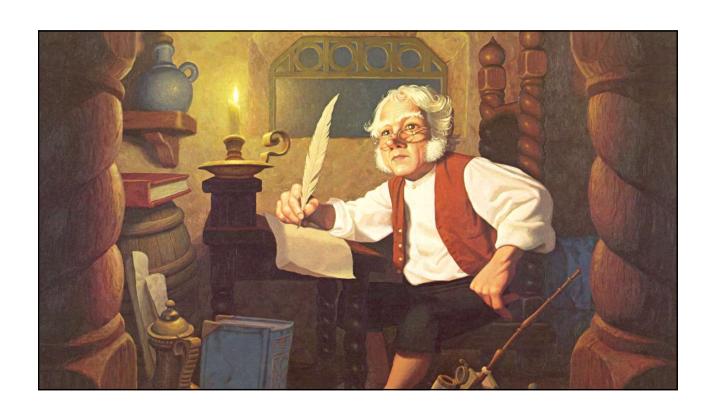


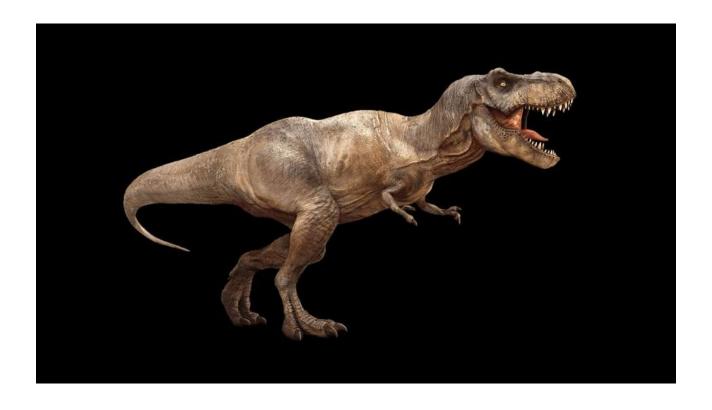


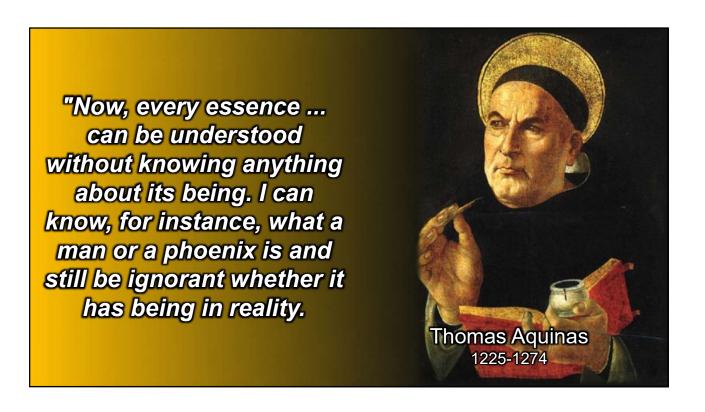


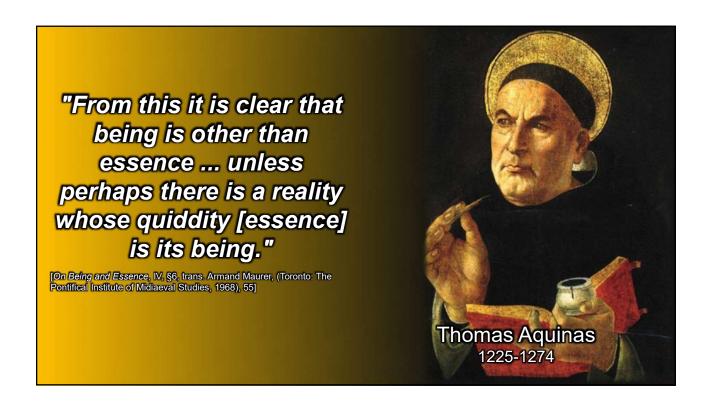
That essence and existence are distinct in sensible objects is evident from the fact that one can understand the essence of a thing without knowing whether it exists.

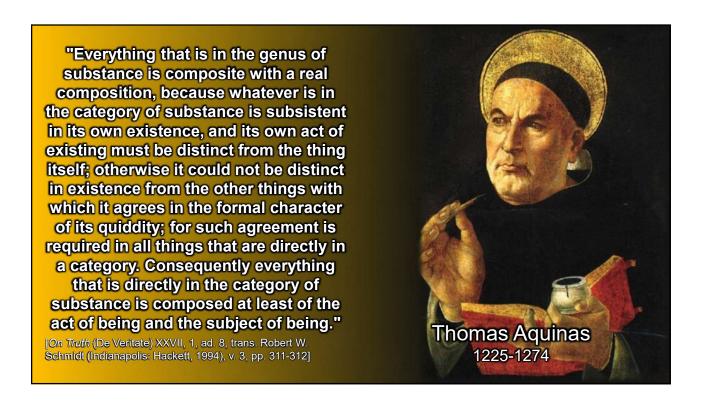


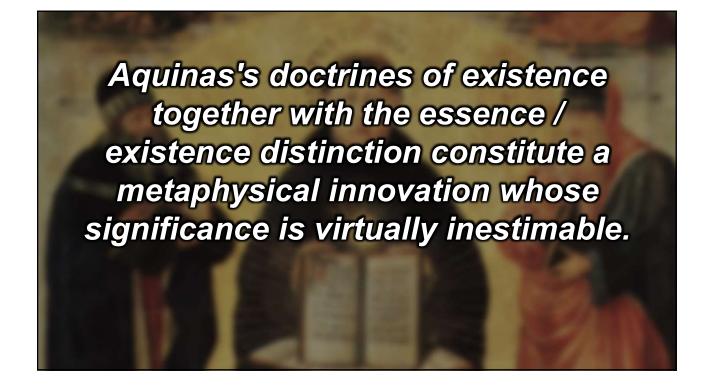


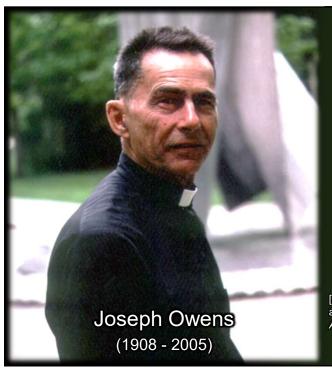








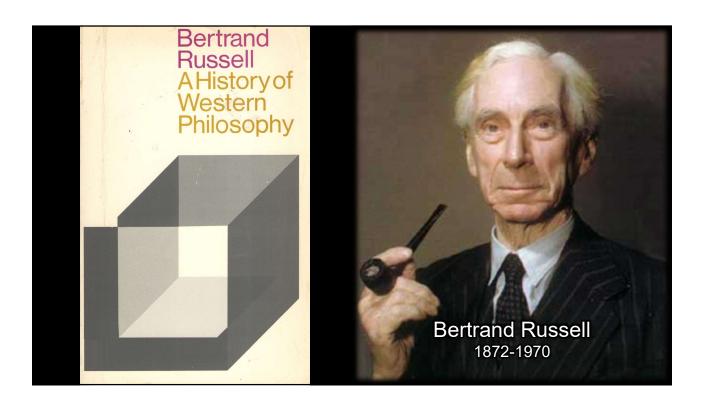


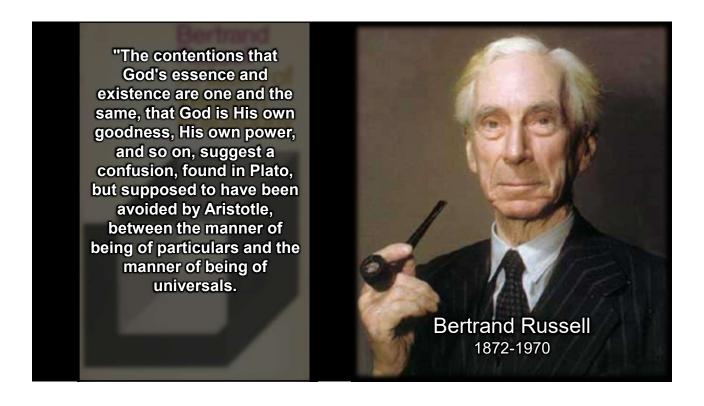


"The real distinction between essence and existence could be regarded in neothomistic circles as the fundamental truth of Christian philosophy, which pervaded the whole of Thomistic metaphysics."

[Joseph Owens, "Aristotle and Aquinas," in Norman Kretzman and Eleonore Stump, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993): 39]

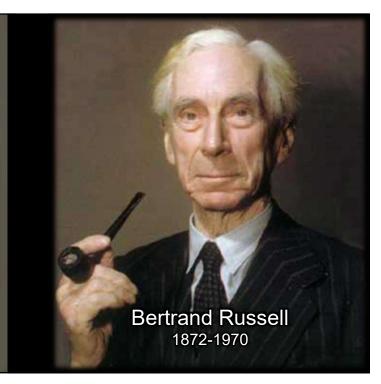
These doctrines are what enable
Aquinas to turn the pagan
philosophy of Aristotle into the
Christian philosophy that Thomism
is, particularly regarding the
existence and attributes of God and
the doctrine of creation.

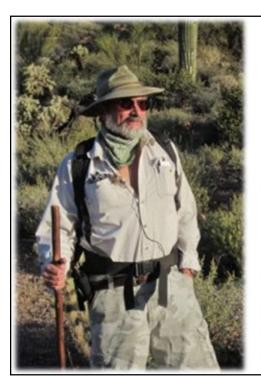




God's essence is, one must suppose, of the nature of universals, while His existence is not. It is not easy to state this difficulty satisfactorily, since it occurs within a logic that can no longer be accepted. But it points clearly to some kind of syntactical confusion, without which much of the argumentation about God would lose its plausibility."

[Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1945), 462]





A CRITIQUE OF THE QUANTIFICATIONAL ACCOUNT OF EXISTENCE

William F. Vallicella

University of Dayton

Dayton, Ohio

A CRITICISM OFTEN brought against philosophers who raise questions about Being or existence charges that these philosophers have simply been misled by the surface grammar of existence statements into thinking that " exists " and its cognates are logical predicates, and thus into thinking that there must be some mysterious property or quasi-property called " Being "2 to which this putative predicate refers, and into which it would make sense to inquire. According to Bertrand Russell,

... there is a vast amount of philosophy that rests upon the notion that existence, is, so to speak, a property that you can attribute to things, and that the things that exist have the property of existence and the things that do not exist do not. That is rubbish ... 3

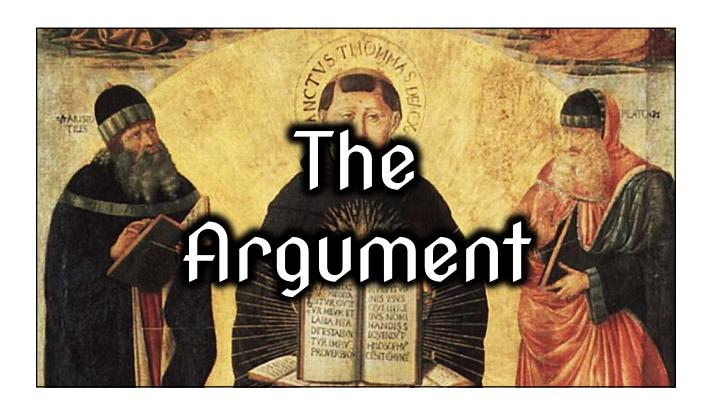
In a somewhat more restrained tone, Rudolf Carnap agrees that "Most metaphysicians since antiquity have allowed themselves to be seduced into pseudostatements by the verbal, and therewith the predicative form of the word 'to be,' e.g., 'I am,'

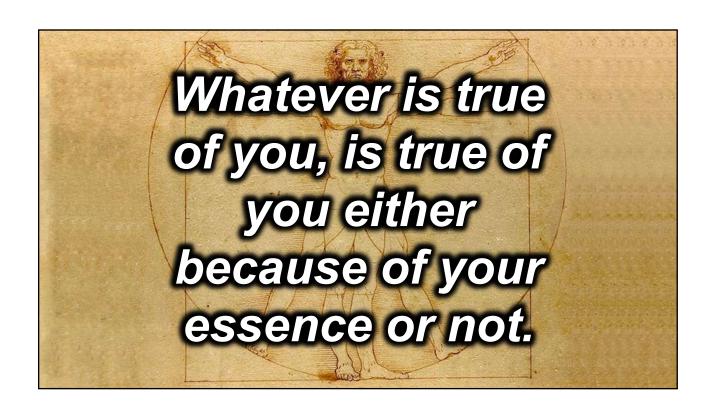
1." Logical " as opposed to " grammatical." Note that Kant uses " logical" in the sense of " grammatical ". For Kant it is self-evident that " exists " is a logical predicate; the only question is whether it is a " real" or " determining " predicate. (See Critique of Pure Reason A598 8626.) In recent discussions, it is taken as self-evident that " exists " is a grammatical predicate; the only question is whether it is also a logical predicate.

