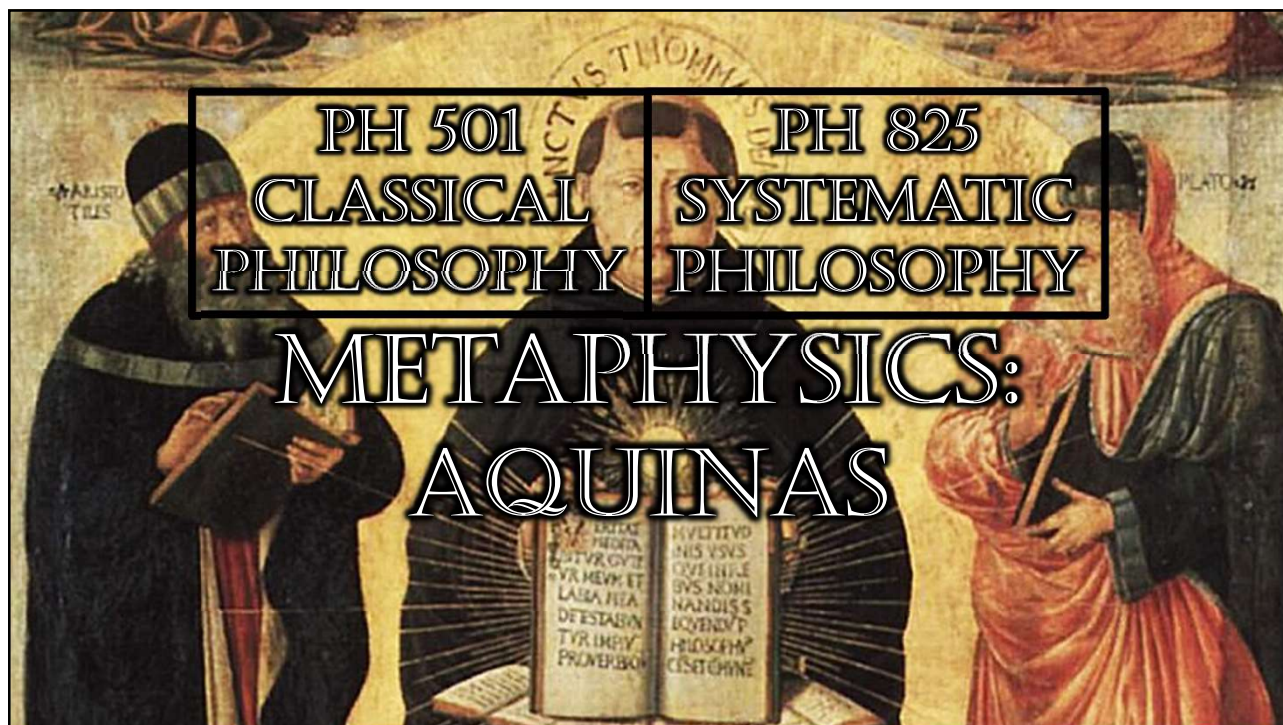
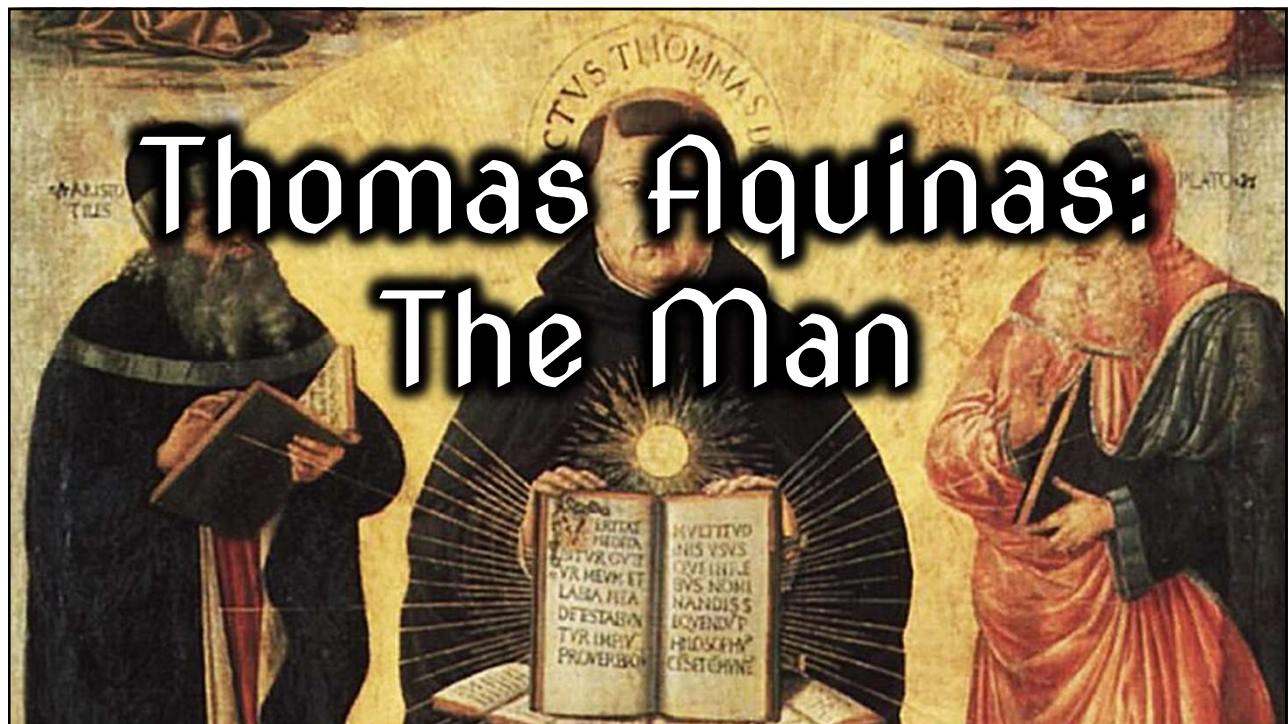
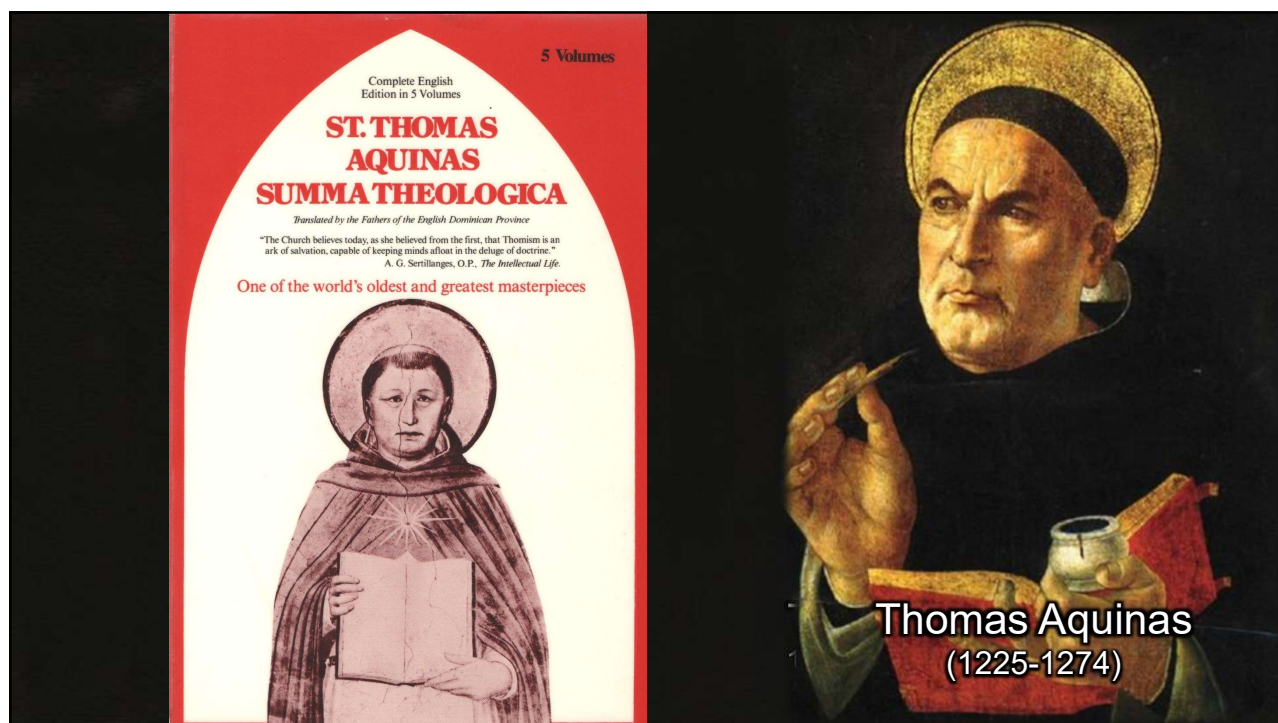








***Thomas Aquinas was a  
13<sup>th</sup> Century Dominican  
theologian.***





## 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*

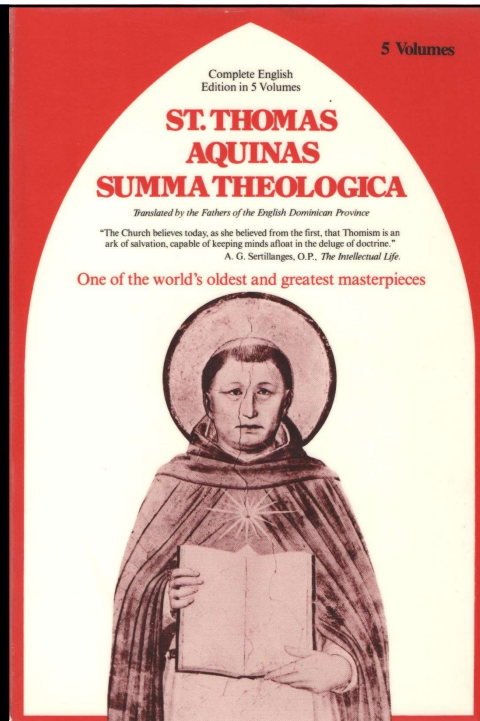


Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

Quodlibetalblog  
"Discussing Aquinas"

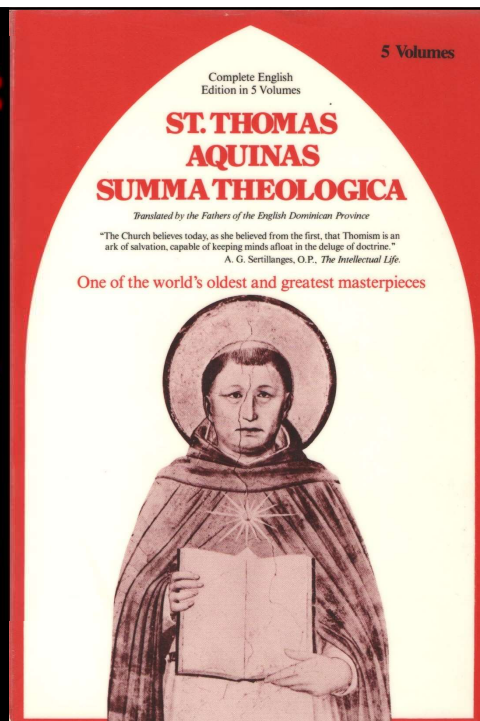


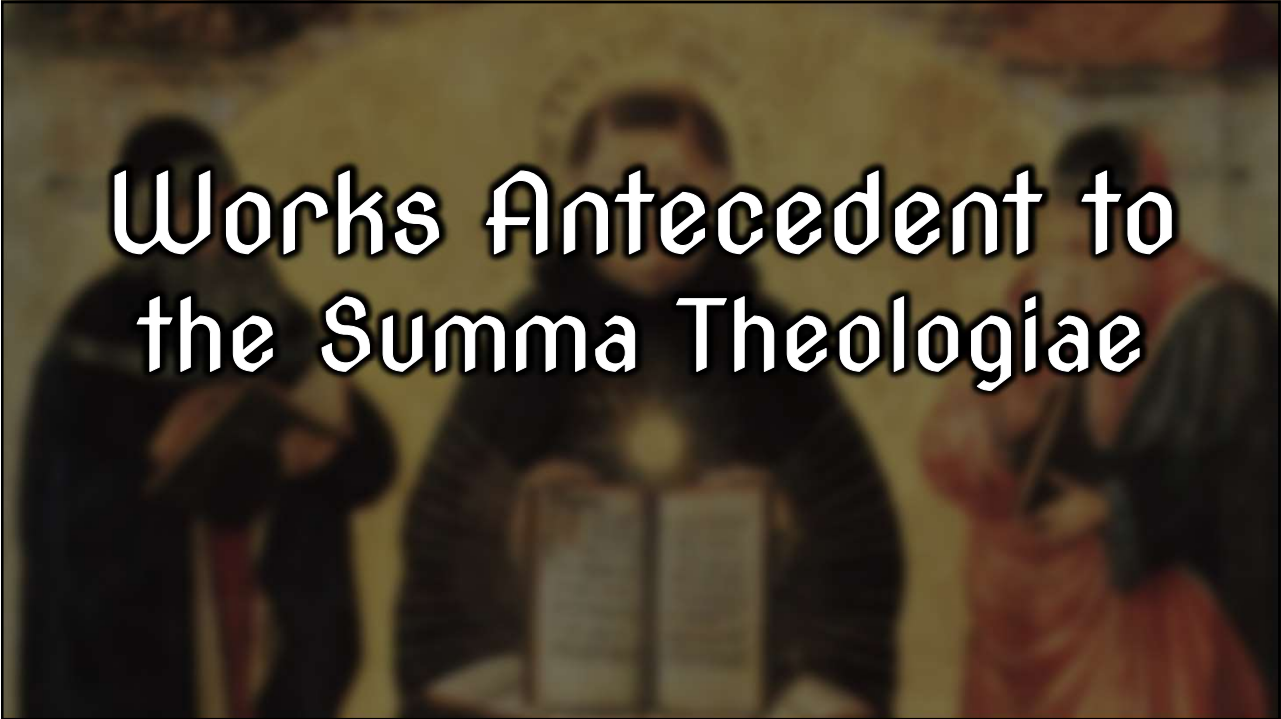
- ❖ Aquinas began writing his *Summa Theologiae* in 1266.
- ❖ Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae* is his most extensive work.
- ❖ It was, however, unfinished.
- ❖ It was written as a Teacher's Guide



- ❖ It was written as an attempt to "set forth whatever is included in this Sacred Science as briefly and clearly as the matter itself may allow ... in such a way as may tend to the instruction of beginners."

[Summa Theologiae, from the Prologue. St. Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologiae: Complete English Edition in Five Volumes, translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981)]





# Works Antecedent to the Summa Theologiae

- ❖ *On Being and Essence*
- ❖ *Writings on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*
- ❖ *Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius*
- ❖ *Exposition on the 'On the Hebdomads' of Boethius*
- ❖ *On the Principles of Nature*
- ❖ *Truth*
- ❖ *Summa Contra Gentiles*
- ❖ *On the Power of God*



## ∞ The Content of the *Summa Theologiae* ∞

First Part: God

Second Part: Man

Third Part: Christ

## ∞ The Content of the *Summa Theologiae* ∞

First Part

*Prima Pars*; I; Ia

119 questions consisting of 584 articles

- ❖ existence and nature of God
- ❖ creation
- ❖ man
- ❖ divine government

## ∞ The Content of the *Summa Theologiae* ∞

First Part of the Second Part

*Prima Secundae*; I-II; Ia-Iae

114 questions consisting of 619 articles

- ❖ morality
- ❖ the habits
- ❖ law

## ∞ The Content of the *Summa Theologiae* ∞

Second Part of the Second Part

*Secunda Secundae*; II-II; Iia-Iiae

189 questions consisting of 917 articles

- ❖ faith
- ❖ prudence and justice
- ❖ fortitude and temperance
- ❖ acts of certain men (prophecy; tongues; contemplative life, etc.)



## ∞ The Content of the *Summa Theologiae* ∞

### Third Part

*Tertia Pars*; III; IIIa

90 questions consisting of 549 articles

- ❖ Christ
- ❖ sacraments (section on penance was unfinished)

*This makes a total of 512 questions with 2,669 articles (not counting the supplement).*

## ∞ The Content of the *Summa Theologiae* ∞

Supplement (written by Rainaldo da Piperno)

Suppl.; Suppl. IIIae

99 questions consisting of 446 articles

- ❖ completion of section on penance
- ❖ confession
- ❖ indulgences
- ❖ marriage
- ❖ eschatology

## ☞ The Content of the *Summa Theologiae* ☞

Appendices 1 and 2 (compiled by Nicolai from Aquinas's *Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*)

❖purgatory

## ☞ The Plan of the *Summa Theologiae* ☞

Question (e.g., The Existence of God)

First Article of the Question (e.g., Whether the Existence of God is Self-Evident)

Objections

first objection

second objection

...

"On the contrary" (usually a quote from an authority)

"I answer that" (unpacking of his own arguments pertaining to the article)

Replies to each of the objections

Next Article of the Question

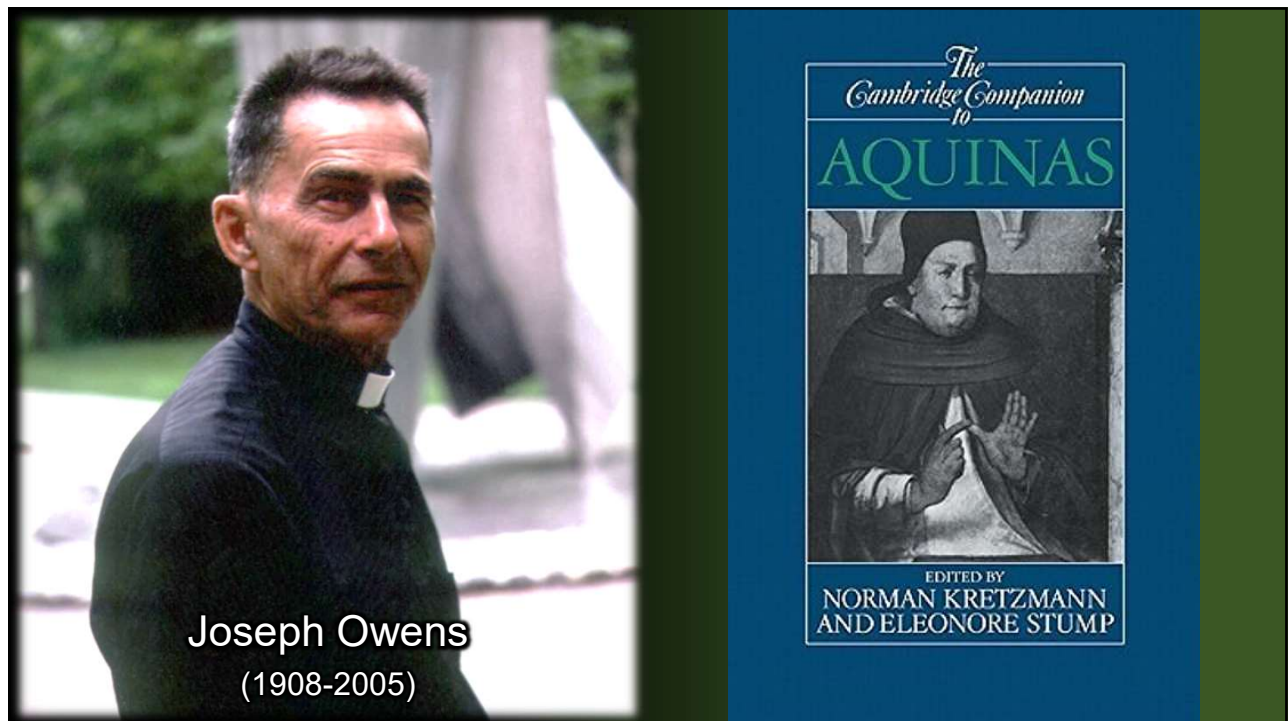
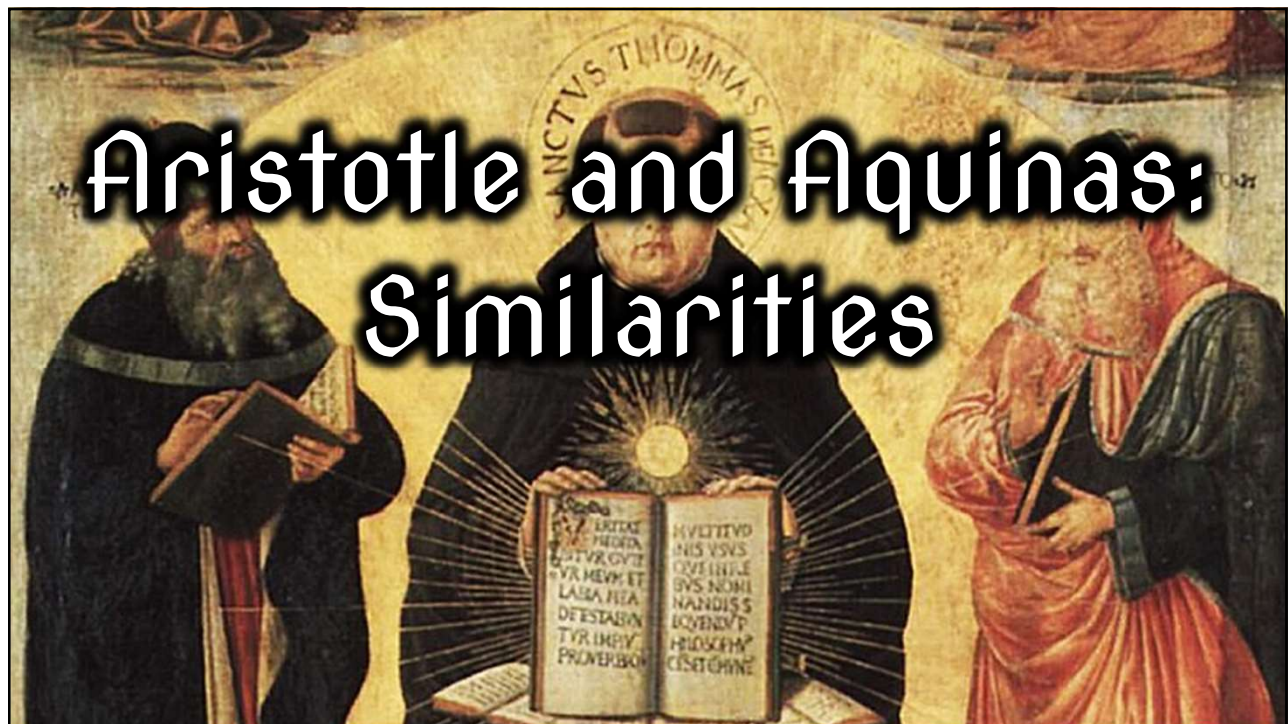
...

[repeat until all the articles for this question are exhausted]

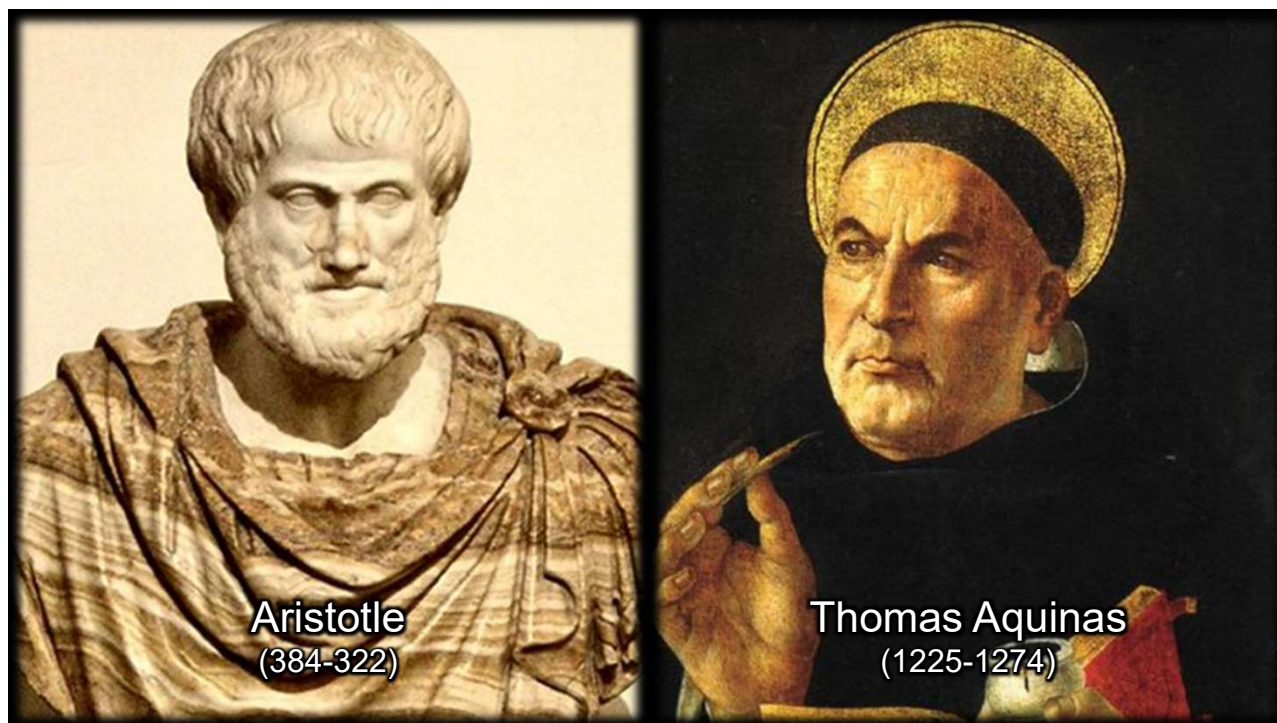
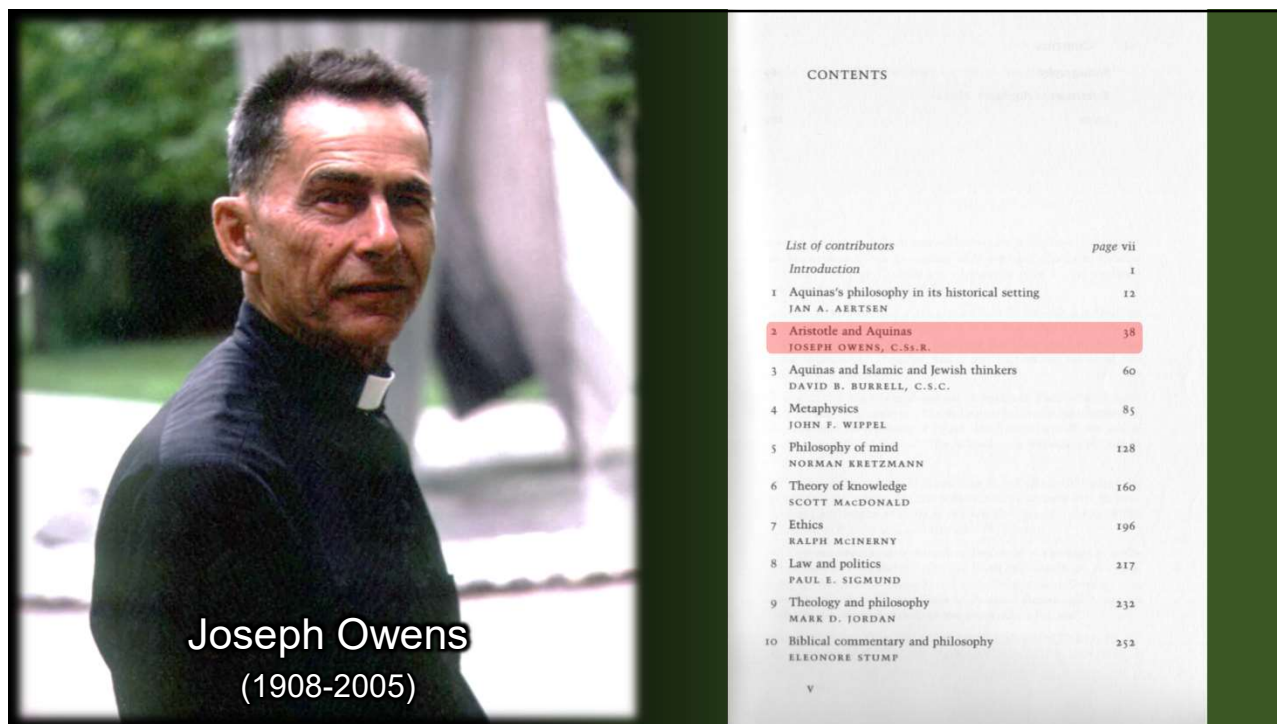
Next Question

...

[repeat until all 614 questions consisting of 3,125 articles questions are exhausted]







## **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

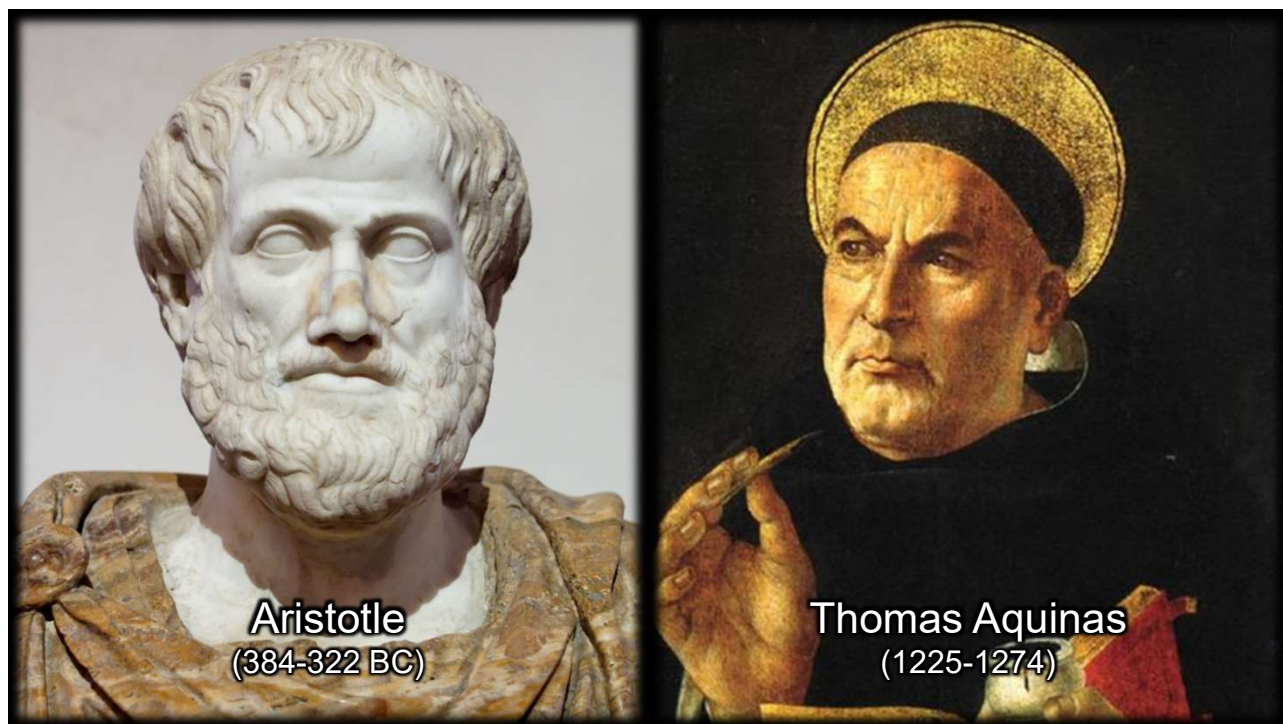
look upon free choice as the source of moral action

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

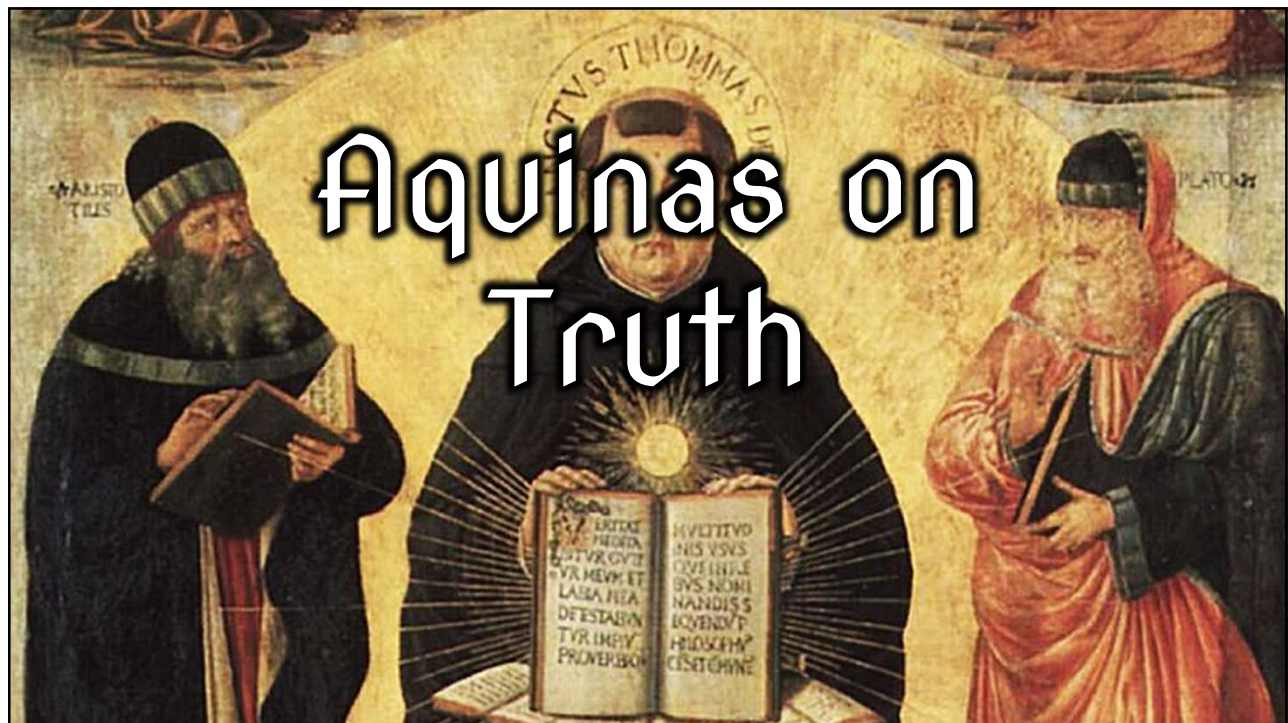
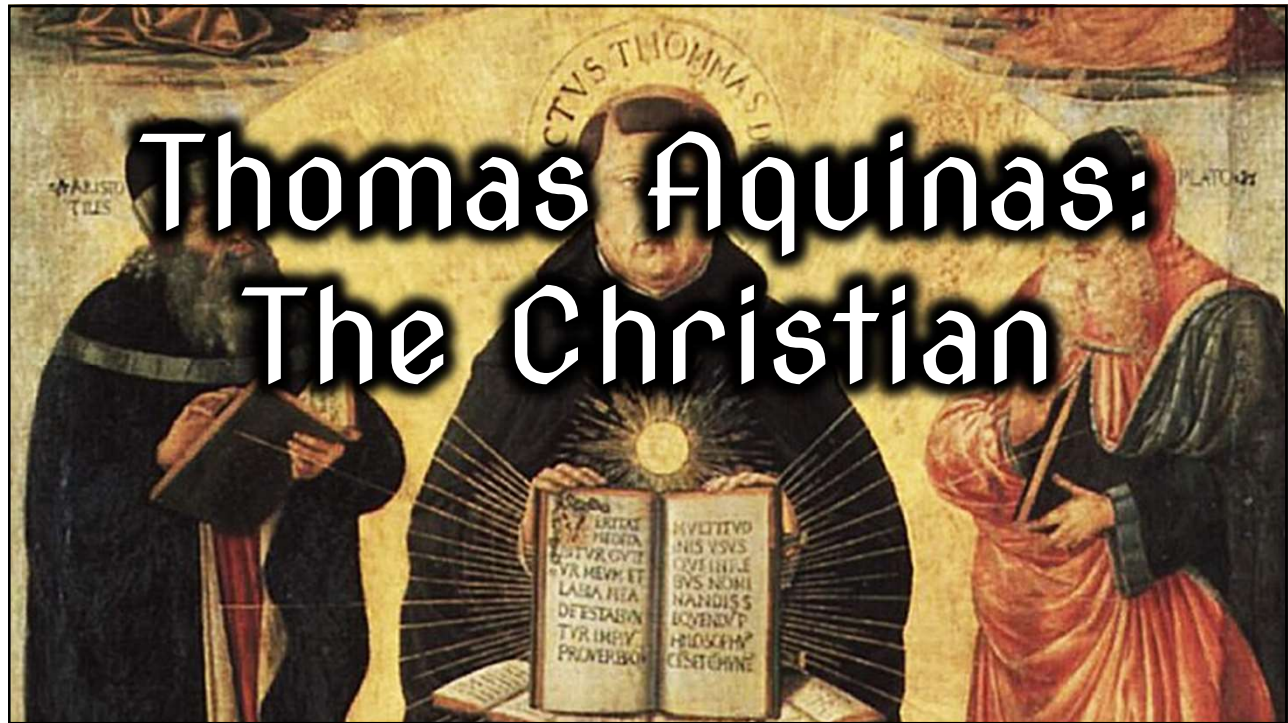






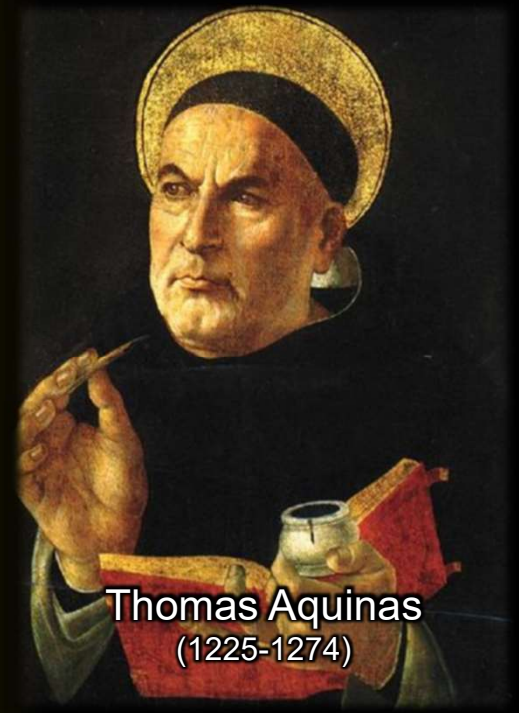
|                                                                                        |                                                                                     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| no metaphysical category of existence as such (only a logical distinction)             | existence is the actuality of all actualities and the perfection of all perfections |
| highest element in metaphysics is Form                                                 | highest element in metaphysics is existence                                         |
| for every being, to be is to be a Form                                                 | existence is distinct from essence in sensible creatures                            |
| existence and essence are known through the same intellectual act                      | existence and essence are known by different intellectual acts                      |
| no connection between ultimate reality in metaphysics and ultimate reality in religion | <b>God is ultimate reality</b>                                                      |





***"The true denotes  
that towards which  
the intellect tends."***

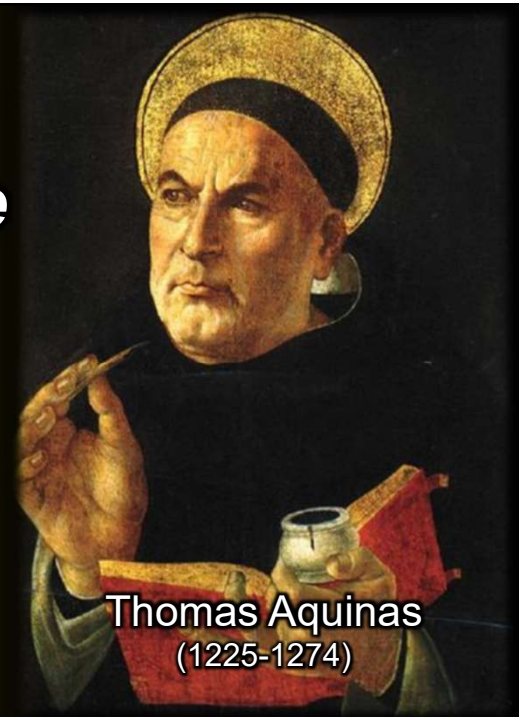
[*Summa Theologiae*, I, 16, 1, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province  
(Westminster: Christian Classics, 1948), 89]



Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

***"Truth is defined by  
the conformity of the  
intellect and thing;  
and hence to know  
this conformity is to  
know truth."***

[*Summa Theologiae*, I, 16, 2, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province  
(Westminster: Christian Classics, 1948), 90-91]

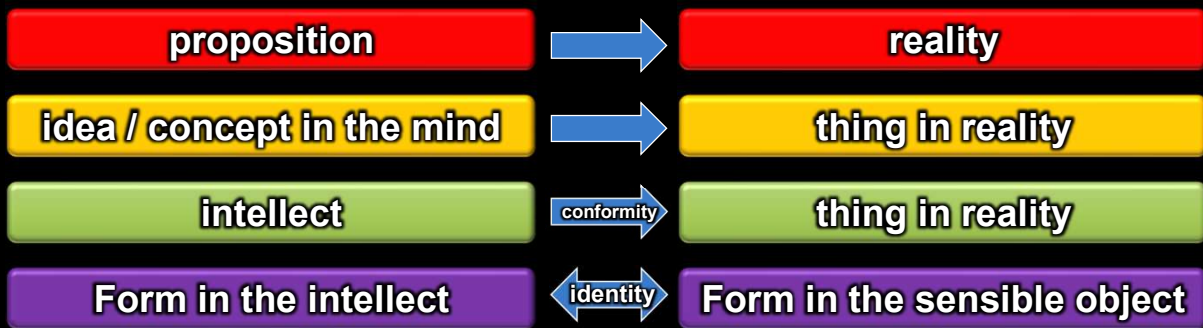


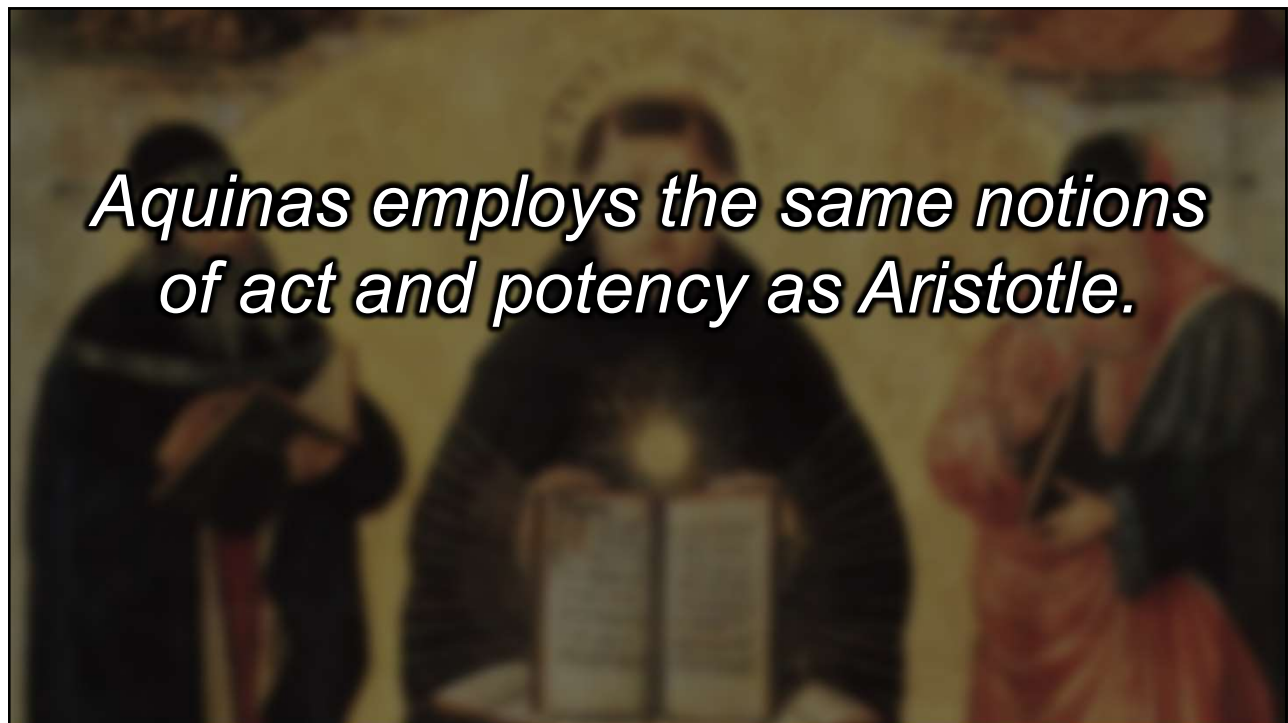
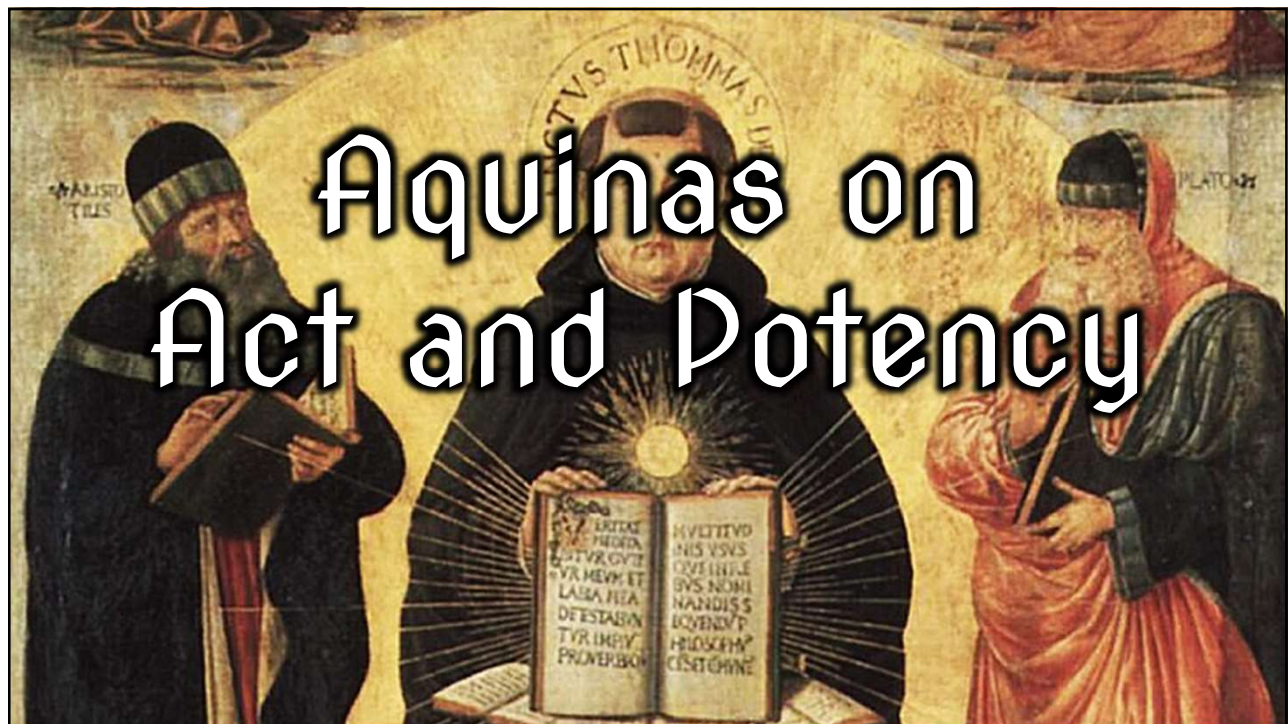
Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)



# Correspondence Theory of Truth

# Correspondence Theory of Truth

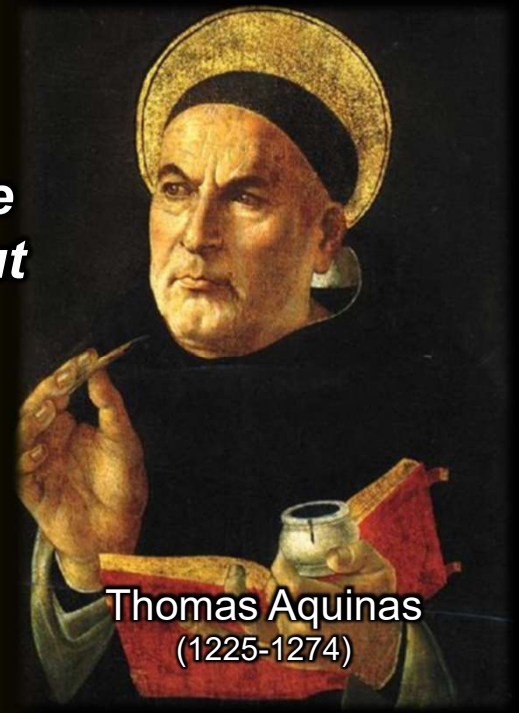






***"By non-existence we understand not simply those things which do not exist, but those which are potential, and not actual."***

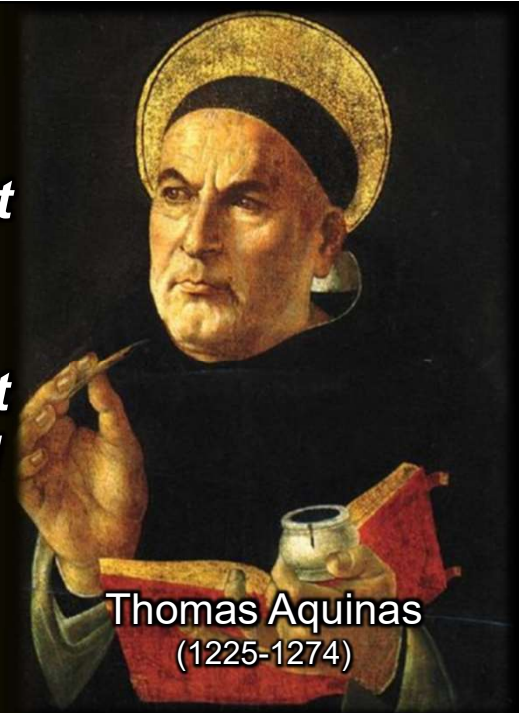
[Summa Theologiae, I, 5, 2]



Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

***"Observe that some things can exist though they do not exist, while other things do exist. That which can be is said to exist in potency; that which already exists is said to be in act."***

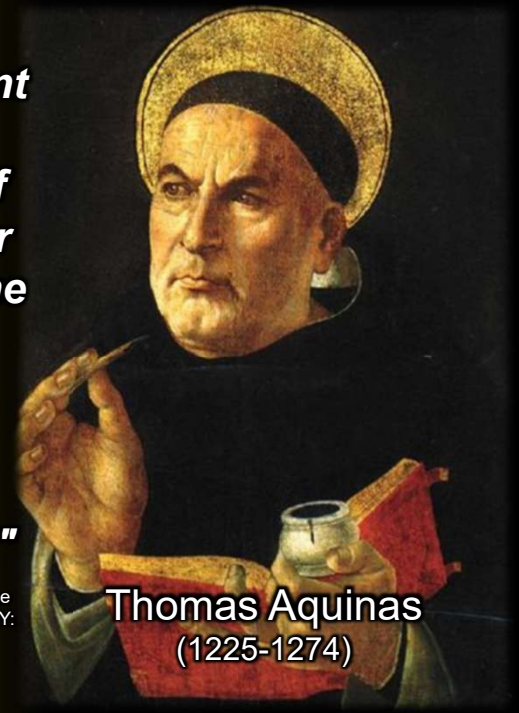
[On the Principles of Nature, trans. Vernon J. Bourke in The Pocket Aquinas (New York: Washington Square Press, 1960), 61]



Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

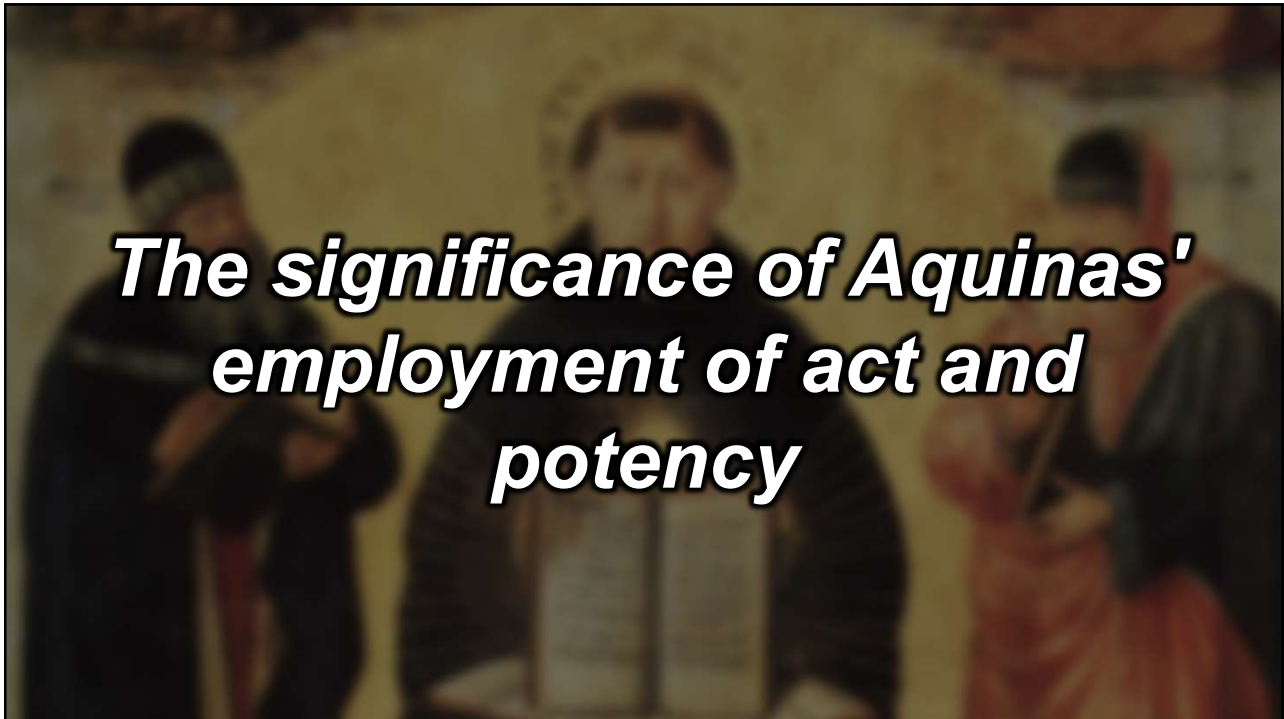
***"Now, from the foregoing it is evident that in created intellectual substances there is composition of act and potentiality. For in whatever thing we find two, one of which is the complement of the other, the proportion of one of them to the other is as the proportion of potentiality to act; for nothing is completed except by its proper act."***

[Summa Contra Gentiles, II, 53, §1-2, trans. James F. Anderson (University of Notre Dame Press Edition) vol. 2, p. 155. Reprint of *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith* (Garden City, NY: Hanover House)]



**Thomas Aquinas**  
(1225-1274)

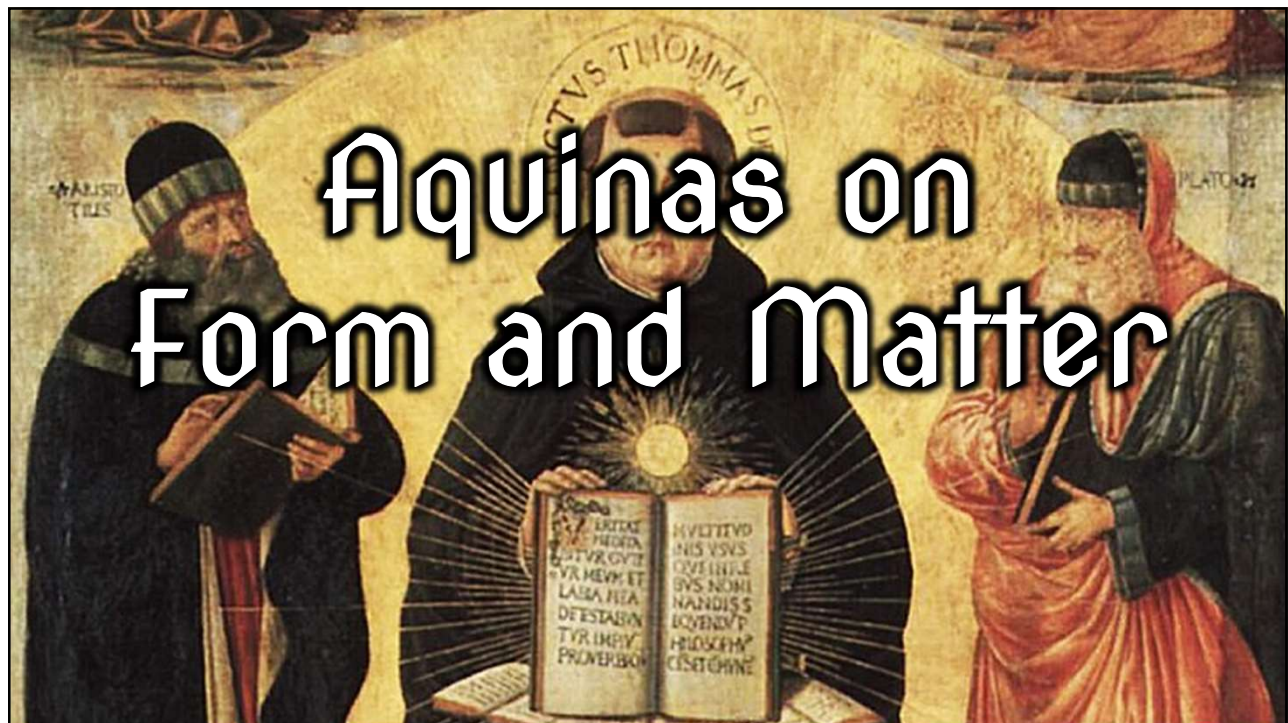
***The significance of Aquinas' employment of act and potency***

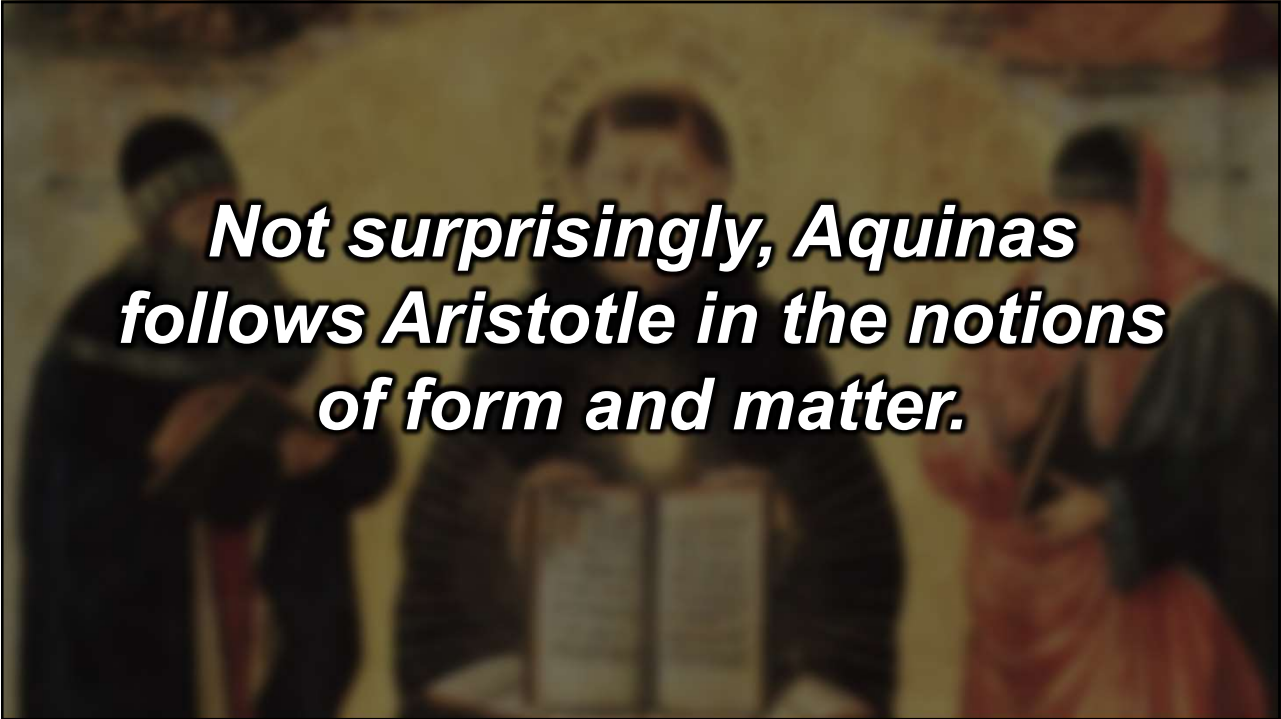




***Sensible things are not be able to ultimately account for the actualization of their own potentialities.***

***The act / potency of sensible things stands in stark contrast to God's nature of being pure actuality.***

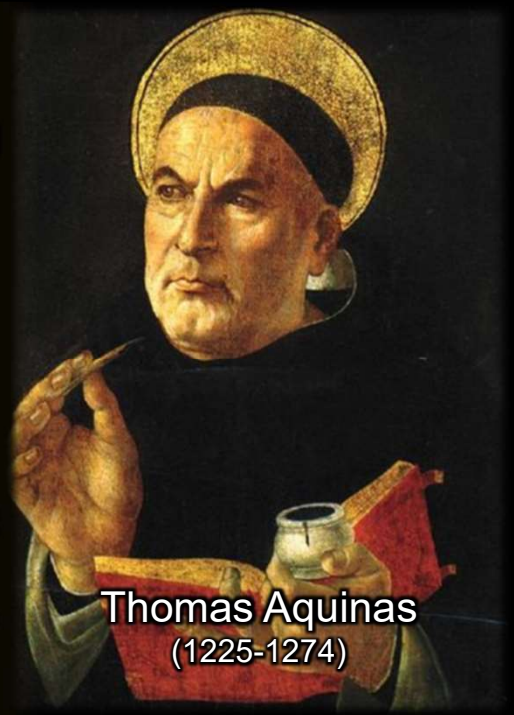




***Not surprisingly, Aquinas follows Aristotle in the notions of form and matter.***

**"Because the definition telling what a thing is signifies that by which a thing is located in its genus or species, philosophers have substituted the term 'quiddity' for the term 'essence.' The Philosopher [i.e., Aristotle] frequently calls this 'what something was to be' [*quod quid erat esse*; τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι (to ti ēn einai)]; that is to say, that which makes a thing to be what it is. It is also called 'form.'"**

[*On Being and Essence*, I, §4, trans. Armand Maurer, 2nd revised ed. [Mediaeval Sources in Translation 1] (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1968), 31]



**Thomas Aquinas**  
(1225-1274)



# "What-ness"

*with respect to a thing's operations:*

*Nature*

*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*

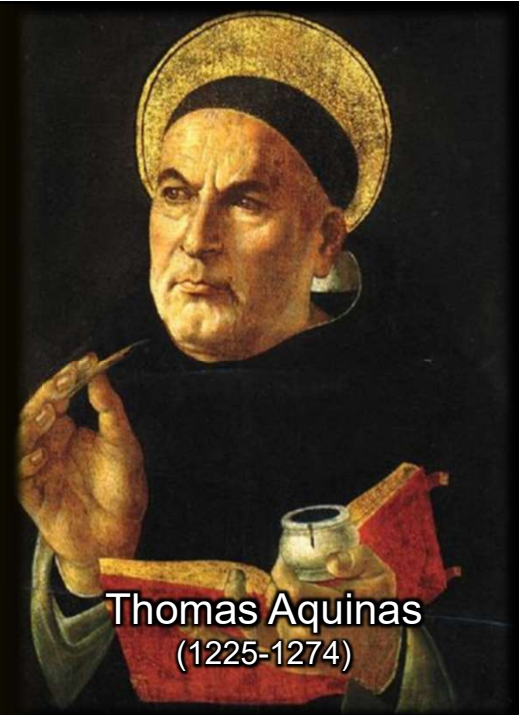
***Matter is not a principle of  
knowing but is a principle of  
individuation.***

***Matter is actualized by Form.***

***Matter and Form together  
(hylomorphism) constitute a  
sensible (i.e., physical) object.***

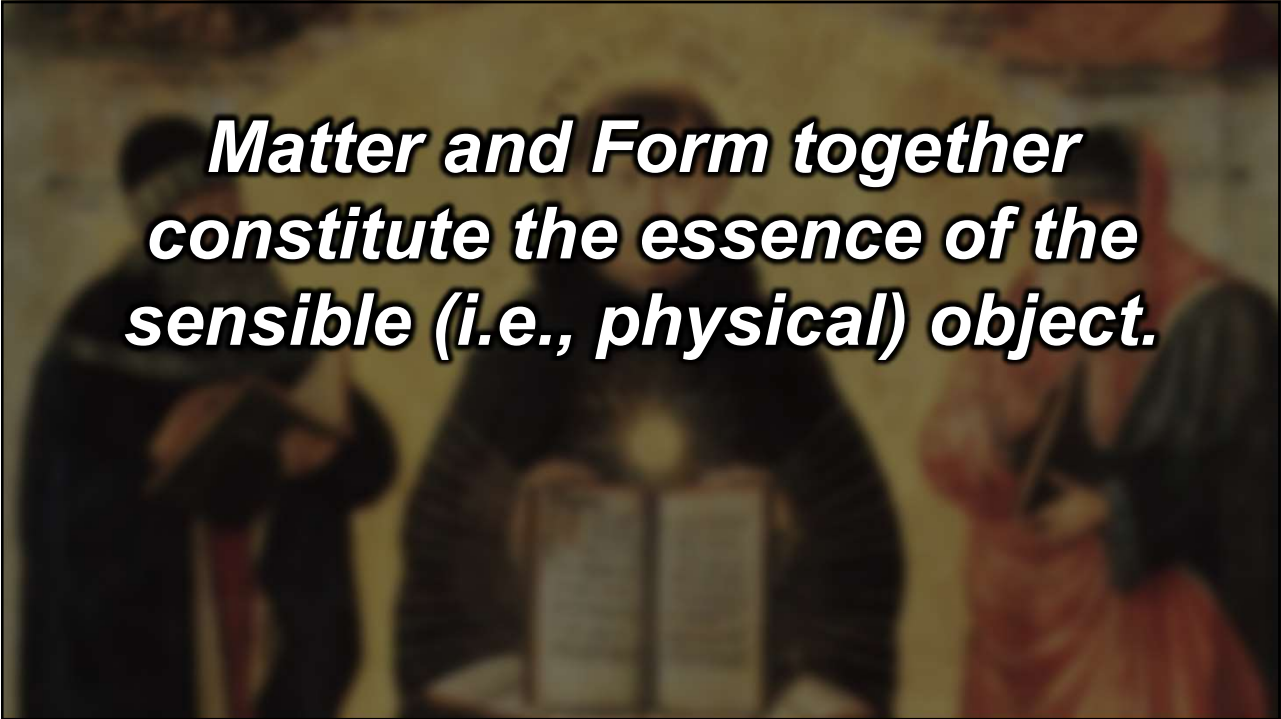
***"Form and matter are  
found in composite  
substances, as for  
example the soul and  
body in man."***

[On Being and Essence, II, §1, trans. Maurer, 34]



**Thomas Aquinas**  
(1225-1274)

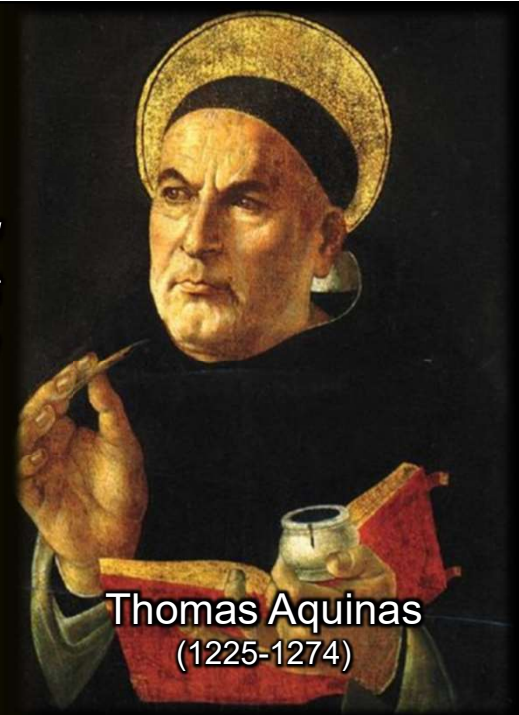




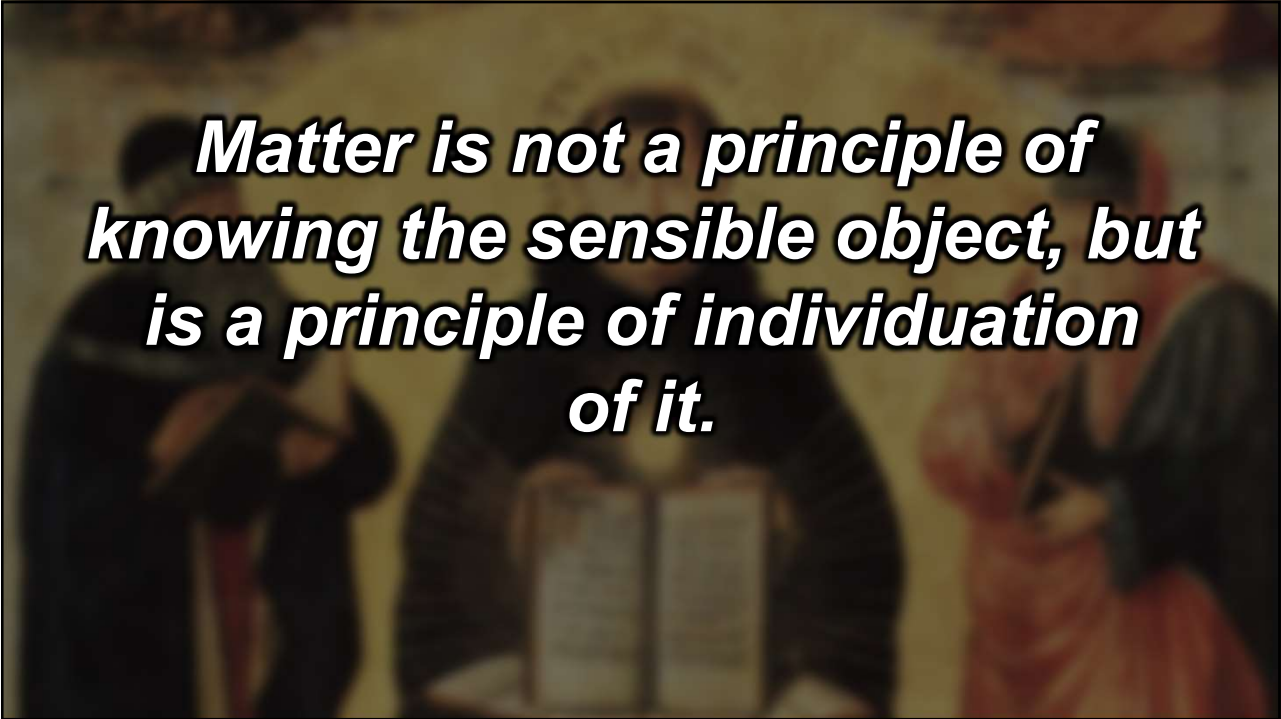
***Matter and Form together  
constitute the essence of the  
sensible (i.e., physical) object.***

***"It is evident, therefore,  
that essence embraces  
both matter and form."***

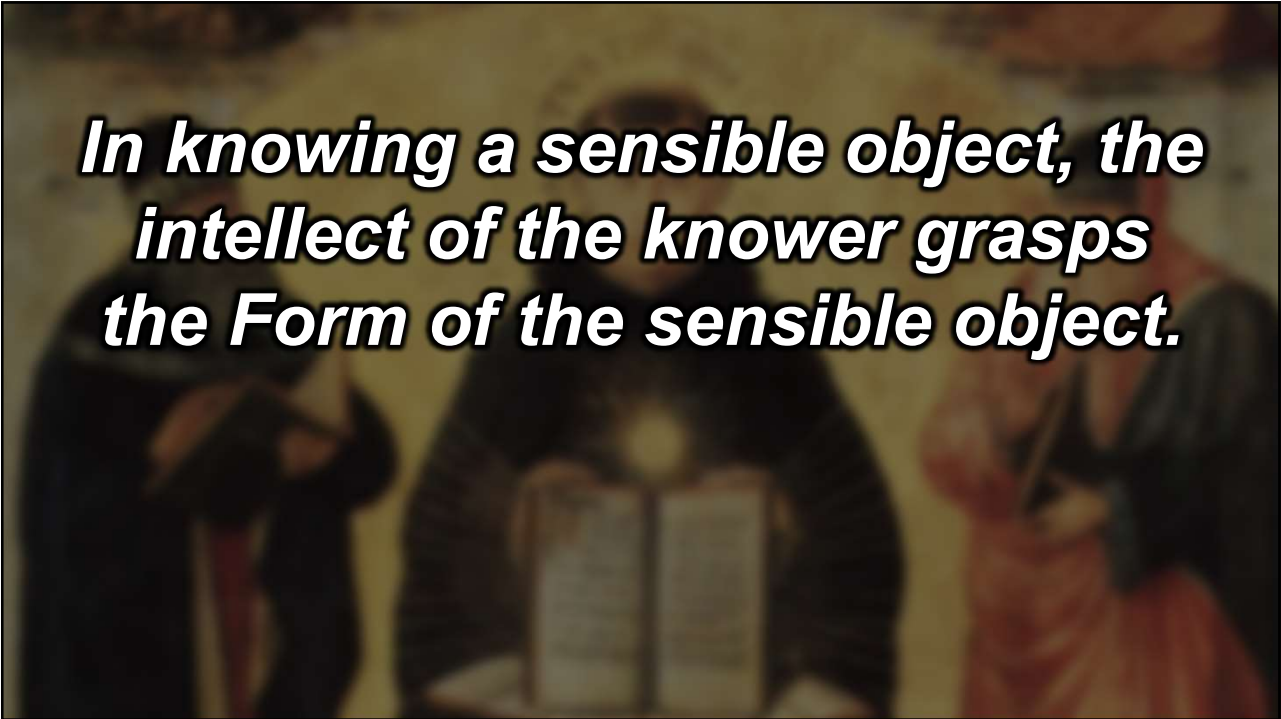
[*On Being and Essence*, II, §1, trans. Maurer, 35]



**Thomas Aquinas**  
(1225-1274)

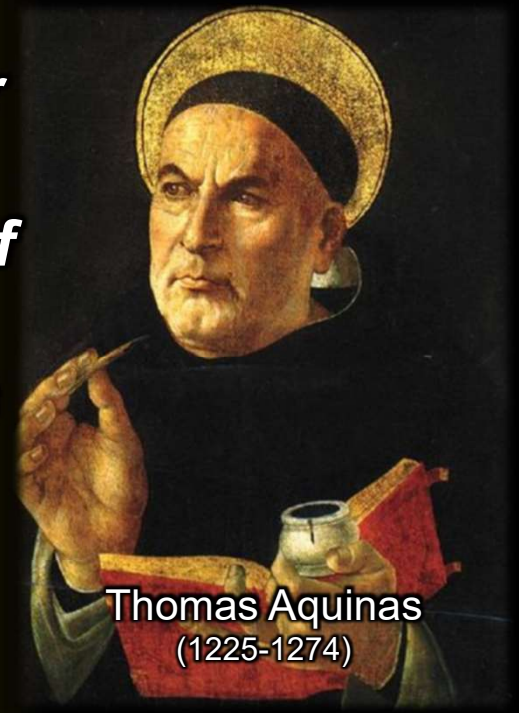


***Matter is not a principle of knowing the sensible object, but is a principle of individuation of it.***



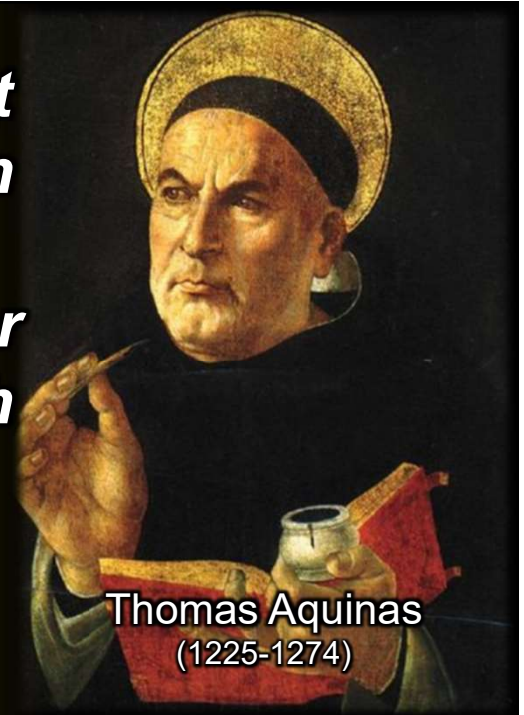
***In knowing a sensible object, the intellect of the knower grasps the Form of the sensible object.***

***"Therefore, the manner of knowing a thing conforms to the state of the knower, which receives the form in its own way."***



Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

***"It is not necessary that the thing known exist in the manner of the knower or in the manner in which the form which is the principle of knowing exists in the knower."***

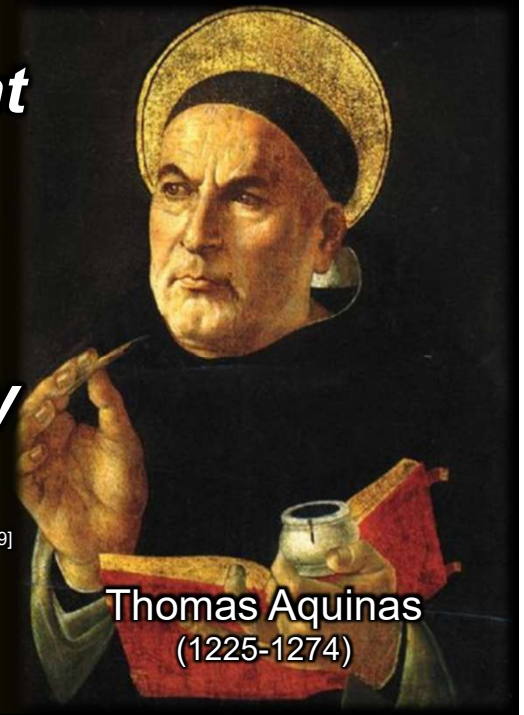


Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)



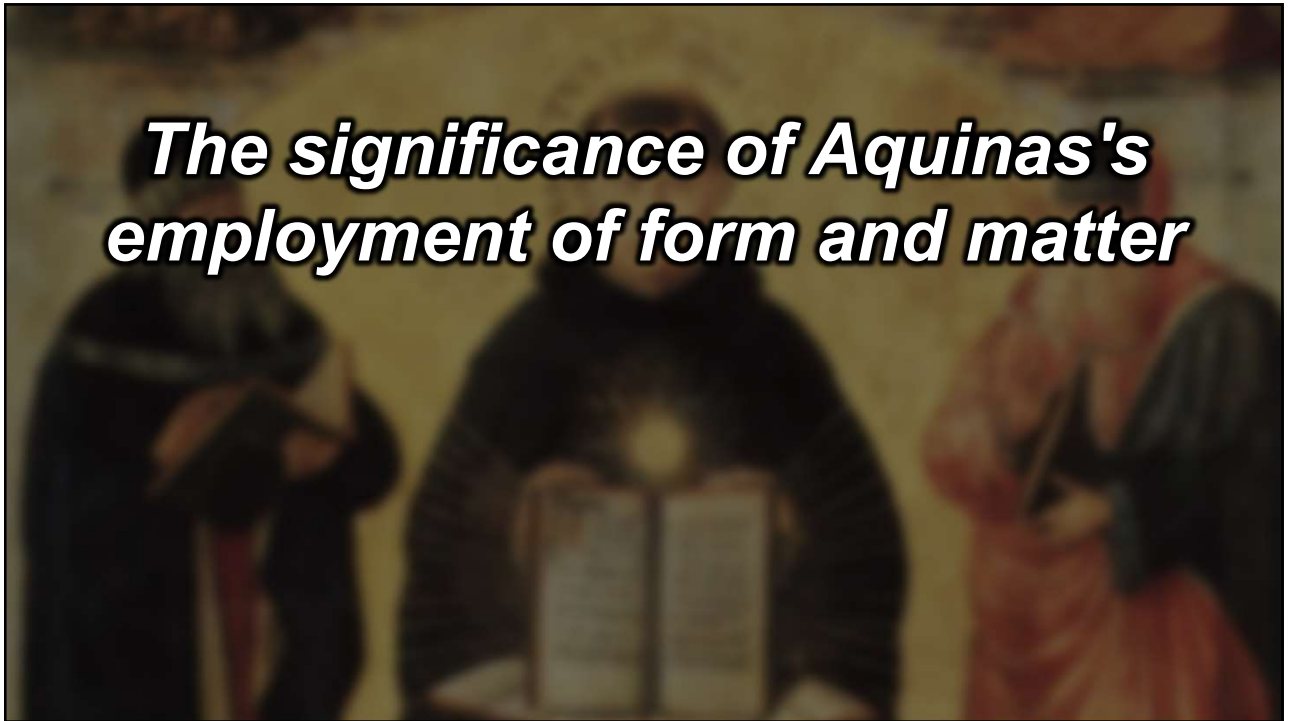
***"From this it follows that  
nothing prevents us  
from knowing material  
things through forms  
which exist immaterially  
in our minds."***

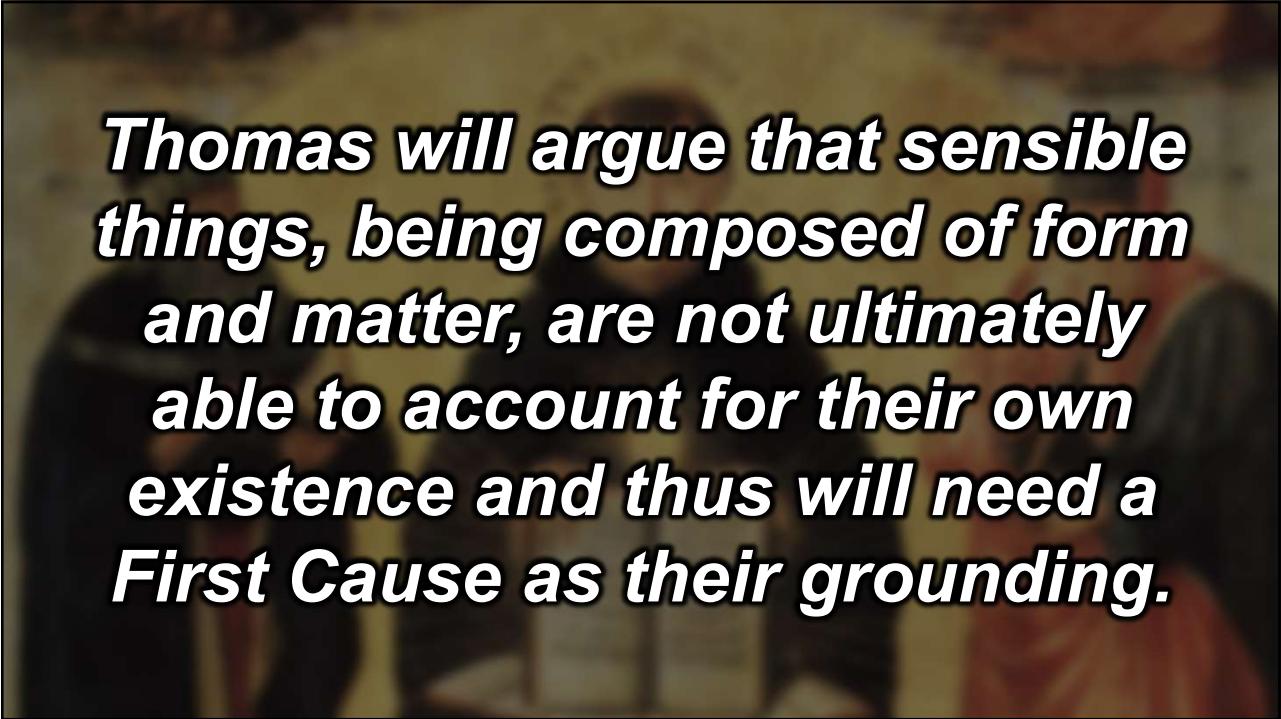
[Truth, QX, A. IV, Reply, trans. James V. McGlynn, vol. 2, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), 19]



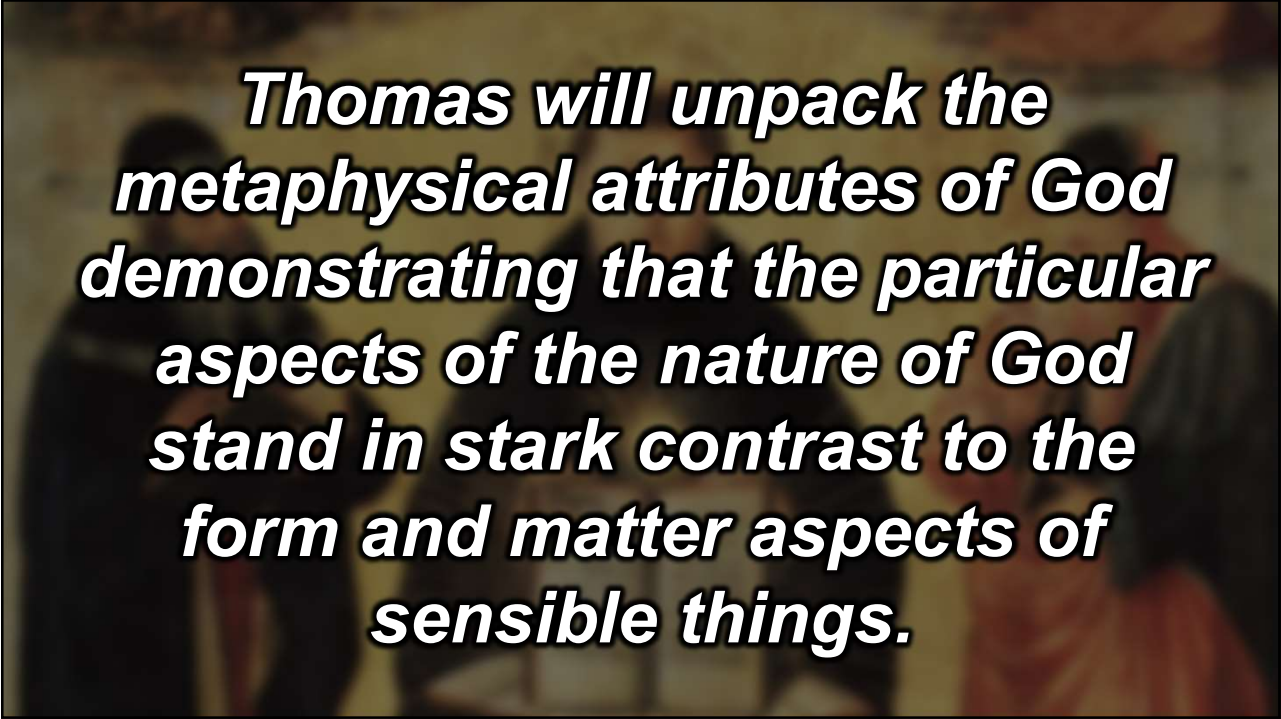
Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

***The significance of Aquinas's  
employment of form and matter***



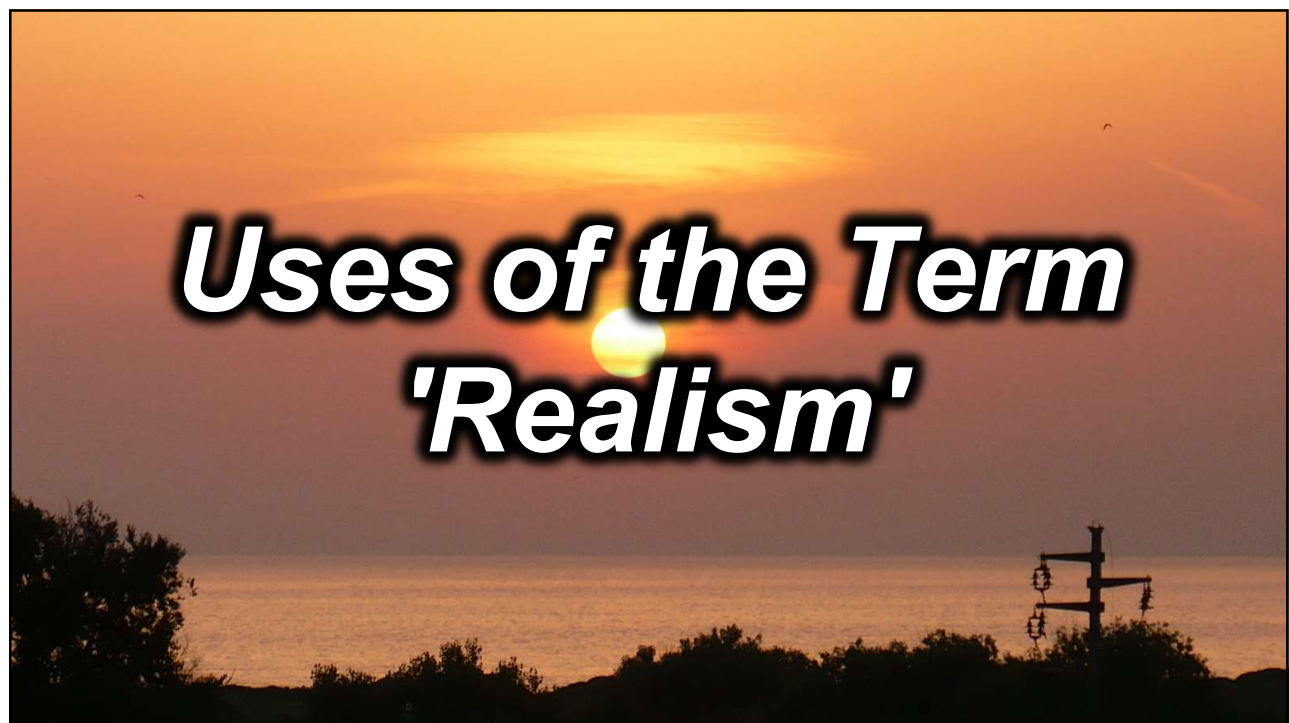
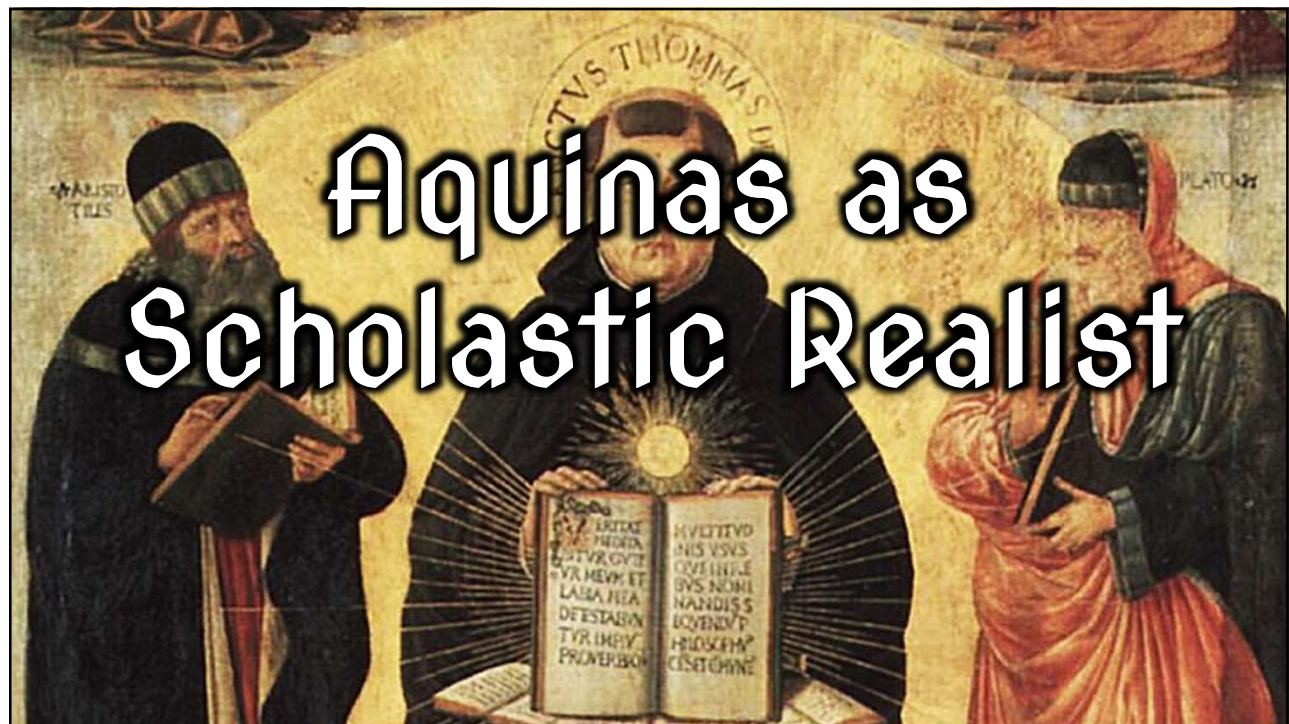


***Thomas will argue that sensible things, being composed of form and matter, are not ultimately able to account for their own existence and thus will need a First Cause as their grounding.***

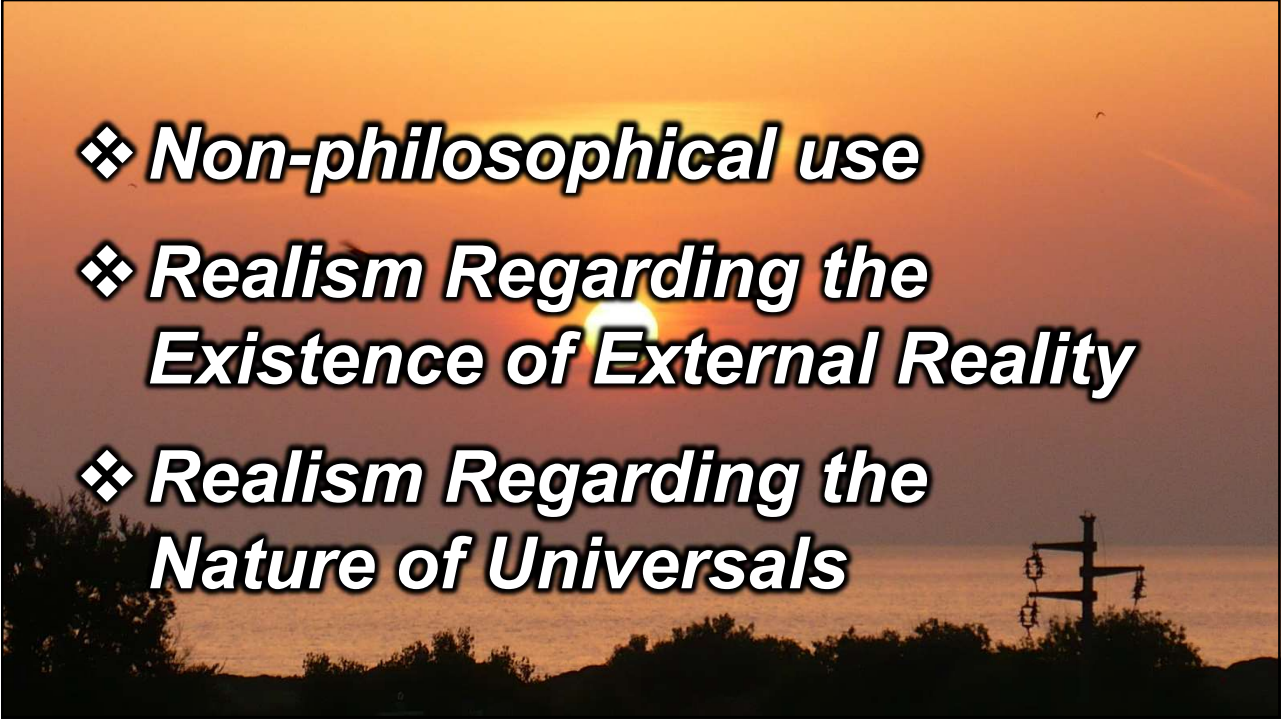


***Thomas will unpack the metaphysical attributes of God demonstrating that the particular aspects of the nature of God stand in stark contrast to the form and matter aspects of sensible things.***



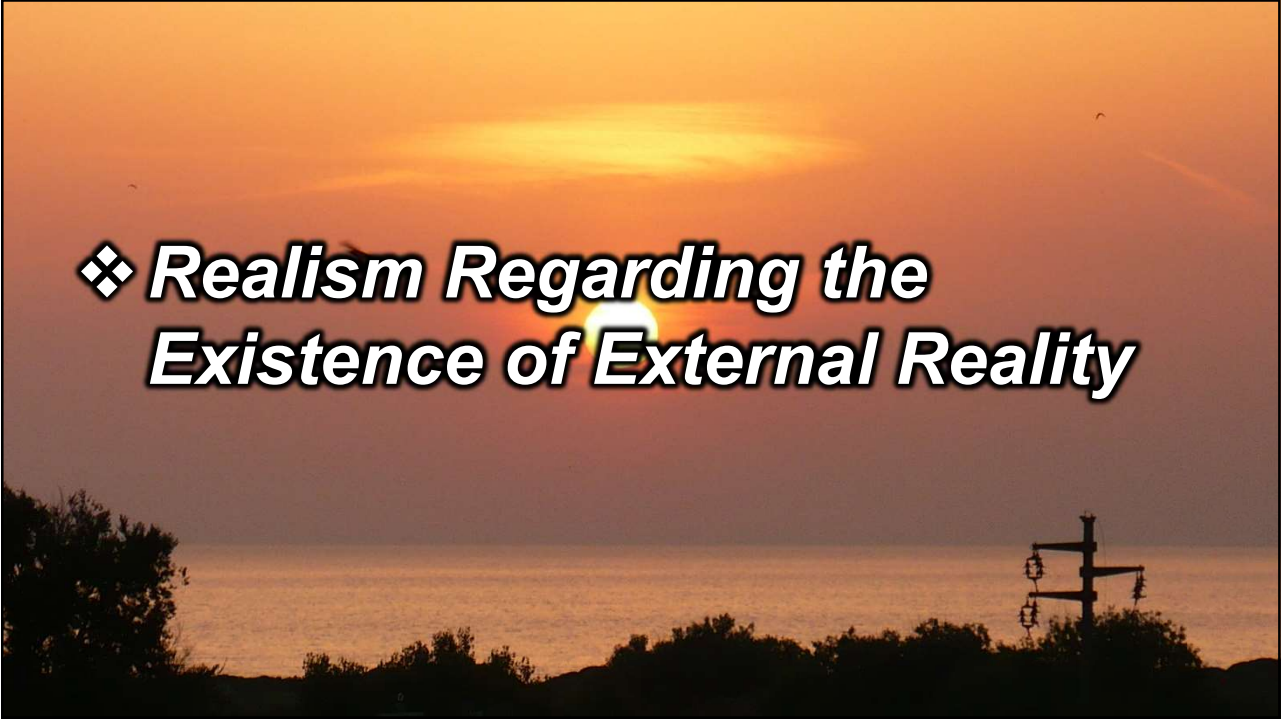




- 
- A sunset scene with a bright orange sky, a low sun, and silhouettes of trees and a utility pole. The text is overlaid on the upper left portion of the image.
- ❖ ***Non-philosophical use***
  - ❖ ***Realism Regarding the Existence of External Reality***
  - ❖ ***Realism Regarding the Nature of Universals***

- 
- A sunset scene with a bright orange sky, a low sun, and silhouettes of trees and a utility pole. The text is overlaid on the upper left portion of the image.
- ❖ ***Non-philosophical use***

**A realist in the non-philosophical sense of the term is one who approaches an issue with common sense, usually devoid of sentimentality and naiveté.**



**❖ *Realism Regarding the Existence of External Reality***

***Here realism maintains that there is a material reality external to us as knowers and that this material external reality exists whether we are perceiving it or not.***

***This notion of realism is contrasted with Idealism. Idealism (George Berkeley) maintains that there is no external material reality.***



***Any view of knowing that maintains that there is a reality external to us as knowers is a form of realism.***

***Thus, John Locke is a realist even though Locke's view on how we know external reality is quite different from Plato's, Aristotle's and Aquinas's views.***



❖ ***Realism Regarding the Nature of Universals***

***Here realism maintains that universals (e.g., human-ness) are real entities that have existence apart from particulars. (Plato)***

***This notion of realism is contrasted with anti-realism like conceptualism (William of Ockham) or nominalism (David Hume).***







# ***Realism and Teleology***



## REALISM: UNIVERSALS

Realism regarding universals holds that universals are real and irreducible to particulars

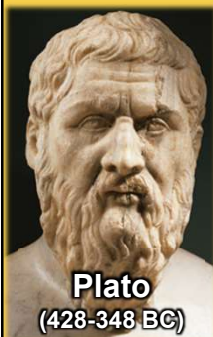
## REALISM: TELEOLOGY

Realism regarding teleology (Teleological Realism) holds that teleology is a real and irreducible feature of the natural world.