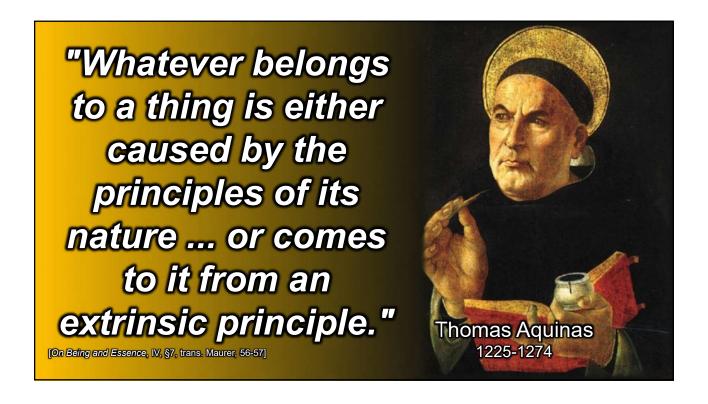
² I capitalize the initial letter of "Being," not out of misplaced piety, but in order to mark the distinction between Being and being. Lower case " being " can be used to refer collectively or distributively to the totality of beings. Upper case " Being " refers, however, not to beings collectively or distributively, but to that which constitutes beings as beings, the " property " which they all have " in common."

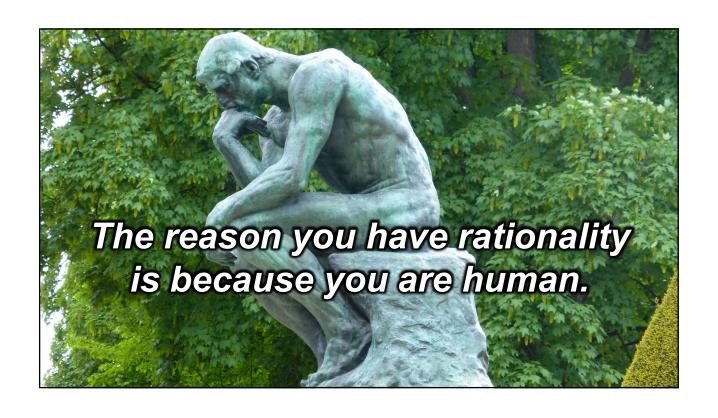
"The Philosophy of Legical Atomicm" in Legis and Knowledge, ed. Robert C. March (New York: C. P. Putram's Cons.