## REALISM: UNIVERSALS

Realism regarding universals holds that universals are real and irreducible to particulars

### Extreme Realism



Plato  
(428-348 BC)

Universals are the only things that are fully real. Particulars are merely "shadows" of their exemplars.

## REALISM: TELEOLOGY

Realism regarding teleology (Teleological Realism) holds that teleology is a real and irreducible feature of the natural world.

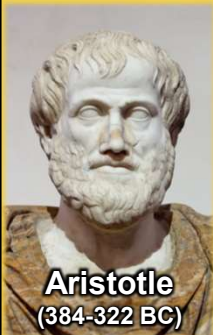
### Platonic Teleological Realism

Teleology is irreducible but is entirely derived from an outside (extrinsic) source, as, for example, a divine mind like Plato's demiurge.

## REALISM: UNIVERSALS

Realism regarding universals holds that universals are real and irreducible to particulars

### Moderate Realism



**Aristotle**  
(384-322 BC)

Universals are real but only exist (as universals) in intellects. They come to exist in the intellect by way of abstraction from something metaphysically real in the particulars (i.e., the Form). Thus, the Form "tree" exists as a universal in the intellect of the knower and as a particular in the tree. The Form is individuated by its Matter.

## REALISM: TELEOLOGY

Realism regarding teleology (Teleological Realism) holds that teleology is a real and irreducible feature of the natural world.

### Aristotelian Teleological Realism

Teleology is intrinsic to (immanent within) natural substances and does not derive from any divine source. This is not in conflict with Aristotle's Unmoved Mover. While the Unmoved Mover is the telos toward which all motion is directed, it is not the cause of the existence of the natural substances with their teleologies, in as much as the Unmoved Mover (or Movers) is not at all an efficient cause of the universe.

## REALISM: UNIVERSALS

Realism regarding universals holds that universals are real and irreducible to particulars

### Scholastic Realism



**Aquinas**  
(1225-1274)

Scholastic Realism is the same as Moderate Realism in that the universals can come to exist in the intellects of humans (by abstraction).

Scholastic Realism differs from Moderate Realism in that the universals also exist eternally in the mind of God as their Creator.

## REALISM: TELEOLOGY

Realism regarding teleology (Teleological Realism) holds that teleology is a real and irreducible feature of the natural world.

### Scholastic Teleological Realism

Teleology is intrinsic to (immanent within) natural substances. In this it is the same as Aristotelian Teleological Realism. However, the existence of final causes (teleology) must ultimately be explained in terms of a divine intellect. In this it differs from both Platonic and Aristotelian Teleological Realism. Like Platonic Teleological realism (but unlike Aristotelian Teleological Realism) it sees the divine mind as relevant to teleology. Like Aristotelian Teleological Realism (but unlike Platonic Teleological Realism) it sees teleology as intrinsic to (immanent within) natural substances.



## REALISM: UNIVERSALS



Note that many (if not most) textbooks do not make this distinction and, thus, would call the Realism of the Scholastics Moderate Realism (either because they do not notice the distinction or do not regard it as warranting a separate label).

## REALISM: TELEOLOGY

The key here is this: "The difference from the Platonic approach is that the Scholastic view does not take the existence of a divine ordering intelligence to follow directly from the existence of teleology in nature. An intermediate step in argumentation is required, for the link between teleology and an ordering intelligence is (with a nod to Aristotle) not taken to be obvious." [Feser, Teleology, 148]

| REALISM: UNIVERSALS                                                                                              | REALISM: TELEOLOGY                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  <p>Aquinas<br/>(1225-1274)</p> | <p>For Feser, the problem with ID is that it skips this intermediate step, thus rendering the argument (either explicitly or by implication) non-Thomistic in as much as it fails to factor in that the teleology arises primarily from the form (i.e., it is intrinsic to or immanent within the substance) while ultimately from God as the Creator of the form. The reason that this is a problem is because certain of the main proponents of ID claim to be Thomistic.</p> |

| ANTI-REALISM: UNIVERSALS                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | ANTI-REALISM: TELEOLOGY                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Universals are either reducible to particulars or are unreal altogether.</p> <p><b>Conceptualism</b></p>  <p>Ockham<br/>(1280-1349)</p> <p>Universals are nothing but concepts in the minds of intellects and have no real grounding in the particulars. It should be noted that some text books label Ockham as a nominalist and would put Hume (below) entirely outside the discussion of universals as a philosophical skeptic.</p> | <p>Teleology is either reducible to non-teleological phenomena or is unreal altogether.</p> <p><b>Teleological Reductivism</b></p> <p>Admits teleology in some sense, but says it can be reduced to non-teleological phenomena.</p> |



## ANTI-REALISM: UNIVERSALS

Universals are either reducible to particulars  
or are unreal altogether.

### Nominalism



Hume  
(1711-1776)

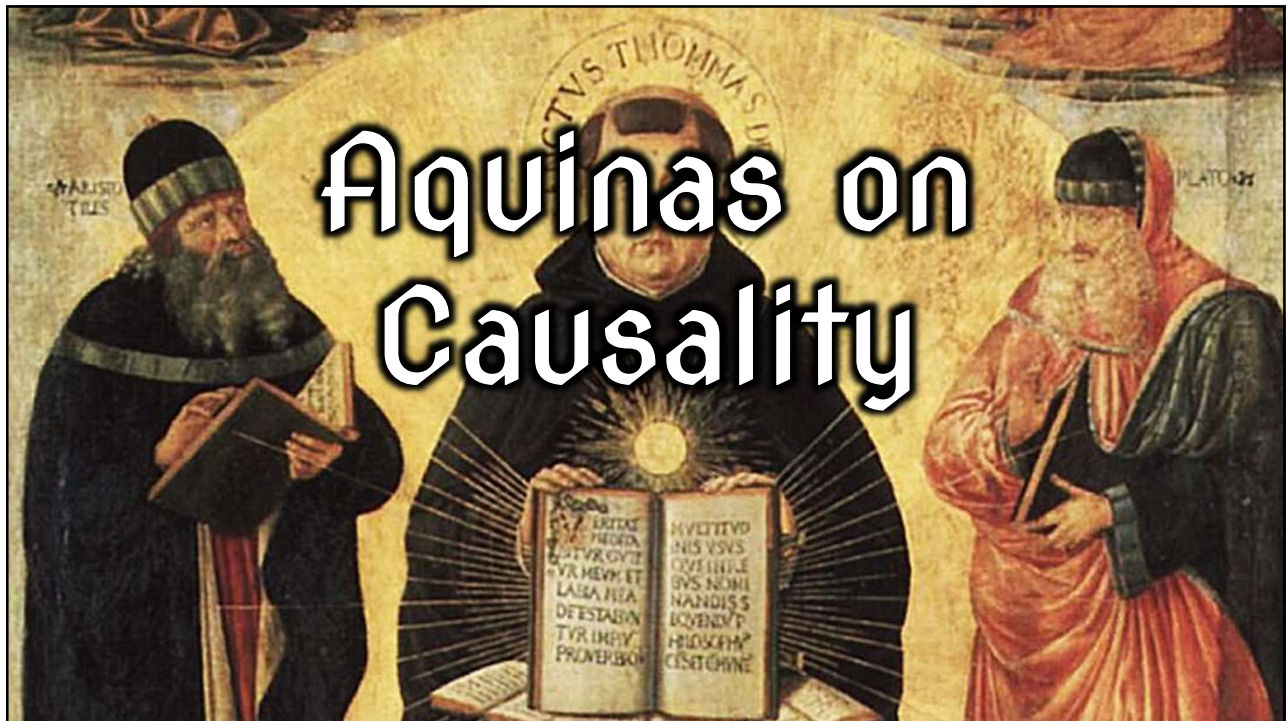
There is no reality to  
universals. Instead, what are  
referred to as  
universals are only names or  
labels given to certain things  
or properties.

## ANTI-REALISM: TELEOLOGY

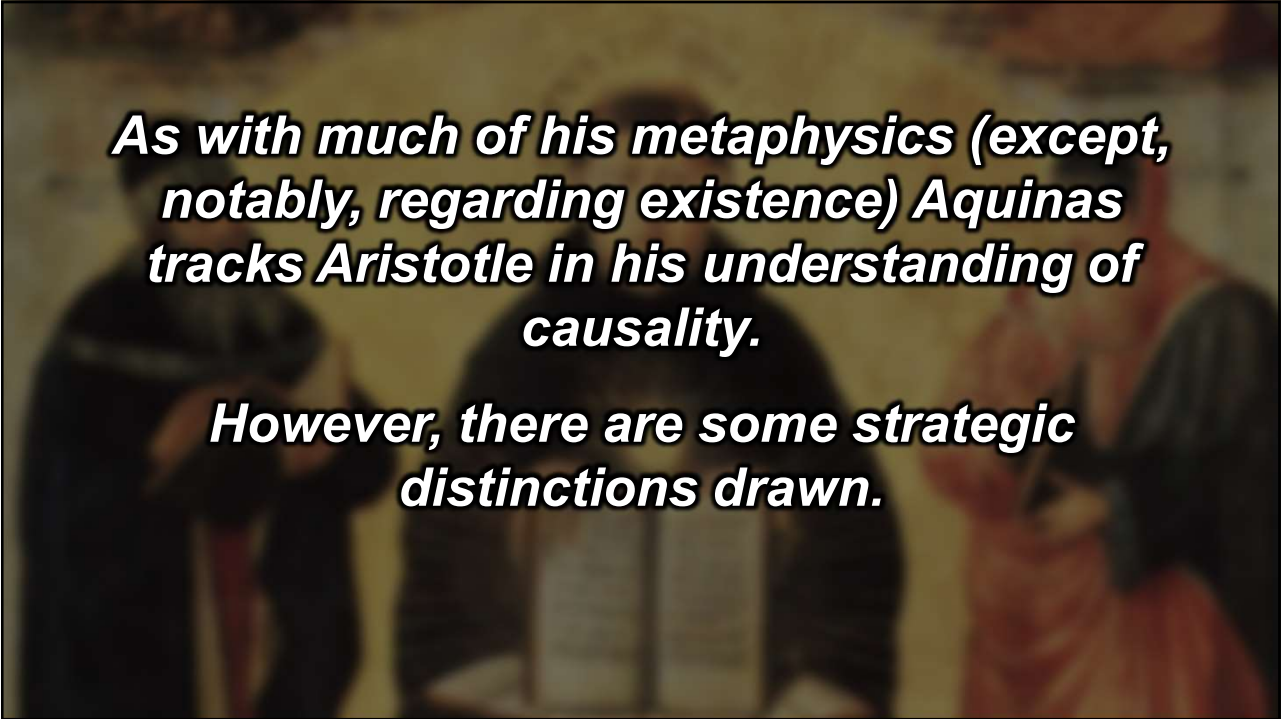
Teleology is either reducible to non-teleological phenomena  
or is unreal altogether.

### Teleological Eliminativism

Denies teleology altogether.

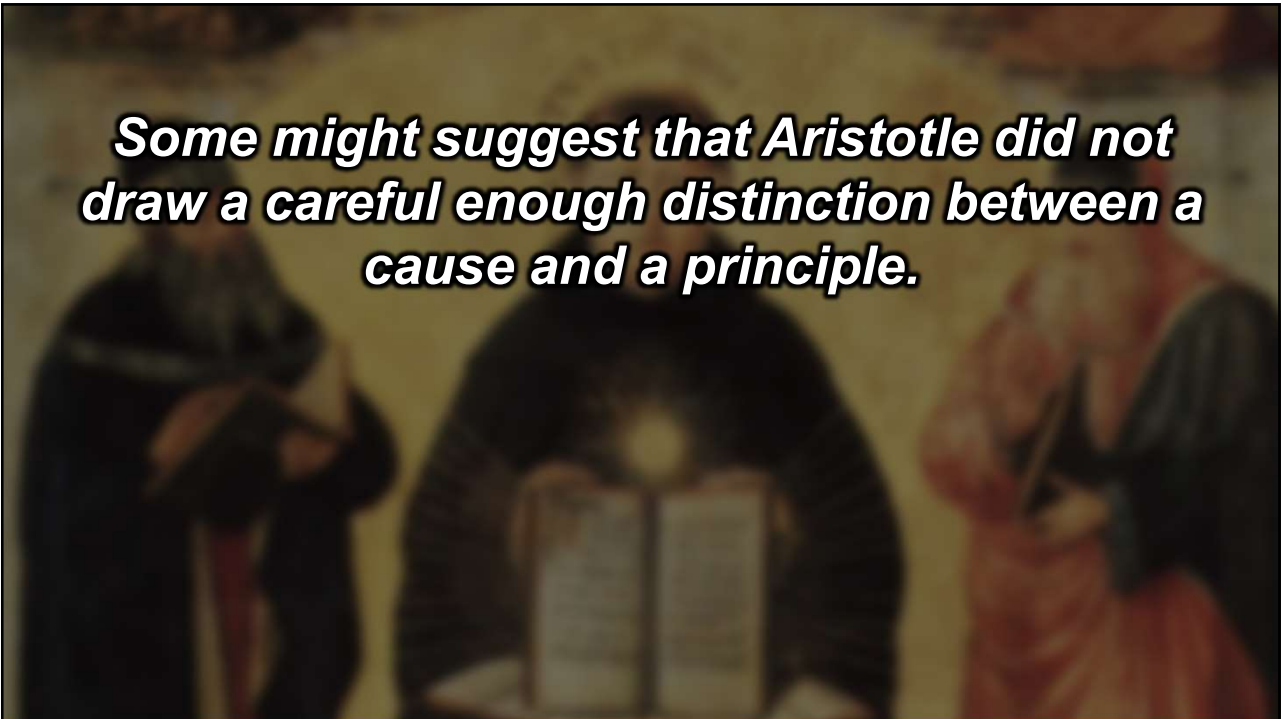






***As with much of his metaphysics (except, notably, regarding existence) Aquinas tracks Aristotle in his understanding of causality.***

***However, there are some strategic distinctions drawn.***



***Some might suggest that Aristotle did not draw a careful enough distinction between a cause and a principle.***

***Aquinas' care to make such a distinction hints at an important emphasis that characterizes his entire metaphysical system, having directly do with how existence figures in to that system.***

***"Now it should be noted that, although a principle and a cause are the same in subject, they nevertheless differ in meaning; for the term principle implies an order or sequence, whereas the term cause implies some influence on the being of the thing caused."***

[Commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Book V, Lesson 1, §751, trans. John P. Rowan (Notre Dame: Dumb Ox Press, 1961), 277, emphasis added]



**Thomas Aquinas**  
(1225-1274)

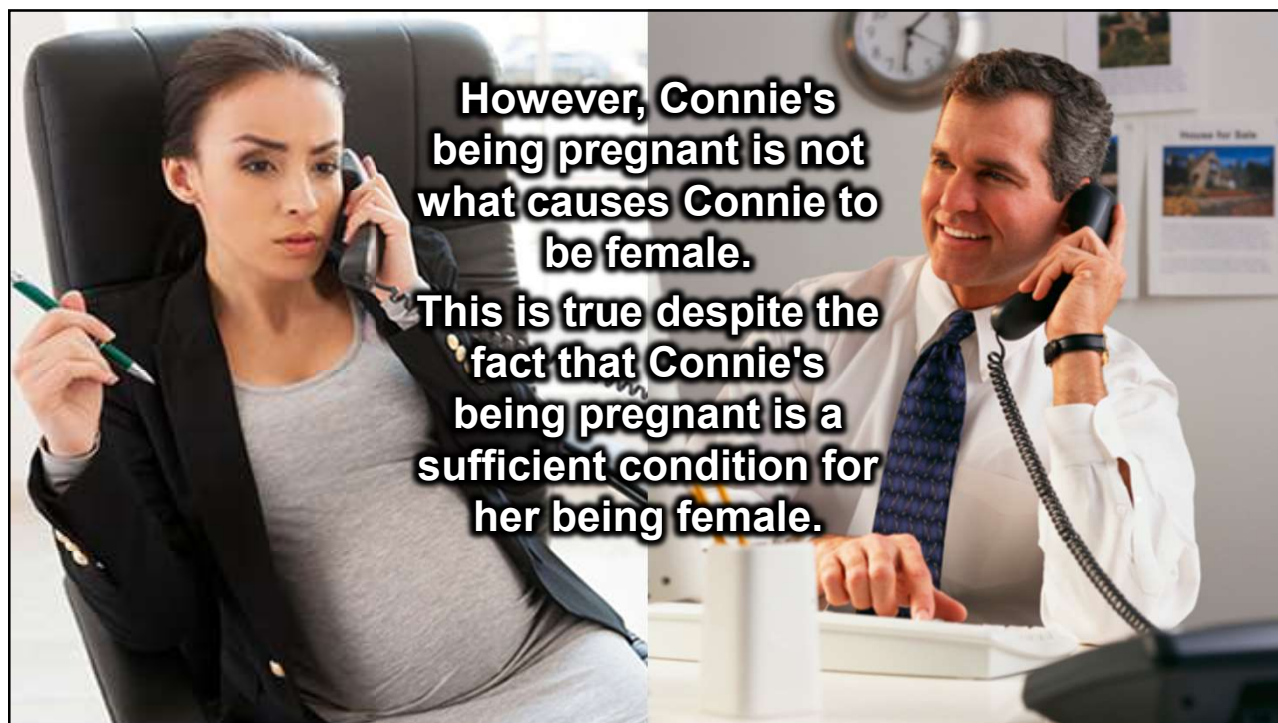
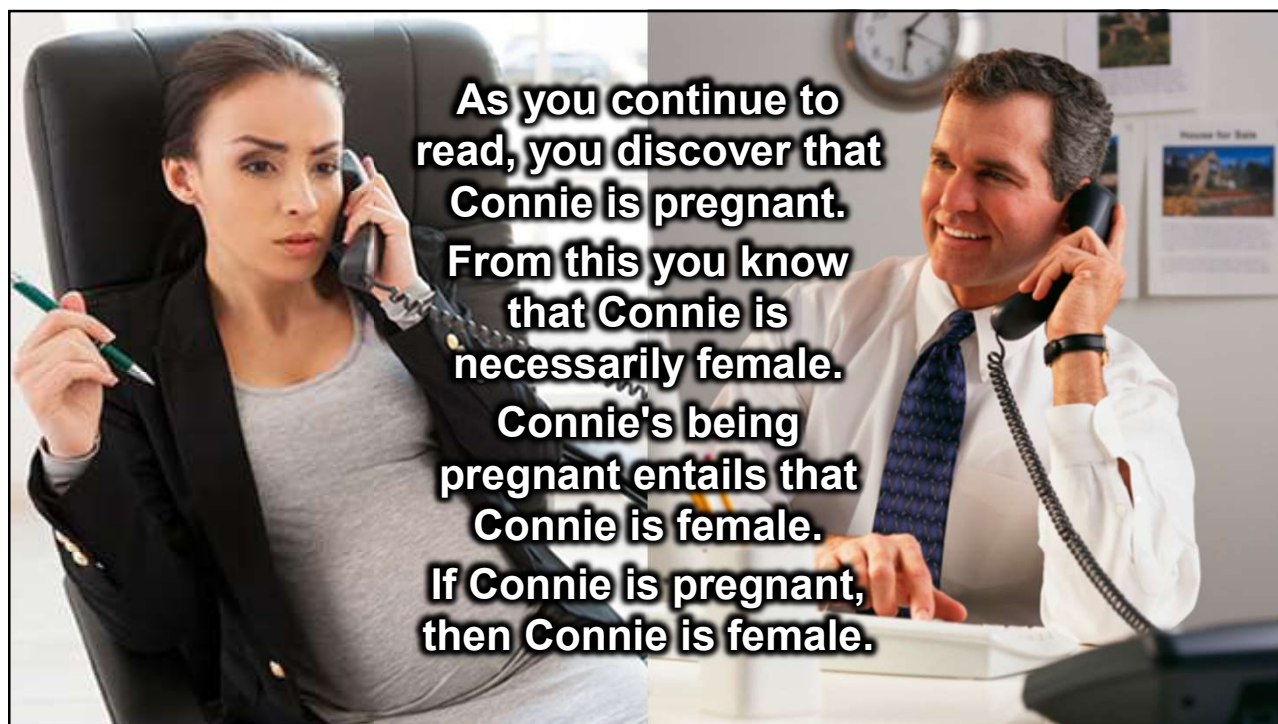
# ***Cause vs. Principle***

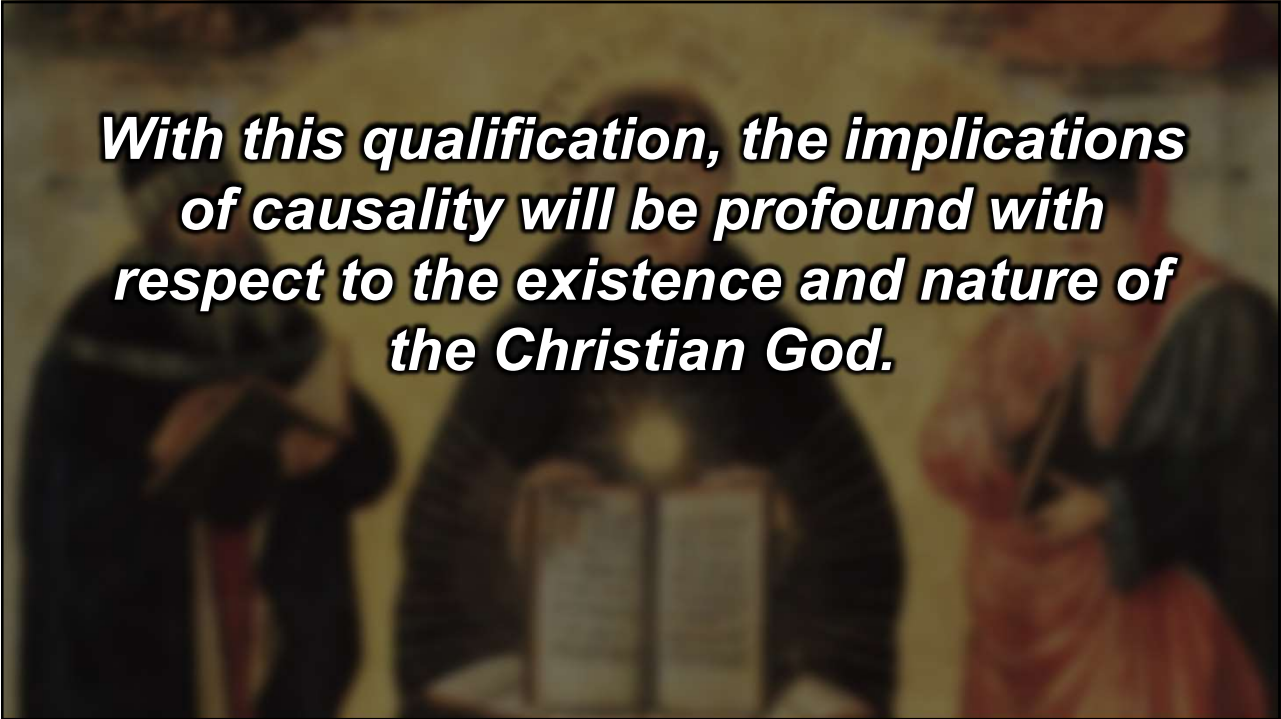


**Suppose you were reading a story about a person named Connie.**

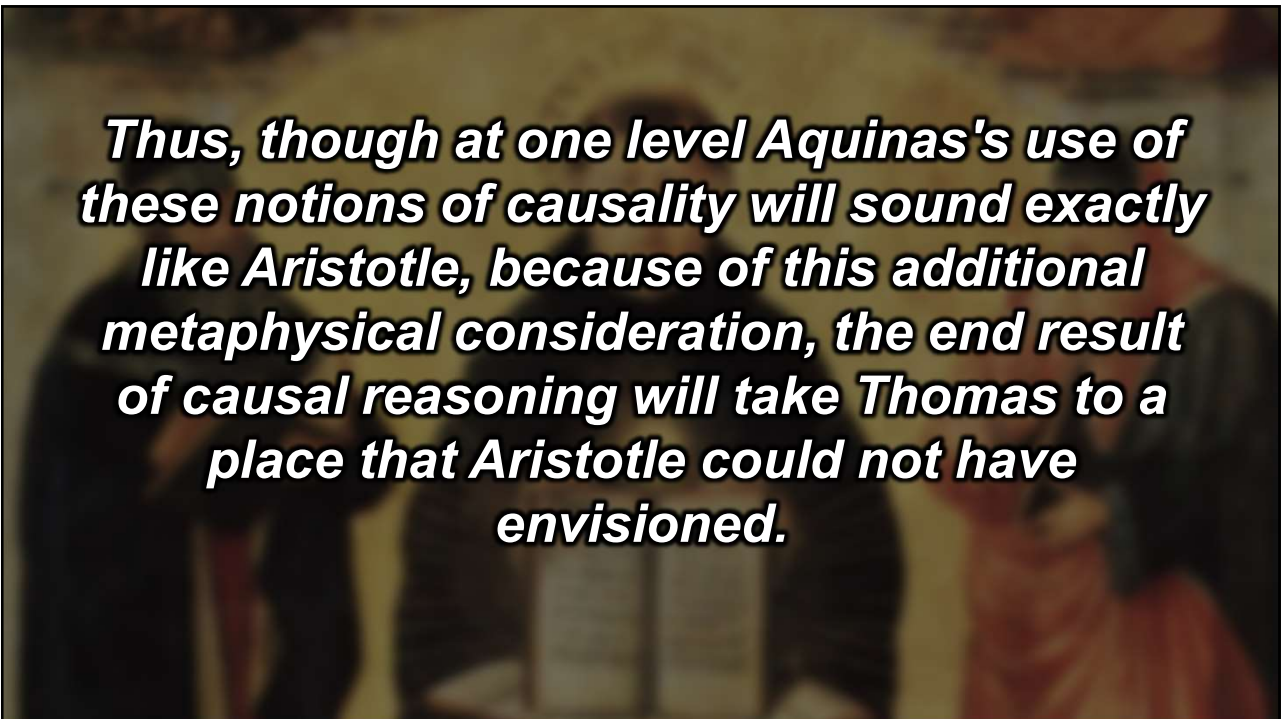
**Though rare, the name 'Connie' might refer to a male instead of a female. As such, you cannot be sure whether Connie is a man or a woman.**



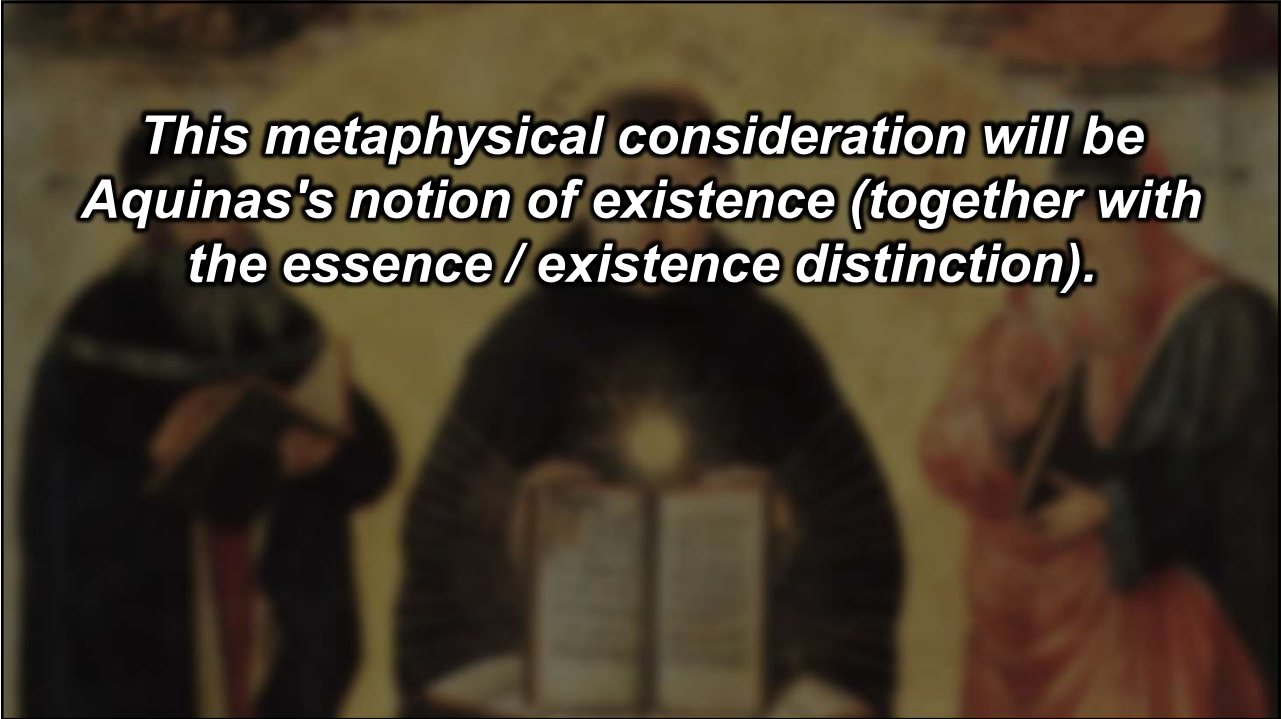




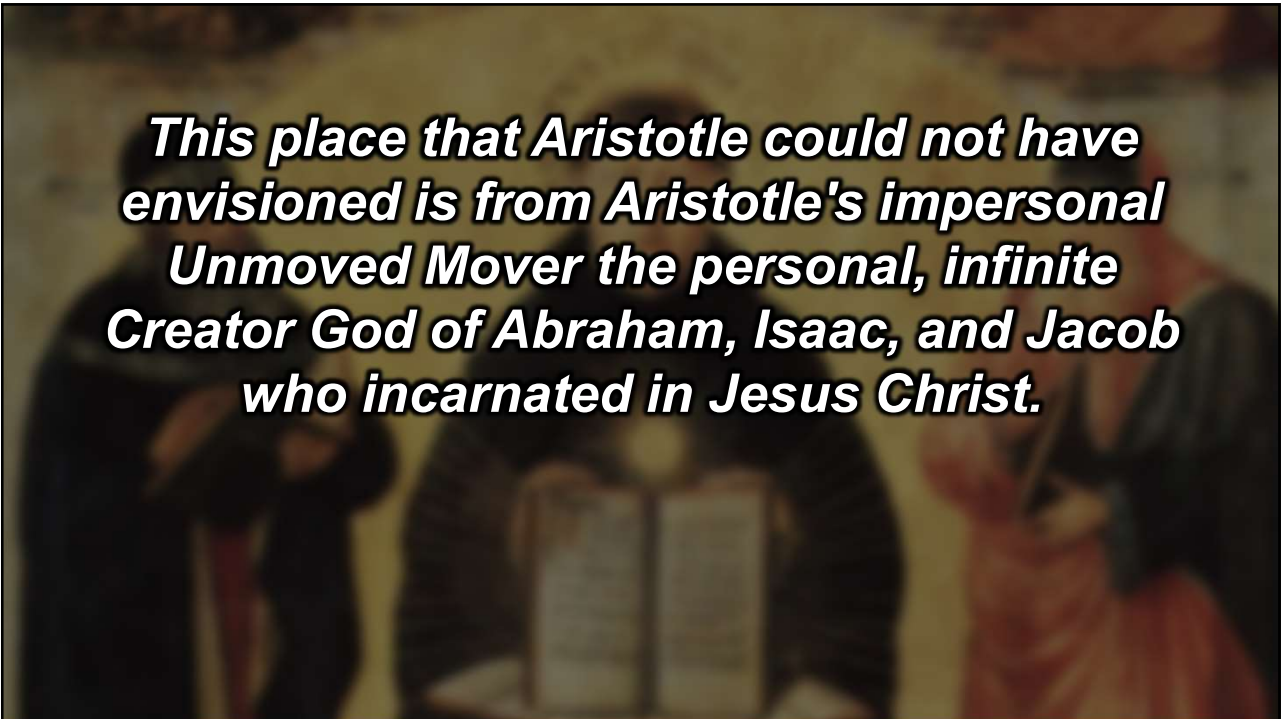
***With this qualification, the implications of causality will be profound with respect to the existence and nature of the Christian God.***



***Thus, though at one level Aquinas's use of these notions of causality will sound exactly like Aristotle, because of this additional metaphysical consideration, the end result of causal reasoning will take Thomas to a place that Aristotle could not have envisioned.***

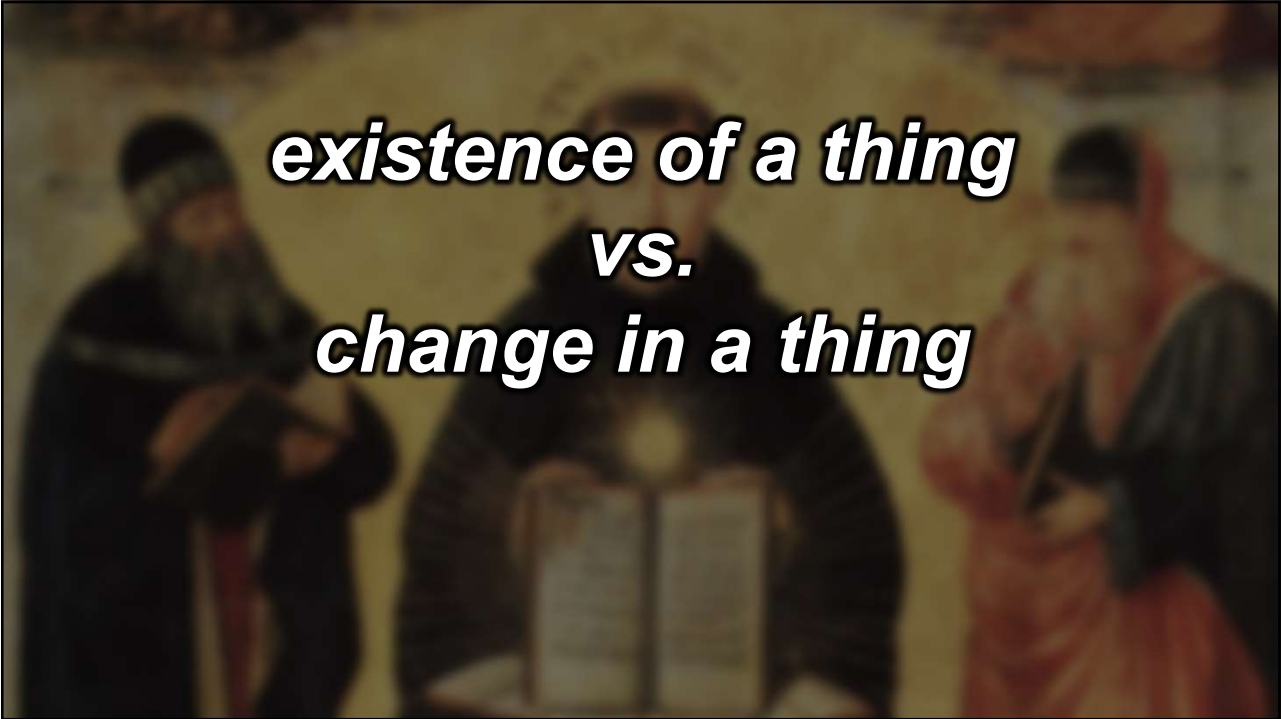


***This metaphysical consideration will be Aquinas's notion of existence (together with the essence / existence distinction).***

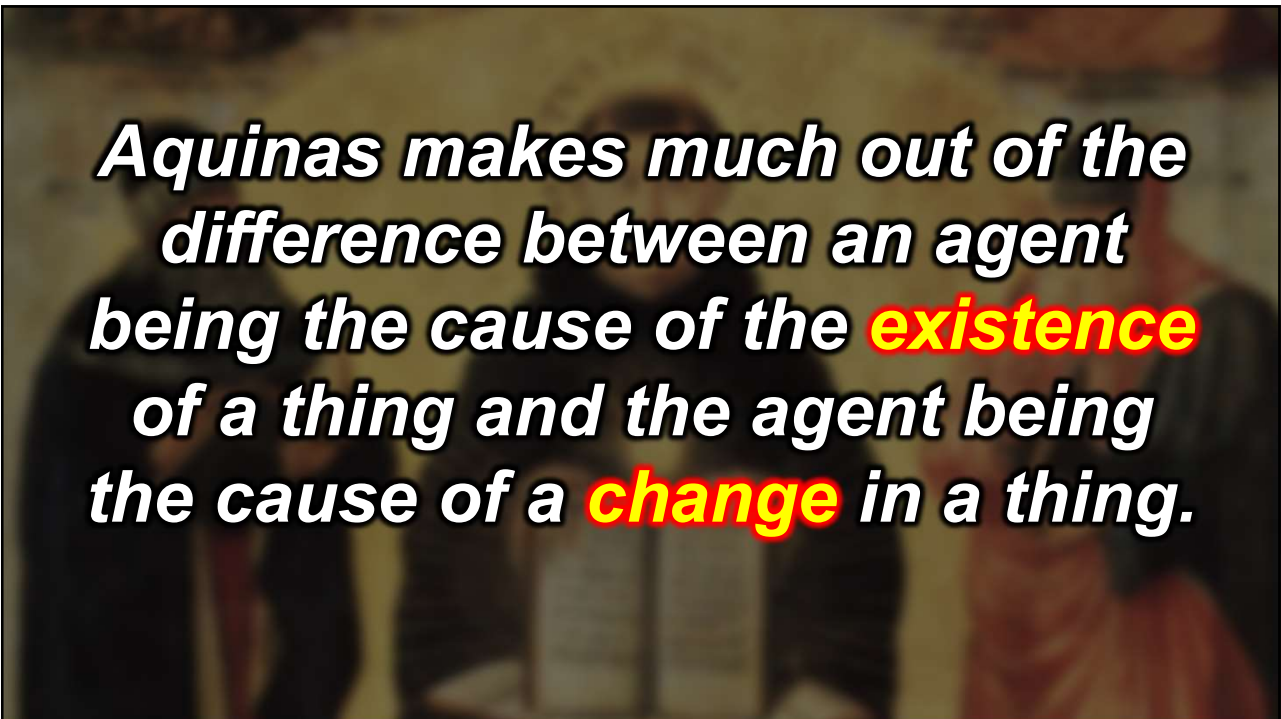


***This place that Aristotle could not have envisioned is from Aristotle's impersonal Unmoved Mover the personal, infinite Creator God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who incarnated in Jesus Christ.***





***existence of a thing  
vs.  
change in a thing***



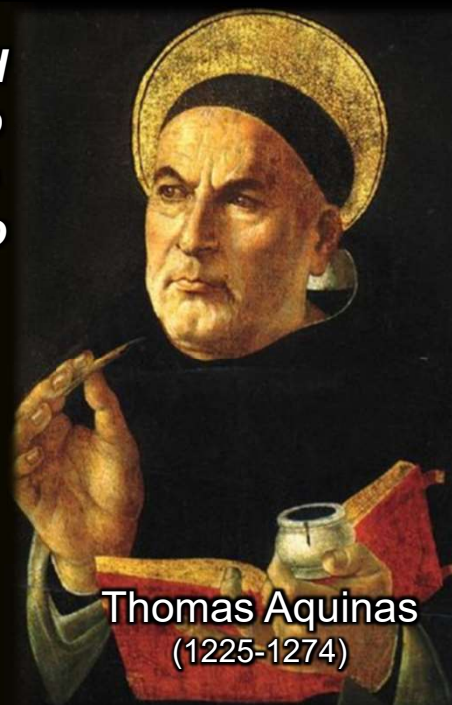
***Aquinas makes much out of the  
difference between an agent  
being the cause of the **existence**  
of a thing and the agent being  
the cause of a **change** in a thing.***

cause of the thing  
to be

cause of the thing  
to be a certain way ...

is much out of the  
difference between an agent  
being the cause of the **existence**  
and the agent being  
the cause of a **change** in a thing.