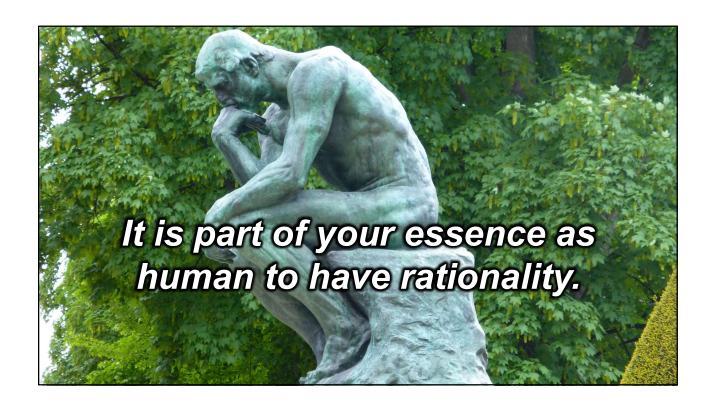


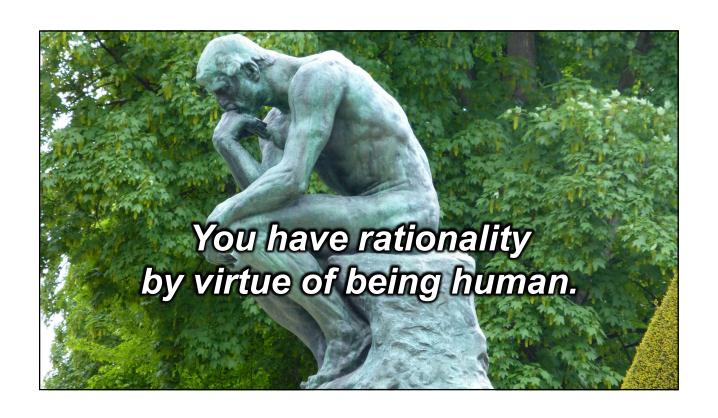


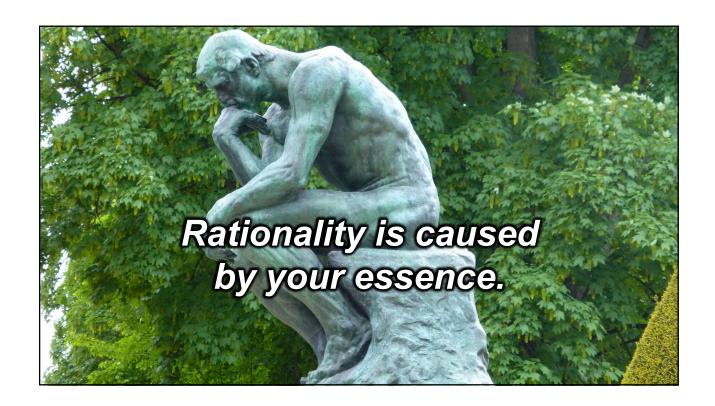


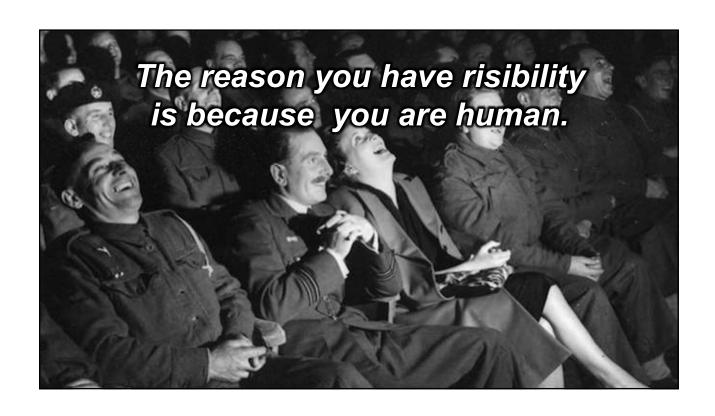


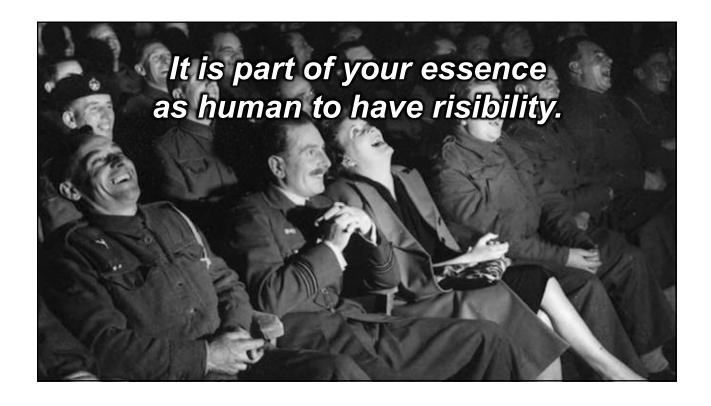


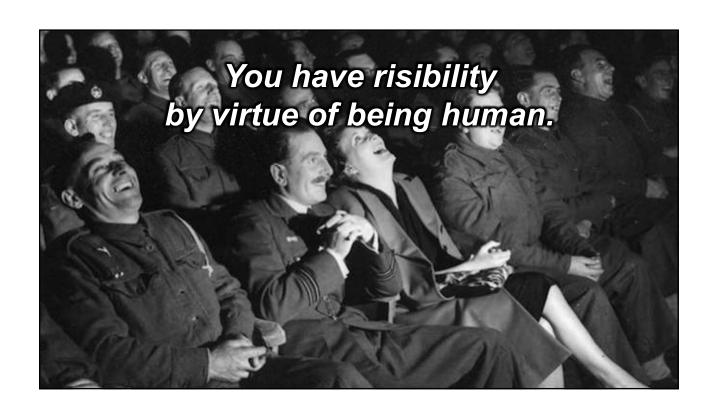


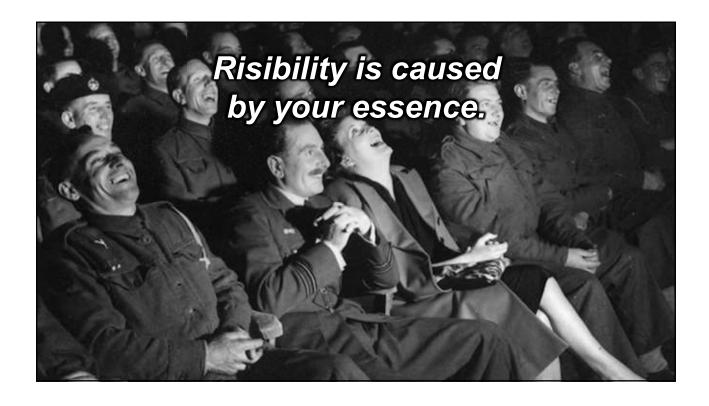


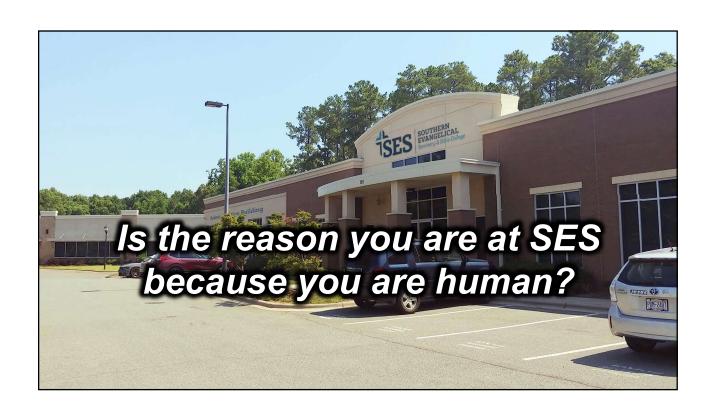


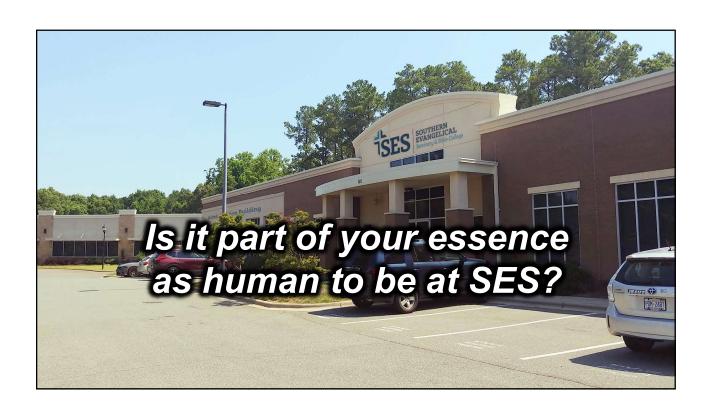






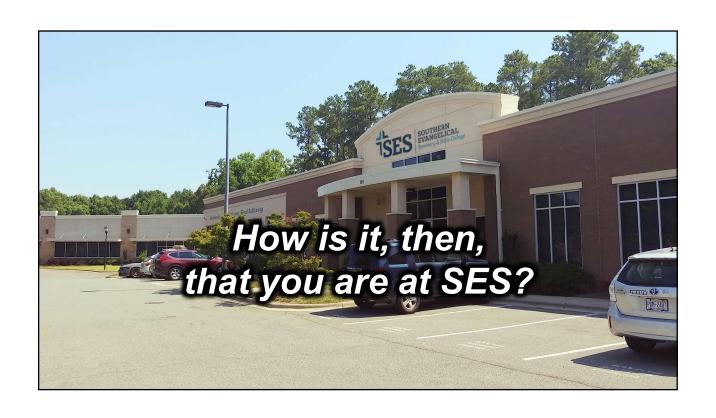


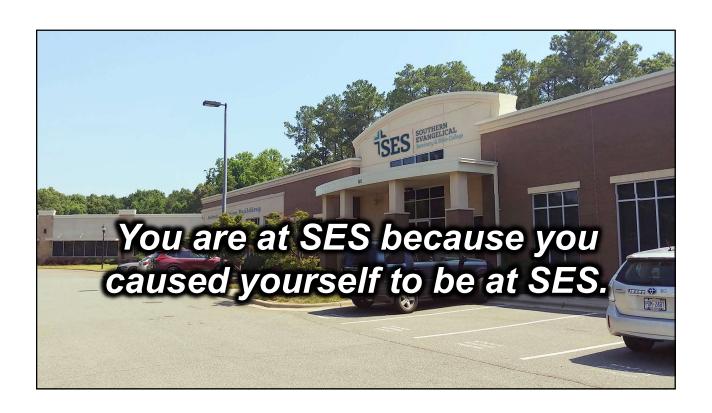


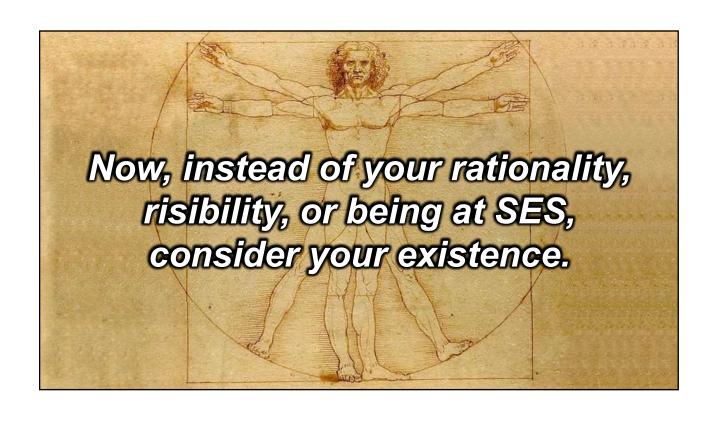


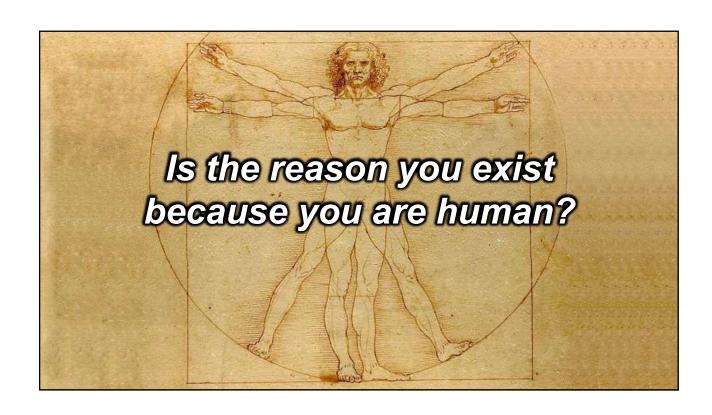


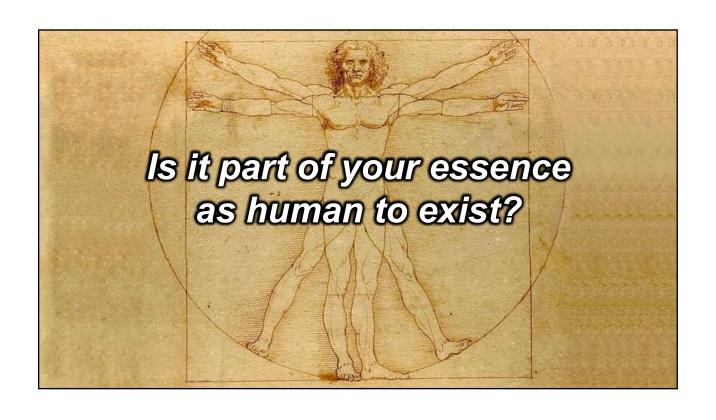


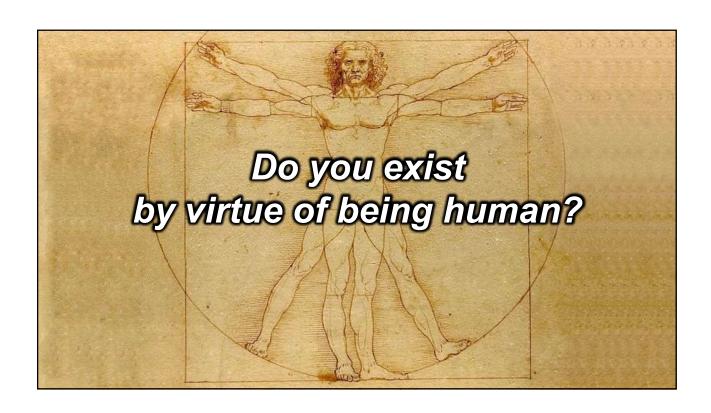


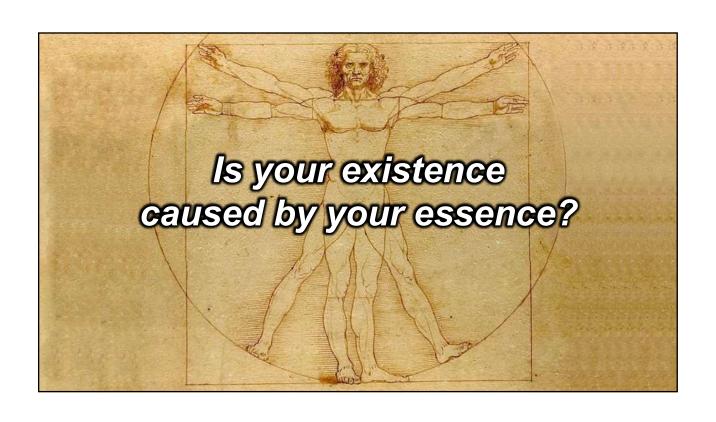


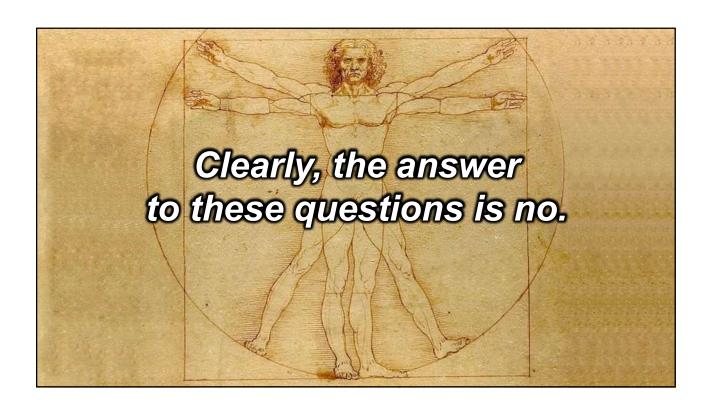


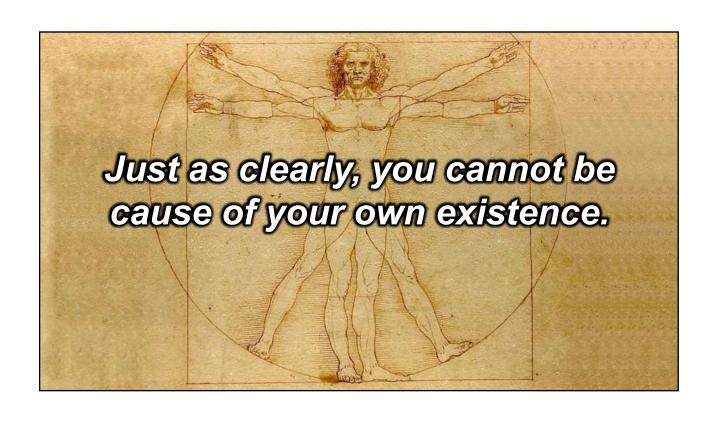


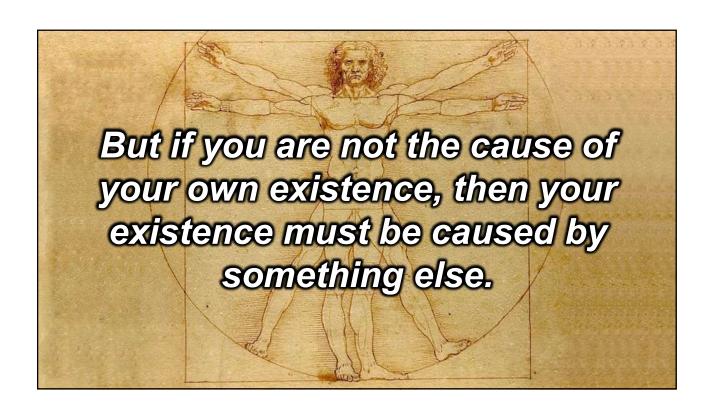


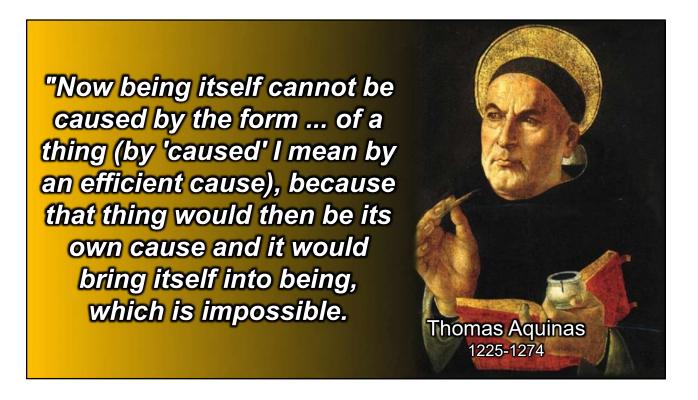


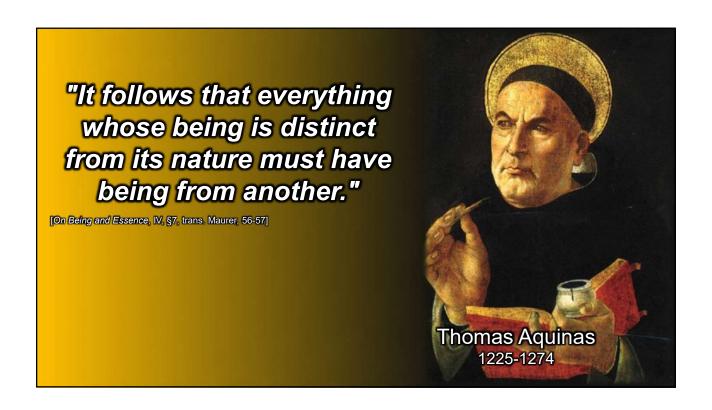


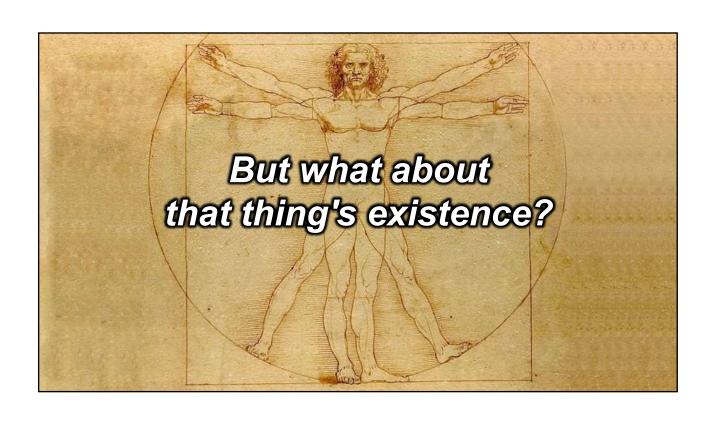


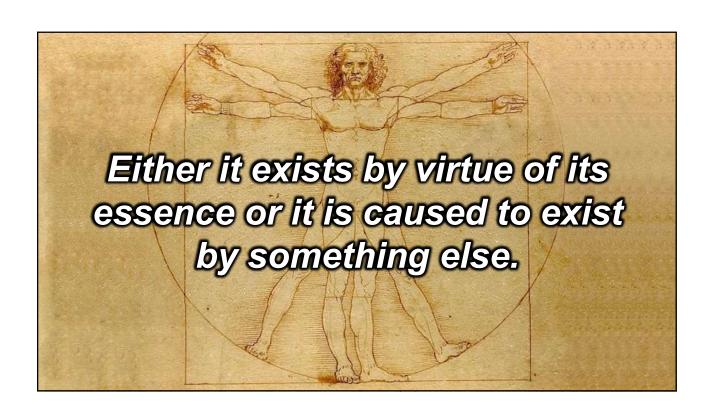












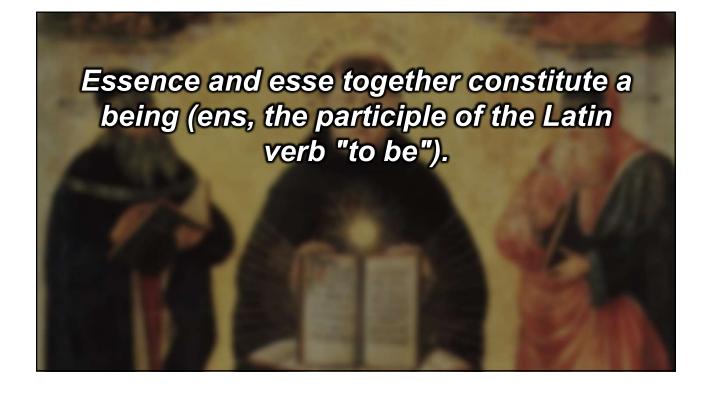




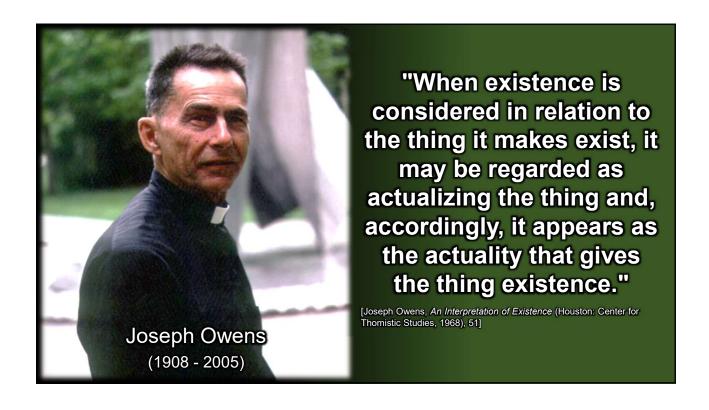
The infinitive of the Latin verb sum (I am) is 'esse' and is often translated into English as 'being' or 'existence.'

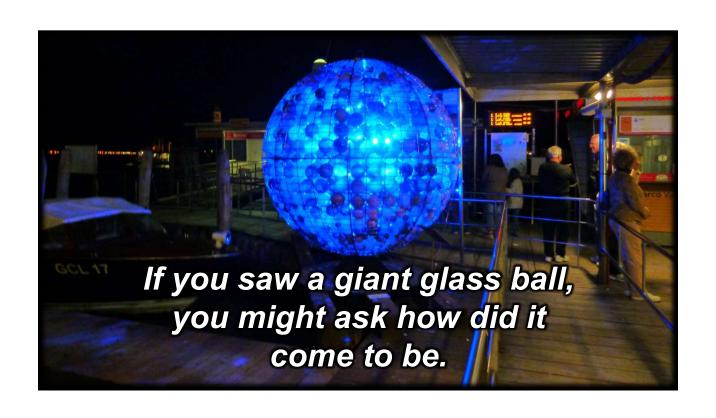
While it was not uncommon in the Middle Ages for philosophers to use the term 'esse' as a synonym for 'essence,' Aquinas explicitly distinguished the two, describing the latter as that which receives esse.

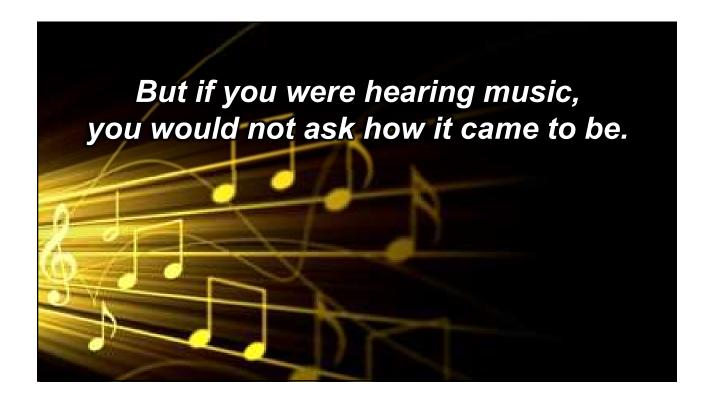
In Aquinas's metaphysical schema, form and matter in sensible things together constitute an essence.

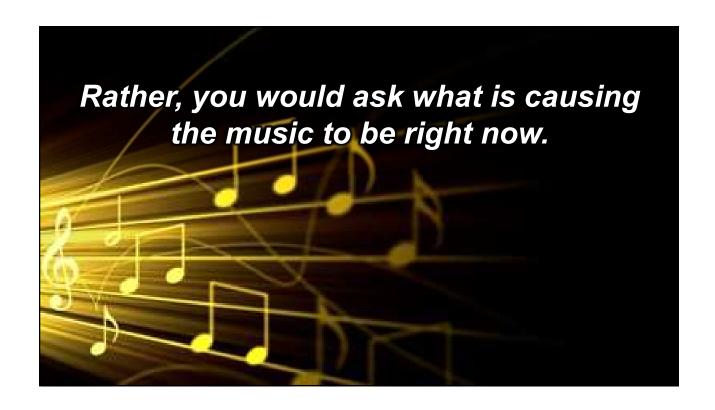


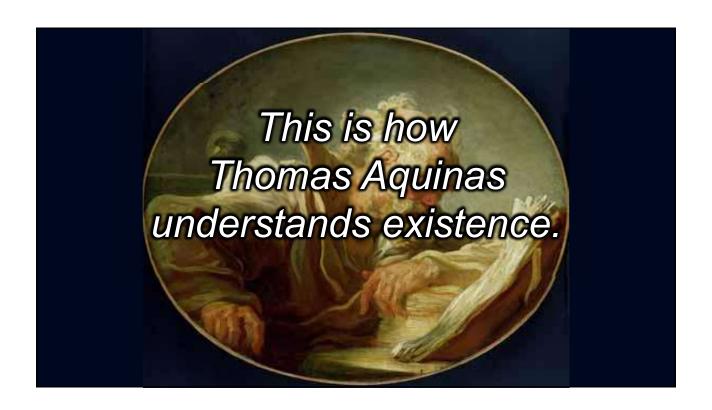
As matter is in potency to form, matter and form together (i.e., an essence) is in potency to existence (esse).
Form actualizes matter; existence (esse) actualizes essence.



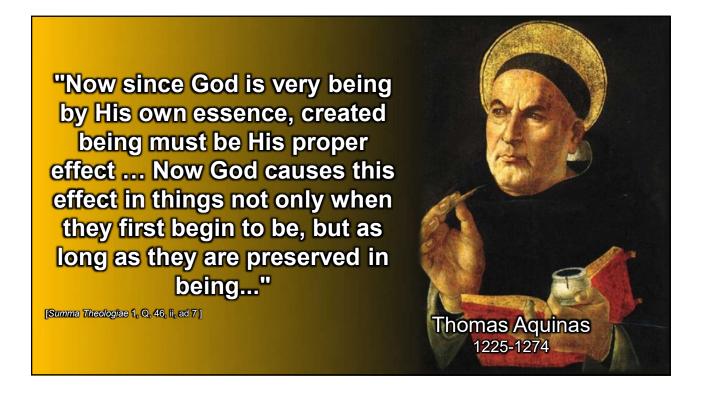




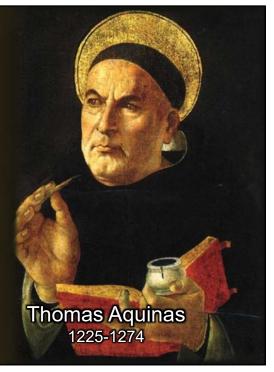




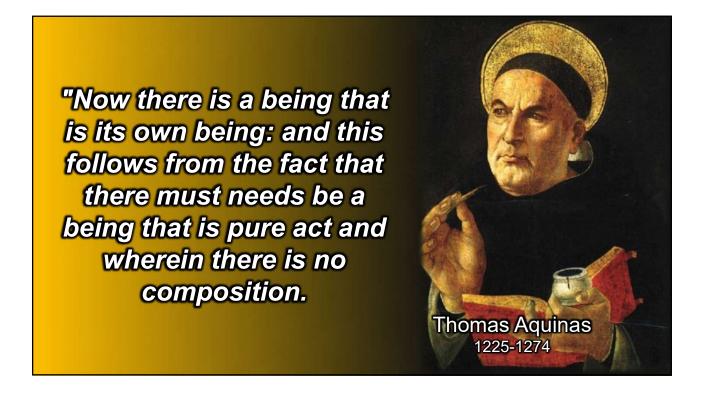
Anything that exists that does not exist by virtue of its essence must be continuously caused to exist by something whose essence IS existence itself.

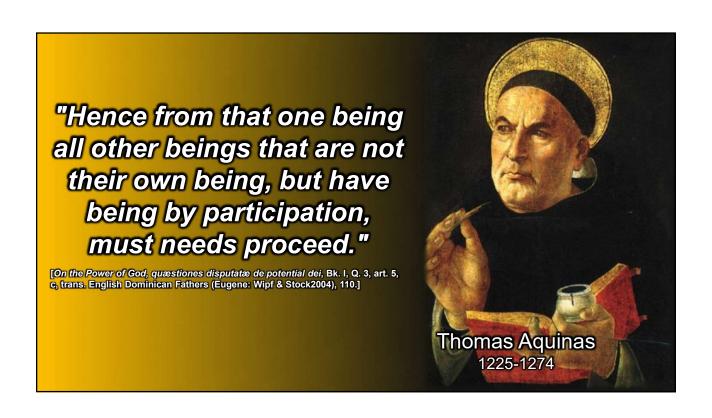


"As the production of a thing into existence depends on the will of God, so likewise it depends on His will that things should be preserved; for He does not preserve them otherwise than by ever giving them existence; hence if He took away His action from them, all things would be reduced to nothing."



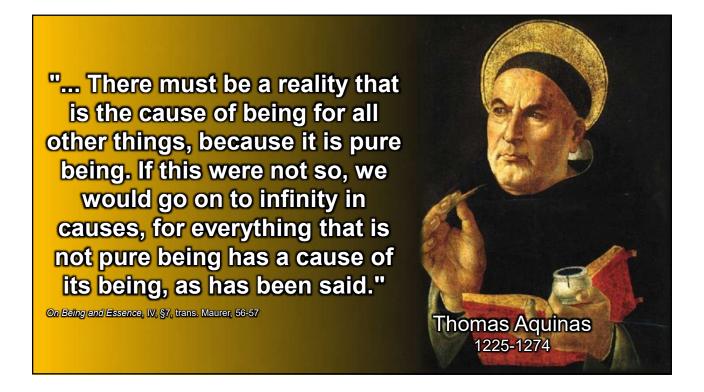
[Summa Theologiae 1, Q, 9, ii]



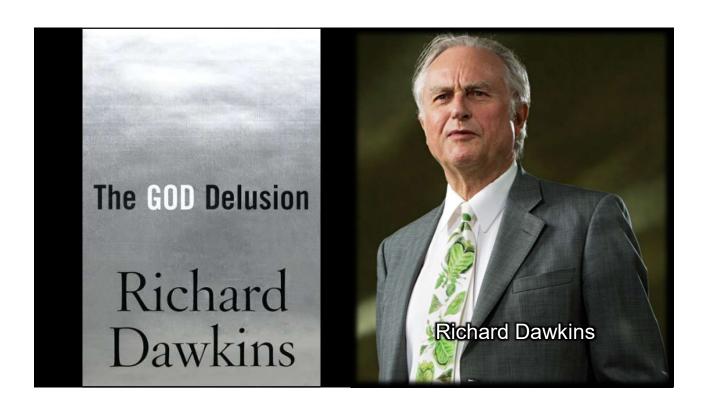




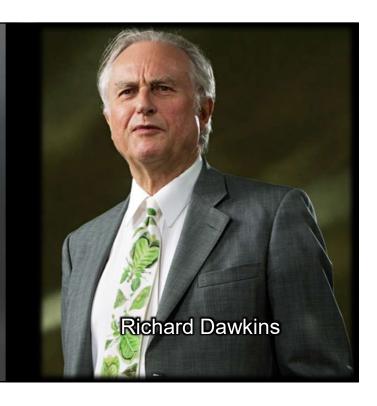
Because if that that thing was not existing by virtue of its essence, it would need to be continuously caused to exist by something else.



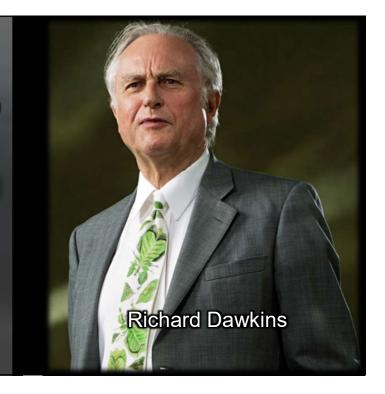




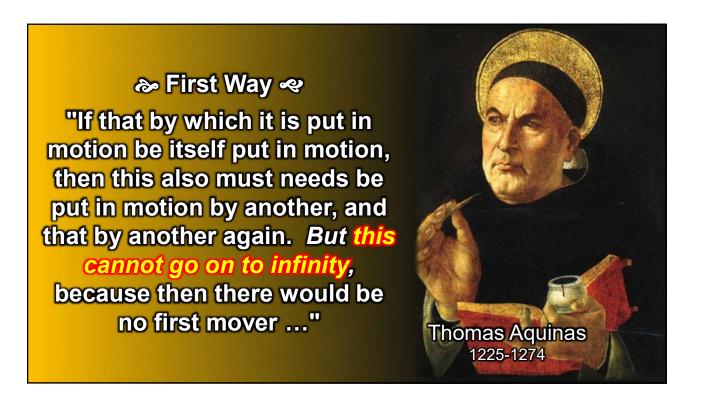
"Thomas Aquinas's Proofs: The Uncaused Cause. Nothing is caused by itself. Every effect has a prior cause, and again we are pushed back into regress. This has to be terminated by a first cause, which we call God."