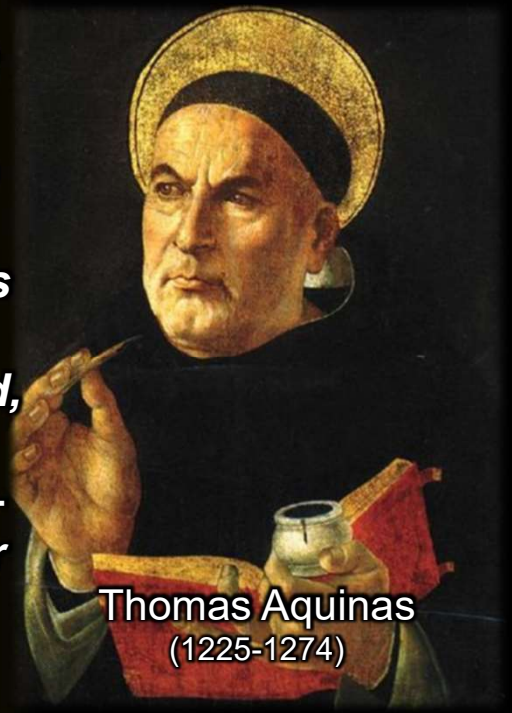
*"Furthermore, effects correspond proportionally to their causes, so that we attribute actual effects to actual causes, potential effects to potential causes, and, similarly, particular effects to particular causes and universal effects to universal causes, as Aristotle teaches in Physics II.*



Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

***"Now, the act of being is the first effect, and this is evident by reason of the universal presence of this act. It follows that the proper cause of the act of being is the first and universal agent, namely, God. Other agents, indeed, are not the cause of the act of being as such, but of being this—of being a man or being white, for example."***

[Summa Contra Gentiles, II, 21, trans. Maurer, Vol. 2, p. 61, emphasis in Maurer]

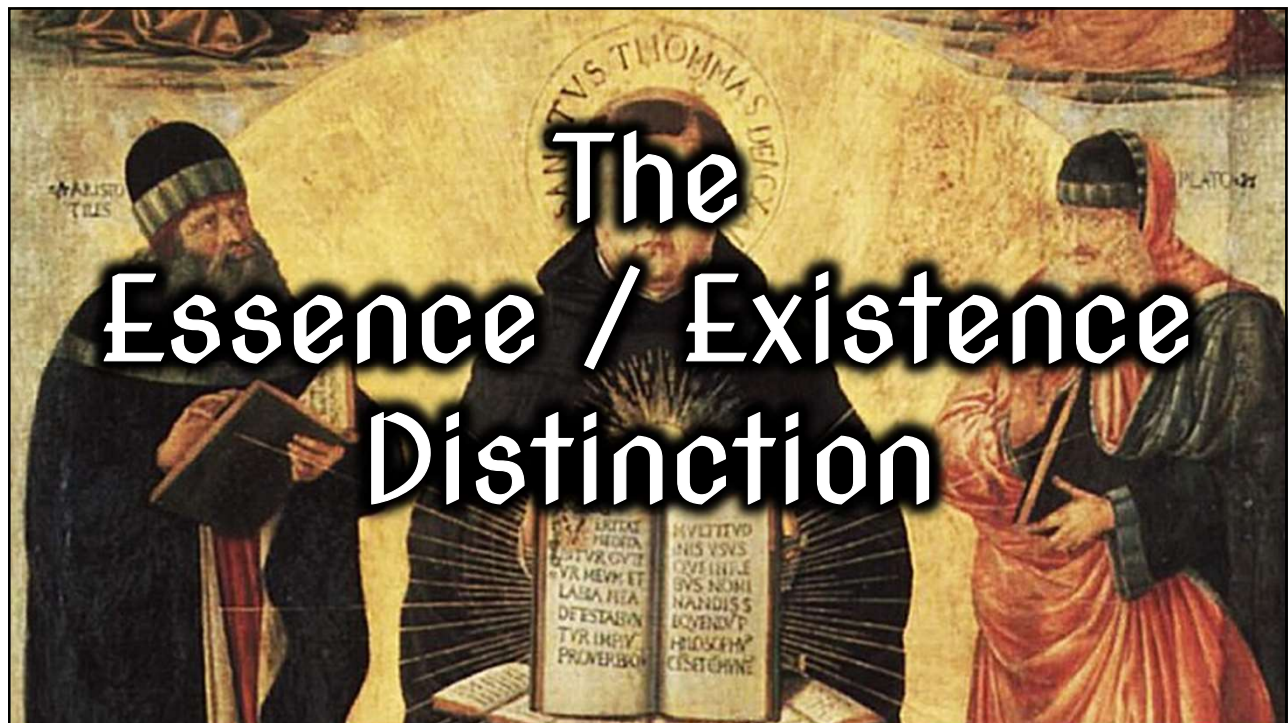


Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

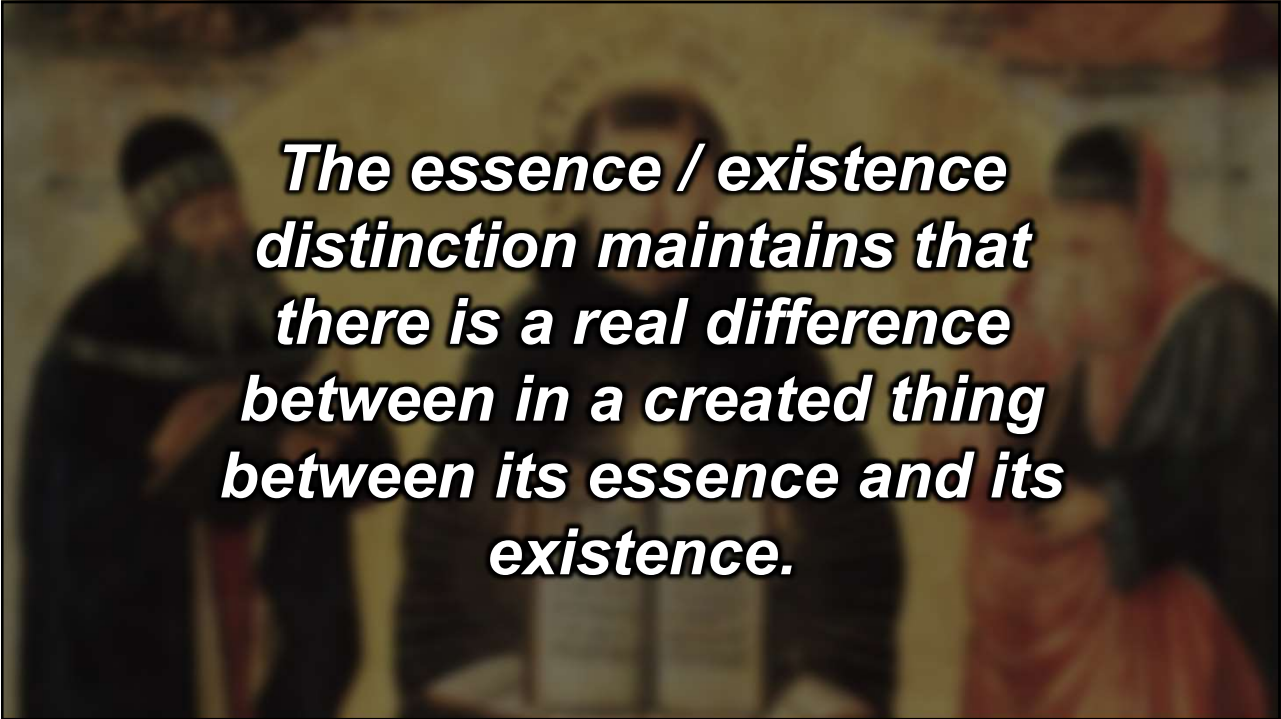
***One can see the significance of this distinction for Aquinas' argument for the existence of God in his Second Way (i.e., his second of the famous "Five Ways" which are five arguments for God's existence given in his Summa Theologiae.***



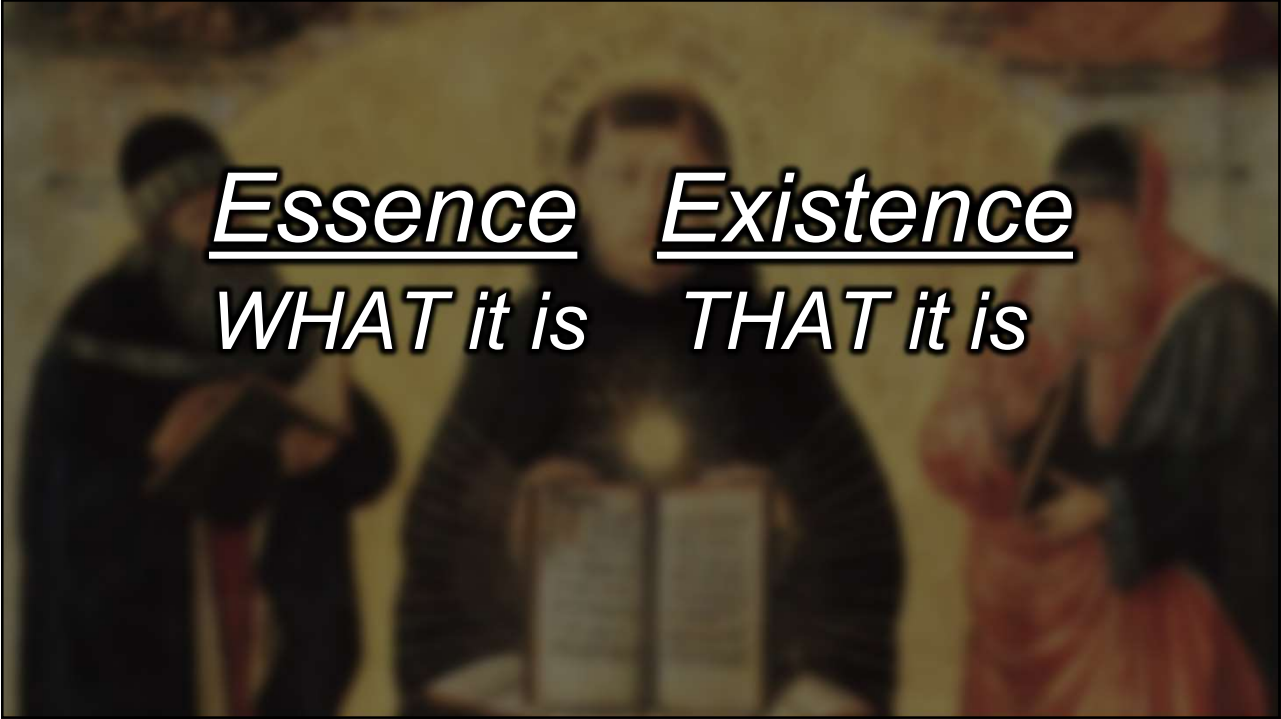
*While causes as such account for the existence of things being **what** they are, Aquinas will maintain there is only one cause that can account for **that** they are.*



# The Essence / Existence Distinction



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

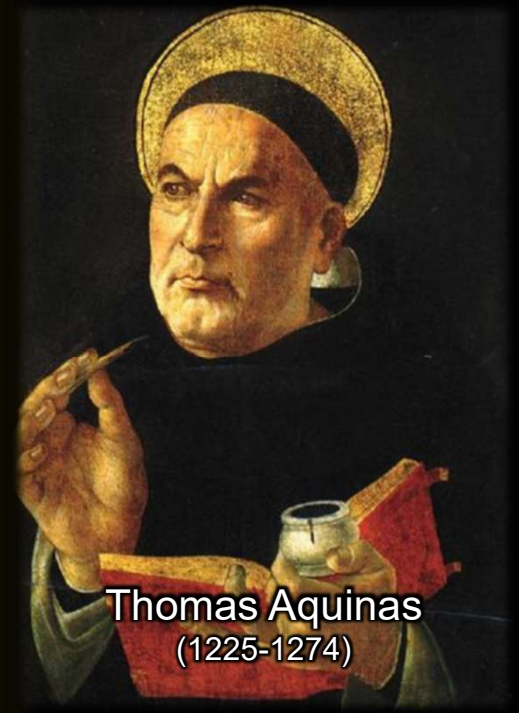


|                       |                         |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| <u><i>Essence</i></u> | <u><i>Existence</i></u> |
| <i>WHAT it is</i>     | <i>THAT it is</i>       |

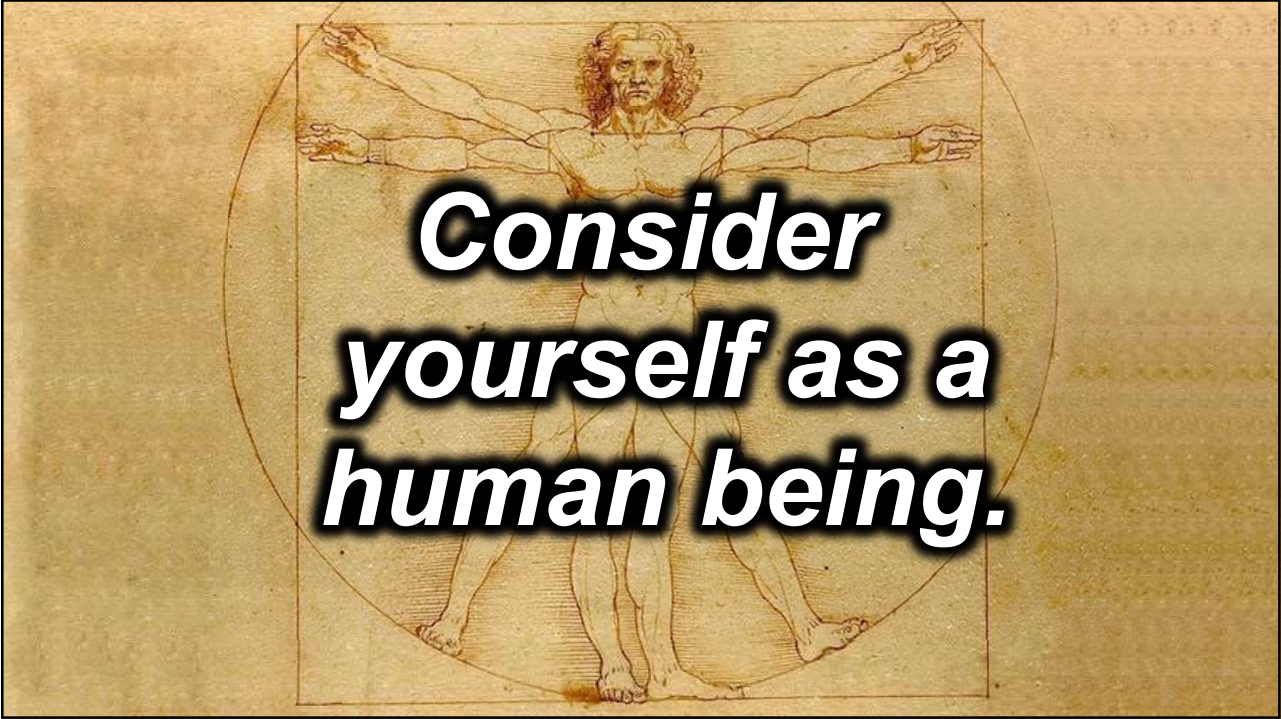


**"Everything that is in the genus of substance is composite with a real composition, because whatever is in the category of substance is subsistent in its own existence, and its own act of existing must be distinct from the thing itself; otherwise it could not be distinct in existence from the other things with which it agrees in the formal character of its quiddity; for such agreement is required in all things that are directly in a category. Consequently everything that is directly in the category of substance is composed at least of the act of being and the subject of being."**

[*On Truth (De Veritate)* XXVII, 1, ad. 8, trans. Robert W. Schmidt (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), v. 3, pp. 311-312]



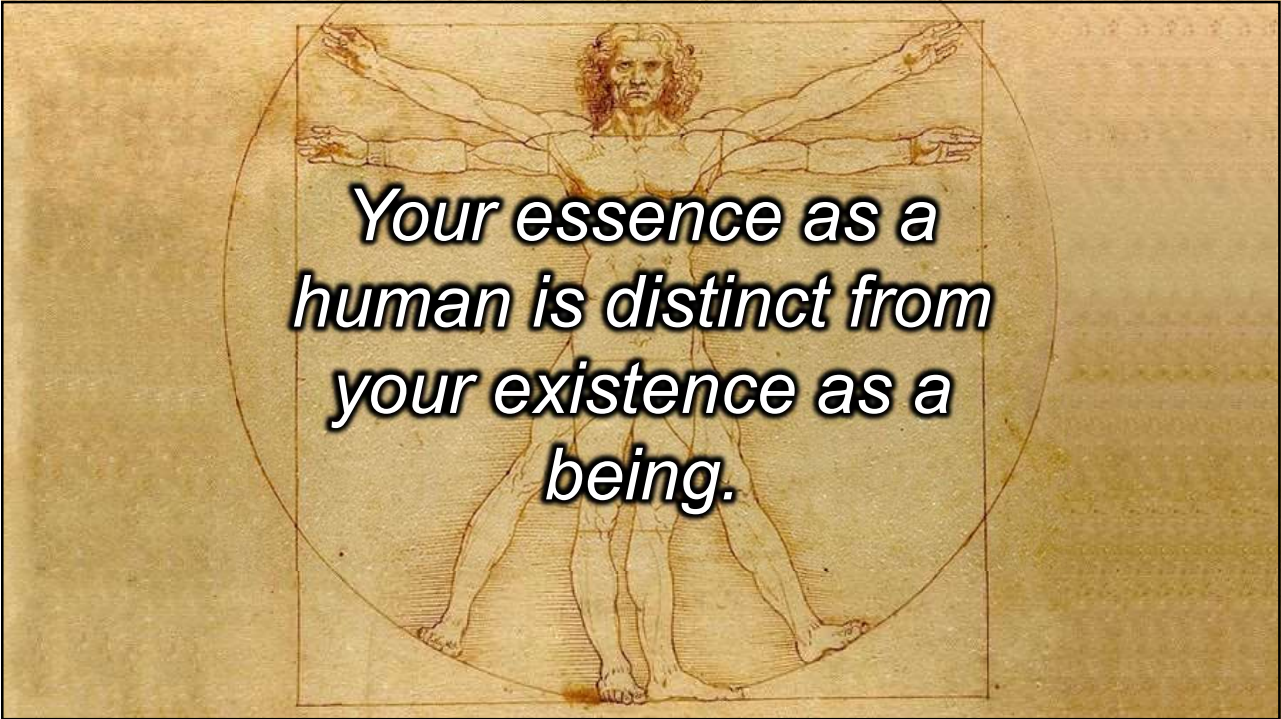
**Thomas Aquinas**  
(1225-1274)



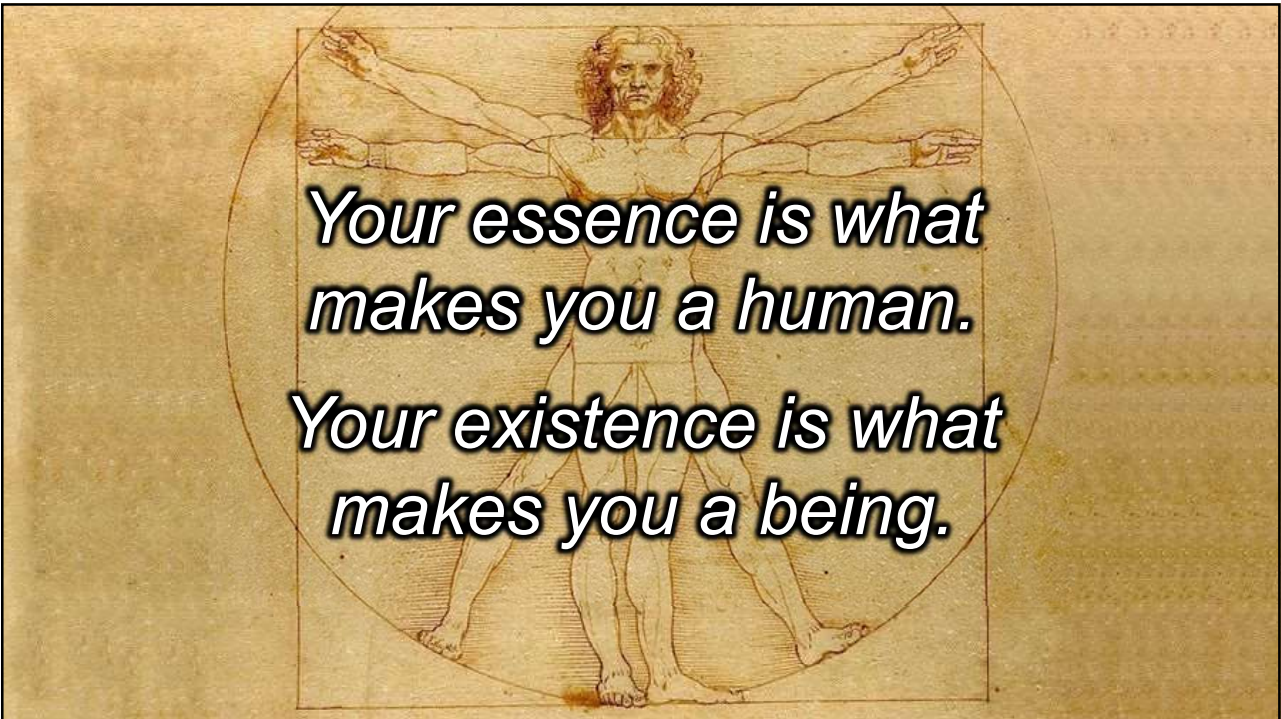
***Consider  
yourself as a  
human being.***

The background of the text is Leonardo da Vinci's famous drawing of the Vitruvian Man, which shows a nude male figure inscribed within a circle and a square.



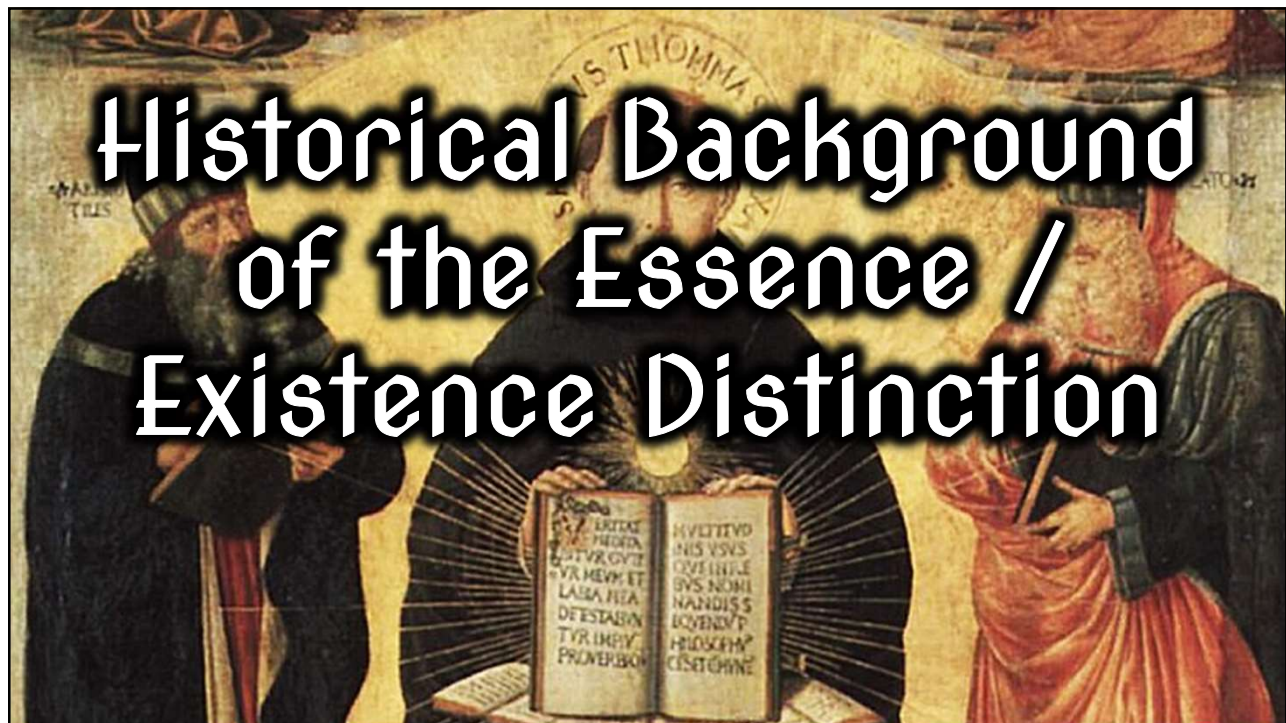
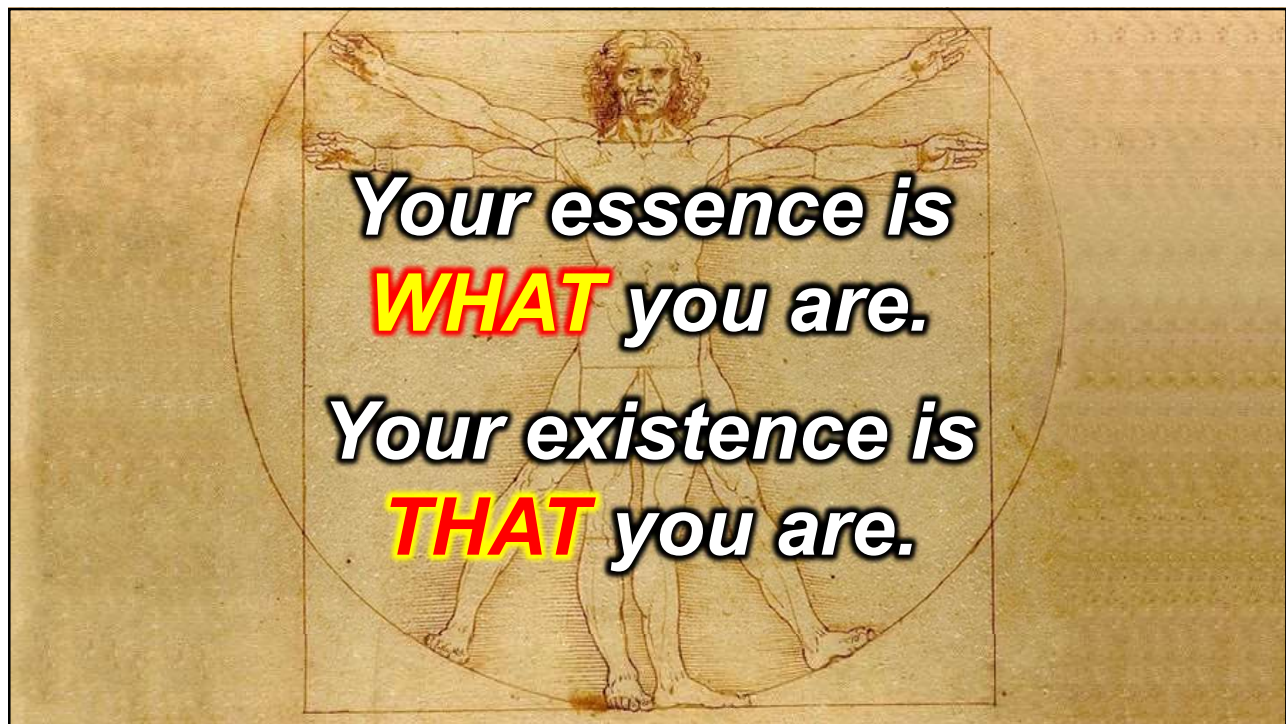
The background of the slide is a reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man drawing. The figure of the man is centered, with arms and legs extended to touch the boundaries of a circle and a square. The text is overlaid on the upper half of the figure.

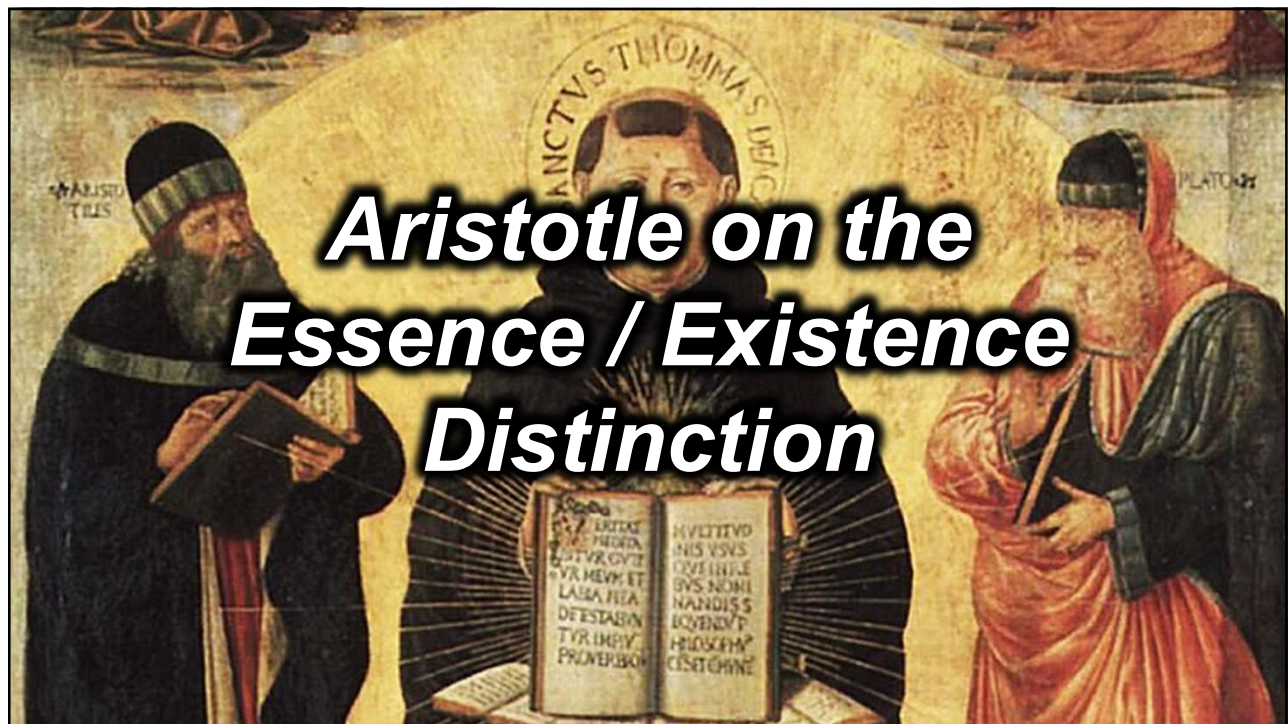
*Your essence as a  
human is distinct from  
your existence as a  
being.*

The background of the slide is a reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man drawing. The figure of the man is centered, with arms and legs extended to touch the boundaries of a circle and a square. The text is overlaid on the lower half of the figure.

*Your essence is what  
makes you a human.  
Your existence is what  
makes you a being.*

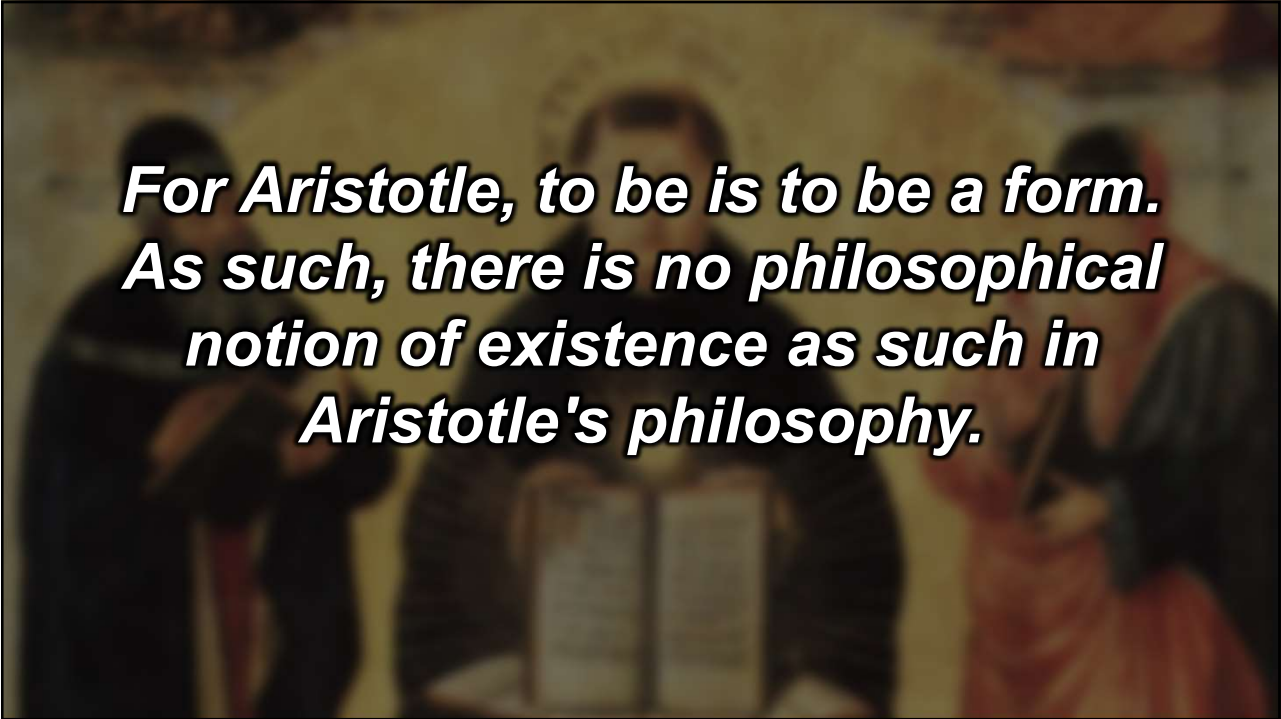




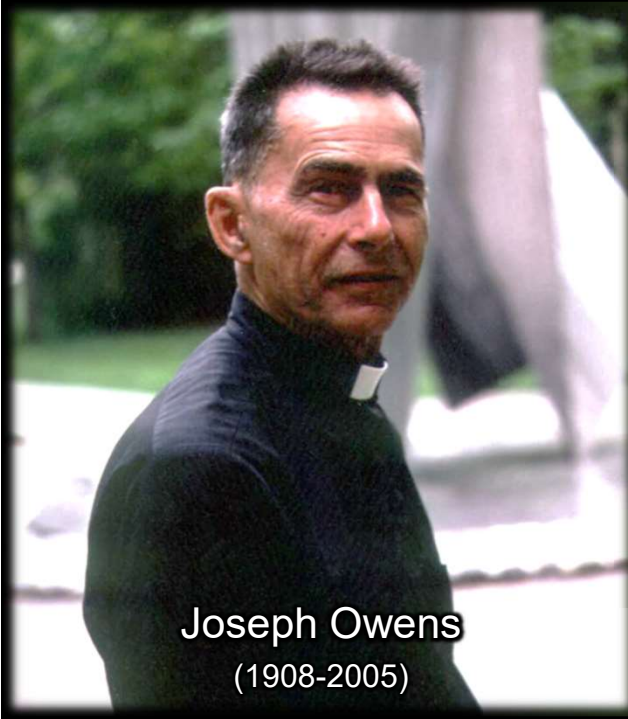


***Aquinas's doctrine of existence together with his doctrine of the distinction of essence and existence serve as the most radical break he has with Aristotle.***





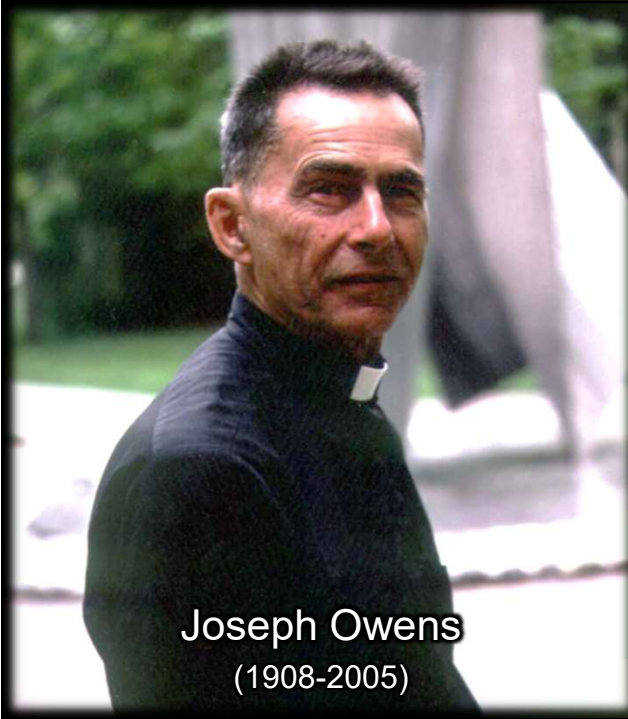
***For Aristotle, to be is to be a form.  
As such, there is no philosophical  
notion of existence as such in  
Aristotle's philosophy.***



**"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."**

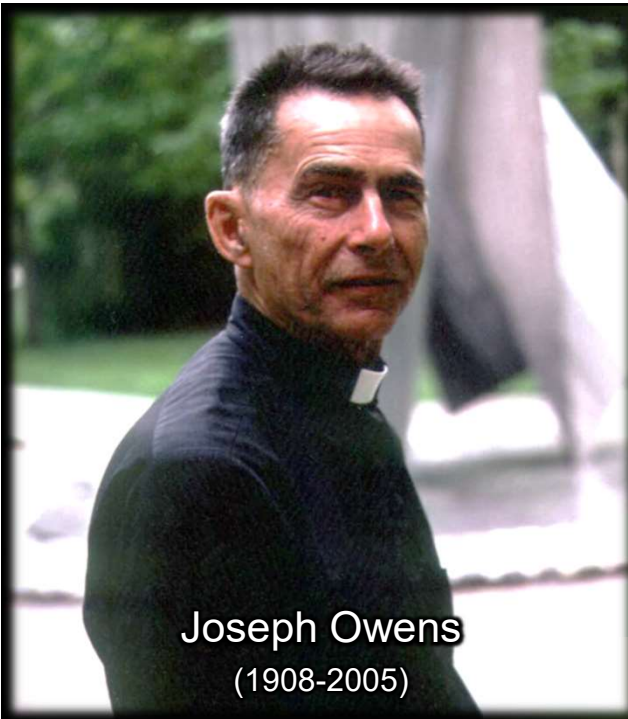
["Aquinas and the Five Ways," *Monist* 58 (January 1974): 21]

**Joseph Owens**  
(1908-2005)

A portrait of Joseph Owens, a man with short dark hair, wearing a black clerical shirt with a white collar. He is looking slightly to the right with a thoughtful expression. The background is blurred, showing green foliage and a white architectural element.

Joseph Owens  
(1908-2005)

**"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."**

A portrait of Joseph Owens, a man with short dark hair, wearing a black clerical shirt with a white collar. He is looking slightly to the right with a thoughtful expression. The background is blurred, showing green foliage and a white architectural element.

Joseph Owens  
(1908-2005)

**"The act of existing must be wholly escaping his *scientific* consideration. All necessary and definite connections between things can be reduced to essence."**

[Joseph Owens, *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics: A Study in the Greek Background of Mediaeval Thought*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed (Toronto: The Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies), 309 emphasis in original]

***Indeed, there does not seem to be a distinctive philosophical discussion of existence as such in any ancient Greek philosophy.***



Parviz Morewedge

## PHILOSOPHIES OF EXISTENCE

Ancient  
and  
Medieval

Edited by  
PARVIZ MOREWEDGE



Charles H. Kahn

Author of "Why Existence Did Not  
Emerge as a Distinct Concept in Greek  
Philosophy"





Parviz Morewedge

"The upshot is that, although we can recognize at least three different kinds of existential questions discussed by Aristotle, Aristotle himself neither distinguishes these questions from one another nor brings them together under any common head or topic which might be set in contrast to other themes in his general discussion of Being."

[Charles H. Kahn, "Why Existence Does Not Emerge as a Distinct Concept in Greek Philosophy," in *Philosophies of Existence: Ancient and Medieval*, ed. Pariz Morewedge (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), 10]

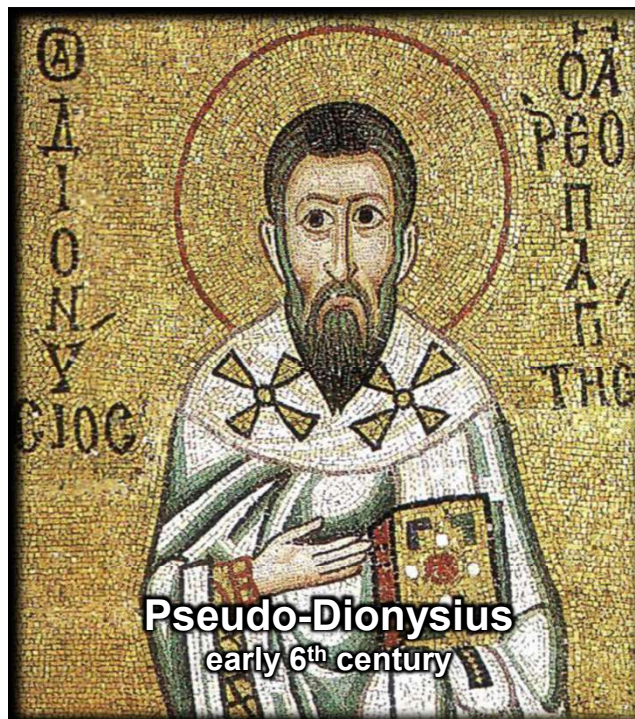


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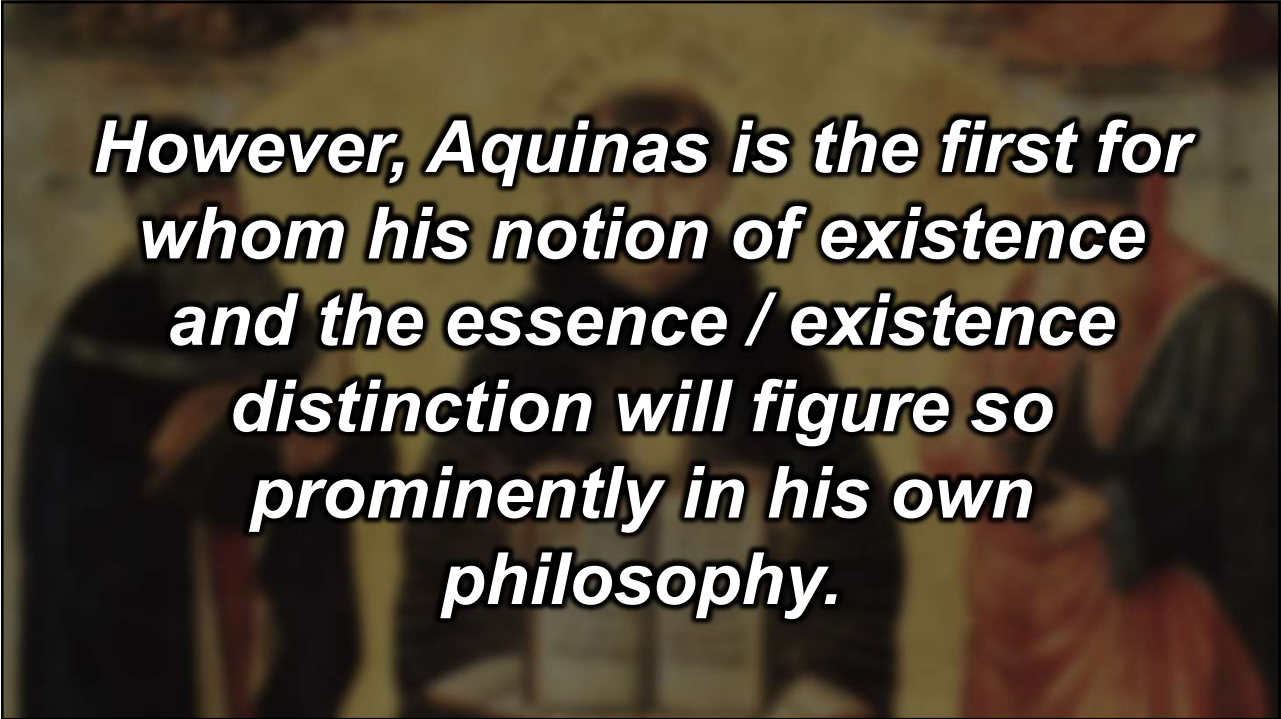


***Thomas was certainly not the first philosopher to make a specific mention of the essence/existence distinction.***

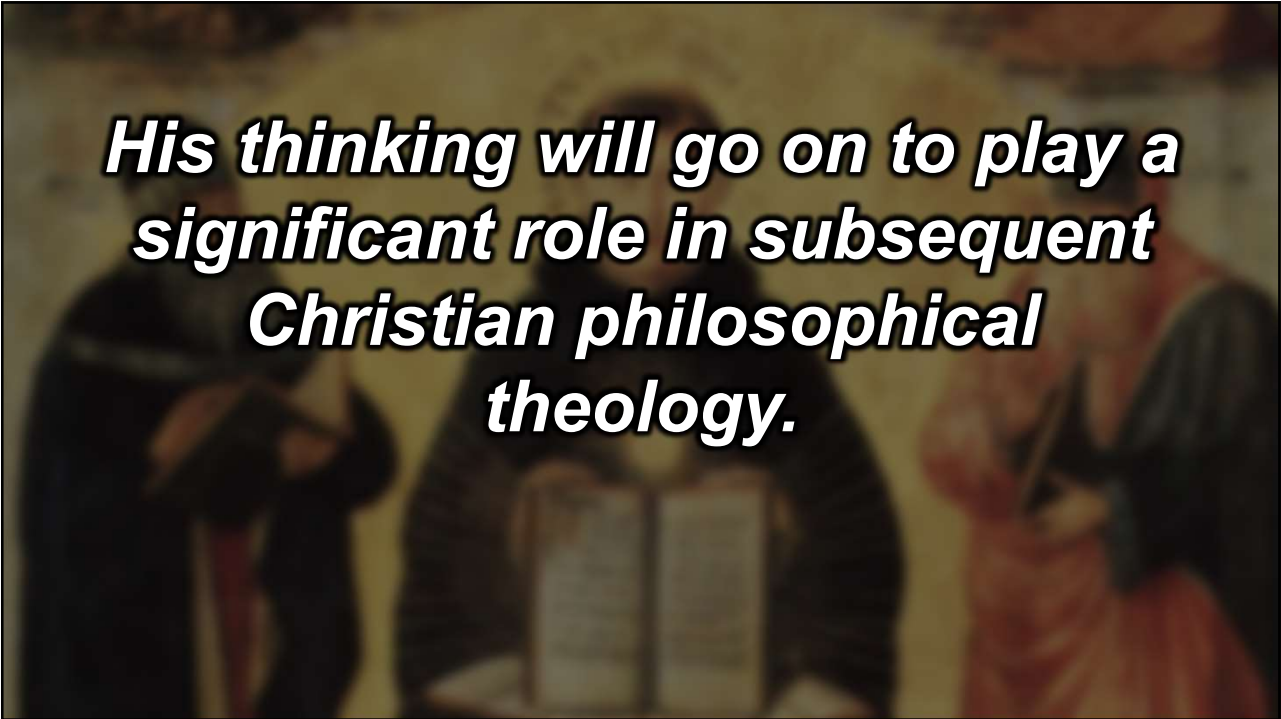


***Further, certain aspects of Aquinas's developed notion of existence was inspired by the earlier thinker Pseudo-Dionysius.***





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



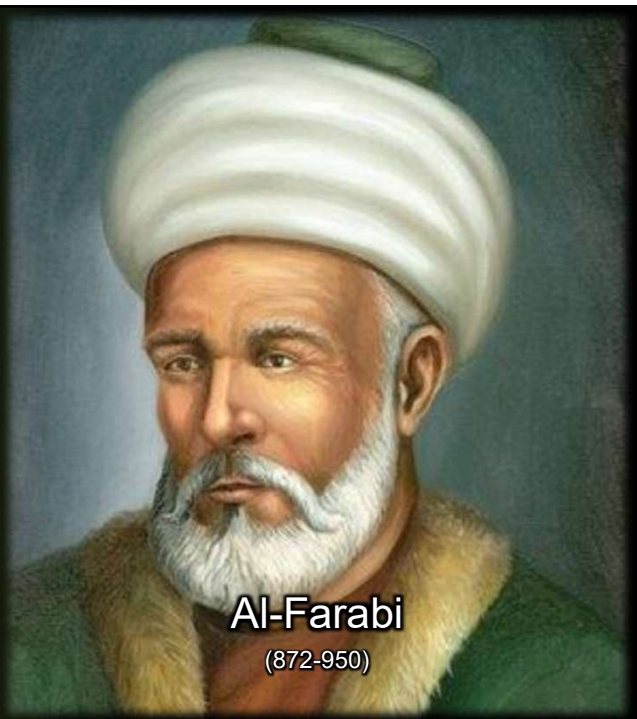
***His thinking will go on to play a significant role in subsequent Christian philosophical theology.***



***There is an earlier  
mention of it is by  
the tenth century  
Arabic philosopher  
Al-Farabi.***



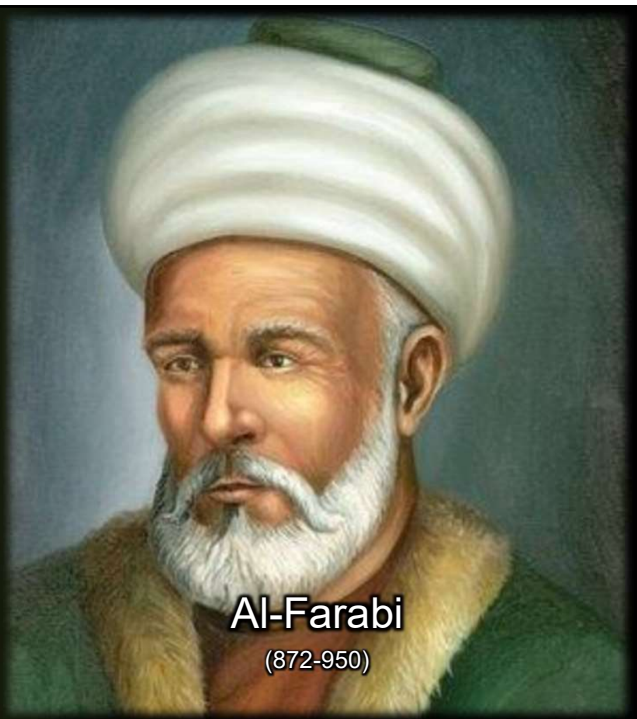
***"We admit that essence  
and existence are distinct  
in existing things. The  
essence is not the  
existence, and it does not  
come under its  
comprehension.***



***"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."***

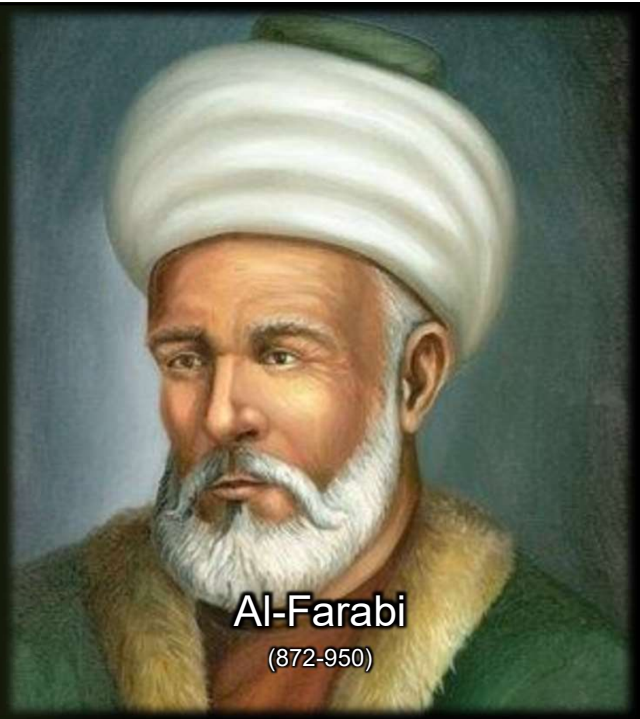


***"But the same token, existence is not included in the essence of things; otherwise it could become one of their constitutive characters,"***



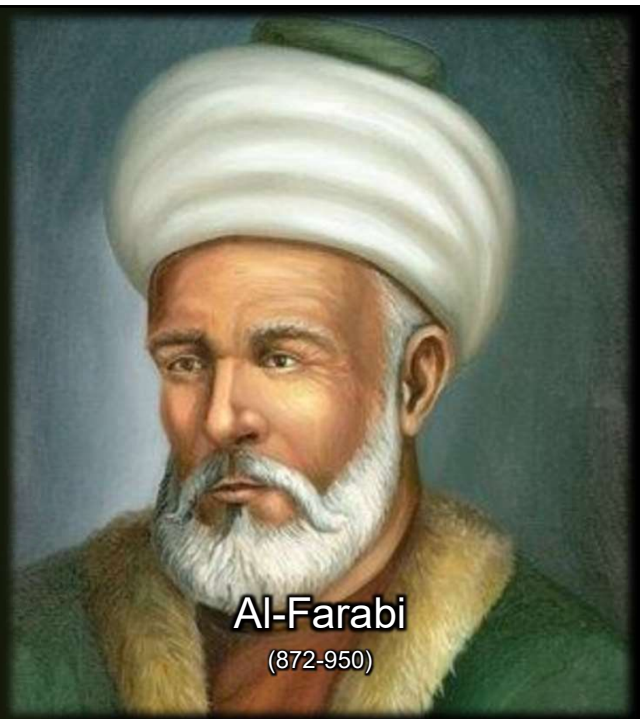


***"and the representation of what essence is would remain incomplete without the representation of its existence. And what is more, it would be impossible for us to separate them by the imagination."***



**Al-Farabi**  
(872-950)

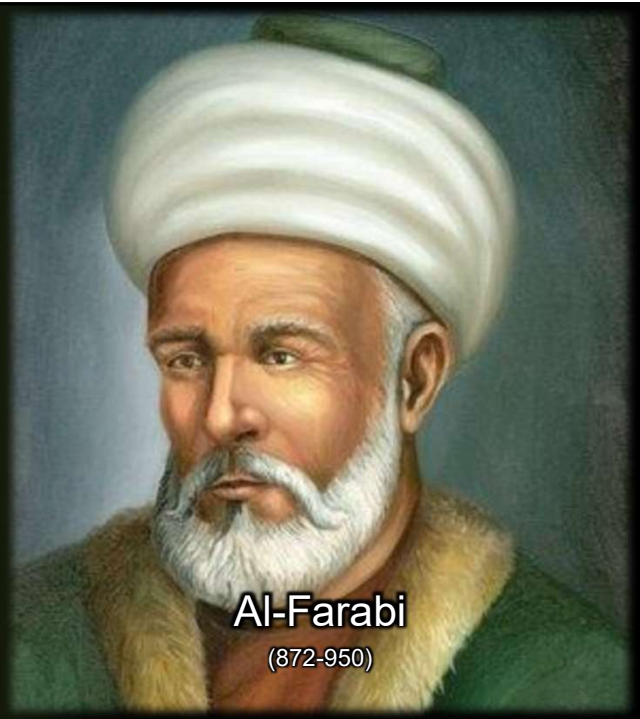
***"If man's existence coincided with his corporeal and animal nature, there would be nobody who, having an exact idea of what man is, and knowing is corporeal and animal nature,***



**Al-Farabi**  
(872-950)



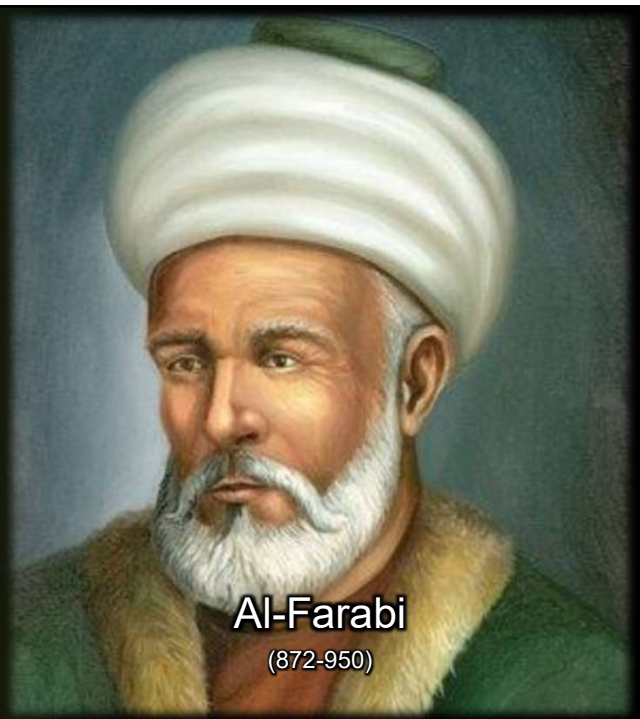
***"could question man's existence. But that is not the way it is, and we doubt the existence of things until we have direct perception of them through the senses, or mediate perception through a proof."***



**Al-Farabi**  
(872-950)

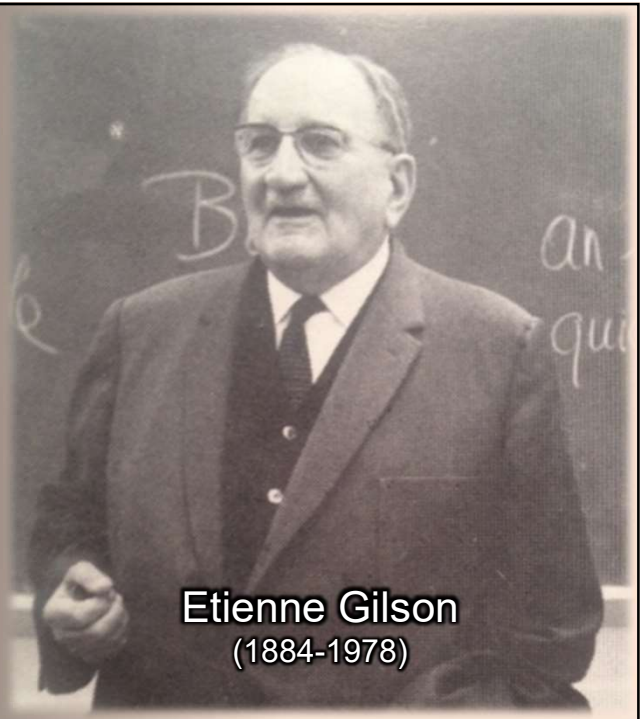
***"If Thus existence is not a constitutive character, it is only an accessory accident."***

[This is a tertiary quote. Djemil Saliba quotes Alfarabi in his *Etude sur la métaphysique*, pp. 84-85. Saliba is quoted by Etienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1955, reprinted 1972), 186]



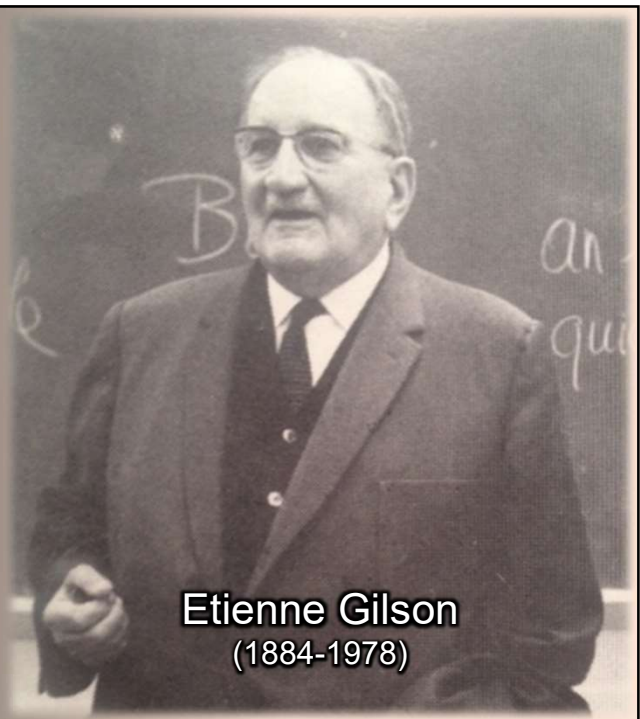
**Al-Farabi**  
(872-950)

***"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.'"***



**Etienne Gilson**  
(1884-1978)

***"We are still far away from the Thomistic position, which will deny both that existence is included in essence and that it is accidental to it. With Thomas Aquinas, existence will become the 'act' of essence, and therefore the act of being; we are not there, but we are on the way to it."***

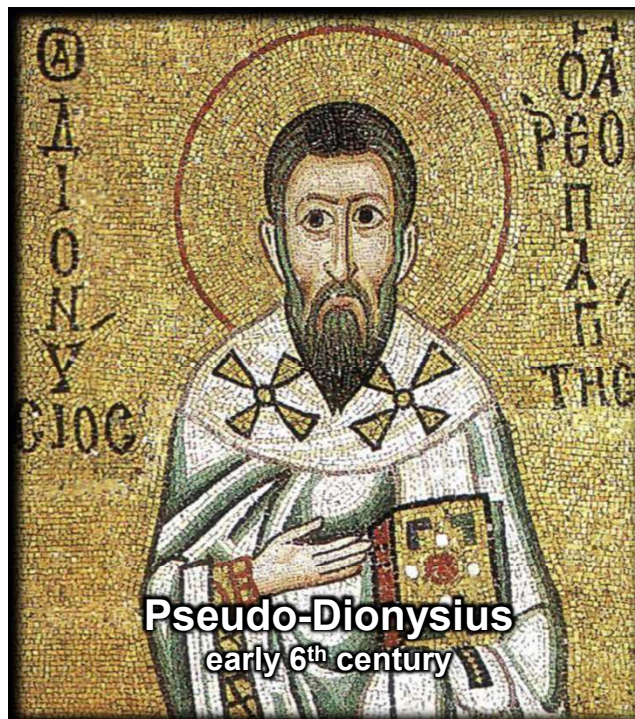


**Etienne Gilson**  
(1884-1978)

[Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, 186]

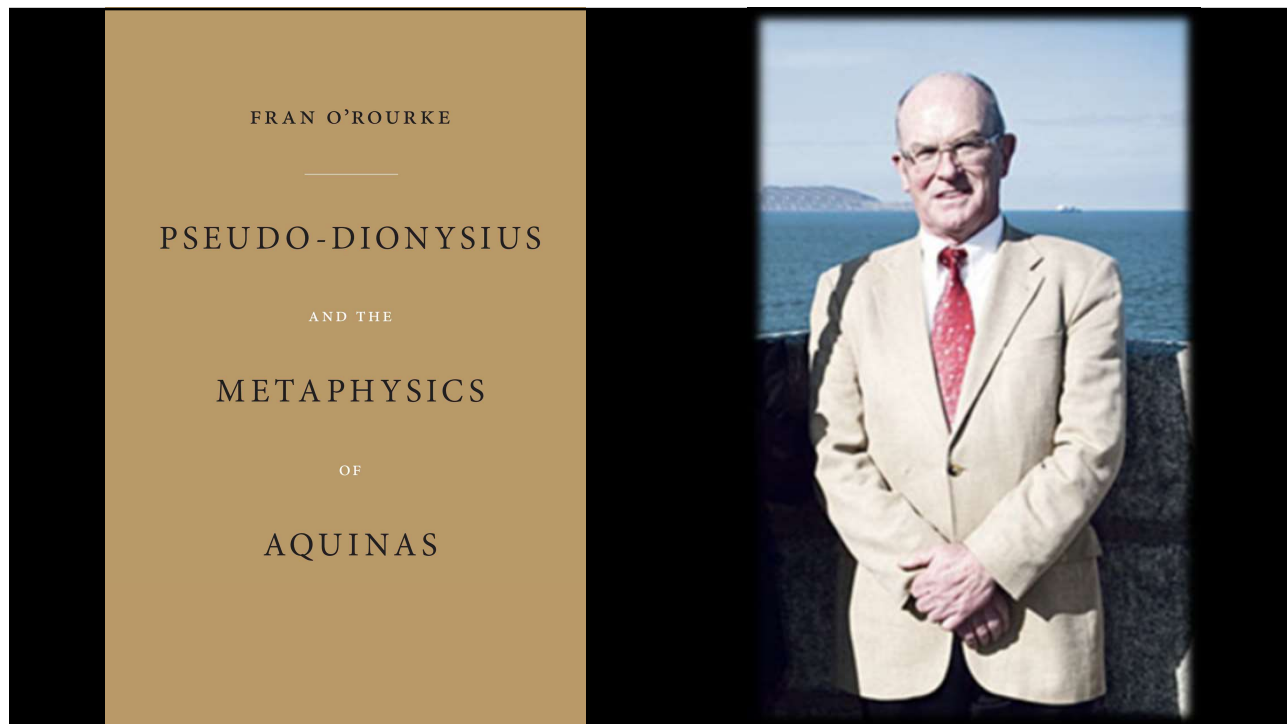


***The language of the distinction between form and being (essence and existence) is also found in the Liber de Causis (Book of Causes, dated late 1000s to early 1100s) and was accommodated by Aquinas for his own purposes.***



***Further, certain aspects of Aquinas's developed notion of existence was inspired by the earlier thinker Pseudo-Dionysius.***

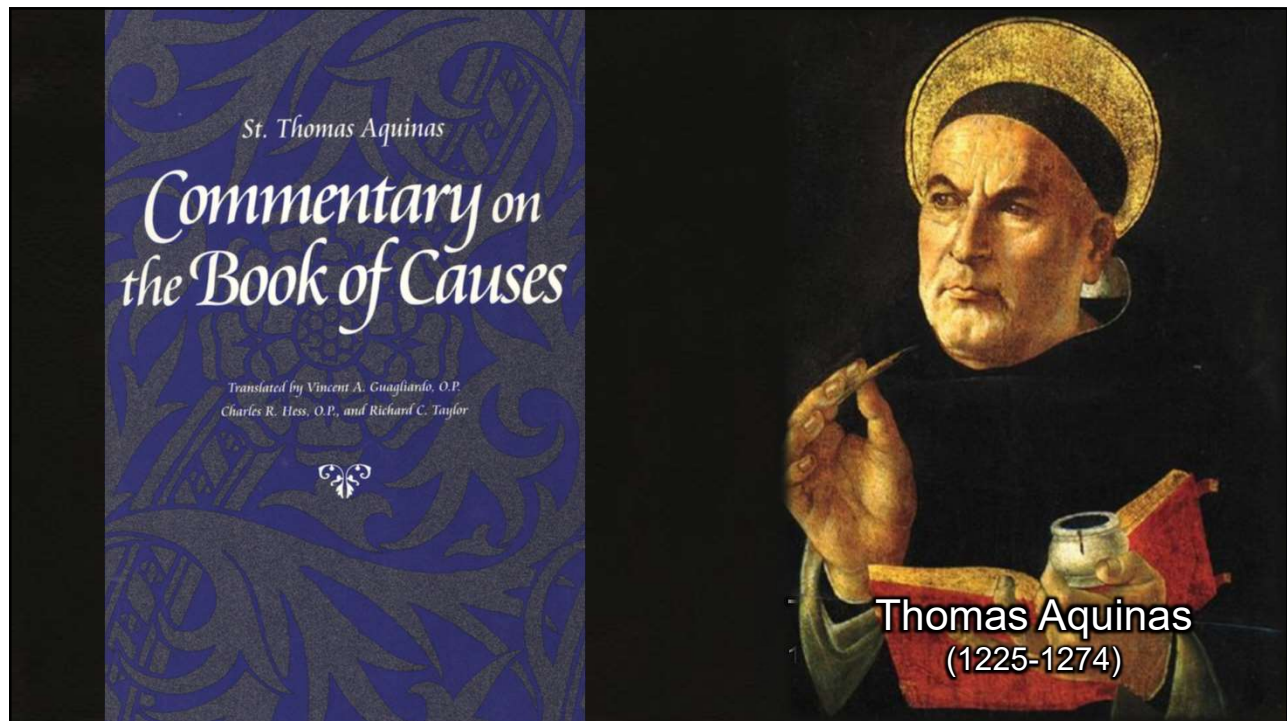




***Probably the biggest influence that suggested the essence/existence distinction was Avicenna, though Aquinas will significantly change the meanings of the terms.***



***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.***





"According to the truth of the matter, the first cause is above being inasmuch as it is itself infinite 'to be' [esse]. 'Being' [ens], however, is called that which finitely participates 'to be,' and it is this which is proportioned to our intellect, whose object is some 'that which is,' [quod quid est]. ... Hence our intellect can grasp only that which has a quiddity participating 'to be.' But the quiddity of God is 'to be' itself."

[Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, trans. Vincent A. Guagliardo, Charles R. Hess, and Richard C. Taylor (Washington, The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 51-52]



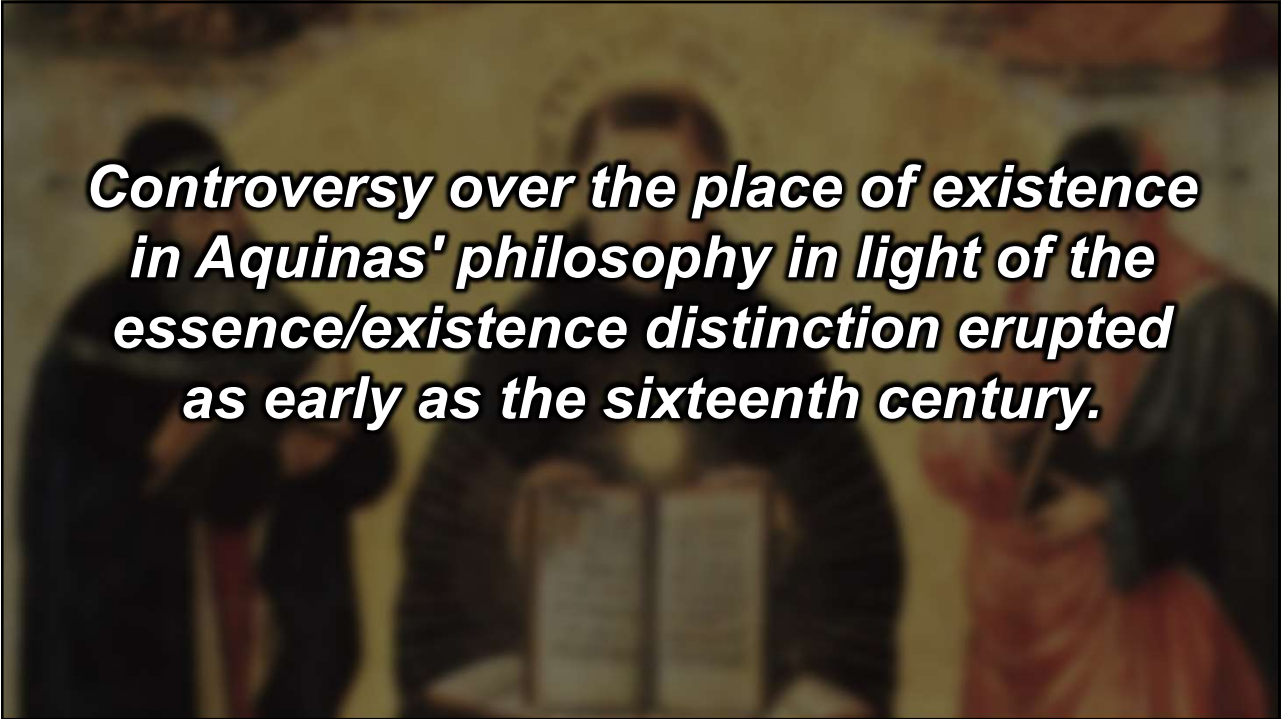
Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

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

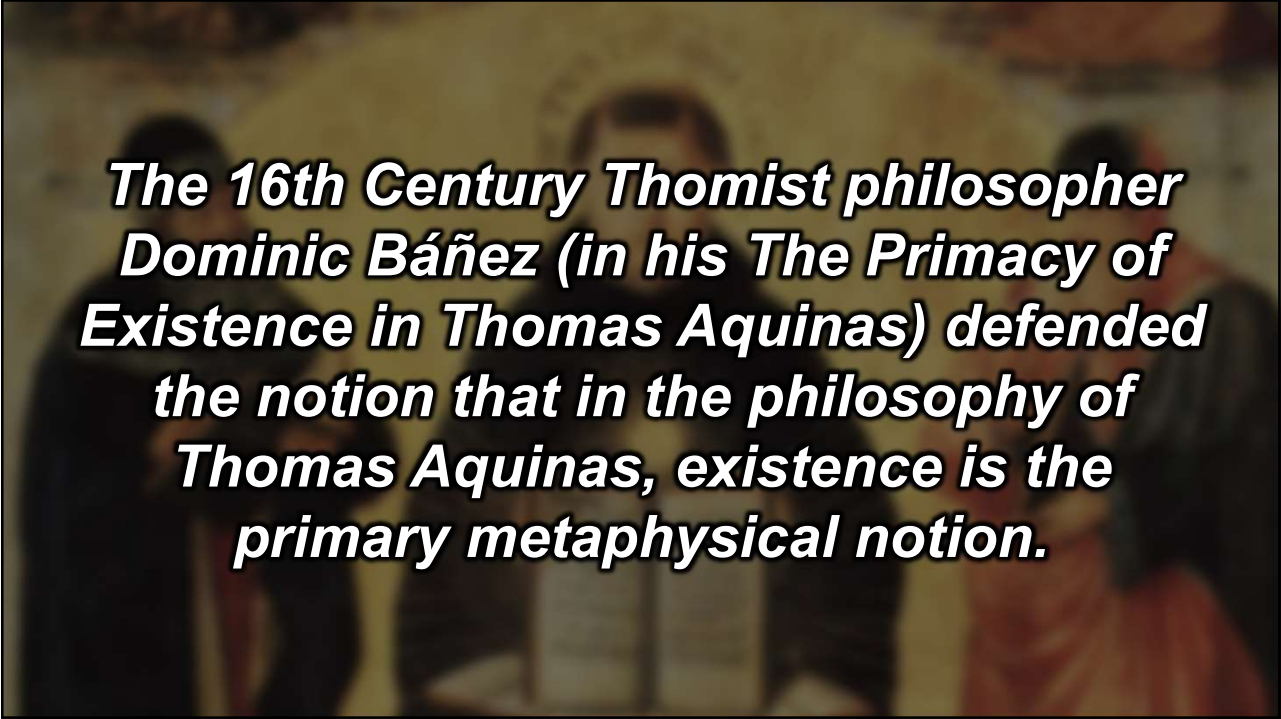
***His thinking will go on to play a significant role in subsequent Christian philosophical theology.***



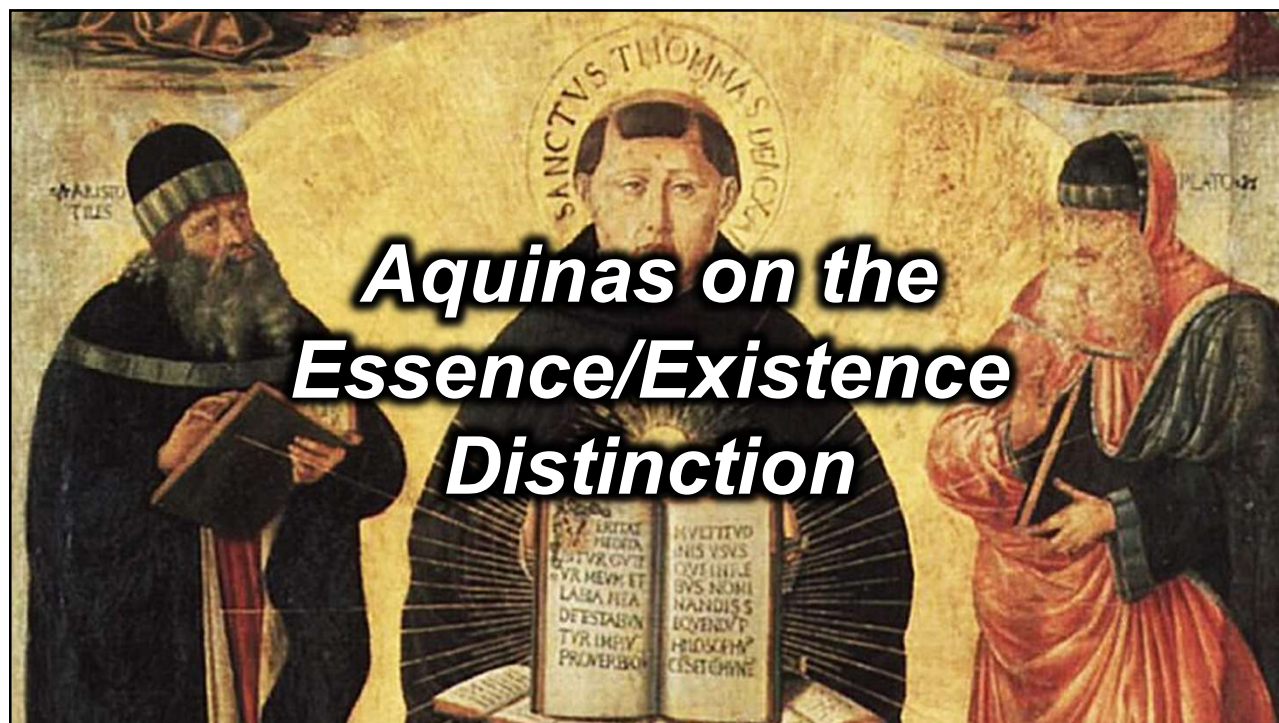
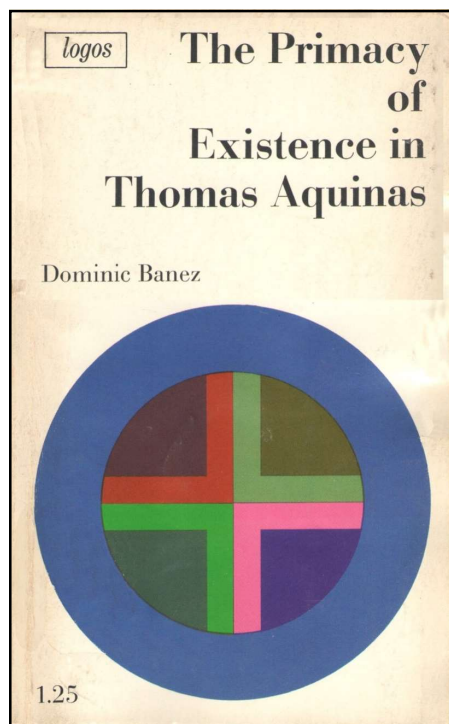




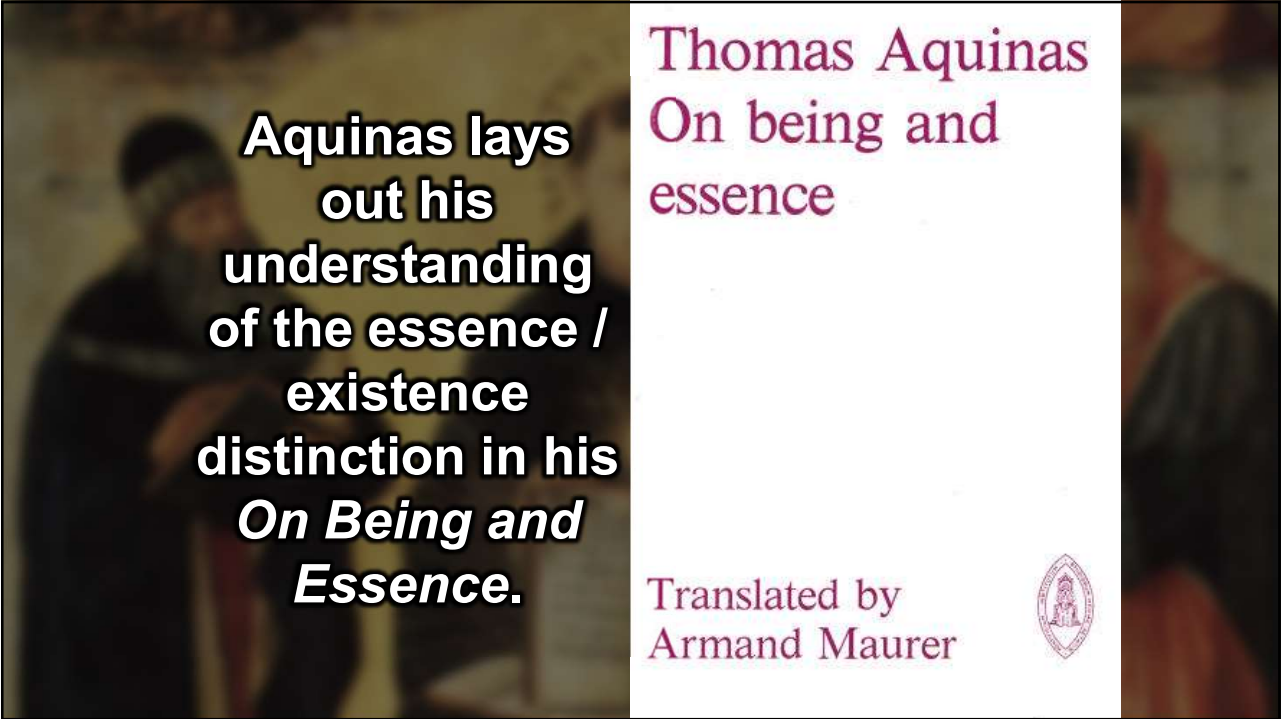
***Controversy over the place of existence in Aquinas' philosophy in light of the essence/existence distinction erupted as early as the sixteenth century.***



***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.***







**Aquinas lays  
out his  
understanding  
of the essence /  
existence  
distinction in his  
*On Being and  
Essence.***

**Thomas Aquinas**  
**On being and  
essence**

Translated by  
Armand Maurer



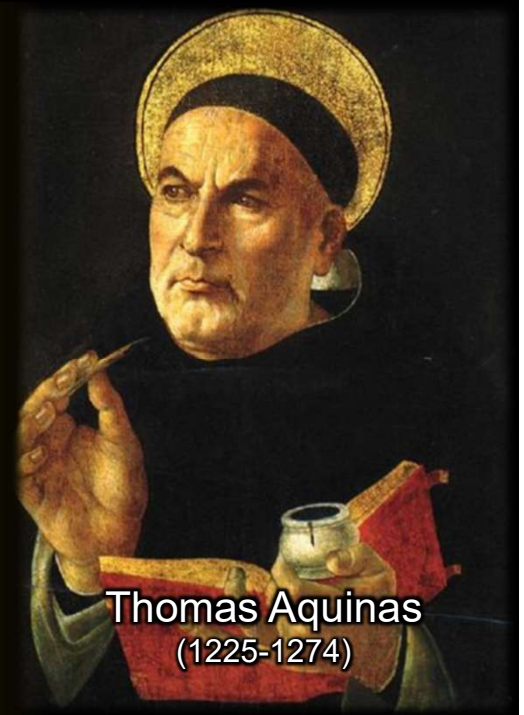
***That essence and  
existence are distinct in  
sensible objects is evident  
from the fact that one can  
understand the essence of  
a thing without knowing  
whether it exists.***







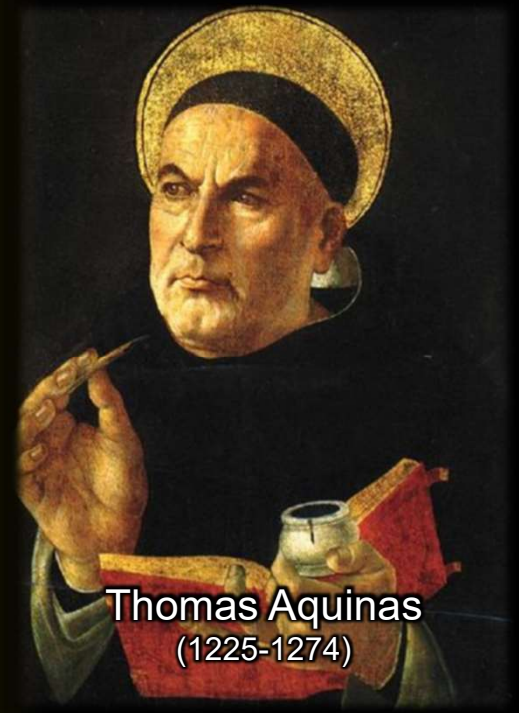
***"Now, every essence ...  
can be understood  
without knowing anything  
about its being. I can  
know, for instance, what a  
man or a phoenix is and  
still be ignorant whether it  
has being in reality.***



**Thomas Aquinas**  
(1225-1274)

***"From this it is clear that being is other than essence ... unless perhaps there is a reality whose quiddity [essence] is its being."***

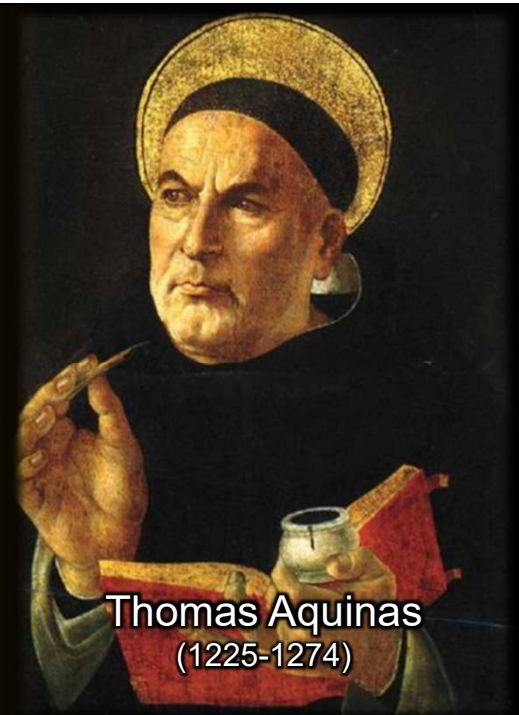
[*On Being and Essence*, IV, §6, trans. Armand Maurer, (Toronto: The Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1968), 55]



Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

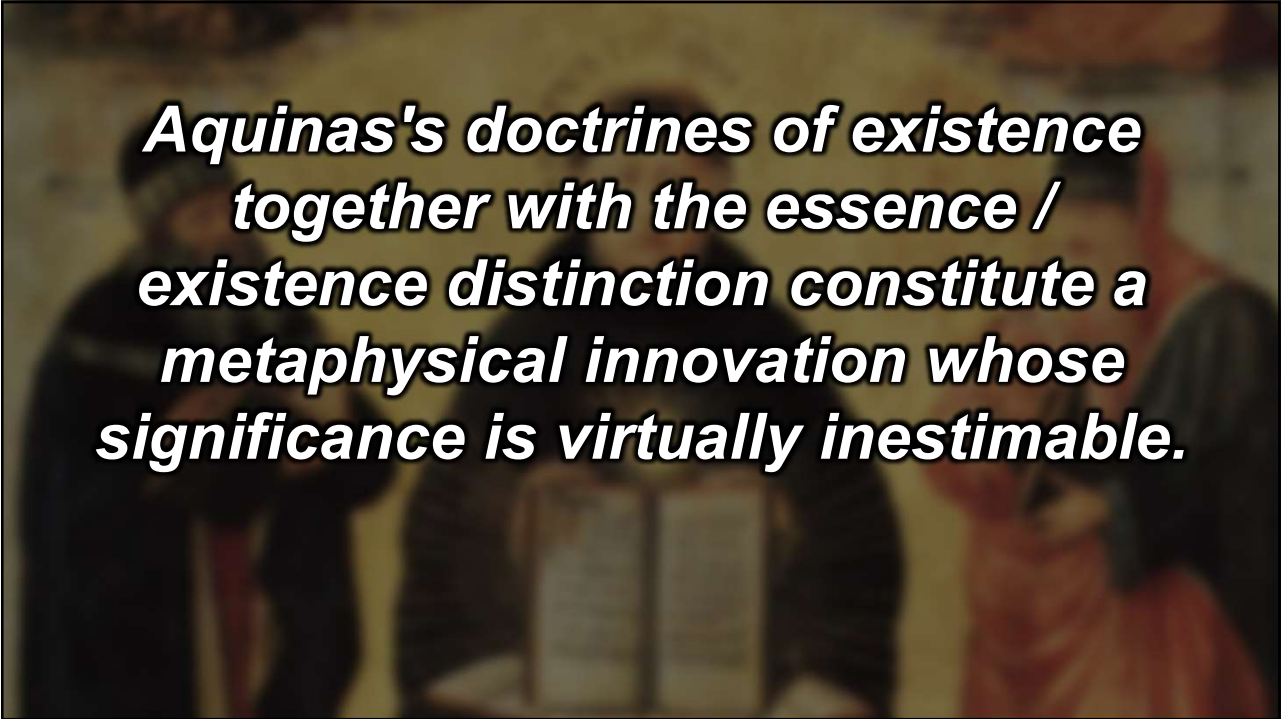
***"Everything that is in the genus of substance is composite with a real composition, because whatever is in the category of substance is subsistent in its own existence, and its own act of existing must be distinct from the thing itself; otherwise it could not be distinct in existence from the other things with which it agrees in the formal character of its quiddity; for such agreement is required in all things that are directly in a category. Consequently everything that is directly in the category of substance is composed at least of the act of being and the subject of being."***

[*On Truth (De Veritate)* XXVII, 1, ad. 8, trans. Robert W. Schmidt (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), v. 3, pp. 311-312]

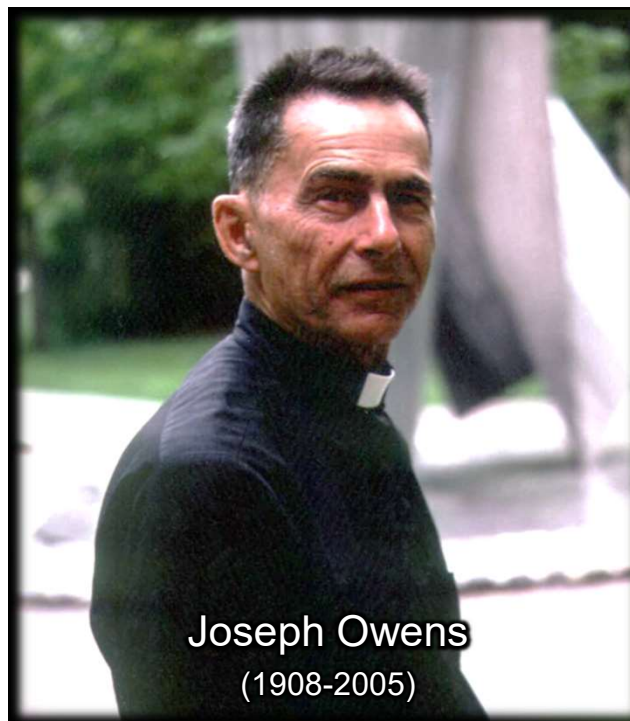


Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)





***Aquinas's doctrines of existence  
together with the essence /  
existence distinction constitute a  
metaphysical innovation whose  
significance is virtually inestimable.***

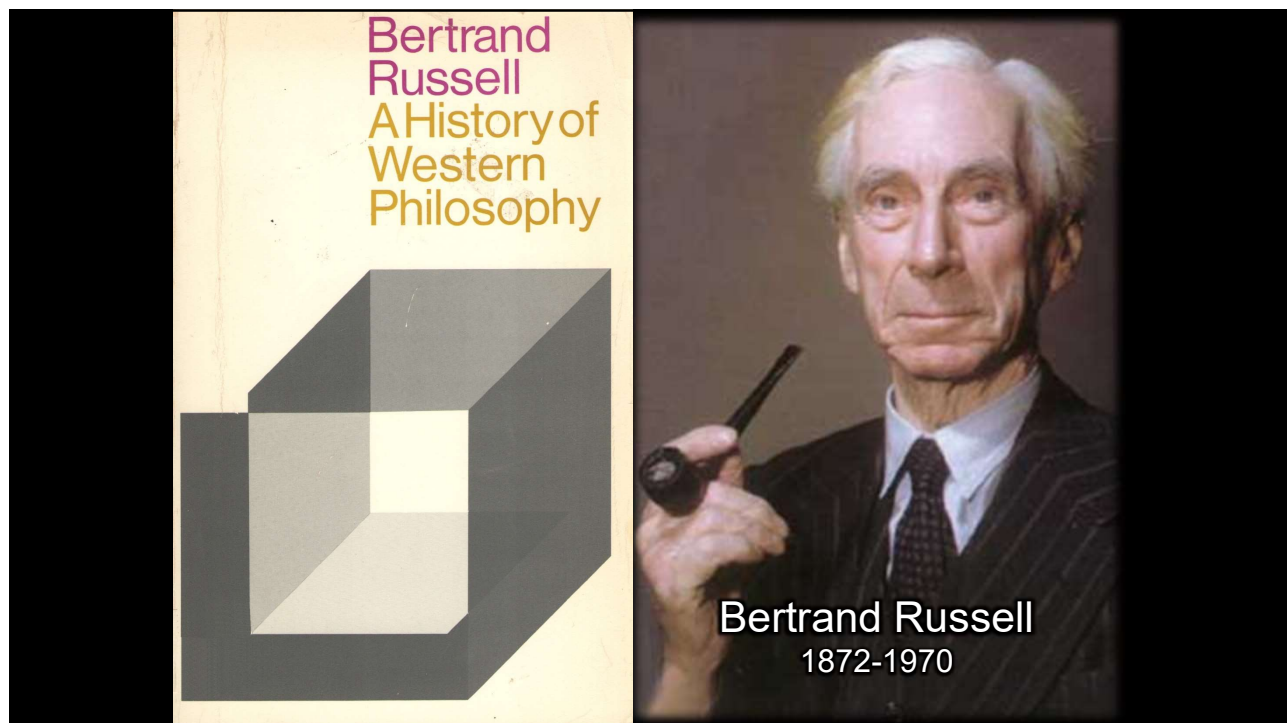


**Joseph Owens**  
(1908-2005)

***"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."***

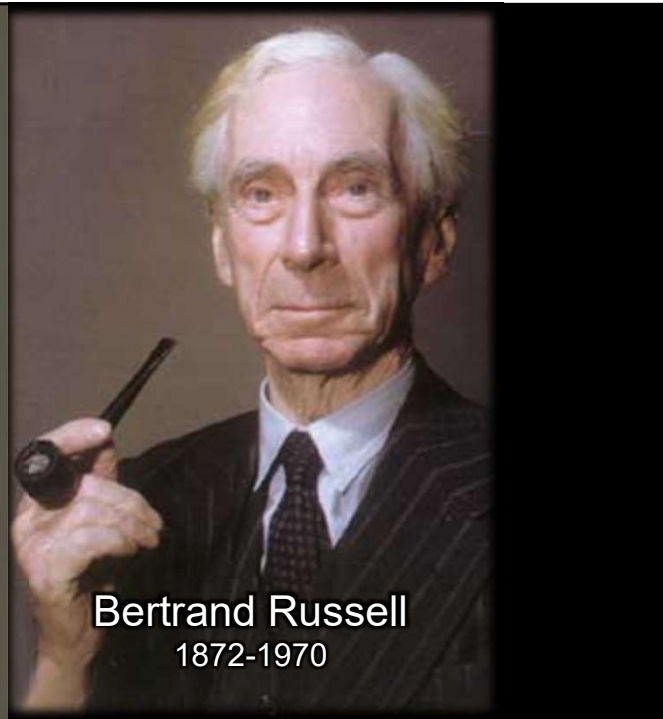
[Joseph Owens, "Aristotle and Aquinas," in Norman Kretzman and Eleonore Stump, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993): 39]

***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.***





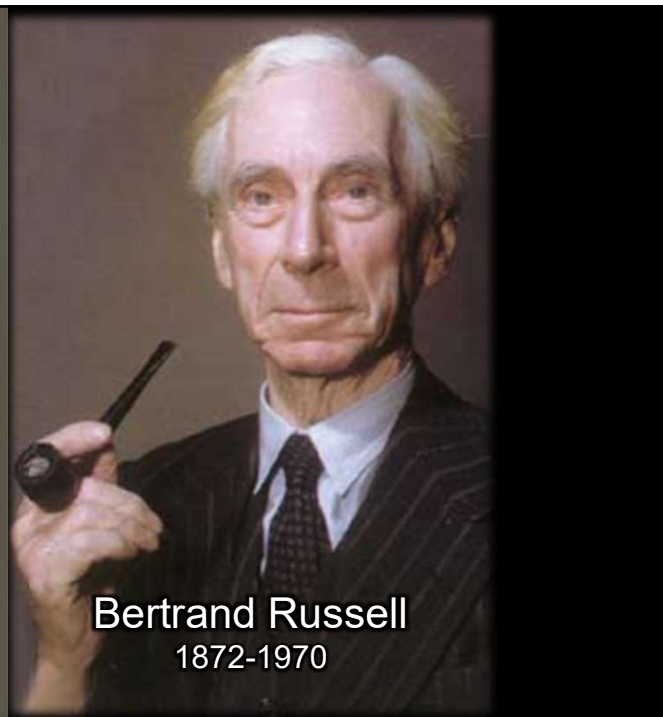
**"The contentions that God's essence and existence are one and the same, that God is His own goodness, His own power, and so on, suggest a confusion, found in Plato, but supposed to have been avoided by Aristotle, between the manner of being of particulars and the manner of being of universals.**



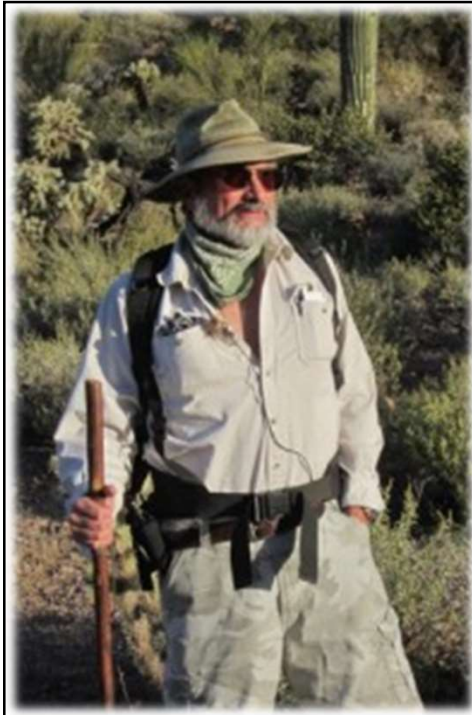
**Bertrand Russell**  
1872-1970

**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]



**Bertrand Russell**  
1872-1970



## 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<sup>1</sup> predicates, and thus into thinking that there must be some mysterious property or quasi-property called "Being"<sup>2</sup> 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 ...<sup>3</sup>

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,'

<sup>1</sup> "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 B626.) 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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."

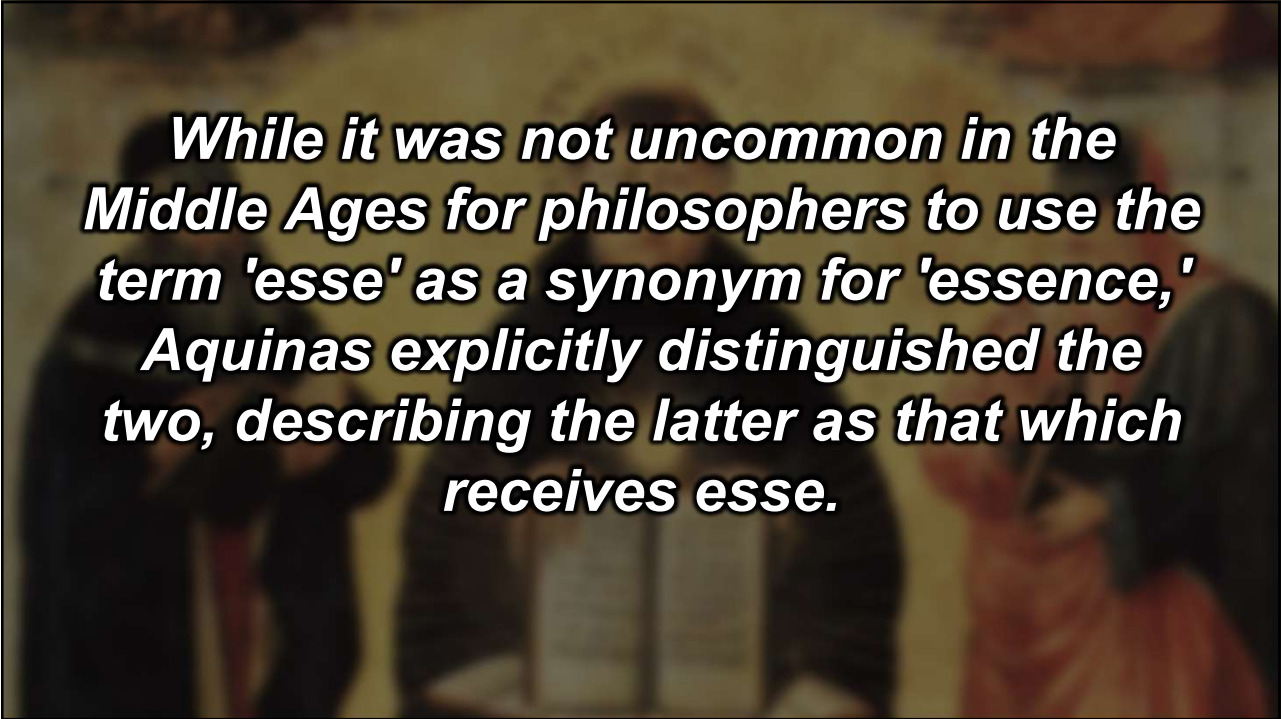
<sup>3</sup> "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism," in *Logic and Knowledge*, ed. Robert C. Marsh (New York: C. D. Van Nostrand, 1956).