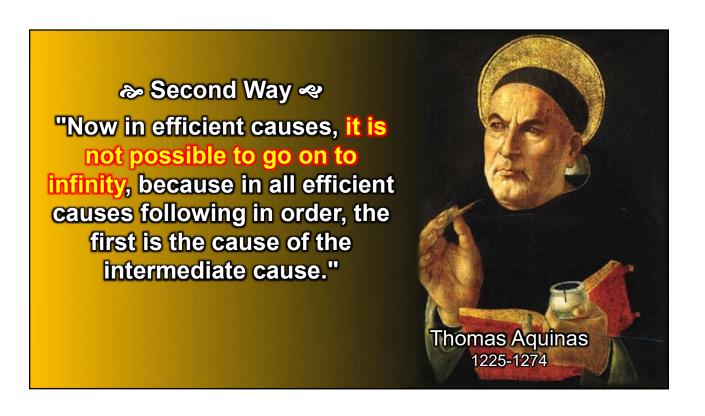


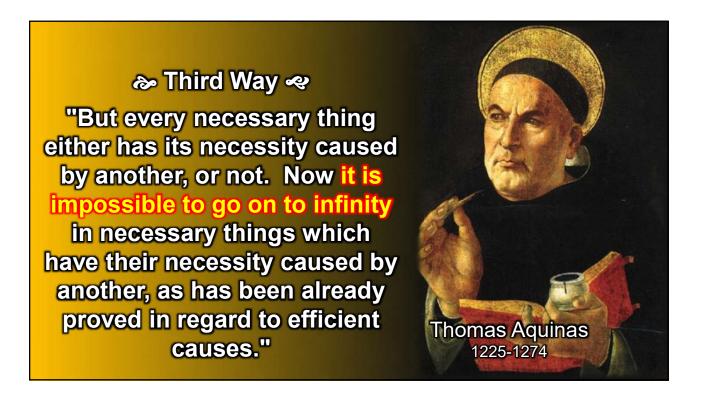
"All three of these arguments [by Aquinas] rely upon the idea of a regress and invoke God to terminate it. They make the entirely unwarranted assumption that God himself is immune to the regress."



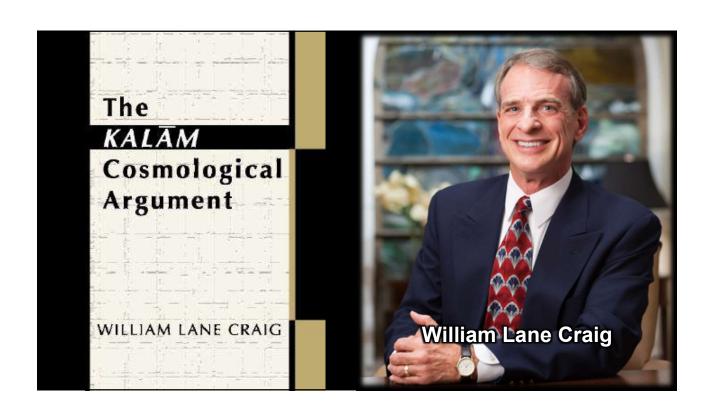
While it is true that Aquinas uses the expression "this cannot go on to infinity" in his famous arguments for God's existence ...

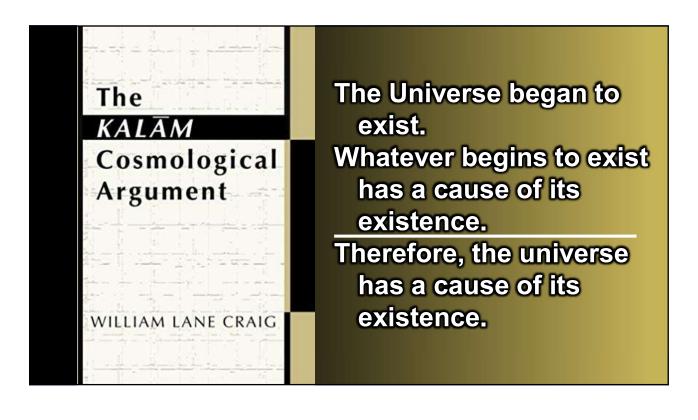






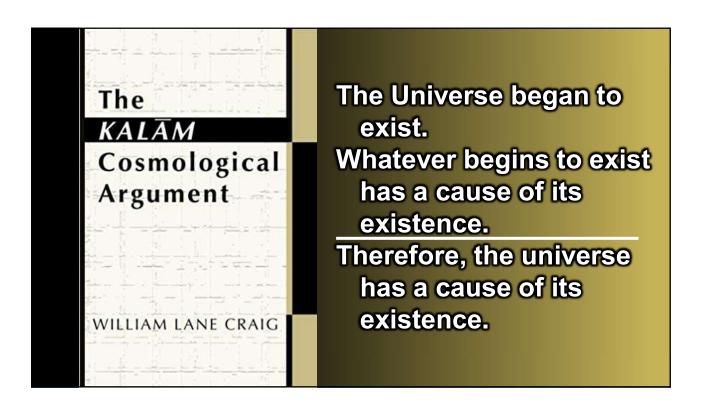
... Dawkins is mistaken in assuming that Aquinas is making an infinite regress argument like the Kalam Cosmological Argument.





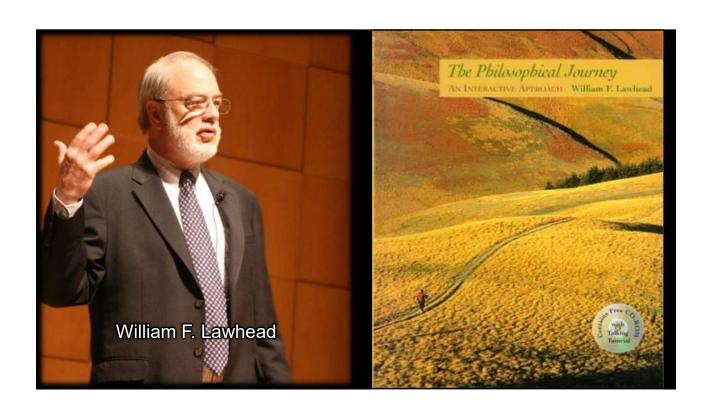
But this is not at all what Aquinas is arguing when he is denying the possibility of an infinite regress.

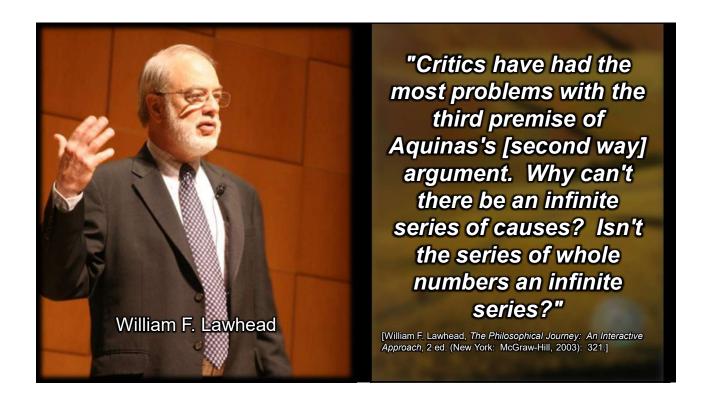
Dawkins is not alone in his mistaken assumption that Aquinas is arguing for the impossibility of an infinite regress in the Kalam sense.

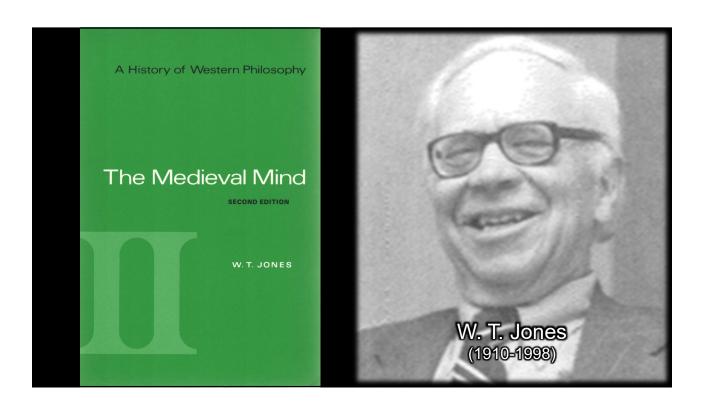


Not: If (since) there cannot be an infinite regress, there must be a first cause. There cannot be an infinite regress. Therefore, there is a first cause.

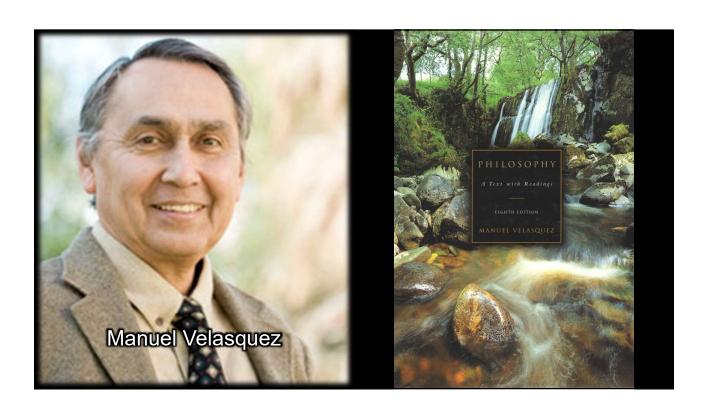
Rather: If (since) there is a first cause, there cannot be an infinite regress. There is a first cause. Therefore, there cannot be an infinite regress.

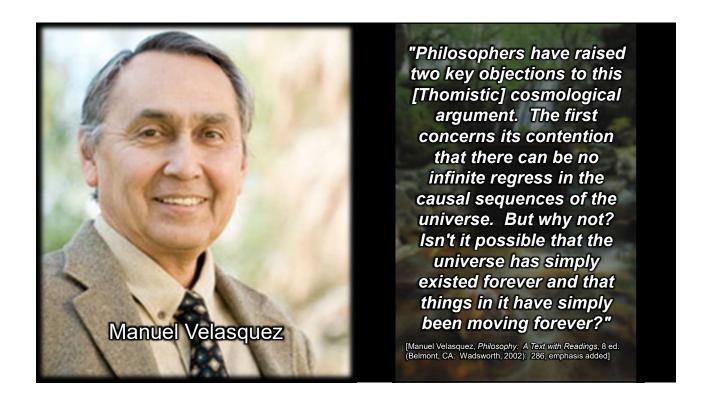


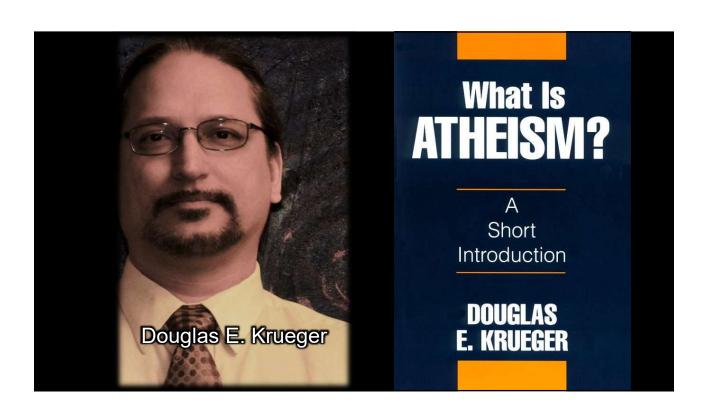


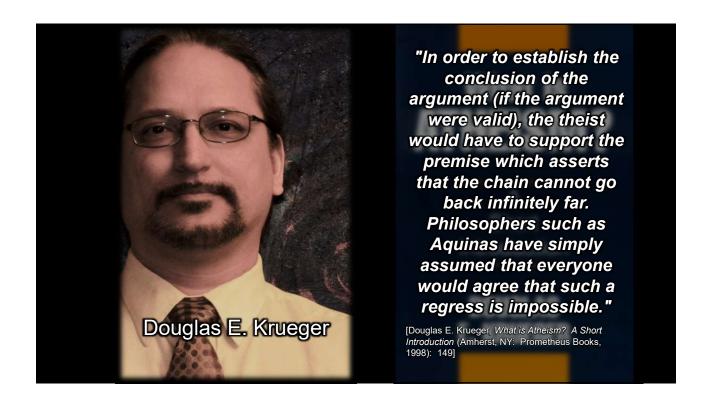


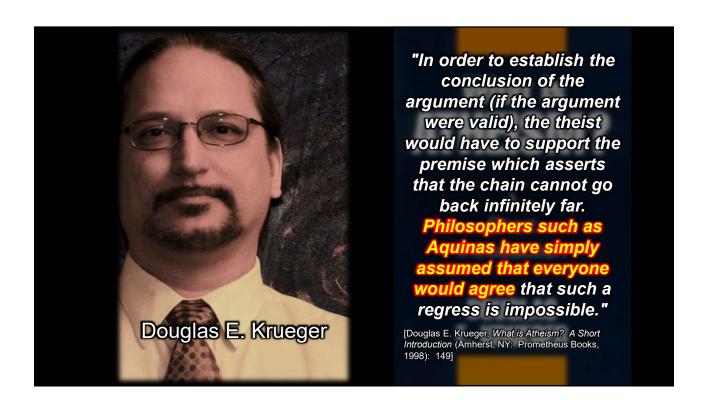
"The question, however, is whether such an infinite series of motions (or causes) is conceivable. Thomas, of course, denied that it is. In reply, the series of positive integers-1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and so on—could be cited. It is clear that this series does not have a last term ... Similarly, it could be said that before any time t, however remote in the past, there was an earlier time t - 1, in which motion was occurring. If there is no greatest positive integer, why need there be any first motion?" W. T. Jones [W. T. Jones, A History of Western Philosophy: The Medieval Mind (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 1969): 219] (1910-1998)