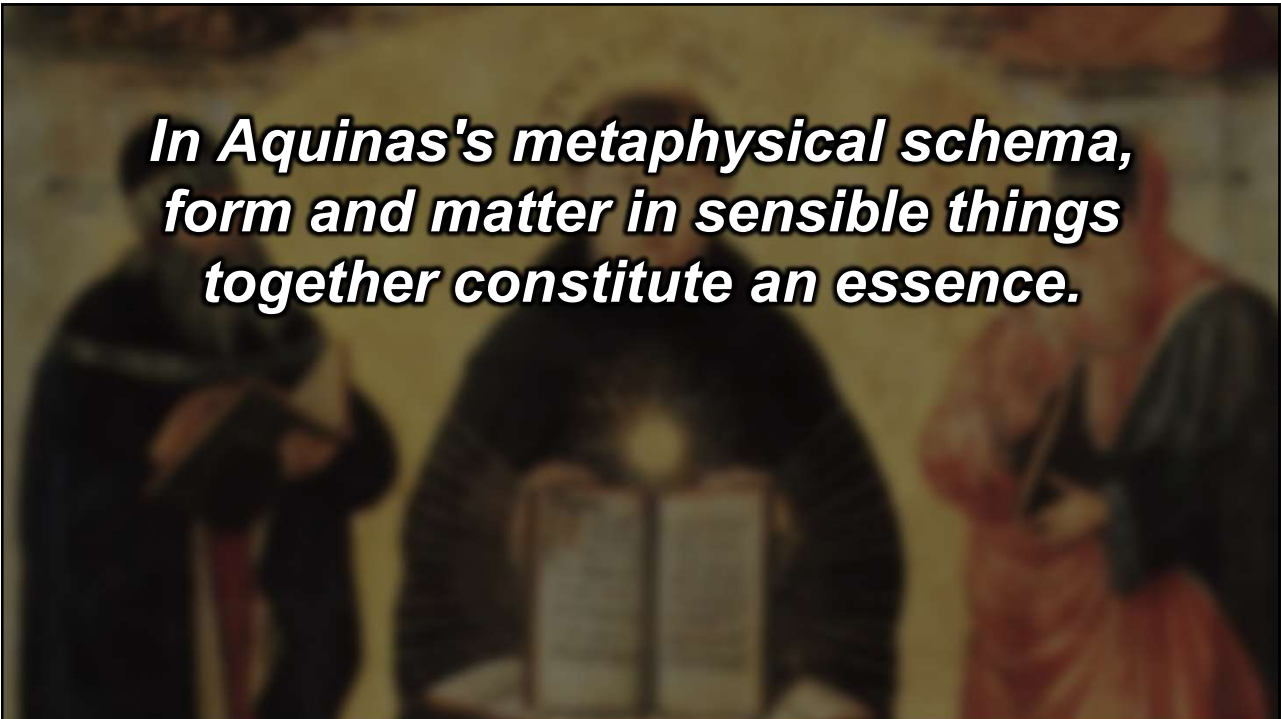




***The infinitive of the Latin verb sum (I am) is 'esse' and is often translated into English as 'being' or 'existence.'***

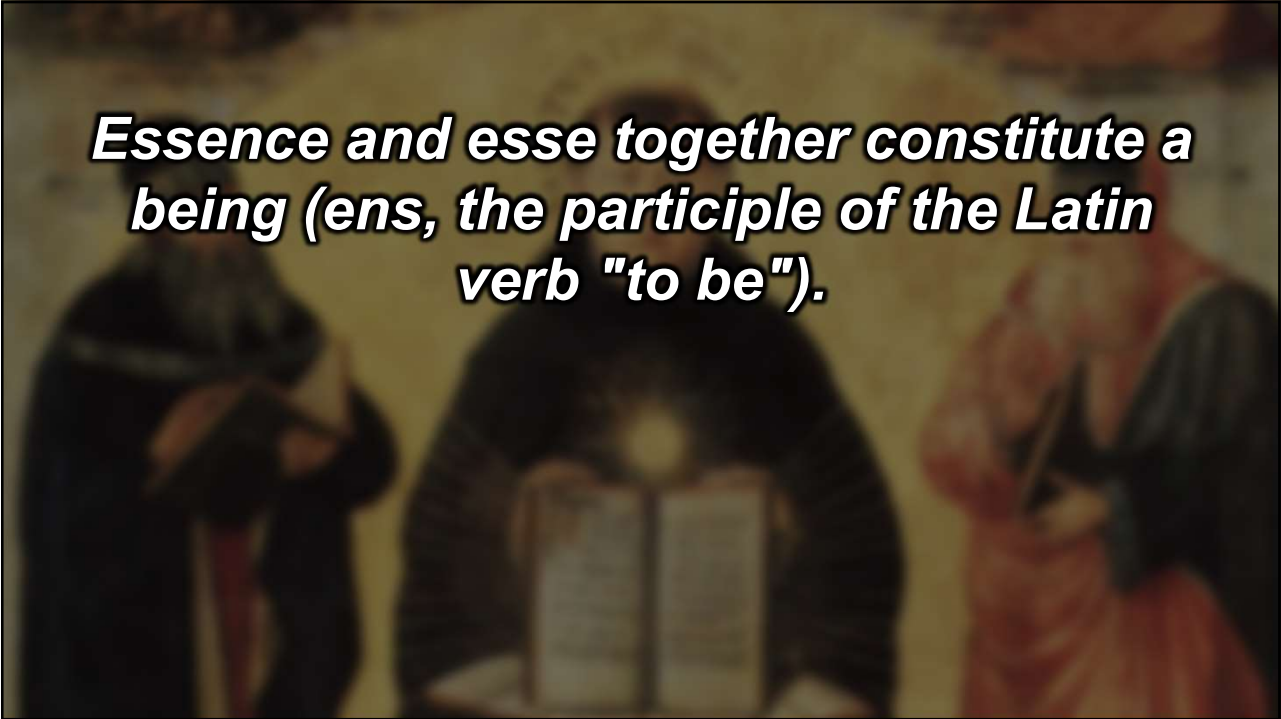


***While it was not uncommon in the Middle Ages for philosophers to use the term 'esse' as a synonym for 'essence,' Aquinas explicitly distinguished the two, describing the latter as that which receives esse.***

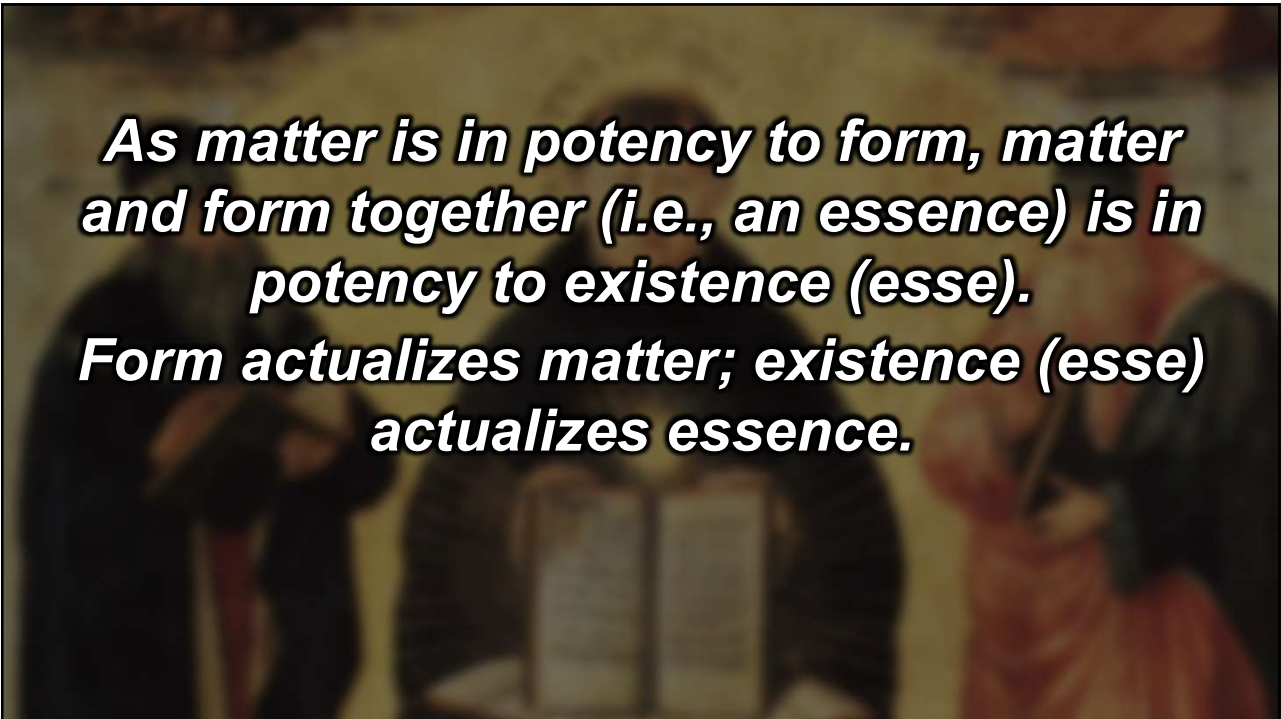


***In Aquinas's metaphysical schema, form and matter in sensible things together constitute an essence.***

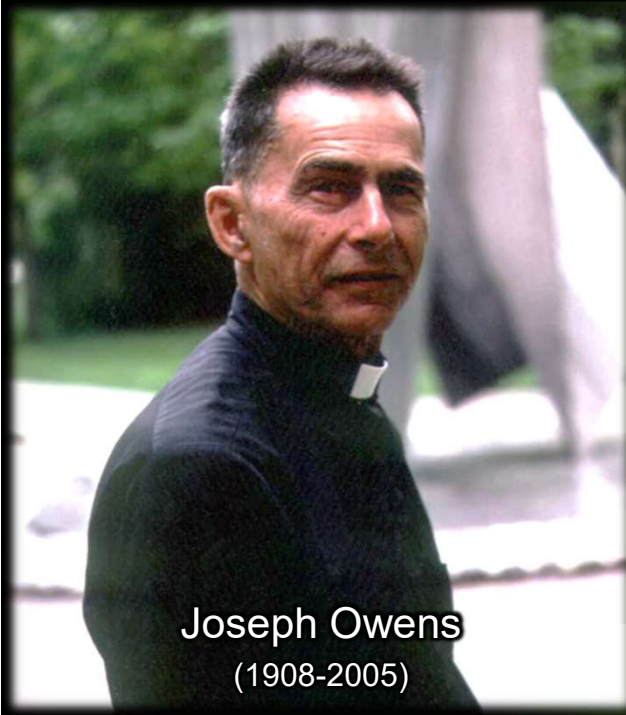




***Essence and esse together constitute a being (ens, the participle of the Latin verb "to be").***



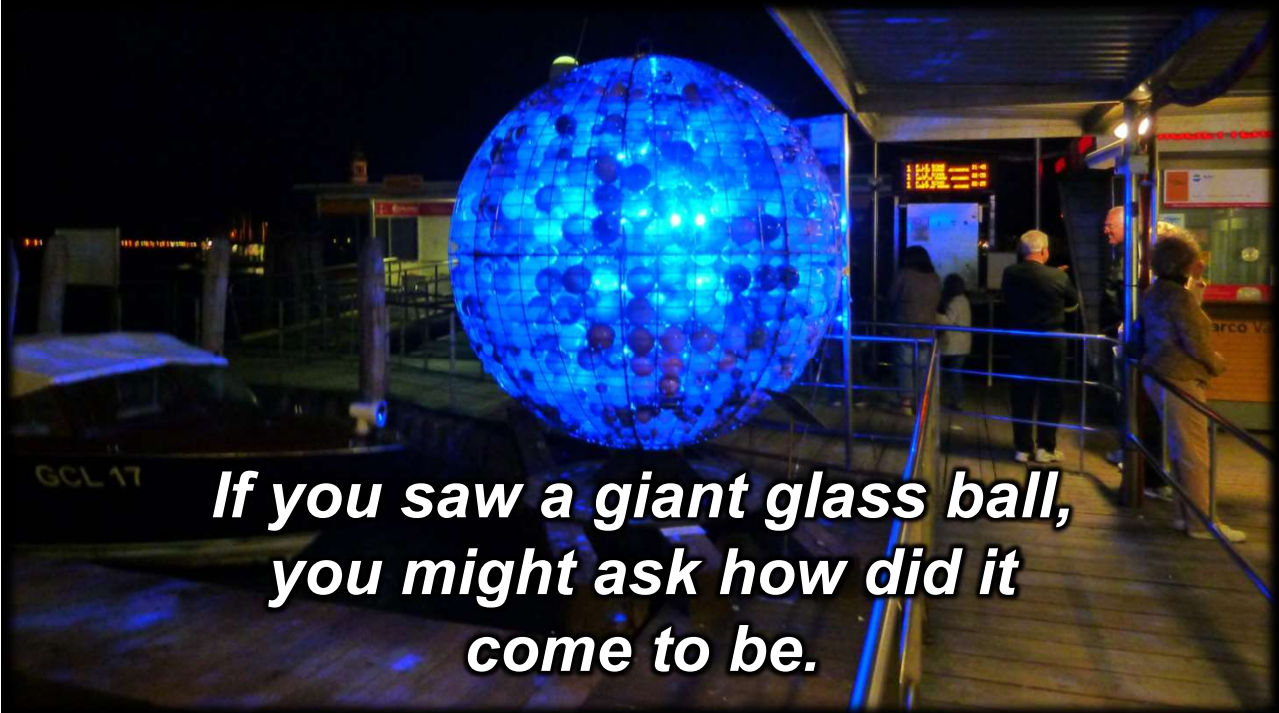
***As matter is in potency to form, matter and form together (i.e., an essence) is in potency to existence (esse).  
Form actualizes matter; existence (esse) actualizes essence.***

A portrait of Joseph Owens, a man with short dark hair, wearing a black turtleneck sweater with a white clerical collar. He is looking slightly to the right of the camera. The background is out of focus, showing some greenery and a white structure.

**Joseph Owens**  
(1908-2005)

**"When existence is considered in relation to the thing it makes exist, it may be regarded as actualizing the thing and, accordingly, it appears as the actuality that gives the thing existence."**

[Joseph Owens, *An Interpretation of Existence* (Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1968), 51]

A large, glowing blue glass ball is the central focus of the image. It is made of many small, interconnected glass pieces. The ball is illuminated from within, creating a bright blue glow. It is situated on a wooden walkway at night. In the background, there are some people and a building with a sign that says "Marco V". The overall scene is dark, with the blue light from the ball providing the main illumination.

***If you saw a giant glass ball,  
you might ask how did it  
come to be.***

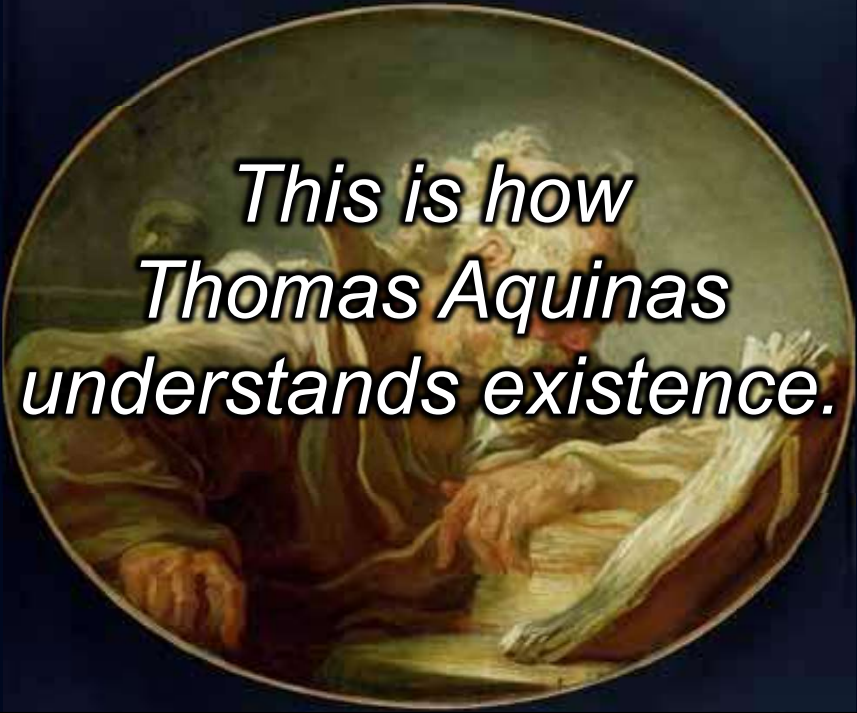




***But if you were hearing music,  
you would not ask how it came to be.***



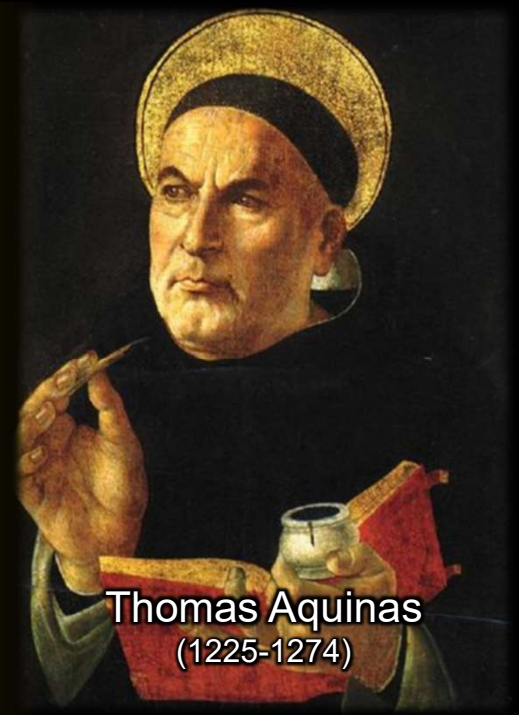
***Rather, you would ask what is causing  
the music to be right now.***



*This is how  
Thomas Aquinas  
understands existence.*

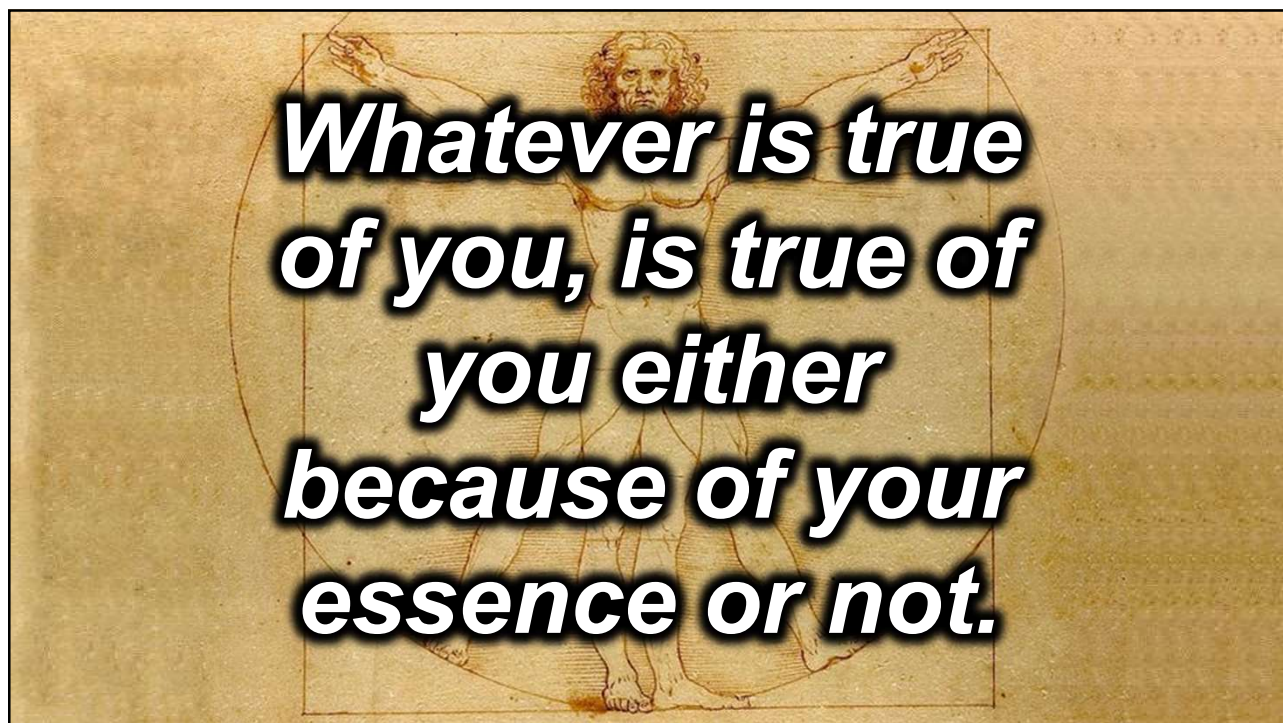
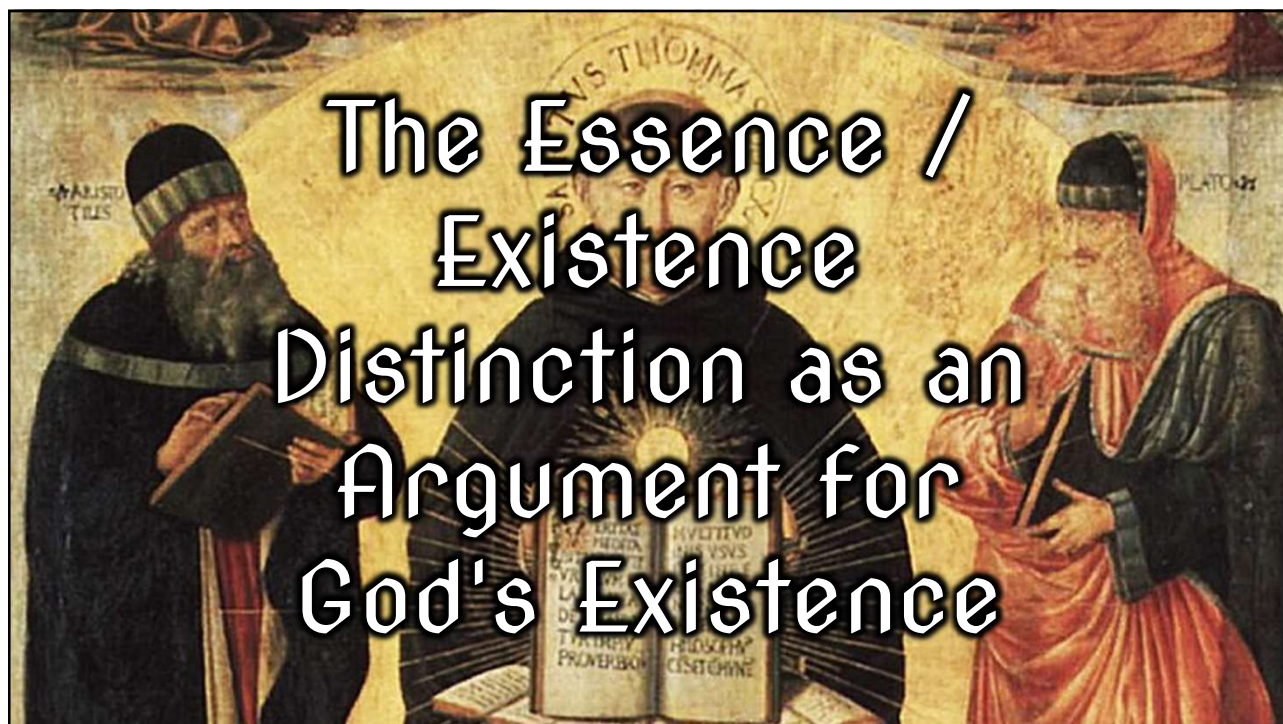
***"God causes this effect  
[existence] in things  
not only when they first  
begin to be, but as long  
as they are preserved  
in being..."***

[Summa Theologiae 1, Q. 46, ii, ad 7]



Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

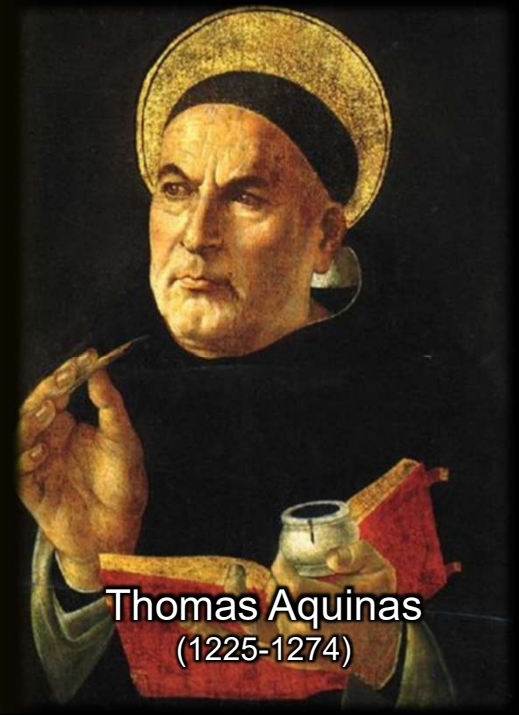




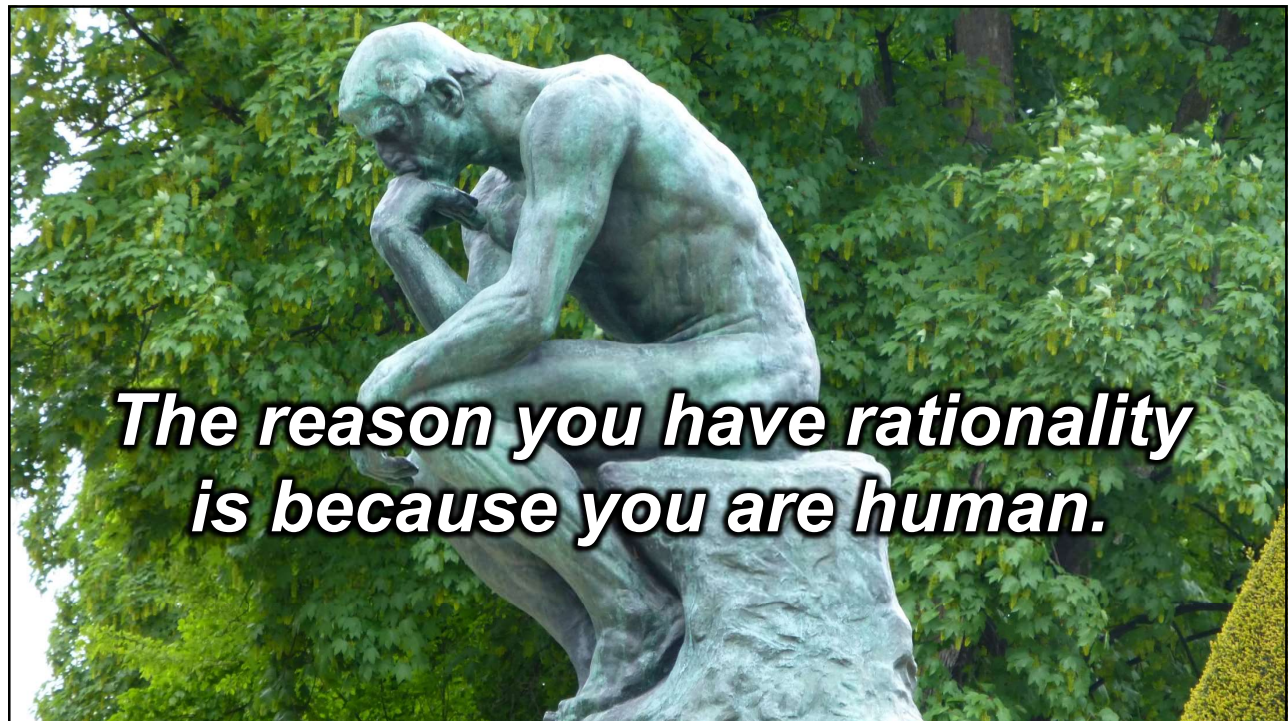


***"Whatever belongs  
to a thing is either  
caused by the  
principles of its  
nature ... or comes  
to it from an  
extrinsic principle."***

[On Being and Essence, IV, §7, trans. Maurer, 56-57]

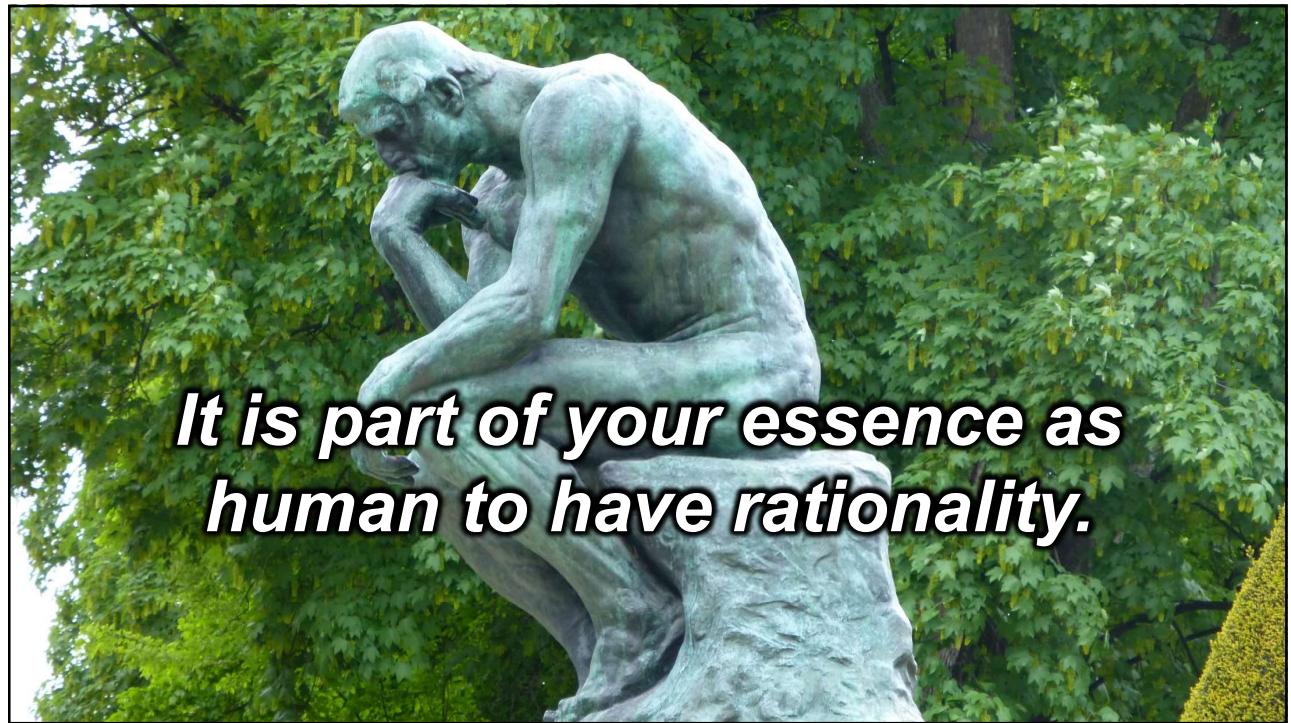


Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

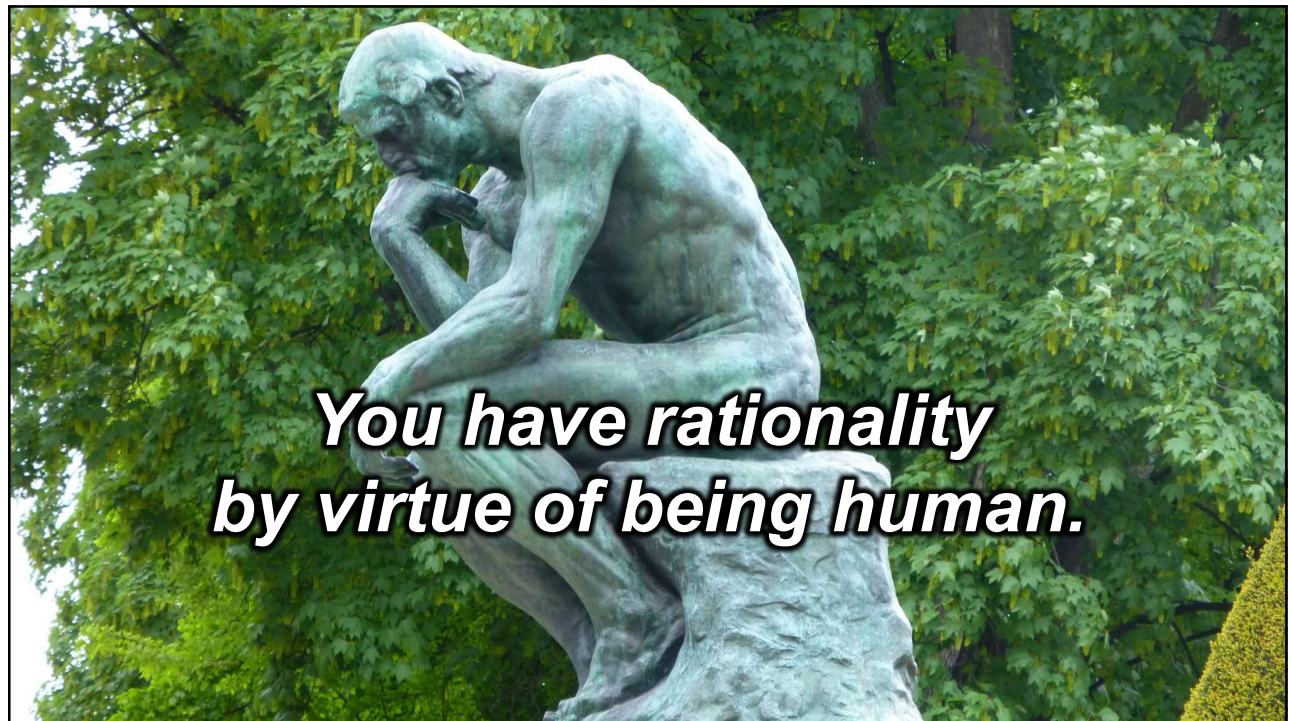


***The reason you have rationality  
is because you are human.***



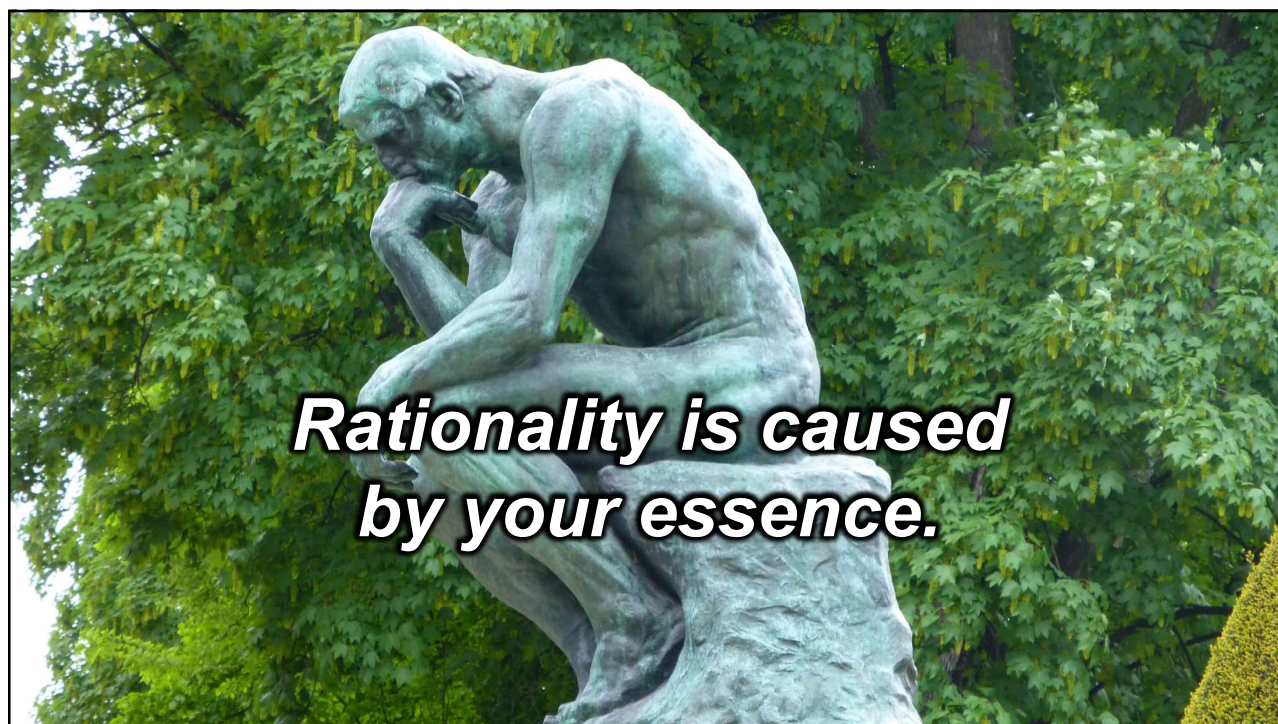


***It is part of your essence as human to have rationality.***

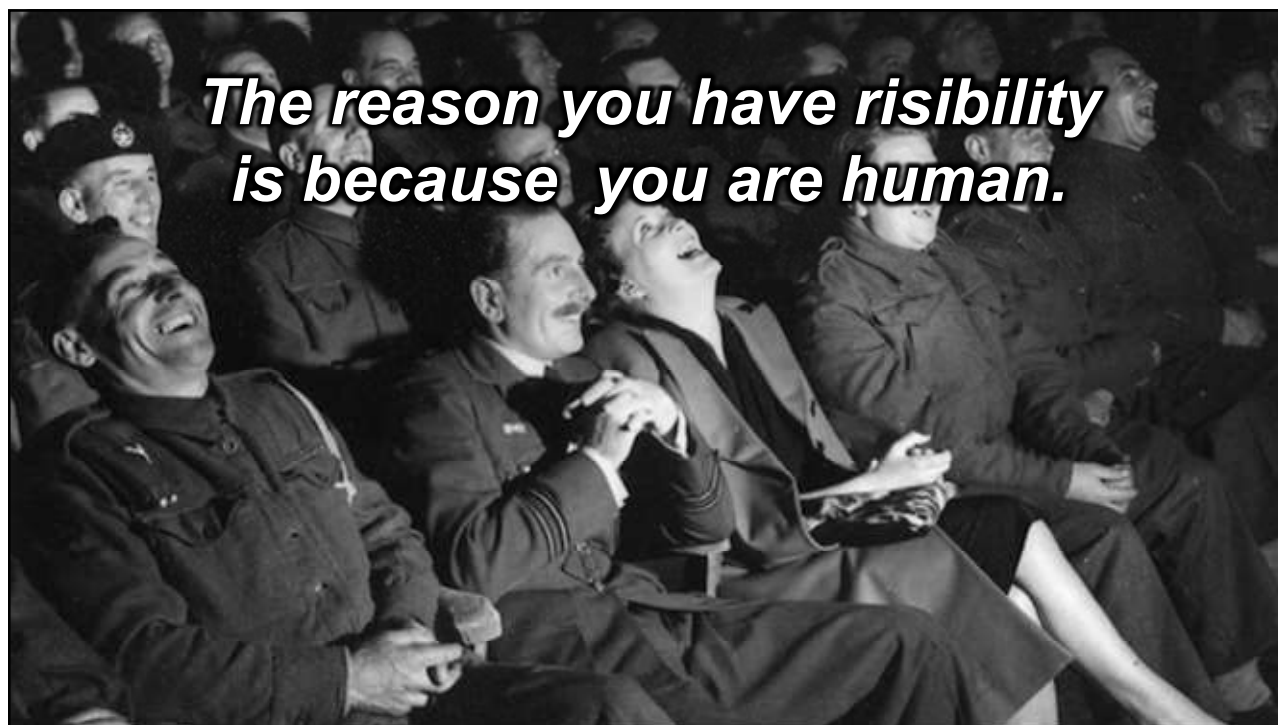


***You have rationality by virtue of being human.***





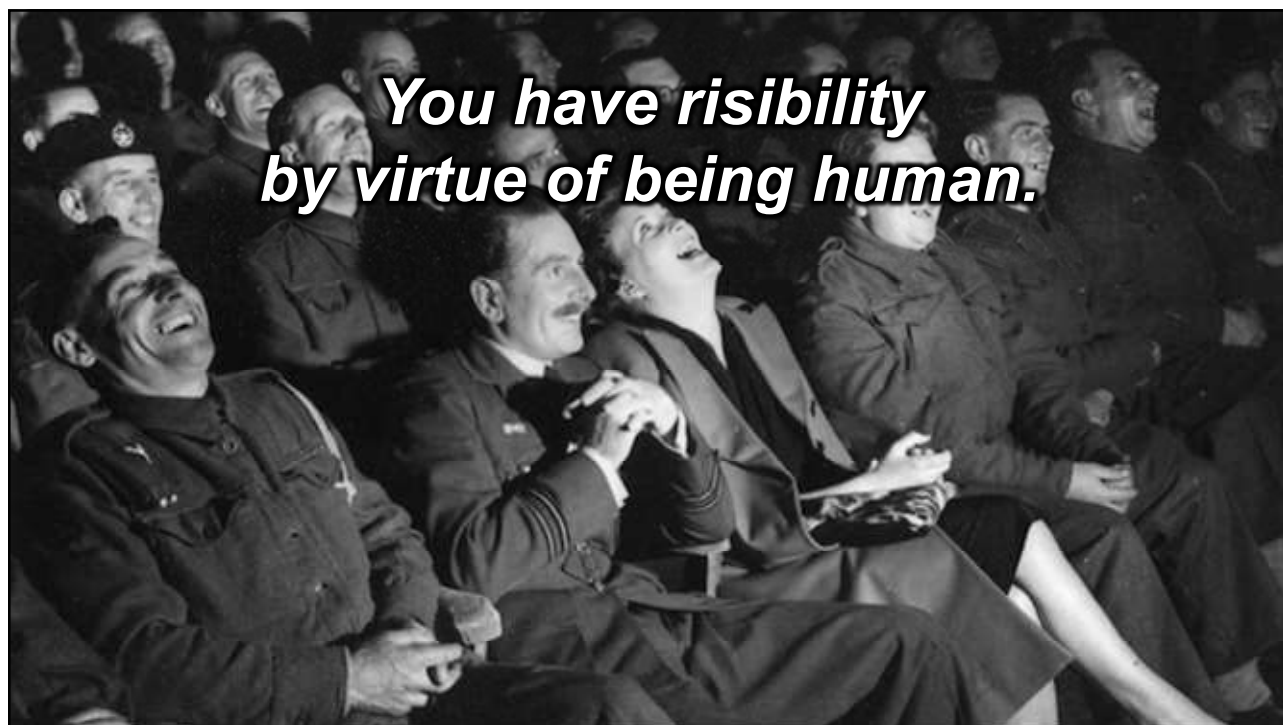
***Rationality is caused  
by your essence.***



***The reason you have risibility  
is because you are human.***

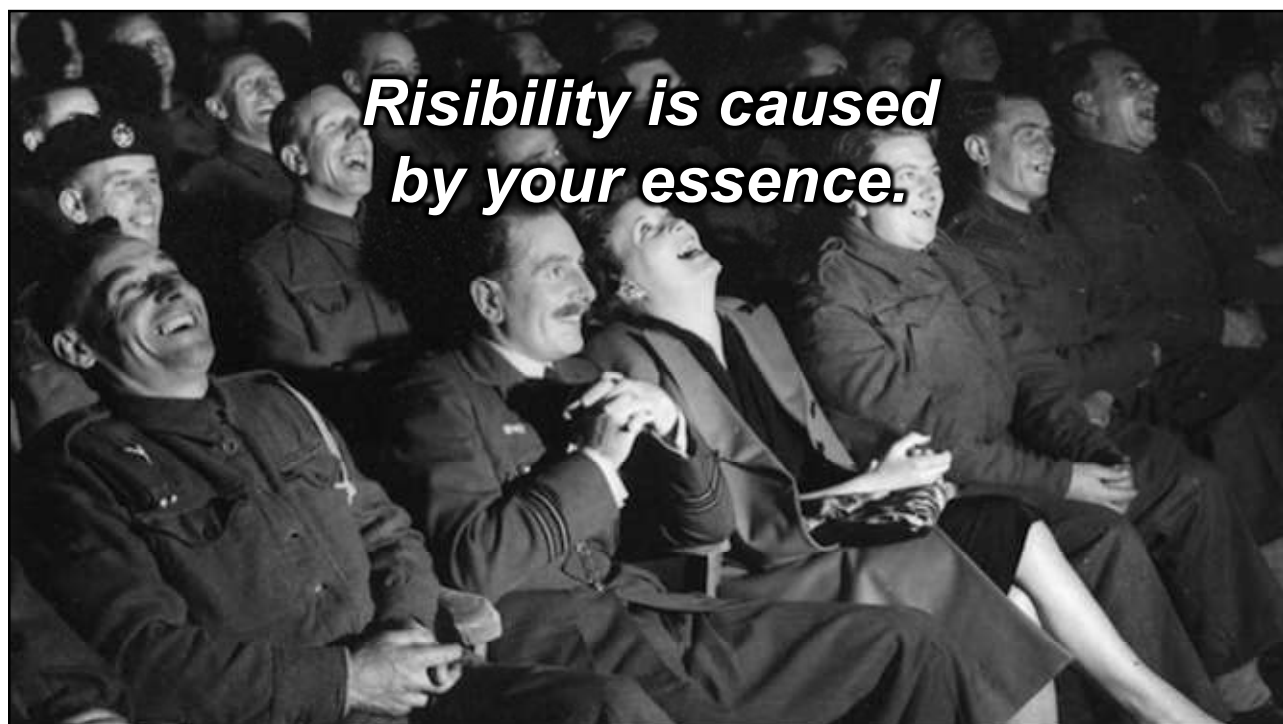


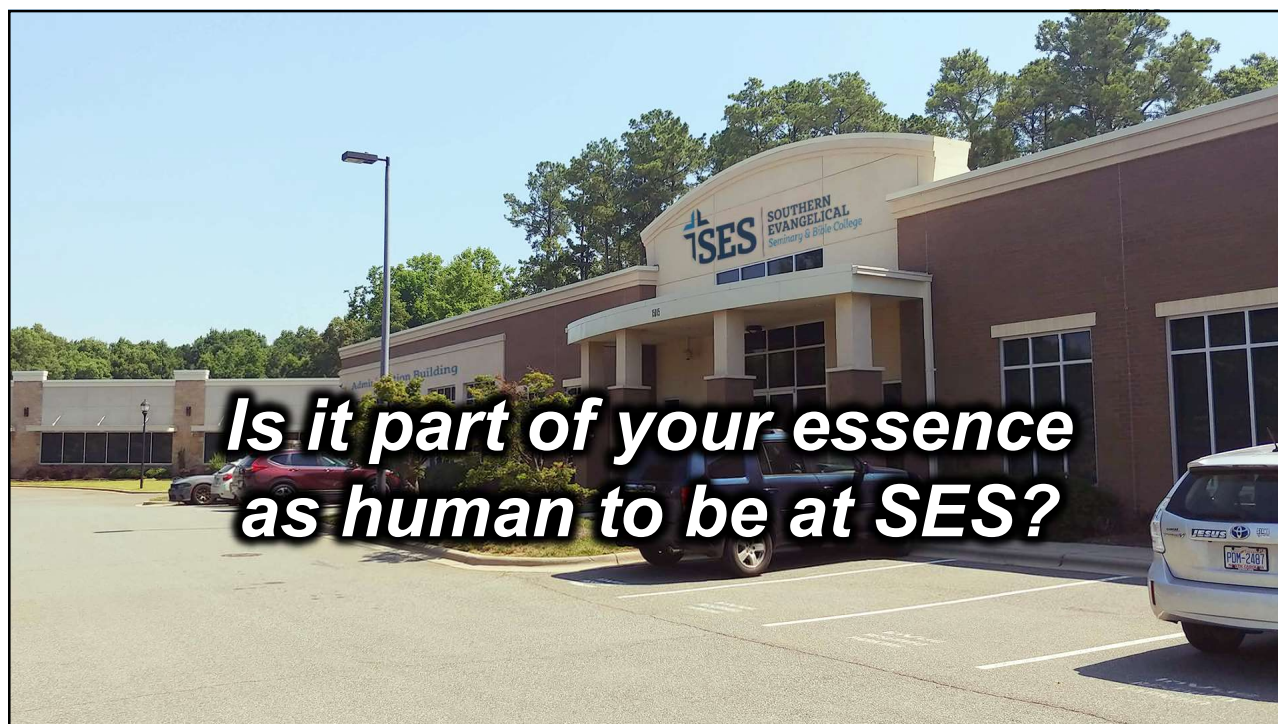
***It is part of your essence  
as human to have risibility.***