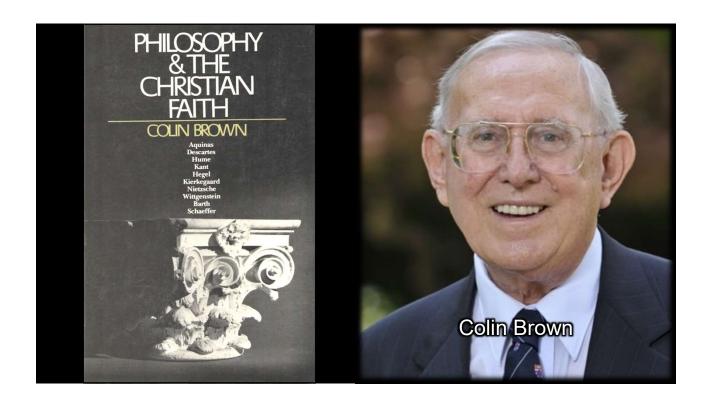




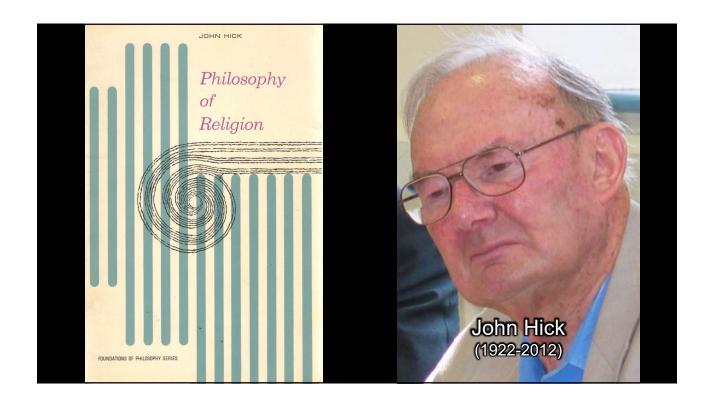






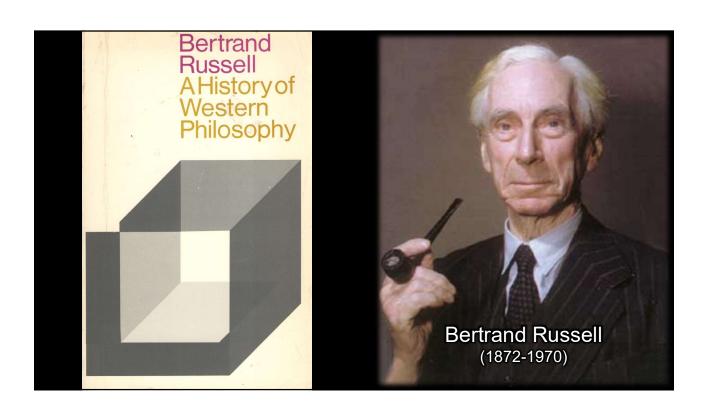


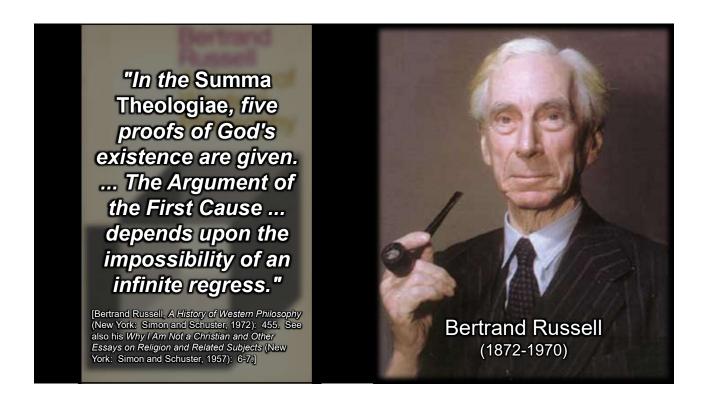
"Aquinas believed that one could argue back from the things that we observe in the world to a prime mover, a first cause or a great designer behind it. In each case the drift of the argument follows the same basic pattern. Every event must have a cause. Nothing causes (or, for that matter, moves or designs) itself. If we press far enough back, we must acknowledge some first cause, prime mover or great designer of all things." Colin Brown [Colin Brown, *Philosophy and the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1968): 26-27, emphasis added]



[Aquinas'] second proof, known as the first cause argument is presented as follows: everything that happens has a cause, and this cause in turn has a cause and so on in a series which must either be infinite or have its starting point in a first cause. Aquinas excludes the possibility of an infinite regress of causes, and so concludes that there must be a first cause, which we call God. [John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, Prentice-Hall Foundations of Philosophy Series, eds. Elizabeth John Hick and Monroe Beardsley (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 20] (1922-2012)

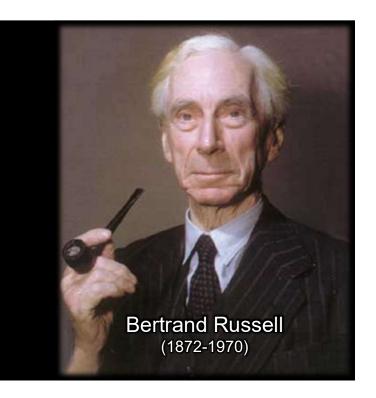






"Take again the arguments professing to prove the existence of God. All of these, except the one from teleology in lifeless things, depend upon the supposed impossibility of a series having no first term. Every mathematician know that there is no such impossibility; the series of negative integers ending with minus one is an instance to the contrary."

[Bertrand Russell, A History of Western Philosophy (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972): 462]



It is my contention that all of these are misunderstanding Aquinas and that Aquinas is not making a Kalam type of argument.

To understand Aquinas's argument here, it is necessary to understand the distinction between two types of infinite series.



Christian Apologetics Journal, 8:1 (Spring 2009) © 2009 Southern Evangelical Seminary

> TWO NOTIONS OF THE INFINITE IN THOMAS AQUINAS' SUMMA THEOLOGIAE 1, QUESTIONS 2 AND 46

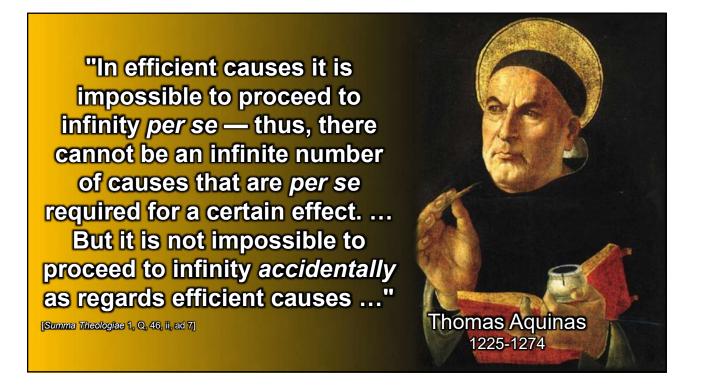
> > Richard G. Howe, Ph.D.

Near the beginning of his Summa Theologiae, the thirteenth century Dominican monk, Thomas Aquinas, claims that "the existence of God can be proved in five ways." These arguments are regularly referred to as his Five Ways and are for many perhaps the most familiar reading from Thomas. Of particular interest for my purposes are the first three of these Five Ways in which Thomas clearly denies the possibility of "going on to infinity." I have discovered that a number of

1. Deam esse quimque viiz probari potest. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae 1, 2, 3. All English translations are from Summa Theologiae of St. Thomas Aquinas, translation by Falber of the English Dominisan Povince (Wastenistee, MD. Christian Catalation, 1981). Homas acknowledges that certain of these arguments are not completely original with him. They are bound for example, in Artisotide Physics (VII. J. 21424 and Machaella, VIII. 7 1072-23. Though the Five Hoys are Thomas' most famous arguments for God's evidence, certain ones of them are expounded with greater detail in other of his works, ne hading his Jummar Contract Certain C. 1, 3.

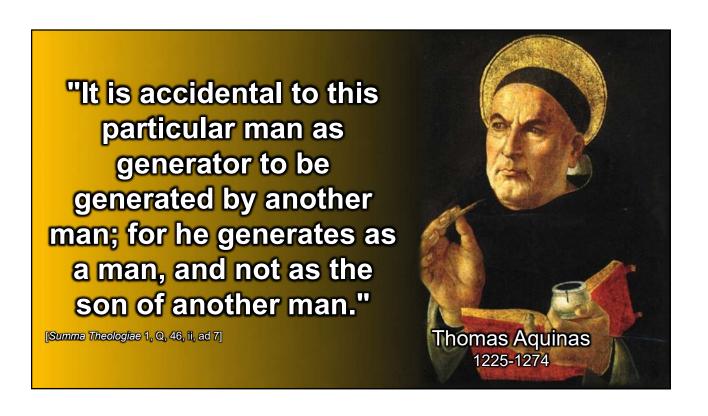
2. procedere for proceduurf in infimum

Richard G. Howe is Professor of Apologetics at Southern Evangelical Seminary in Charlotte, NC





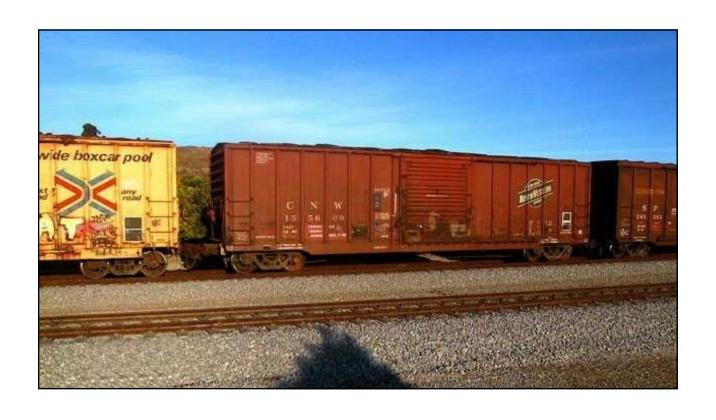






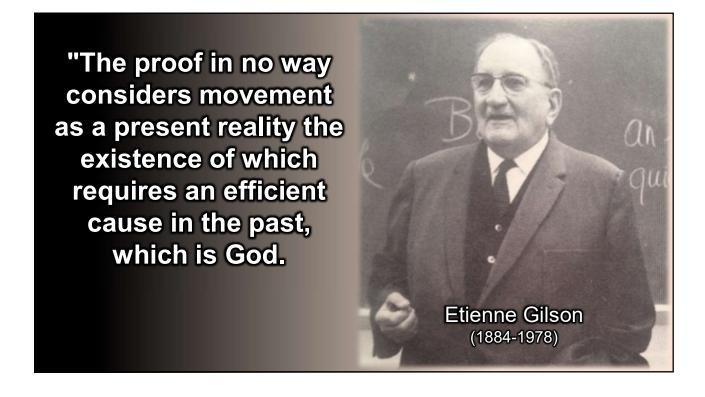






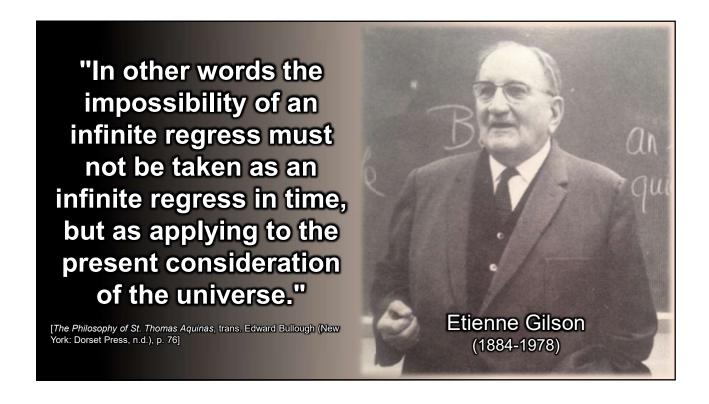




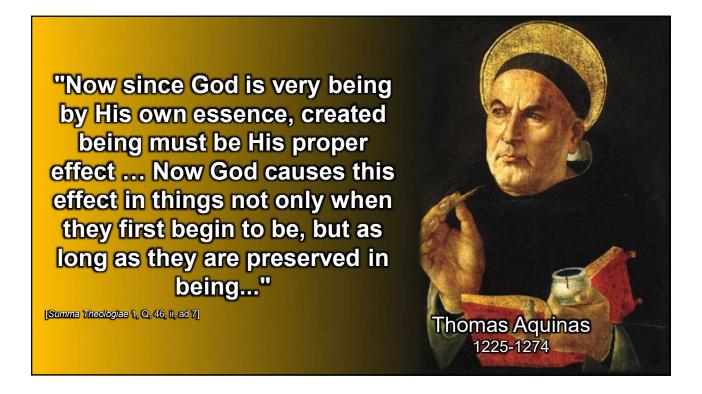


"It aims simply at establishing that in the universe as actually given, movement, as actually given, would be unintelligible without a first Mover communicating it to all things.

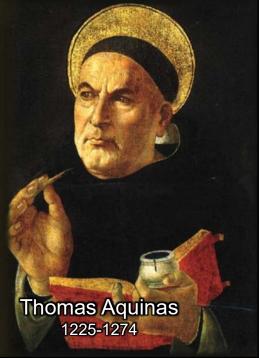
Etienne Gilson (1884-1978)



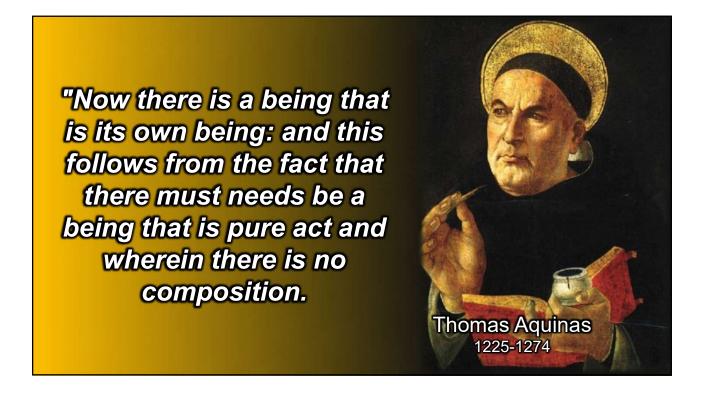
Anything that exists that does not exist by virtue of its essence must be continuously caused to exist by something whose essence IS existence itself.

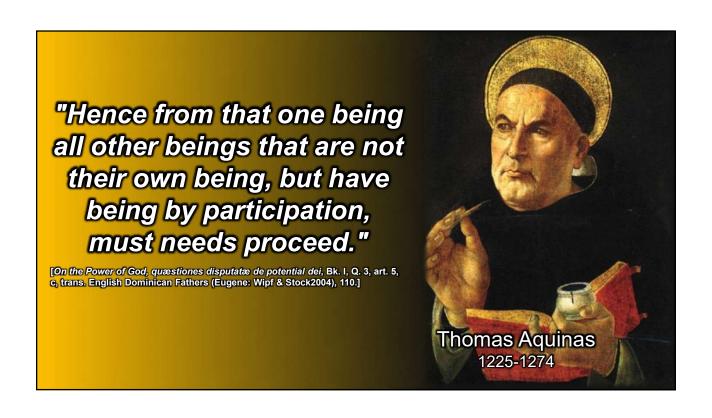


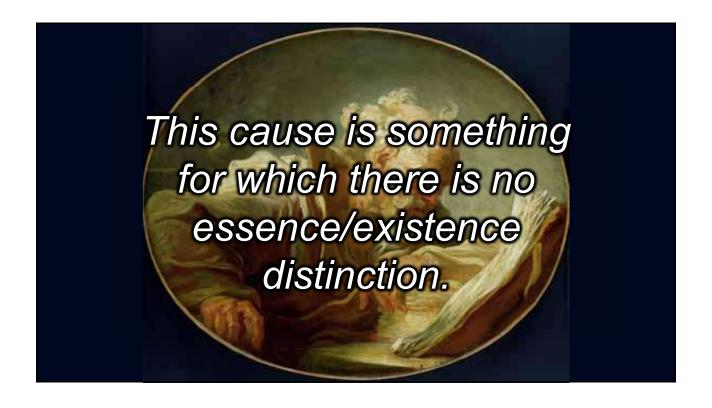
"As the production of a thing into existence depends on the will of God, so likewise it depends on His will that things should be preserved; for He does not preserve them otherwise than by ever giving them existence; hence if He took away His action from them, all things would be reduced to nothing."



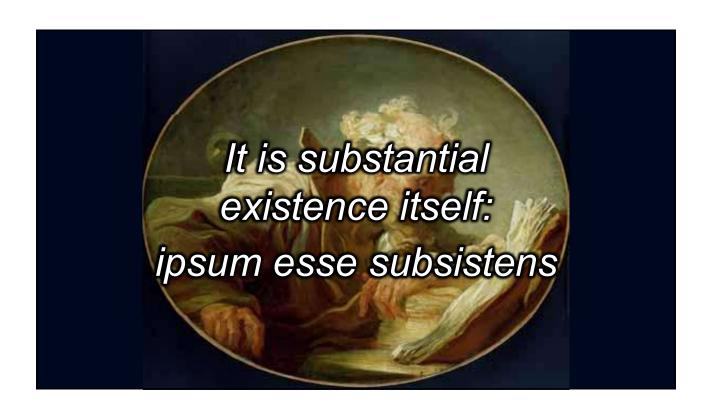
[Summa Theologiae 1, Q, 9, ii]

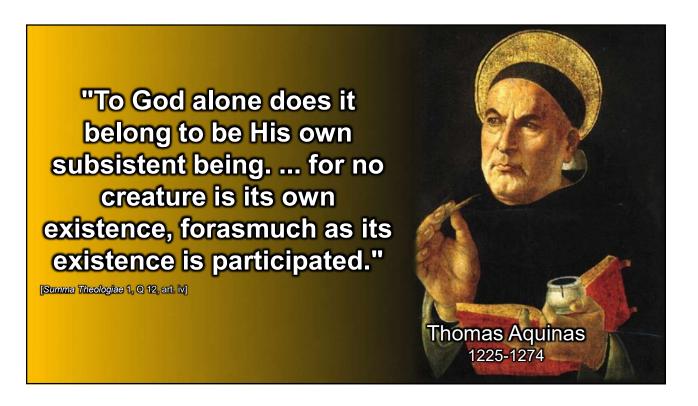


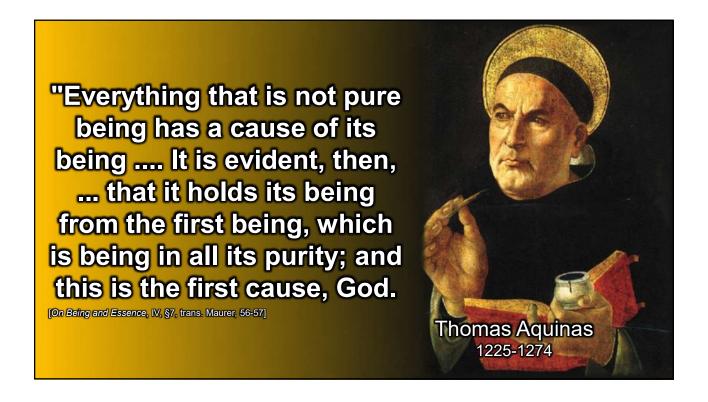


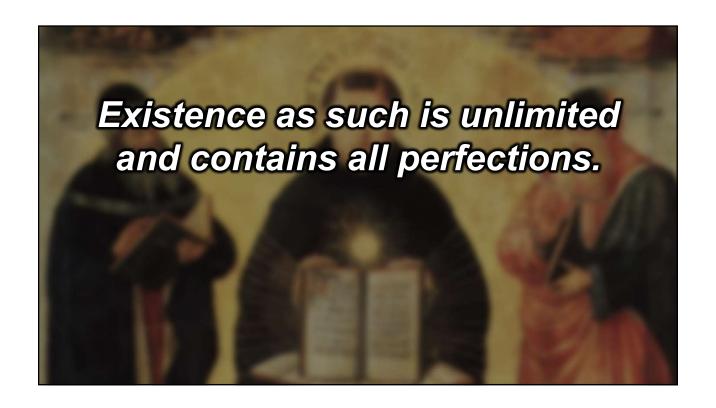




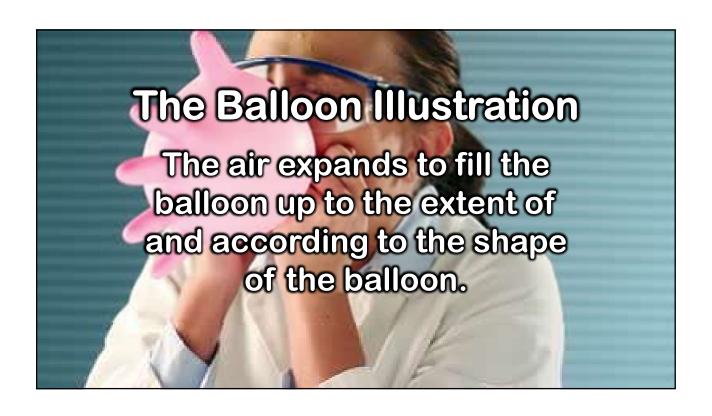








Existence as such is unlimited and contains all perfections.
Existence is limited, if you will, only when conjoined with form or with form and matter.

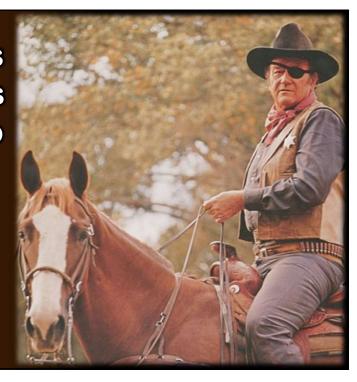


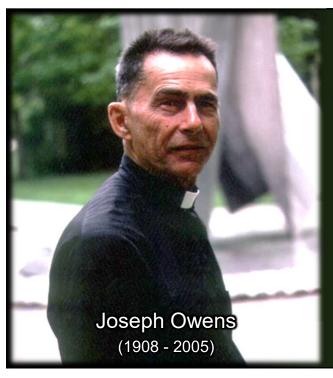
The Balloon Illustration By parallel, the act of existing of a creature "fills up" to the extent of and according to the "shape" of the essence of that creature.

A horse contains all the perfections of existence up to the extent of and according to the limitations of the essence of horse.

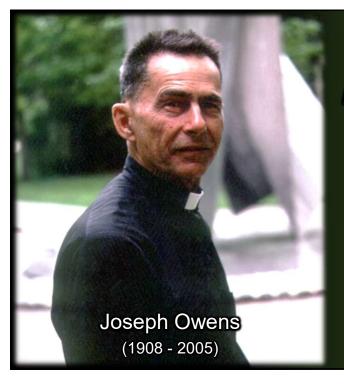


A human contains all the perfections of existence up to the extent of and according to the limitations of the essence of human.

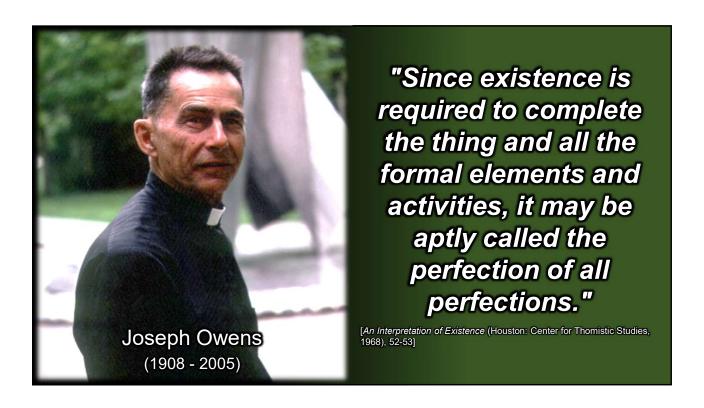




"An alternate word for actuality in this respect is "perfection" (entelecheia). It was used by Aristotle along with actuality to designate the formal elements in the things.



"These perfected the material element in the sense of filling its potentiality and completing the thing.

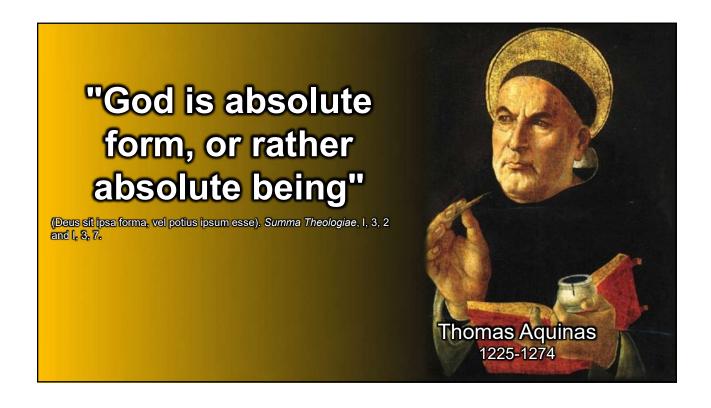


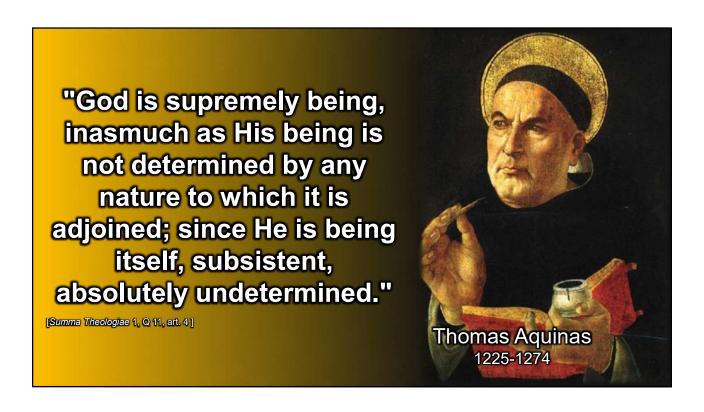


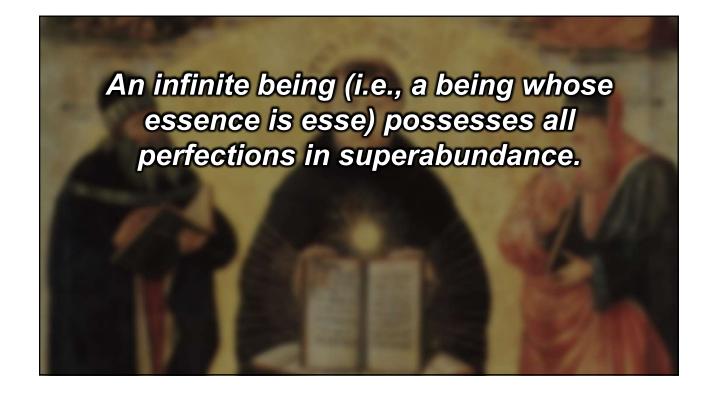
perfection (entelecheia, ἐντελέχεια) to have the end or goal in

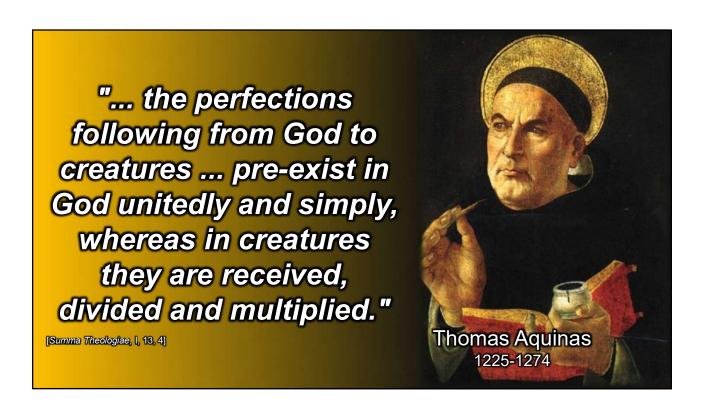
A being whose essence is its existence will have, indeed, will BE, all the perfections of existence without limit.

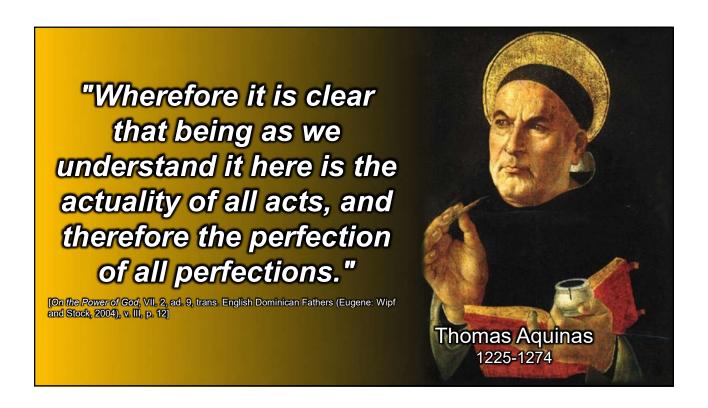
Since in God there is no essence/existence distinction, then all the perfections of being exist in God because God's being is not conjoined with (and, thus, not limited by) form.

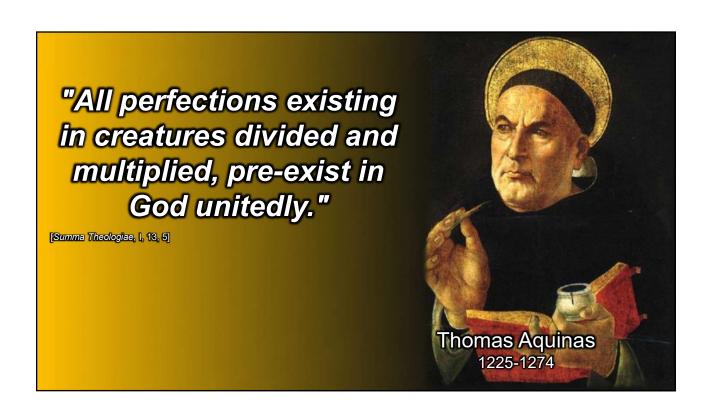


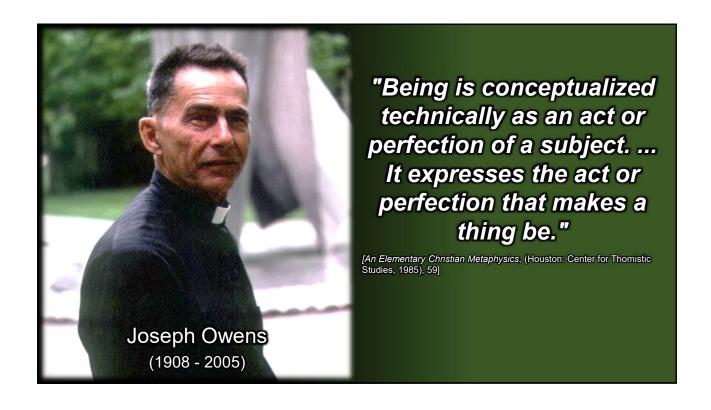


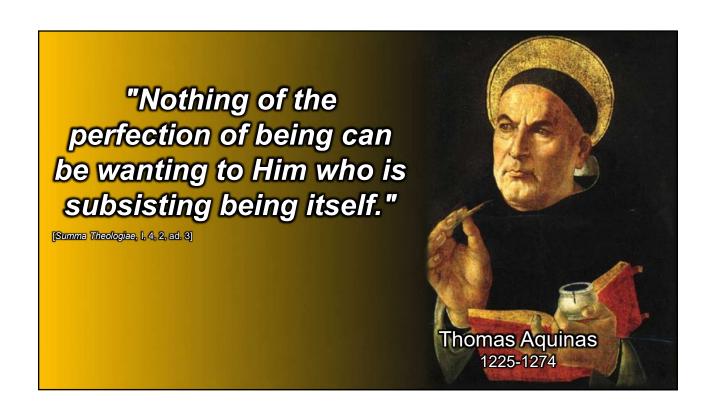


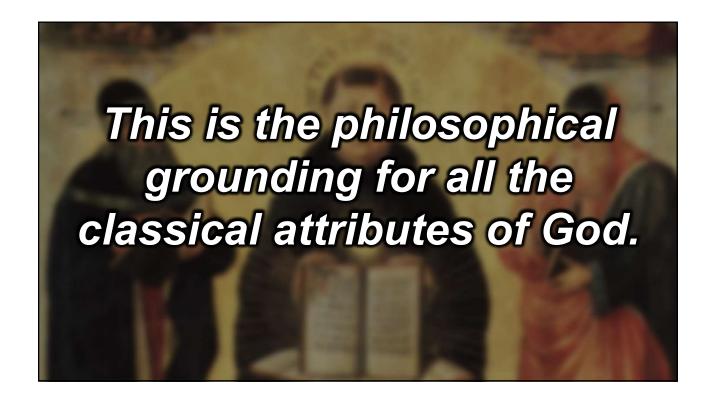




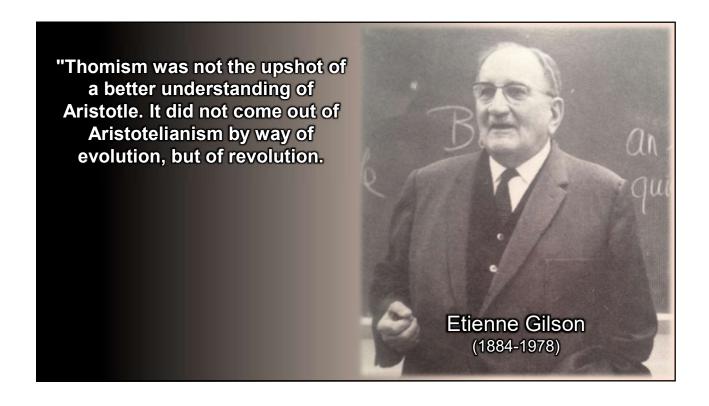


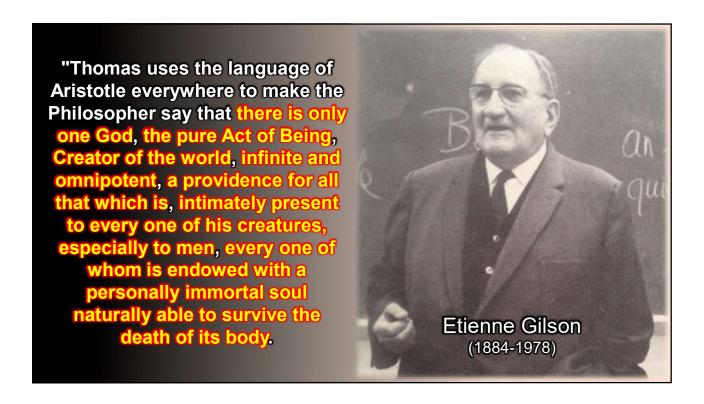


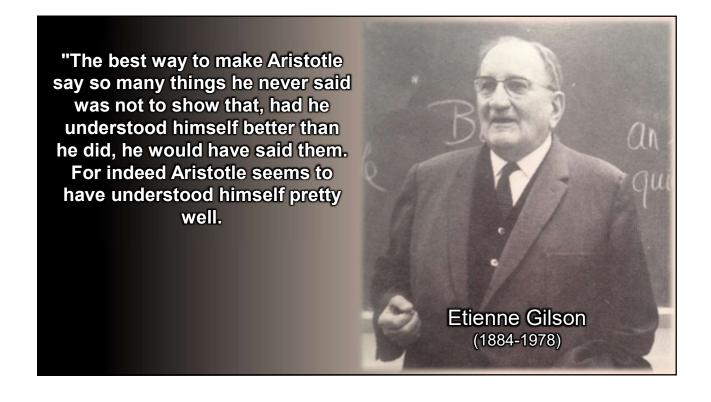




Marrying the metaphysics of Aristotle with the innovations of esse and the essence / existence distinction, Aquinas was able to demonstrate the existence and attributes of a God that Aristotle's philosophy could never foresee.







"He has said what he had to say,
given the meaning which he
himself attributed to the
principles of his own philosophy.
Even the dialectical acumen of
Saint Thomas Aquinas could not
have extracted from the
principles of Aristotle more than
what they could possibly yield.

Etienne Gilson
(1884-1978)