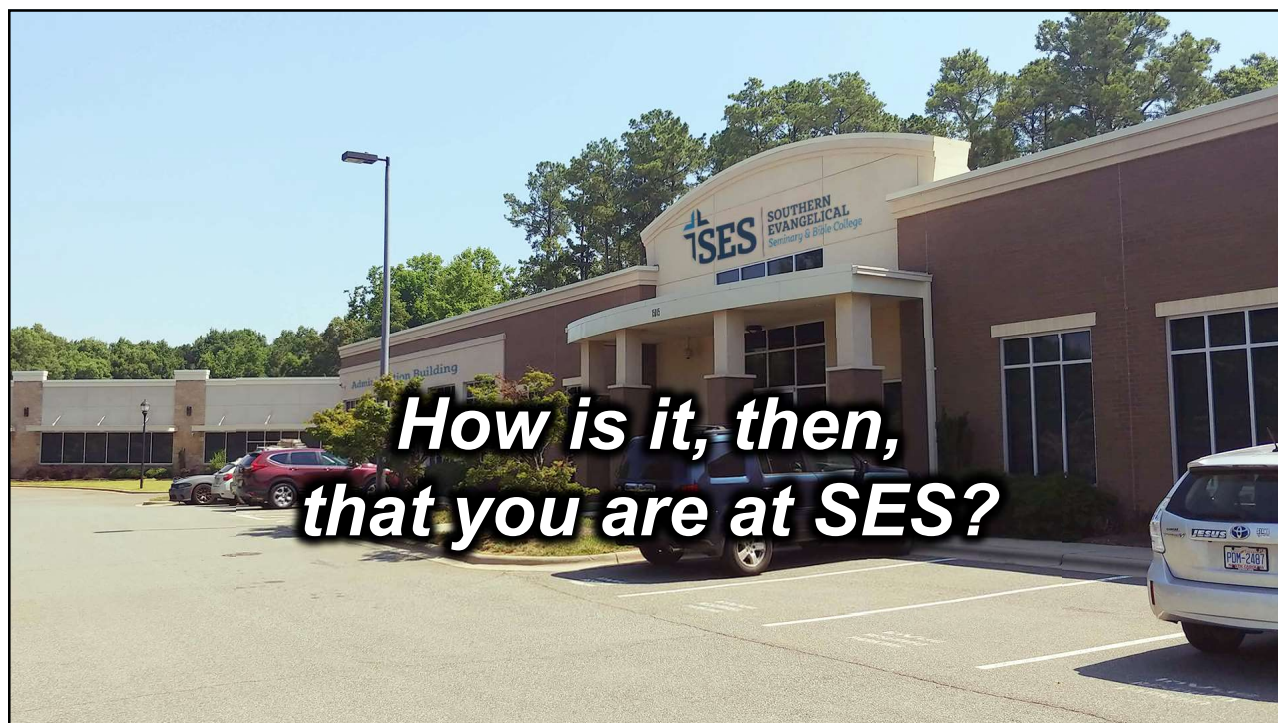
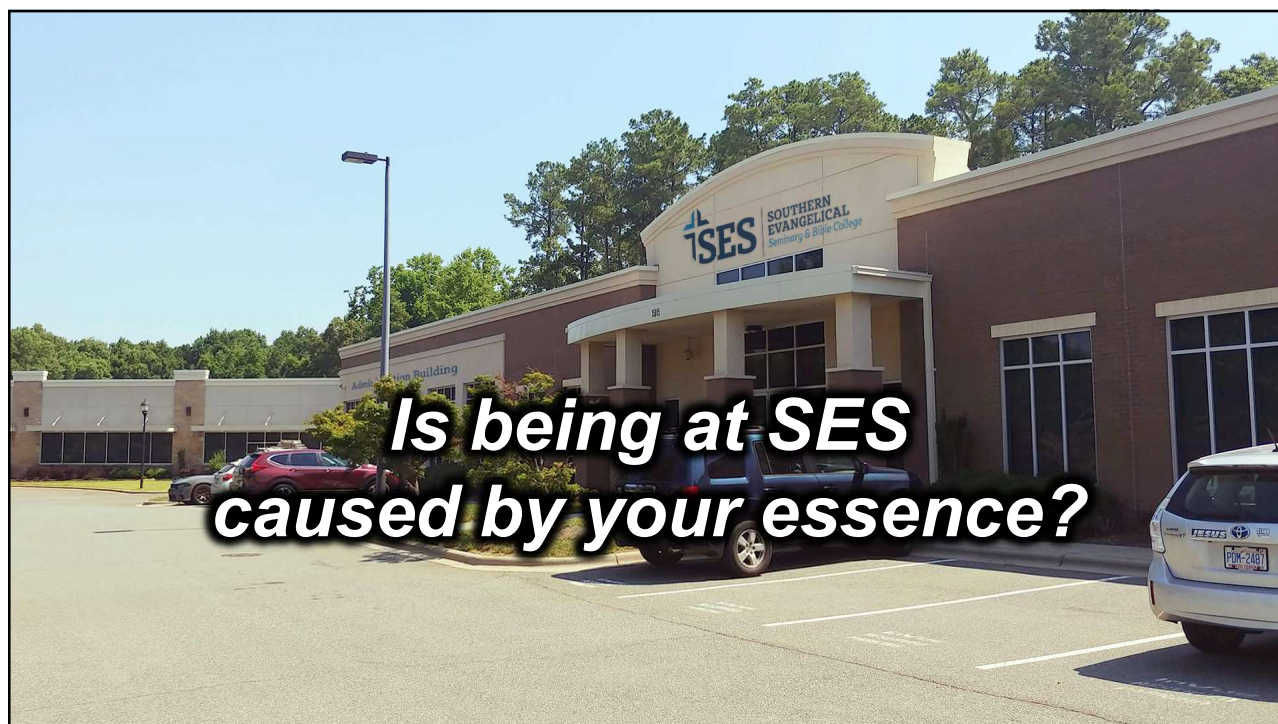
***You have risibility  
by virtue of being human.***



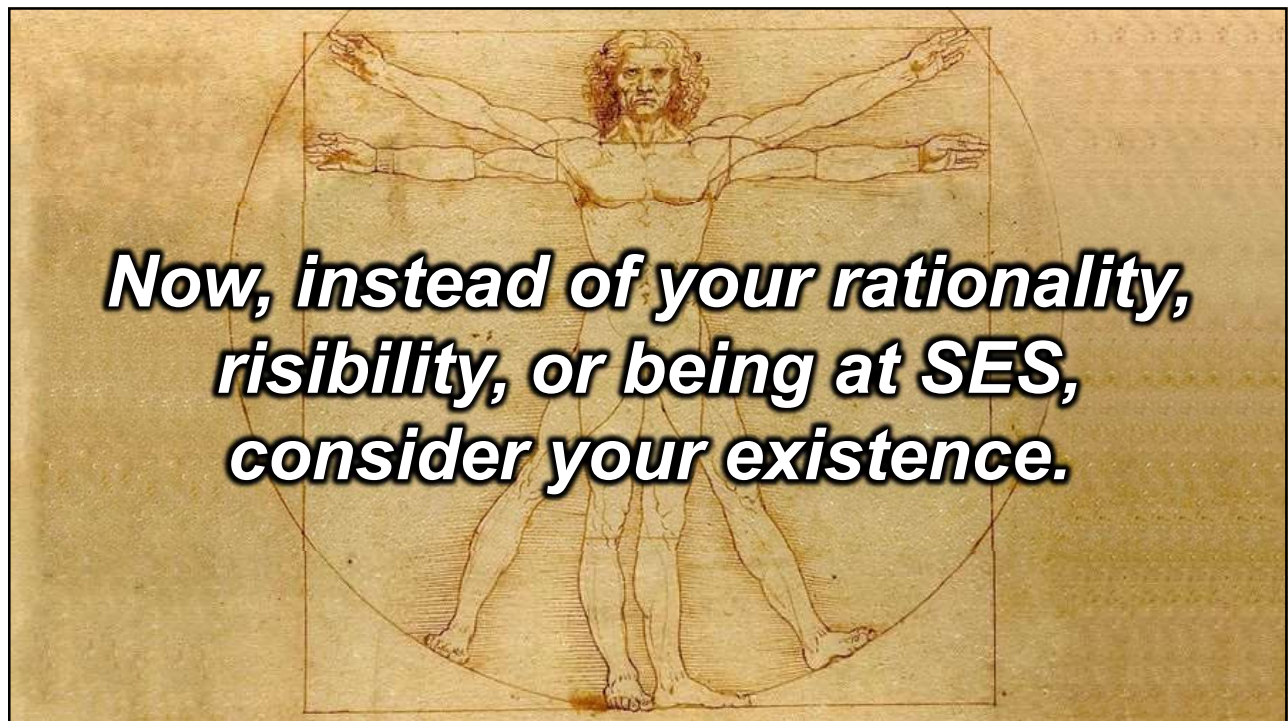
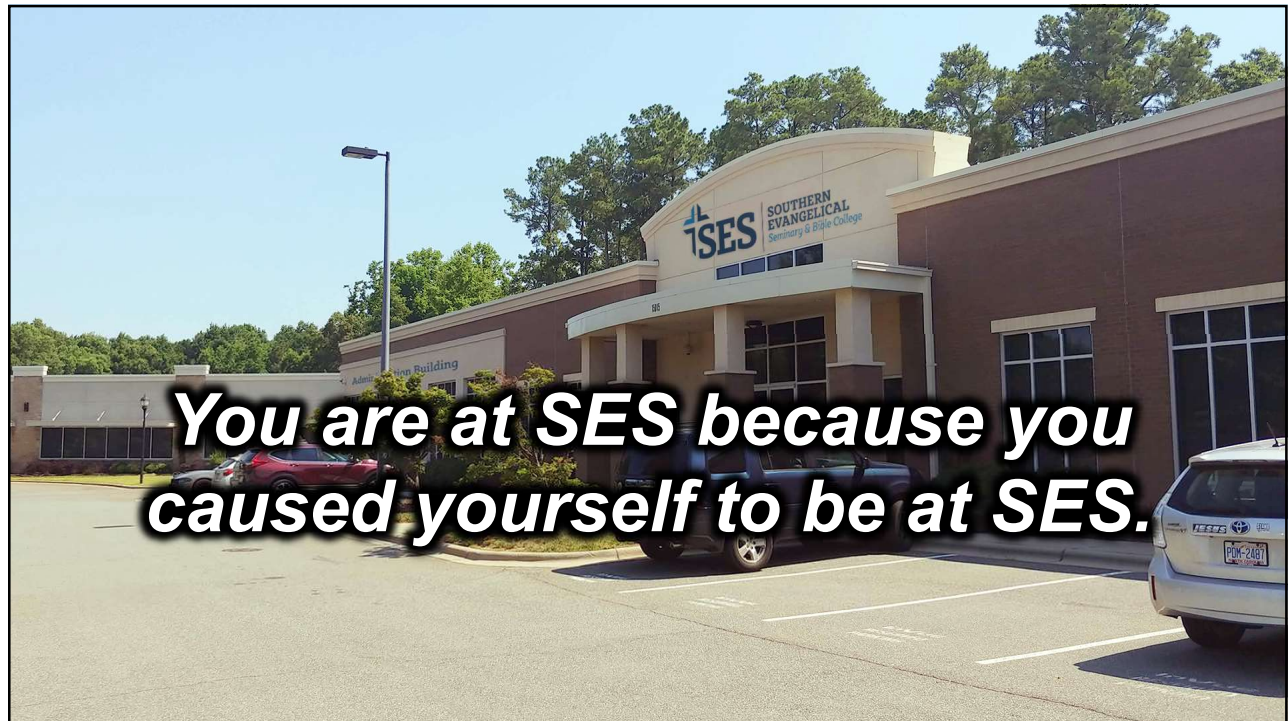




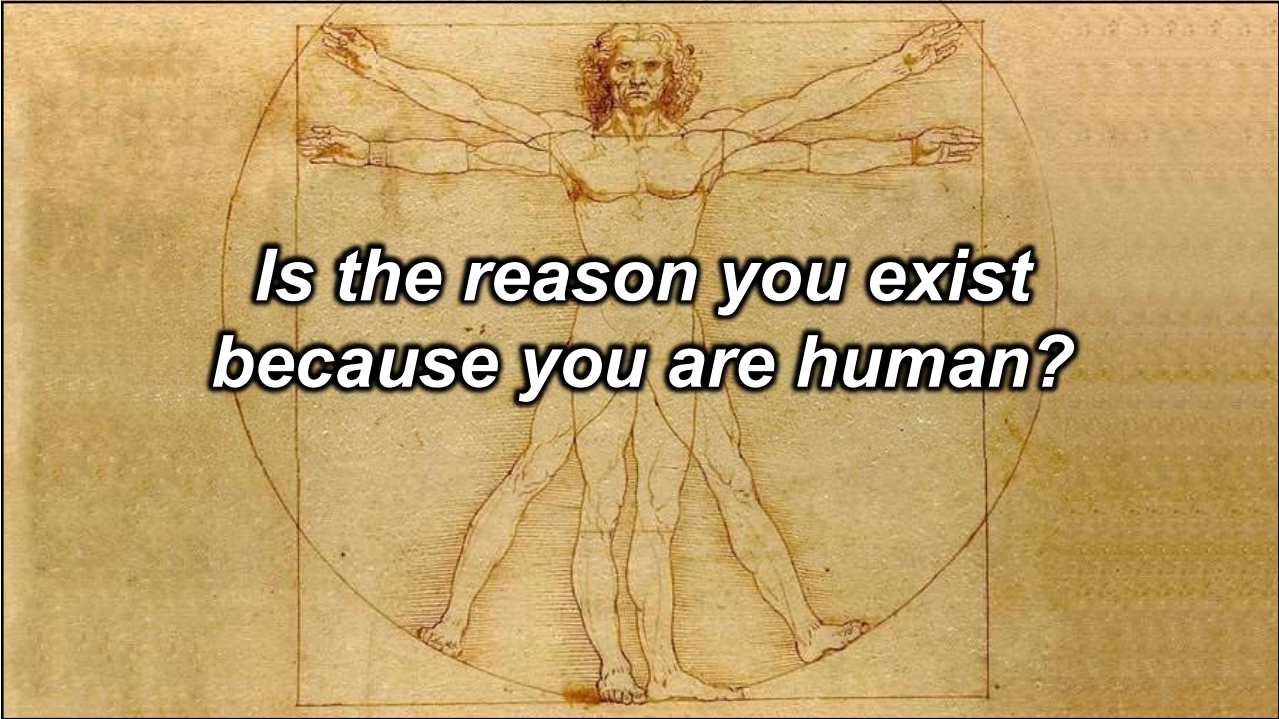




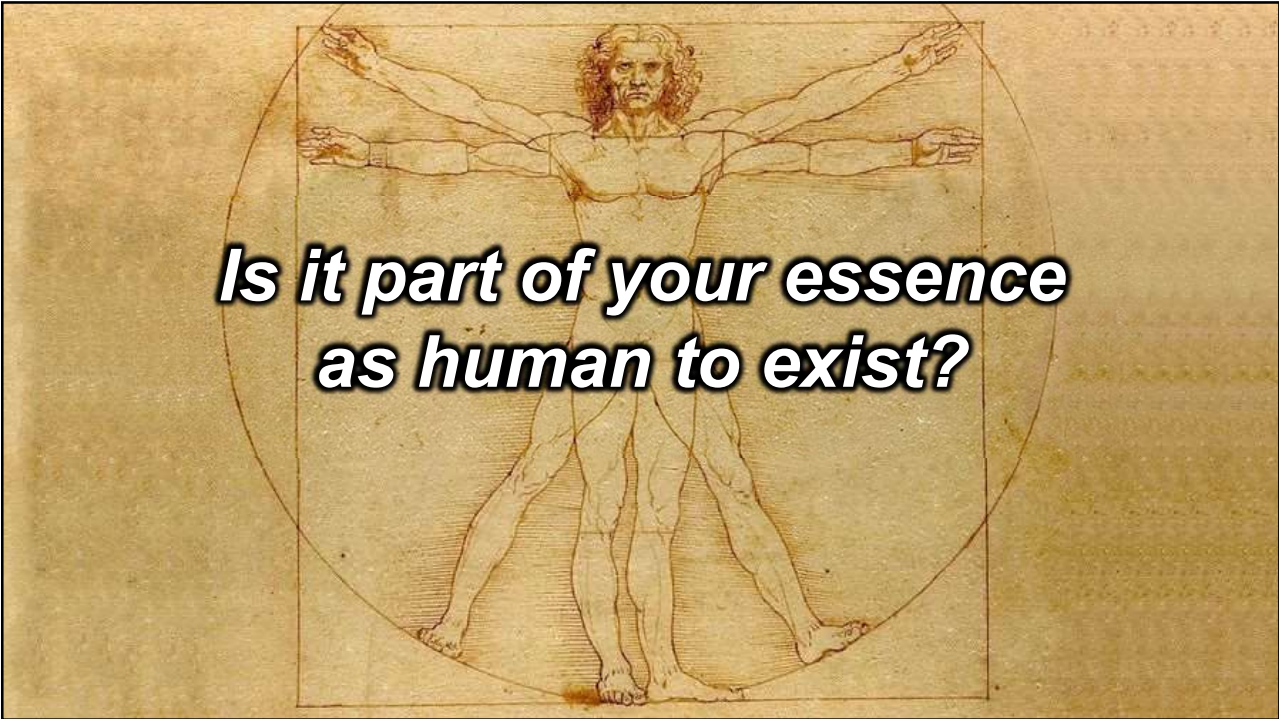






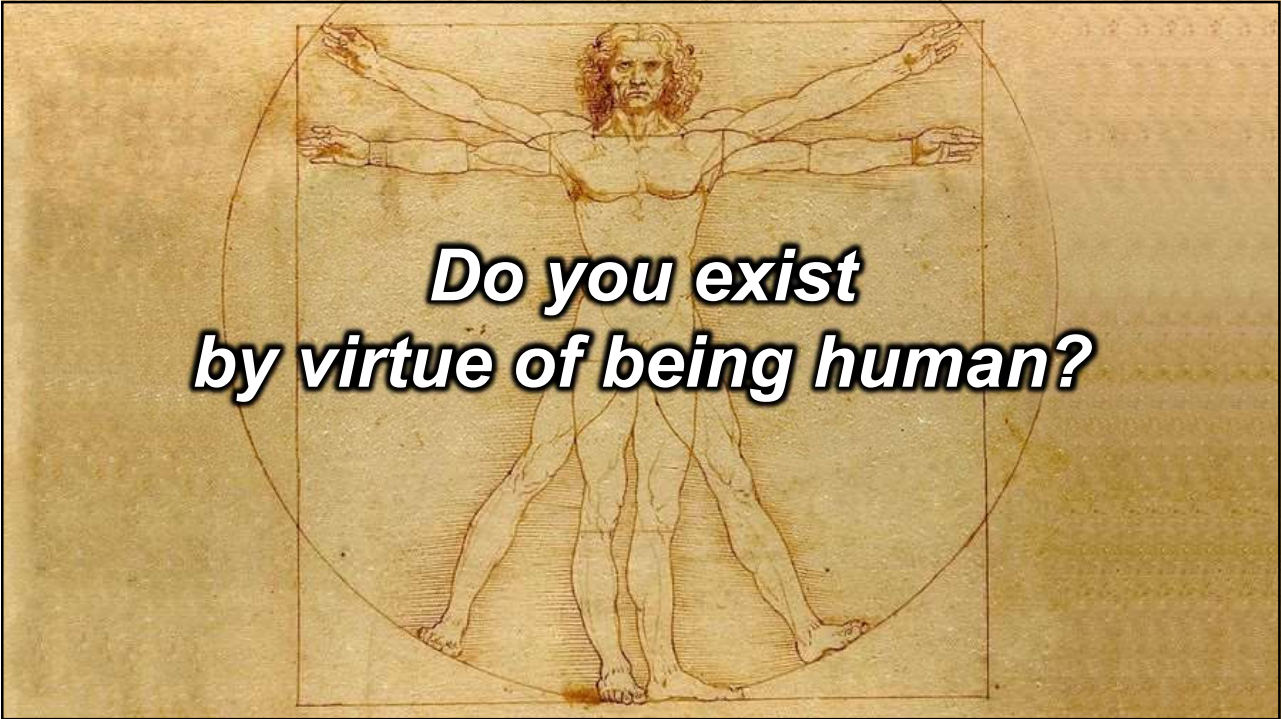
The background of the slide is a reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man drawing. The figure of the man is centered, with arms and legs extended to touch the boundaries of a square and a circle. The text is overlaid on the upper half of the figure.

***Is the reason you exist  
because you are human?***

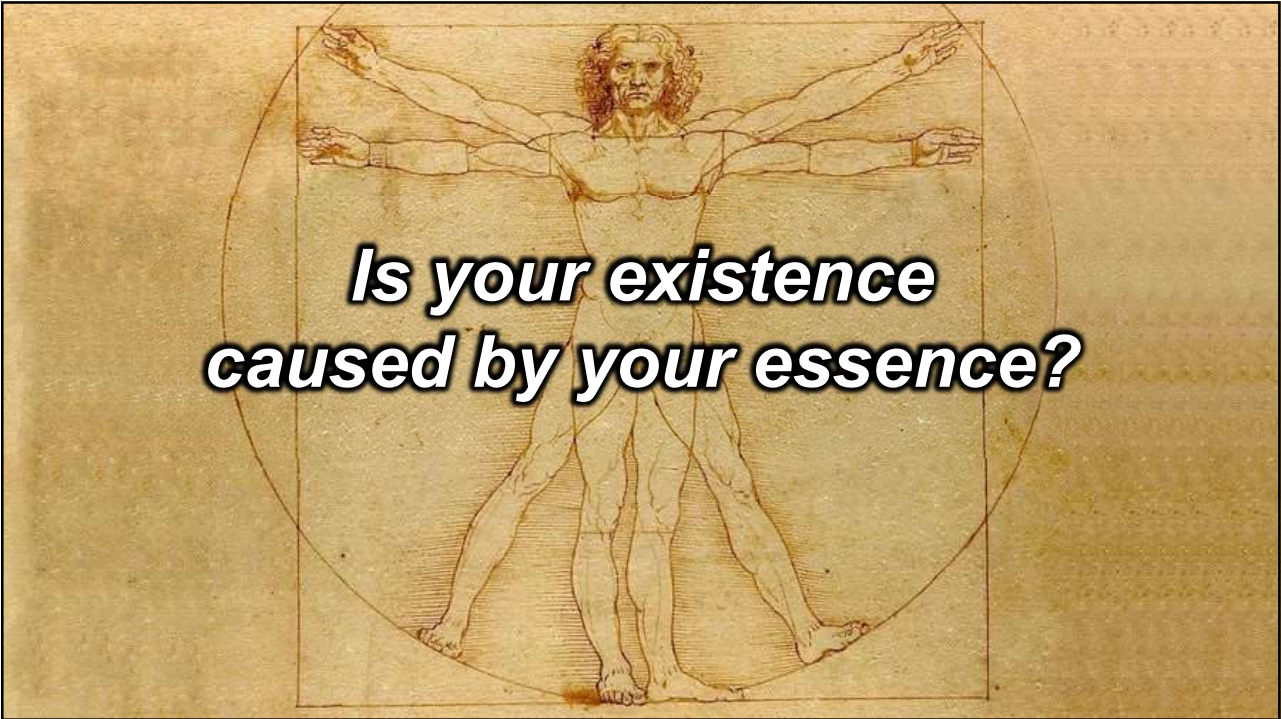
The background of the slide is a reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man drawing. The figure of the man is centered, with arms and legs extended to touch the boundaries of a square and a circle. The text is overlaid on the lower half of the figure.

***Is it part of your essence  
as human to exist?***



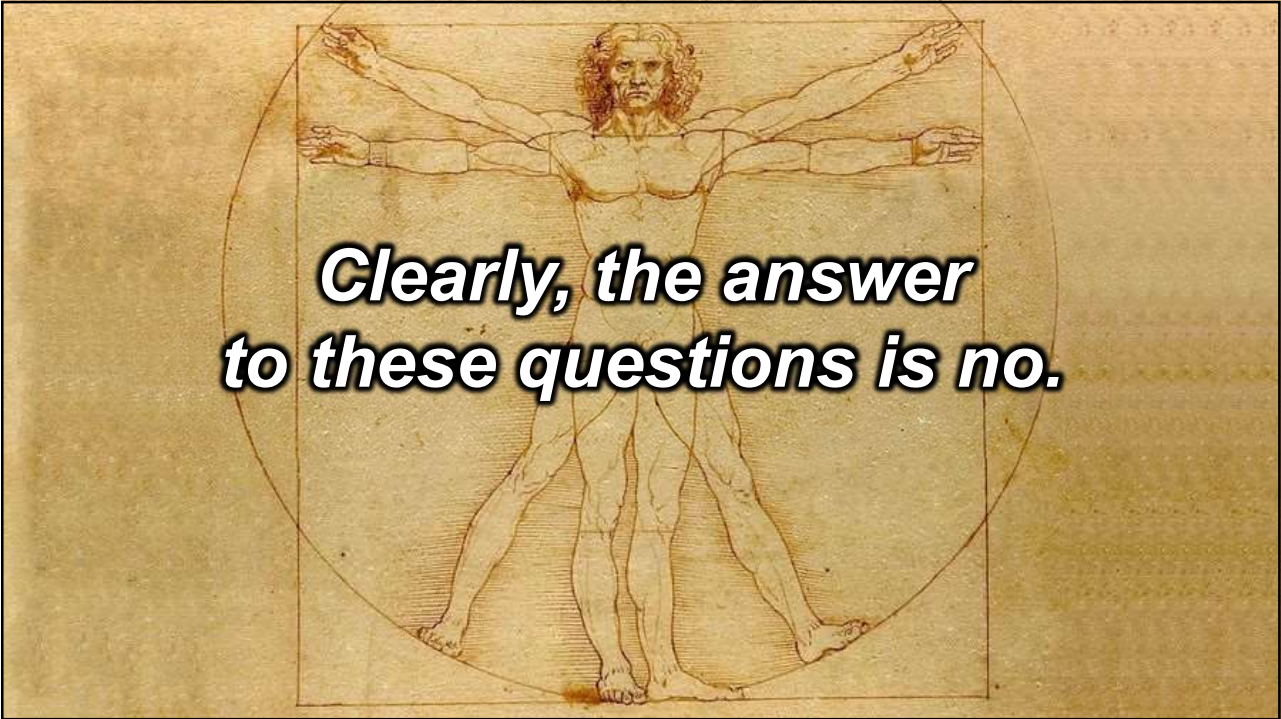
The background of the slide is a reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man drawing. The figure of the man is centered, with arms and legs extended to touch the boundaries of a circle and a square. The text is overlaid in the center of the figure.

***Do you exist  
by virtue of being human?***

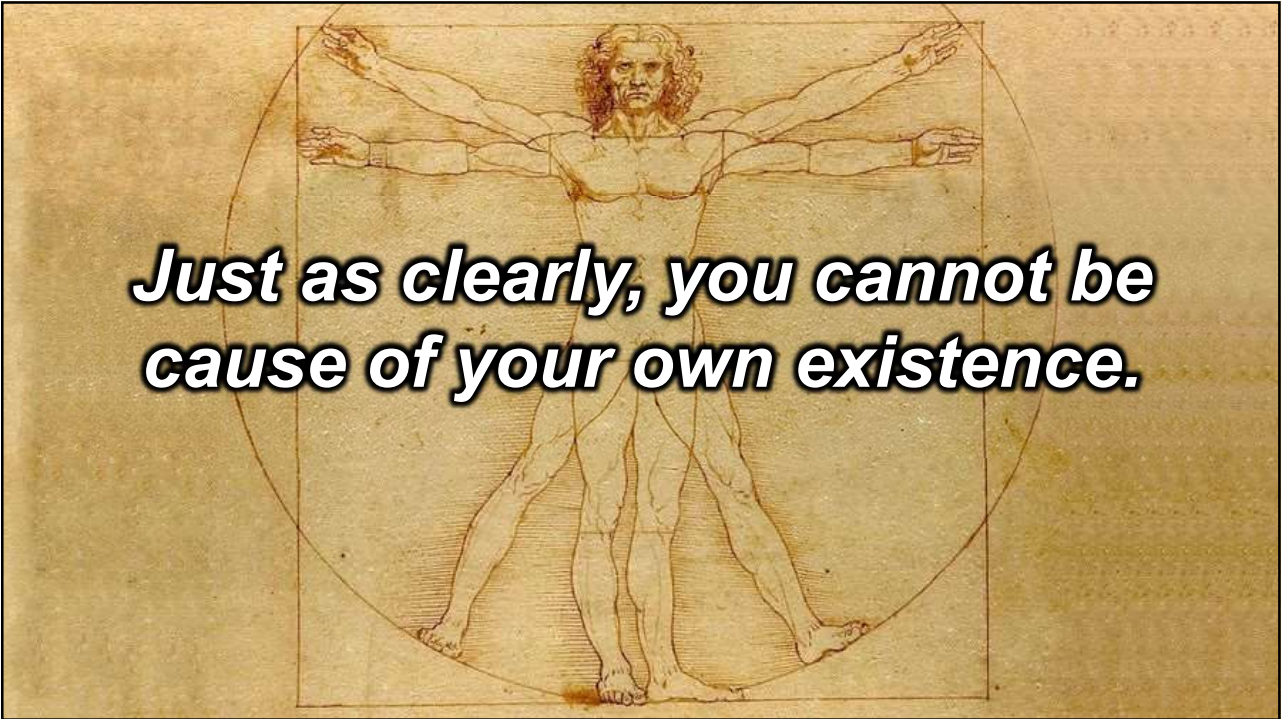
The background of the slide is a reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man drawing. The figure of the man is centered, with arms and legs extended to touch the boundaries of a circle and a square. The text is overlaid in the center of the figure.

***Is your existence  
caused by your essence?***



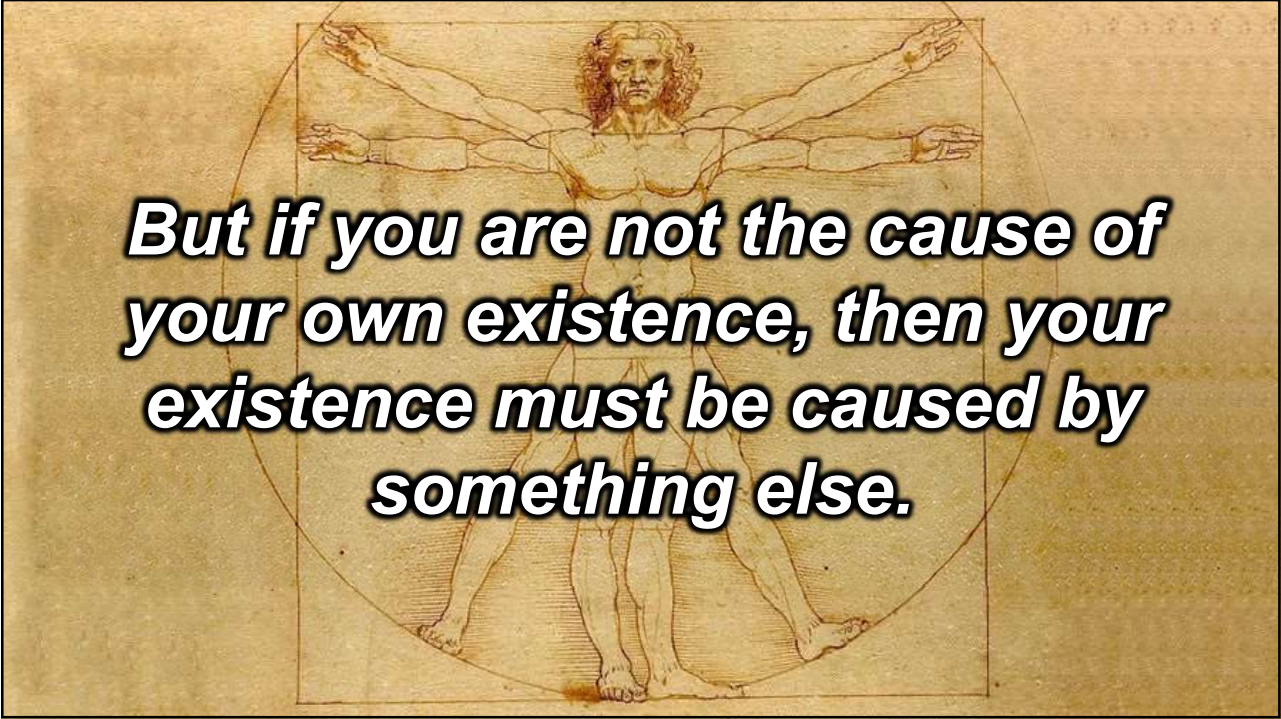
The image shows the famous Vitruvian Man drawing by Leonardo da Vinci. The figure is inscribed within a circle and a square. The text is overlaid on the upper half of the drawing.

***Clearly, the answer  
to these questions is no.***

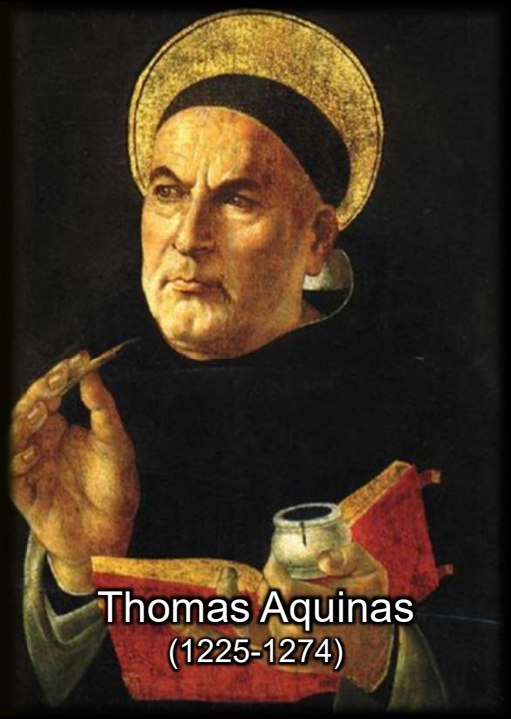
The image shows the famous Vitruvian Man drawing by Leonardo da Vinci. The figure is inscribed within a circle and a square. The text is overlaid on the lower half of the drawing.

***Just as clearly, you cannot be  
cause of your own existence.***



The background of the first slide is a reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man drawing. The figure of the man is centered, with arms and legs extended to touch the boundaries of a square and a circle.

***But if you are not the cause of your own existence, then your existence must be caused by something else.***

The background of the second slide is a portrait of Thomas Aquinas. He is depicted as a man with a halo, wearing a black habit, holding a quill pen in his right hand and a book in his left.

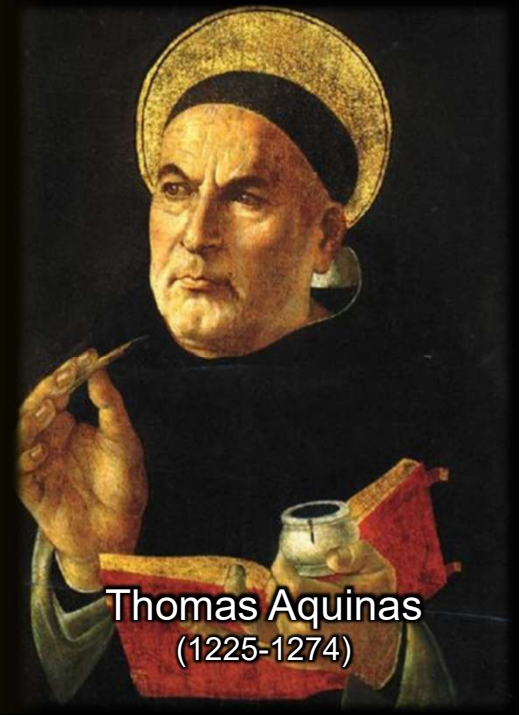
***"Now being itself cannot be caused by the form ... of a thing (by 'caused' I mean by an efficient cause), because that thing would then be its own cause and it would bring itself into being, which is impossible.***

Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)



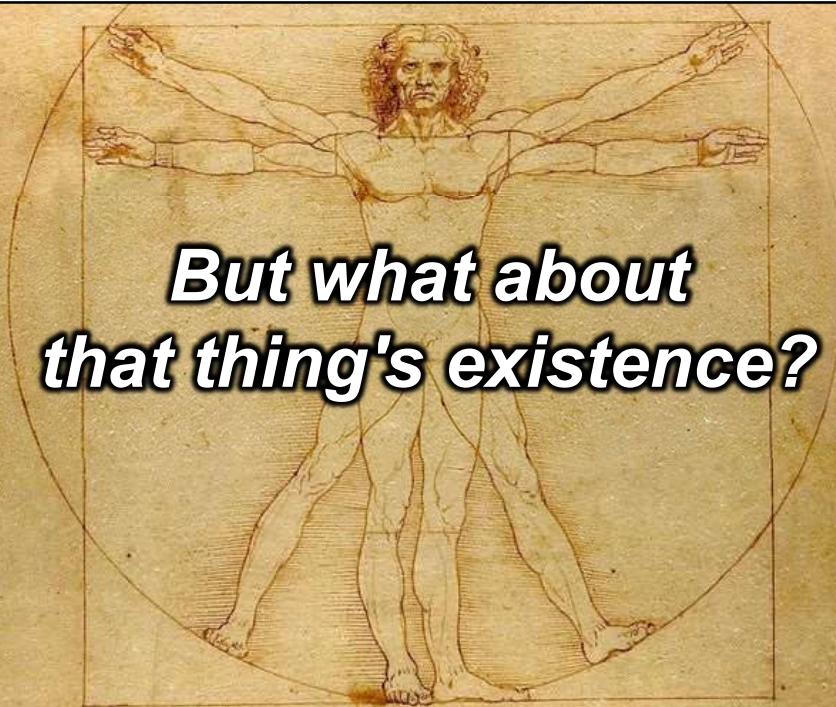
***"It follows that everything  
whose being is distinct  
from its nature must have  
being from another."***

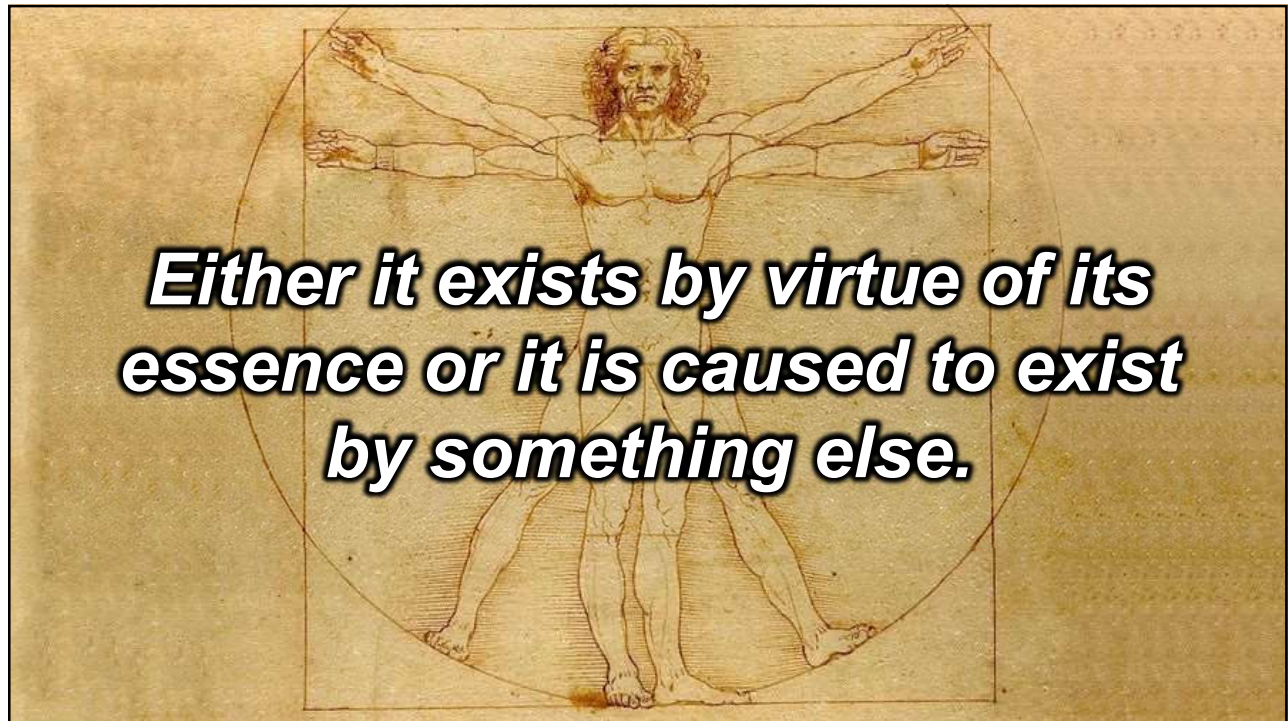
[On Being and Essence, IV, §7, trans. Maurer, 56-57]



**Thomas Aquinas**  
(1225-1274)

***But what about  
that thing's existence?***







## The GOD Delusion

Richard  
Dawkins

Richard Dawkins

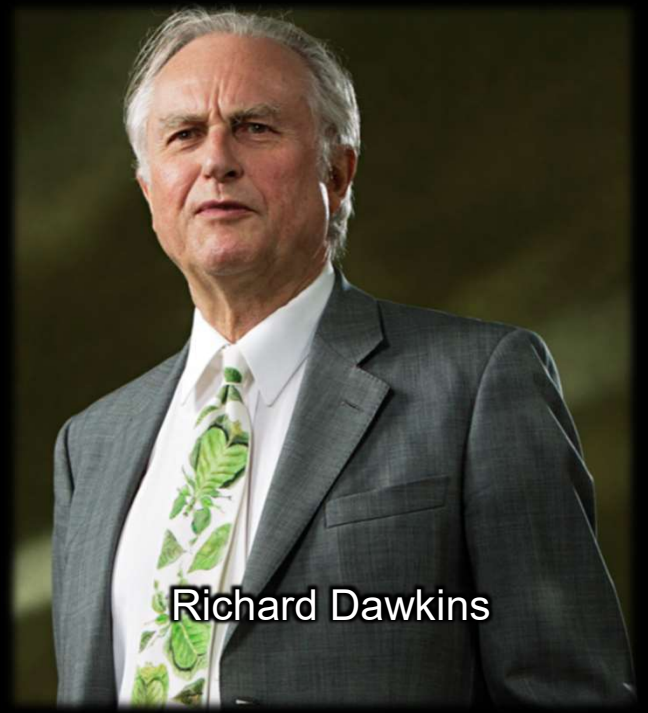
*"Thomas Aquinas's Proofs: The Uncaused Cause. Nothing is caused by itself. Every effect has a prior cause, and again we are pushed back into regress. This has to be terminated by a first cause, which we call God."*

[Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 77]

Richard Dawkins

"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."

[Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 77]



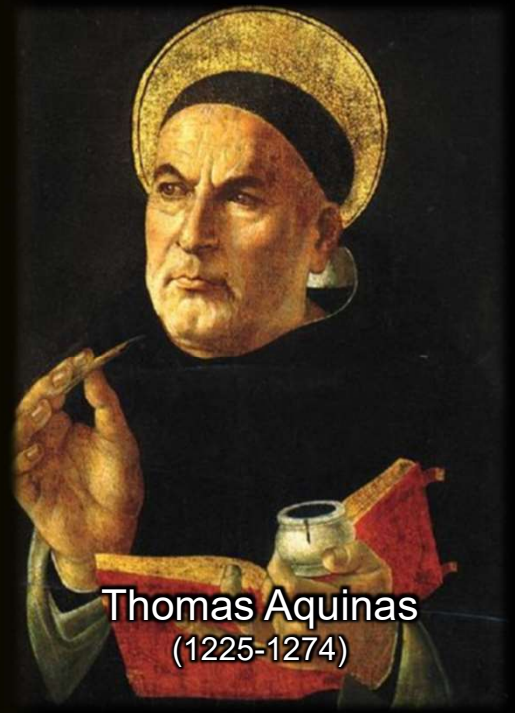
Richard Dawkins

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



### ∞ First Way ∞

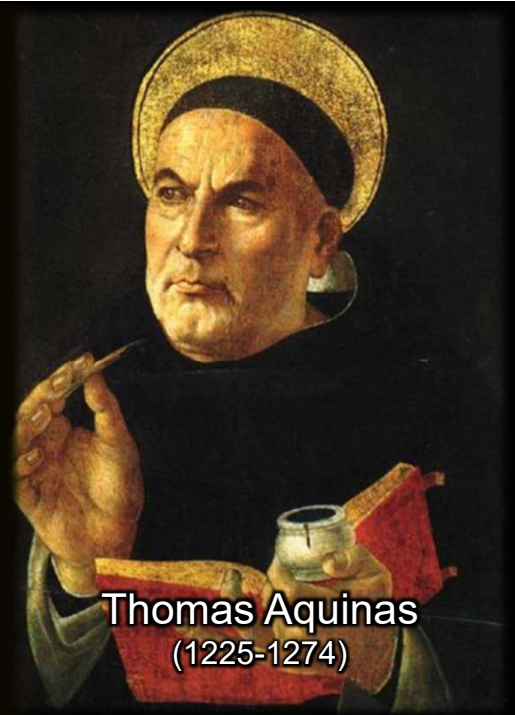
"If that by which it is put in motion be itself put in motion, then this also must needs be put in motion by another, and that by another again. **But this cannot go on to infinity**, because then there would be no first mover ..."



Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

### ∞ Second Way ∞

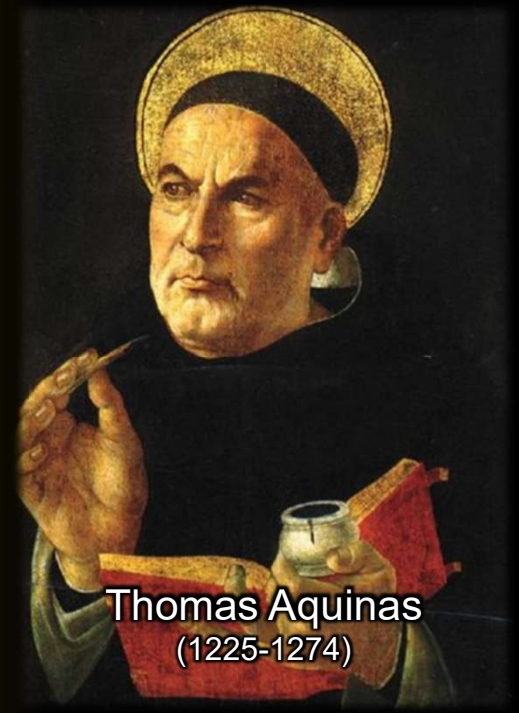
"Now in efficient causes, **it is not possible to go on to infinity**, because in all efficient causes following in order, the first is the cause of the intermediate cause."



Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

### ☞ Third Way ☞

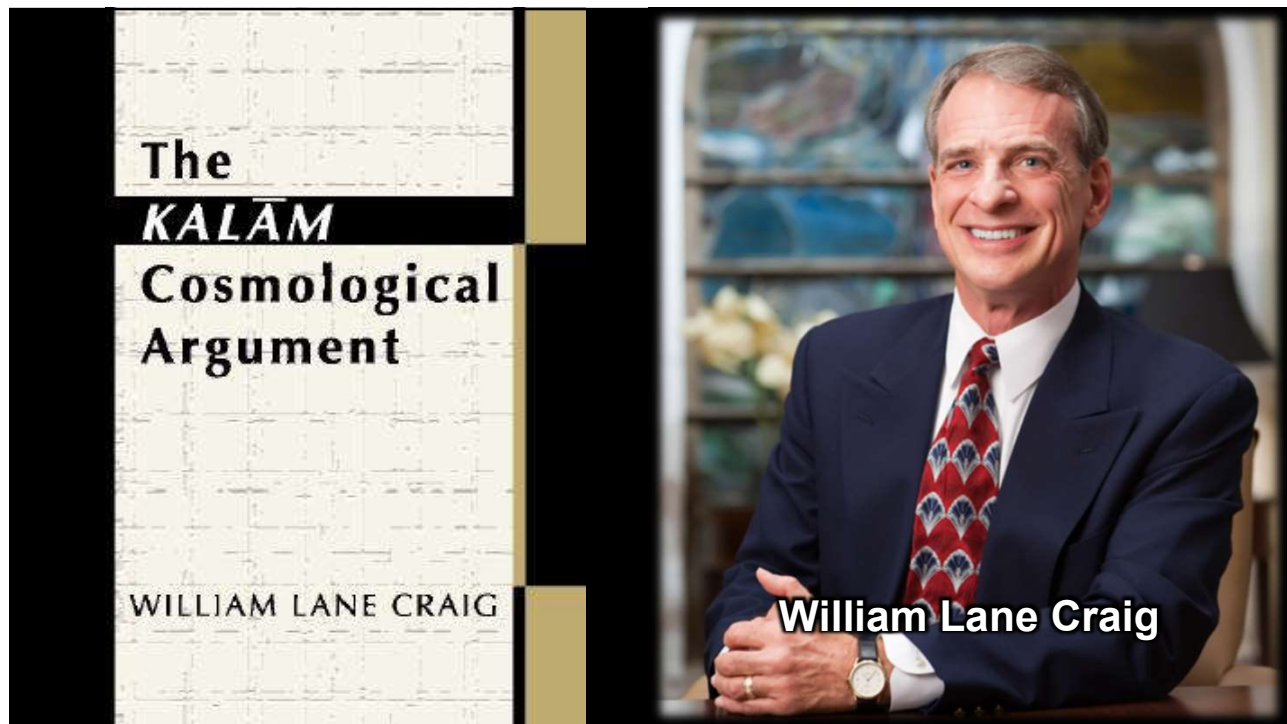
"But every necessary thing either has its necessity caused by another, or not. Now **it is impossible to go on to infinity** in necessary things which have their necessity caused by another, as has been already proved in regard to efficient causes."

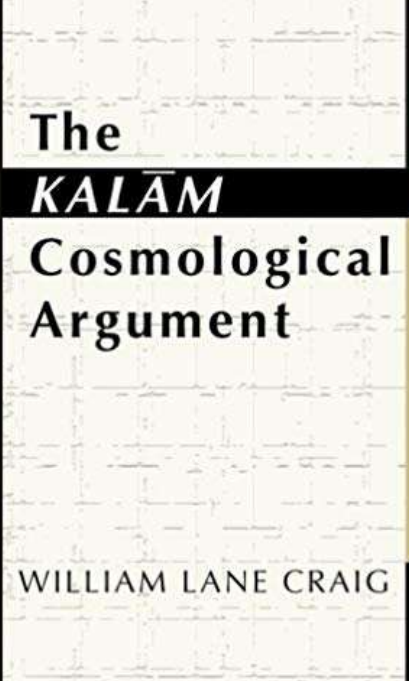


Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

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





|                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  | <p><b>The Universe began to exist.</b></p> <p><b>Whatever begins to exist has a cause of its existence.</b></p> <hr/> <p><b>Therefore, the universe has a cause of its existence.</b></p> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

**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.**

$$1. \sim IR \supset F$$

$$2. \sim IR / \therefore F$$

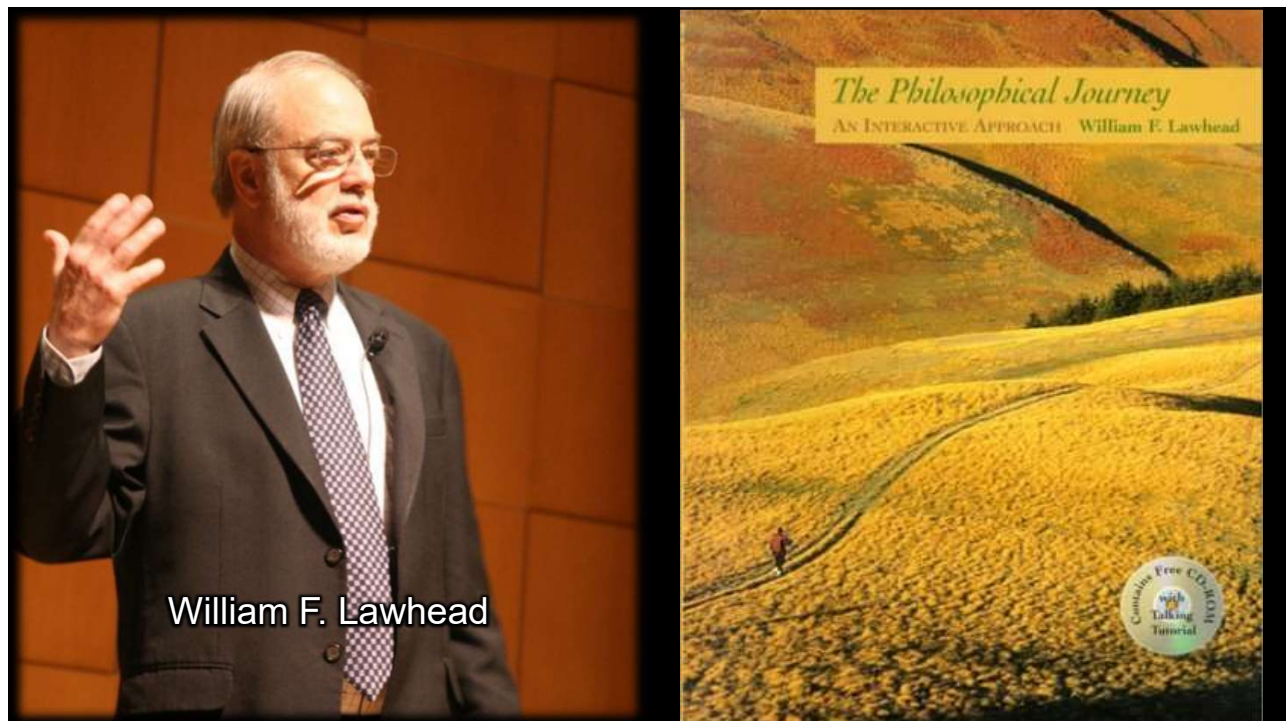
**Rather: If (since) there is a first cause, there cannot be an infinite regress. There is a first cause. Therefore, there cannot be an infinite regress.**

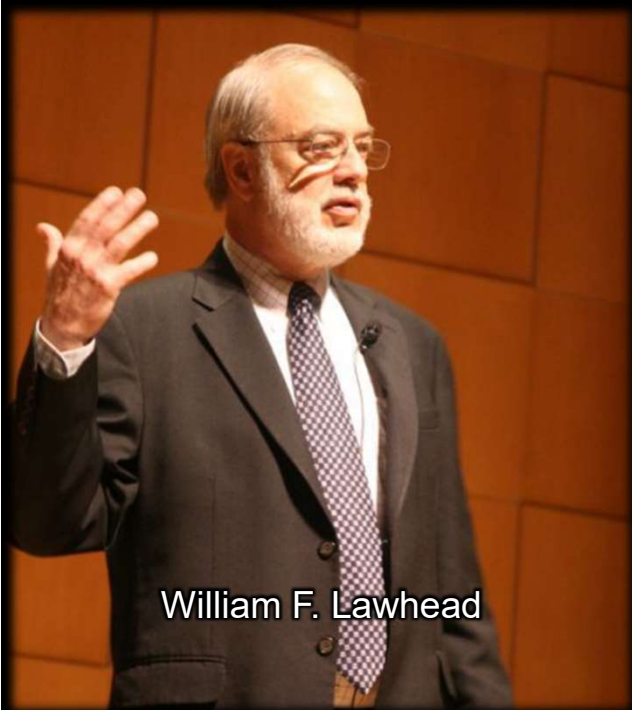
$$1. IR \supset \sim F$$

$$2. F / \therefore \sim IR$$



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

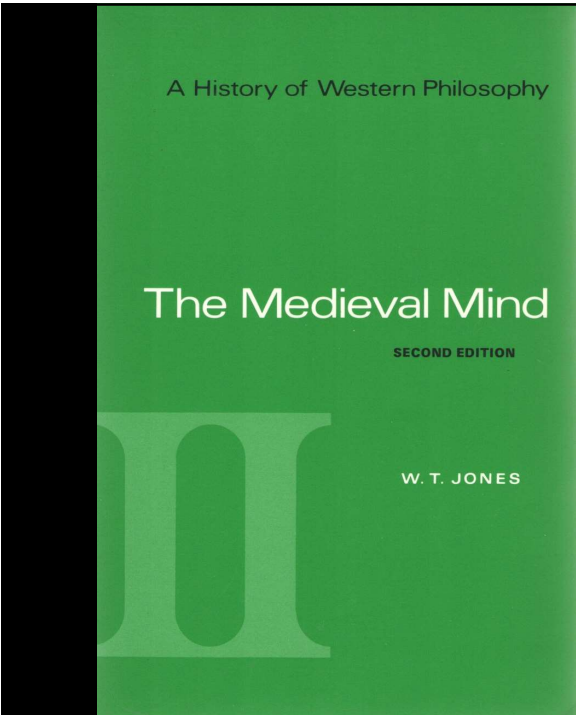




William F. Lawhead

***"Critics have had the most problems with the third premise of Aquinas's [second way] argument. Why can't there be an infinite series of causes? Isn't the series of whole numbers an infinite series?"***

[William F. Lawhead, *The Philosophical Journey: An Interactive Approach*, 2 ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003): 321.]



A History of Western Philosophy

**The Medieval Mind**

SECOND EDITION

W. T. JONES



**W. T. Jones**  
(1910-1993)

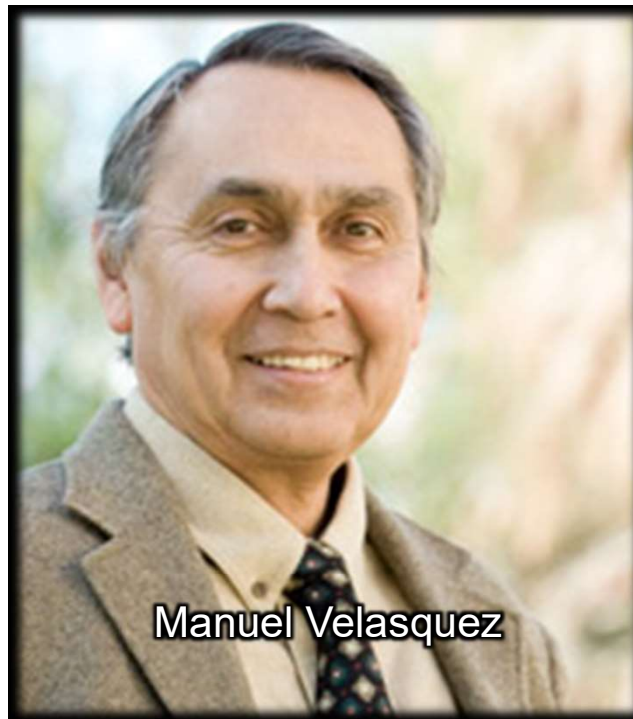


***"The question, however, is whether such an infinite series of motions (or causes) is conceivable. Thomas, of course, denied that it is. In reply, the series of positive integers—1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and so on—could be cited. It is clear that this series does not have a last term ... Similarly, it could 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?"***

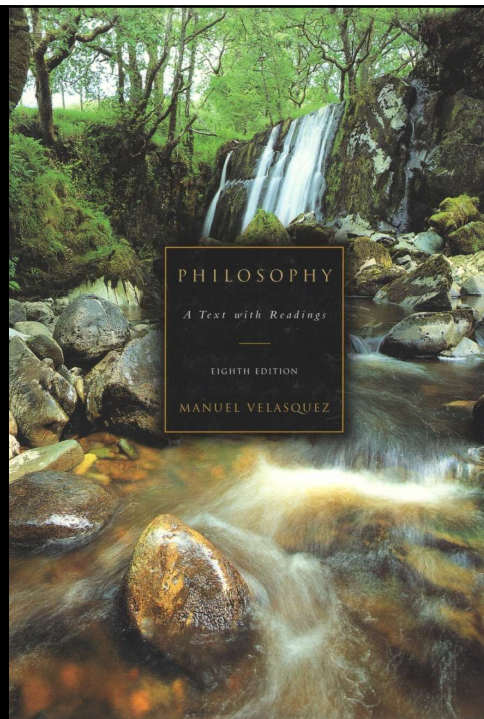
[W. T. Jones, *A History of Western Philosophy: The Medieval Mind* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 1969): 219]

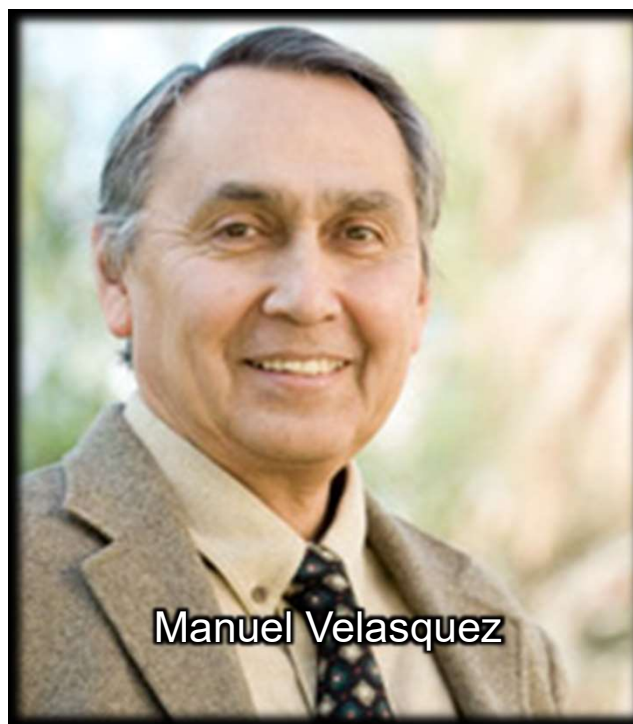


**W. T. Jones**  
(1910-1993)



**Manuel Velasquez**

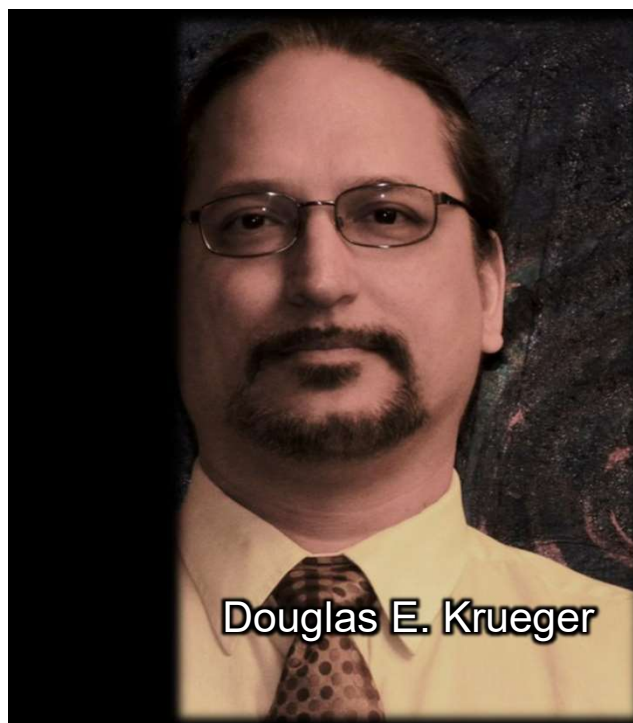




Manuel Velasquez

*"Philosophers have raised two key objections to this [Thomistic] cosmological argument. The first concerns its contention that there can be no infinite regress in the causal sequences of the universe. But why not? Isn't it possible that the universe has simply existed forever and that things in it have simply been moving forever?"*

[Manuel Velasquez, *Philosophy: A Text with Readings*, 8 ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2002): 286, emphasis added]



Douglas E. Krueger

## What Is ATHEISM?

A  
Short  
Introduction

**DOUGLAS  
E. KRUEGER**





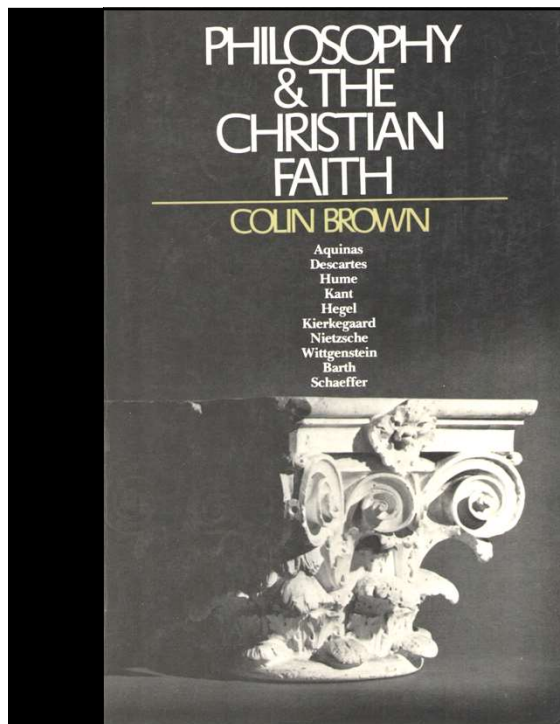
*"In order to establish the conclusion of the argument (if the argument were valid), the theist would have to support the premise which asserts that the chain cannot go back infinitely far. Philosophers such as Aquinas have simply assumed that everyone would agree that such a regress is impossible."*

[Douglas E. Krueger, *What is Atheism? A Short Introduction* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1998): 149]

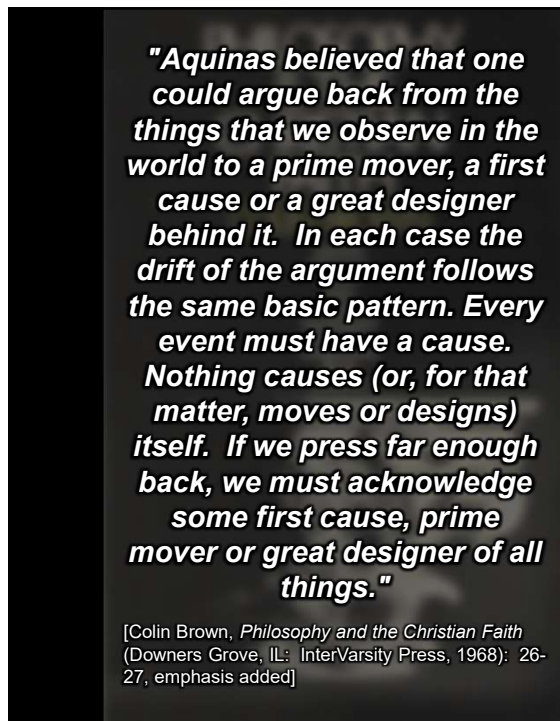


*"In order to establish the conclusion of the argument (if the argument were valid), the theist would have to support the premise which asserts that the chain cannot go back infinitely far. **Philosophers such as Aquinas have simply assumed that everyone would agree that such a regress is impossible.**"*

[Douglas E. Krueger, *What is Atheism? A Short Introduction* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1998): 149]



Colin Brown



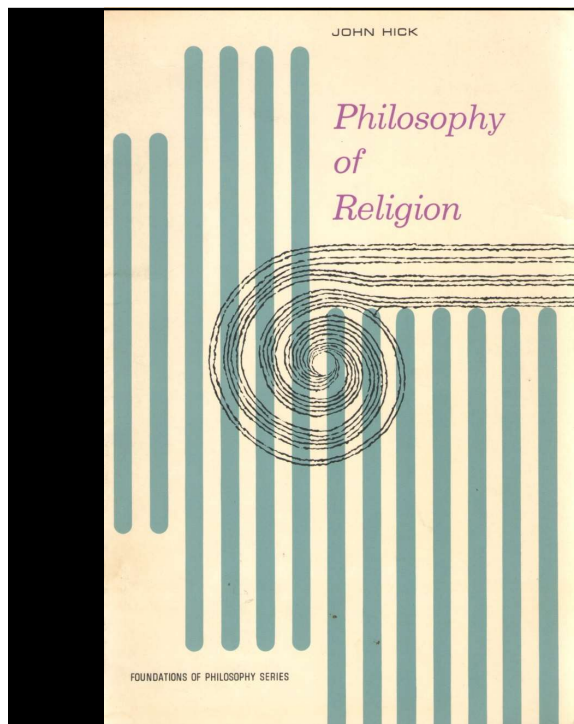
***"Aquinas believed that one could argue back from the things that we observe in the world to a prime mover, a first cause or a great designer behind it. In each case the drift of the argument follows the same basic pattern. Every event must have a cause. Nothing causes (or, for that matter, moves or designs) itself. If we press far enough back, we must acknowledge some first cause, prime mover or great designer of all things."***

[Colin Brown, *Philosophy and the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1968): 26-27, emphasis added]



Colin Brown





**John Hick**  
(1922-2012)

***[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 and Monroe Beardsley (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 20]



**John Hick**  
(1922-2012)

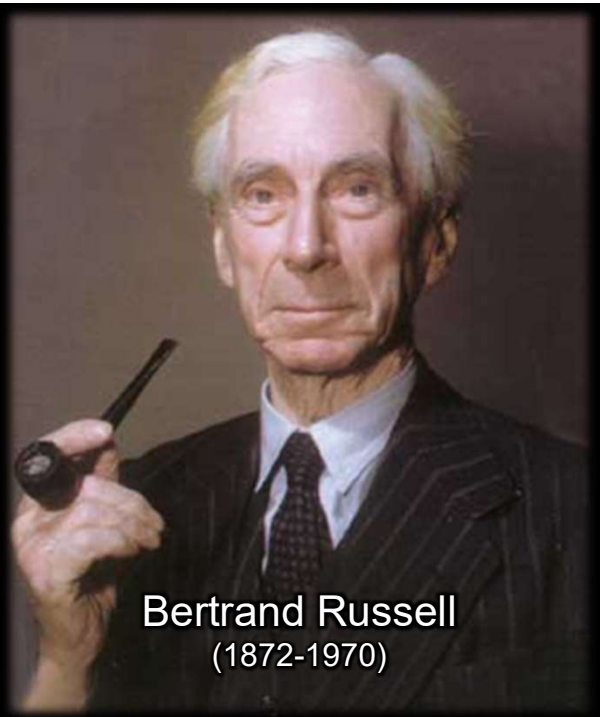
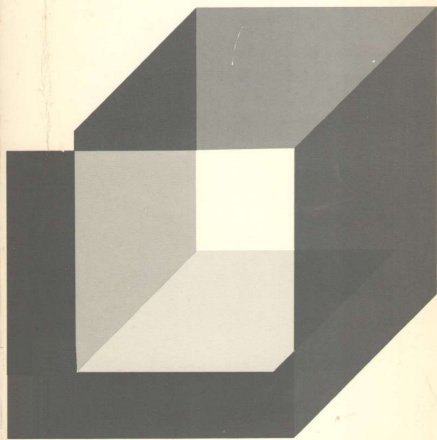
***"The weakness of the [Second Way] argument as Aquinas states it lies in the difficulty (which he himself elsewhere acknowledges) of excluding as impossible an endless regress of events requiring no beginning."***

[Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, 21]



**John Hick**  
(1922-2012)

**Bertrand  
Russell**  
A History of  
Western  
Philosophy

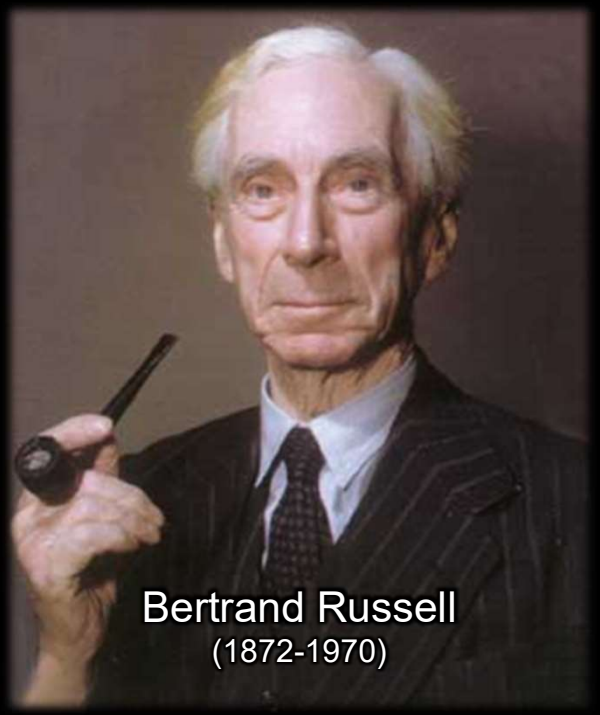


**Bertrand Russell**  
(1872-1970)



***"In the Summa Theologiae, five proofs of God's existence are given. ... The Argument of the First Cause ... depends upon the impossibility of an infinite regress."***

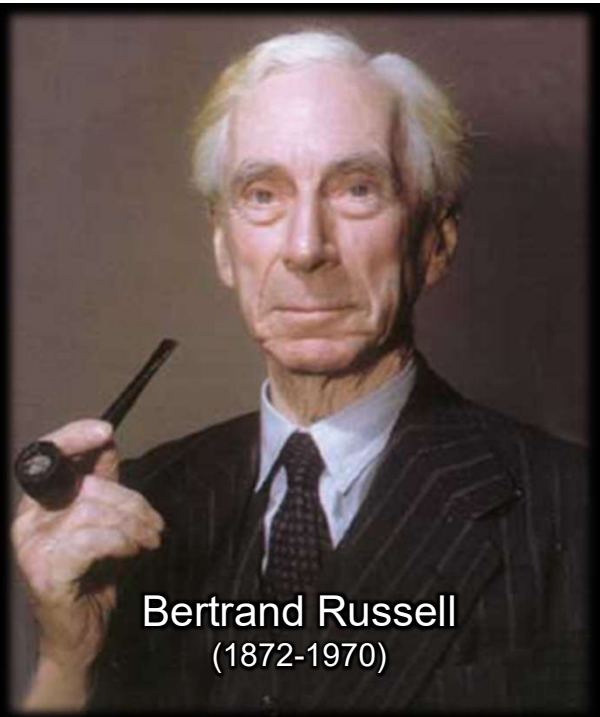
[Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972): 455. See also his *Why I Am Not a Christian and Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957): 6-7.]



**Bertrand Russell**  
(1872-1970)

***"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]



**Bertrand Russell**  
(1872-1970)

***infinitum per accidens***  
**(accidental infinite)**

**VS.**

***infinitum per se***  
**(per se infinite)**

*Christian Apologetics Journal*, 8:1 (Spring 2009)  
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**TWO NOTIONS OF THE INFINITE IN  
THOMAS AQUINAS' *SUMMA THEOLOGIAE*  
I, 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."<sup>1</sup> 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."<sup>2</sup> I have discovered that a number of

1. *Deum esse quinque viis probari potest*, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, 2.  
3. All English translations are from *Summa Theologiae of St. Thomas Aquinas*, translated by Father of the English Dominican Province (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981). Thomas acknowledges that certain of these arguments are not completely original with him. They are found for example in Aristotle's *Physics* VII, 1.241<sup>24</sup> and *Metaphysics* XII, 7.1072<sup>23</sup>. Though the *Five Ways* are Thomas' most famous arguments for God's existence, certain ones of them are expounded with greater detail in other of his works, including his *Summa Contra Gentiles* I, 13.

2. *procedere per se ad infinitum*

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



**"In efficient causes it is impossible to proceed to infinity *per se* — thus, there cannot be an infinite number of causes that are *per se* required for a certain effect. ... But it is not impossible to proceed to infinity *accidentally* as regards efficient causes ..."**

[*Summa Theologiae* 1, Q, 46, ii, ad 7]



Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

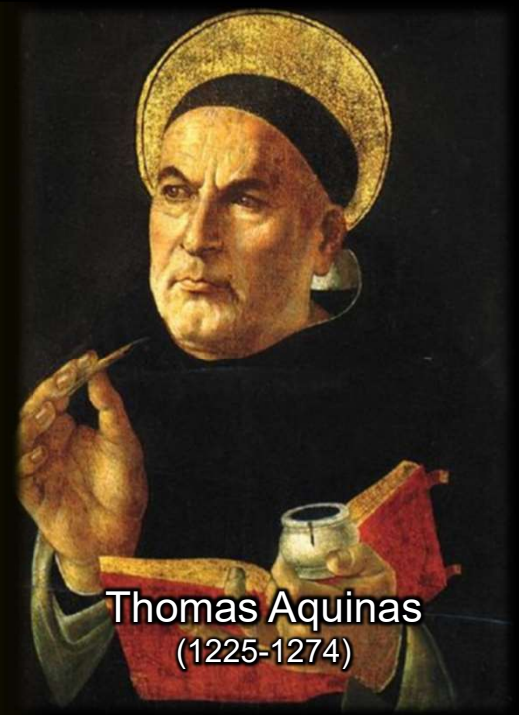
***infinitum per accidens***  
**(accidental infinite)**





**"It is accidental to this particular man as generator to be generated by another man; for he generates as a man, and not as the son of another man."**

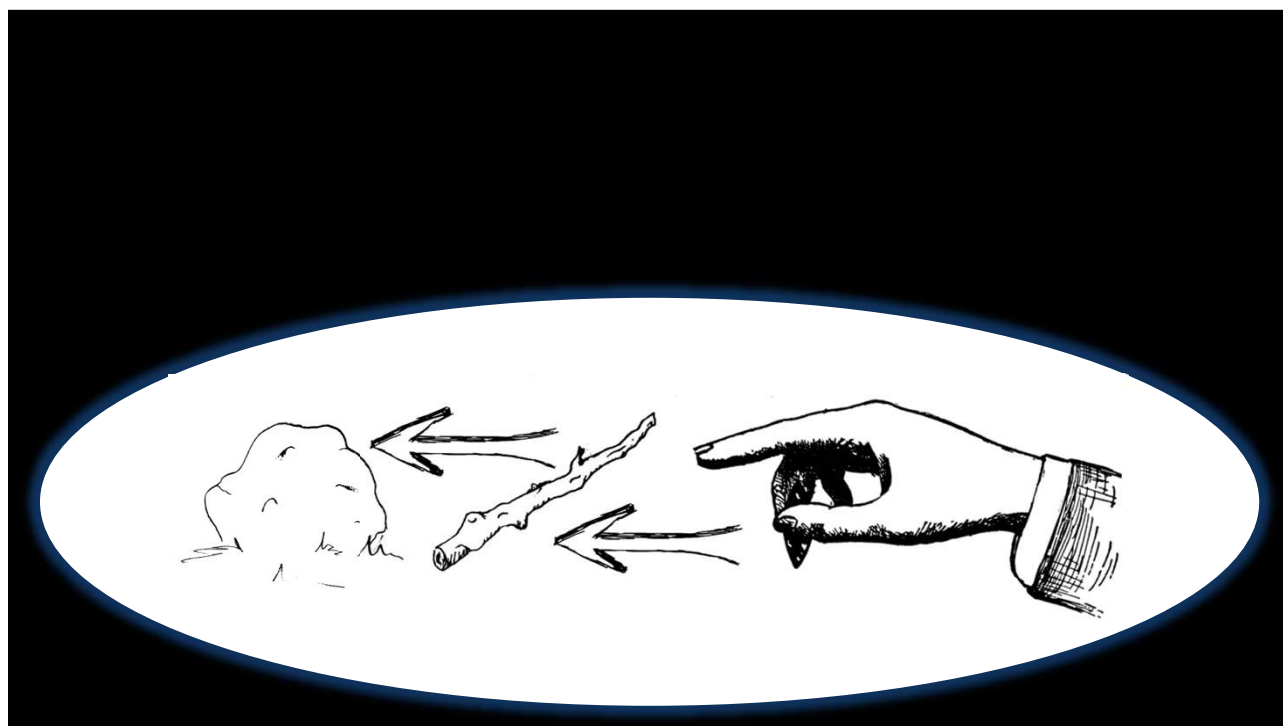
[*Summa Theologiae* 1, Q, 46, ii, ad 7]



**Thomas Aquinas**  
(1225-1274)



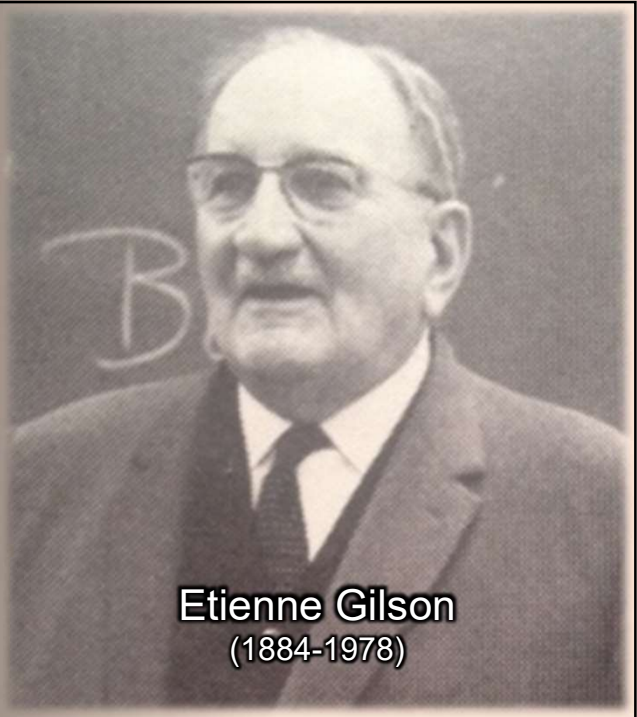






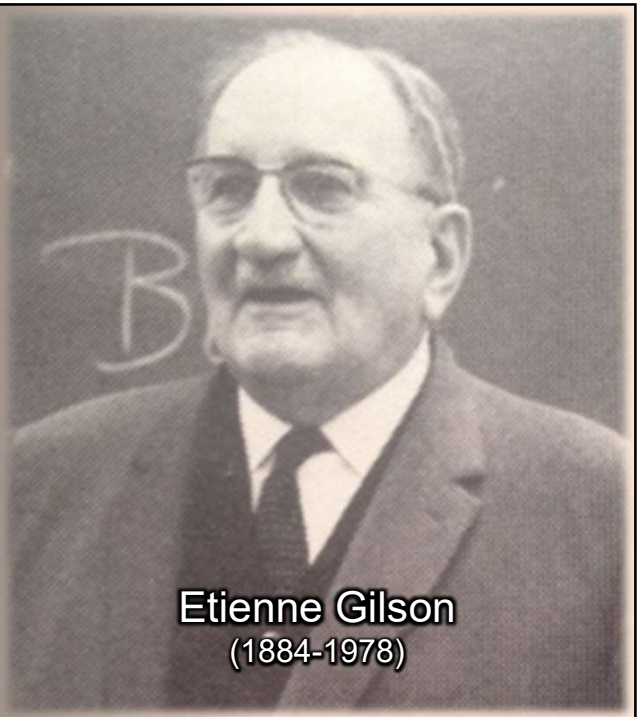


**"The proof in no way considers movement as a present reality the existence of which requires an efficient cause in the past, which is God.**



Etienne Gilson  
(1884-1978)

**"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.**

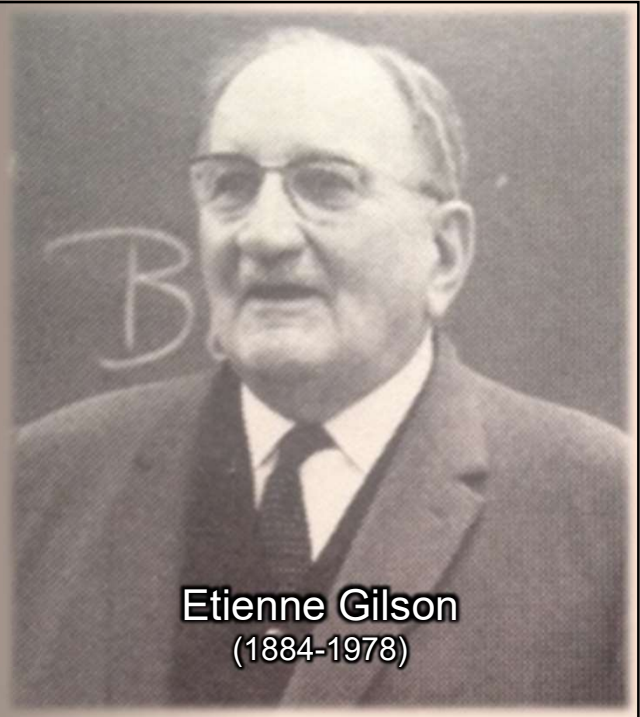


Etienne Gilson  
(1884-1978)



**"In other words the impossibility of an infinite regress must not be taken as an infinite regress in time, but as applying to the present consideration of the universe."**

[The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas, trans. Edward Bullough (New York: Dorset Press, n.d.), p. 76]

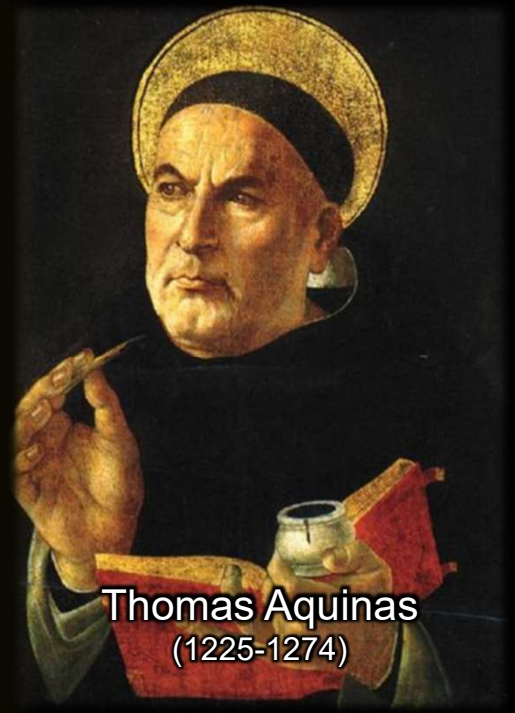


Etienne Gilson  
(1884-1978)

*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.*

**"Now since God is very being by His own essence, created being must be His proper effect ... Now God causes this effect in things not only when they first begin to be, but as long as they are preserved in being..."**

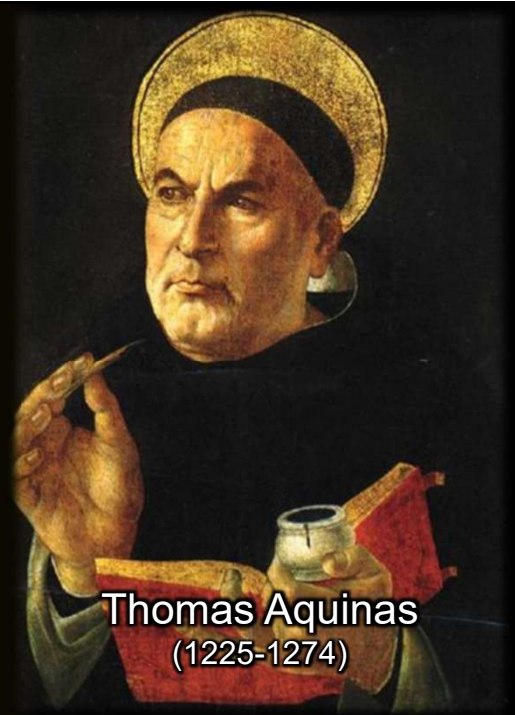
[*Summa Theologiae* 1, Q, 46, ii, ad 7]



Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

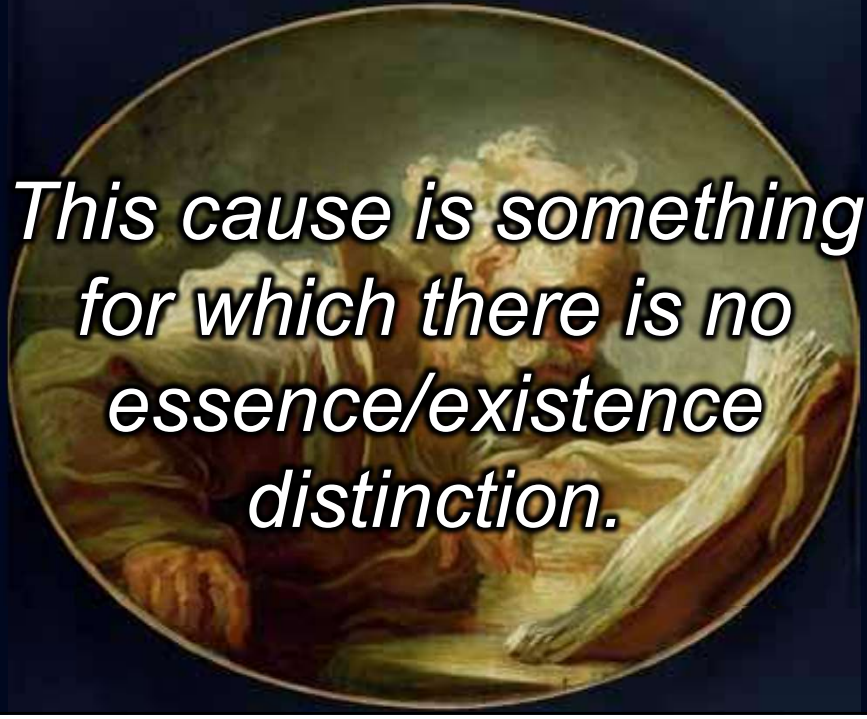
**"As the production of a thing into existence depends on the will of God, so likewise it depends on His will that things should be preserved; for He does not preserve them otherwise than by ever giving them existence; hence if He took away His action from them, all things would be reduced to nothing."**

[*Summa Theologiae* 1, Q, 9, ii]

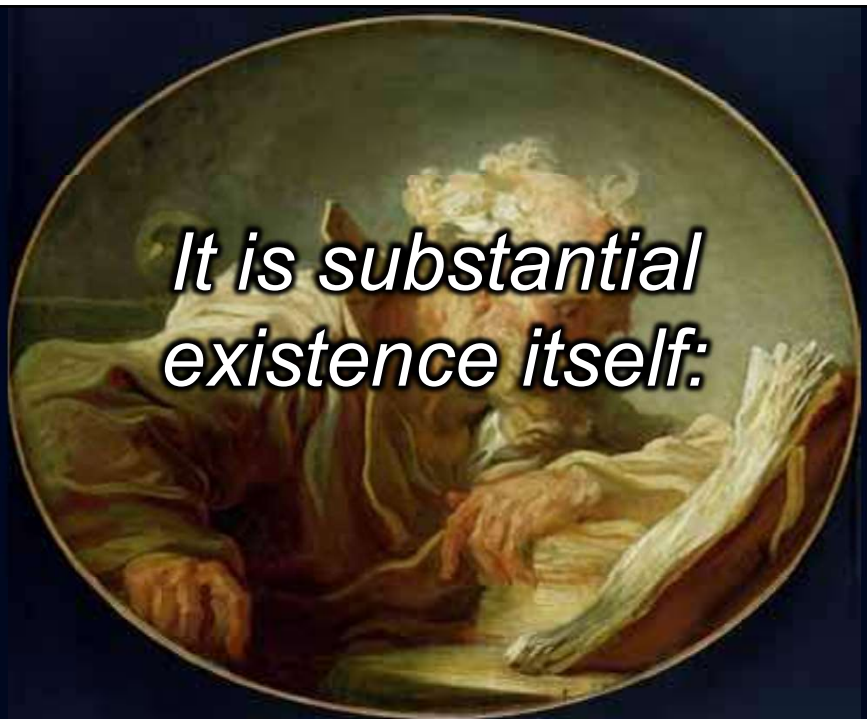


Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

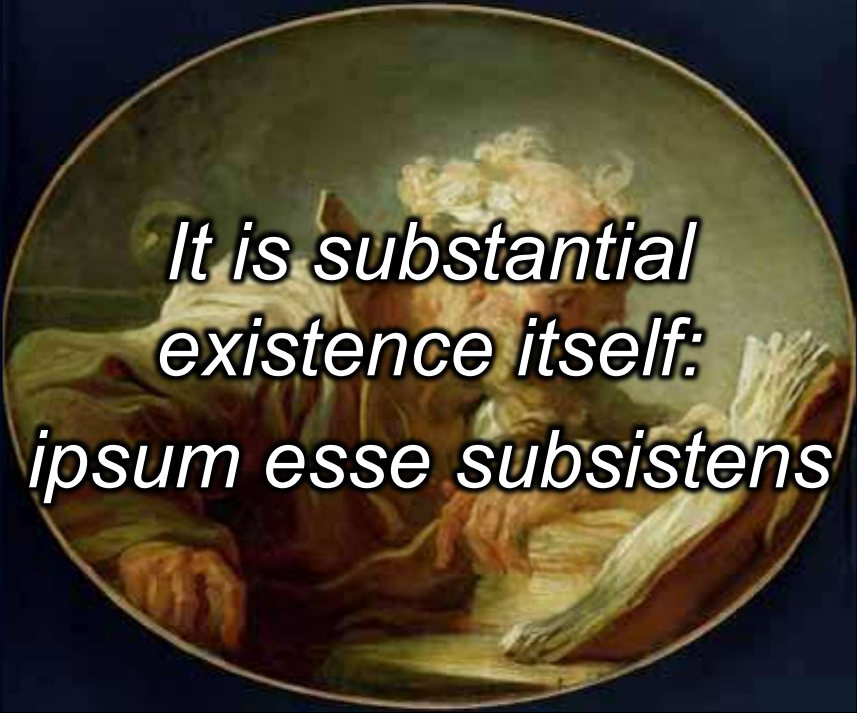




*This cause is something  
for which there is no  
essence/existence  
distinction.*



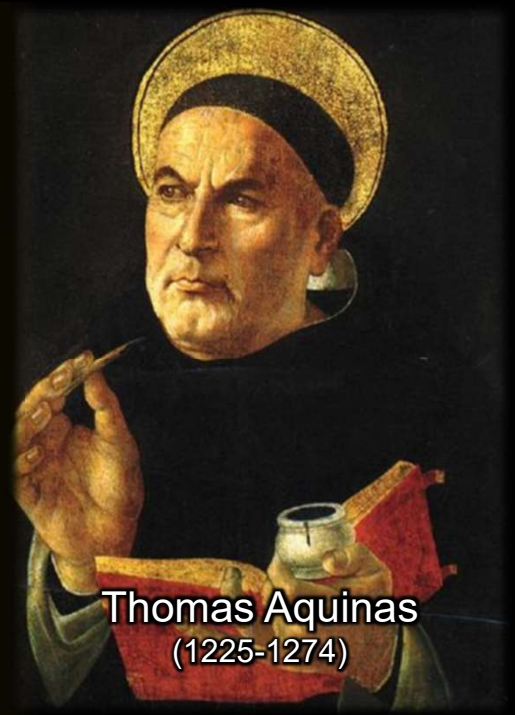
*It is substantial  
existence itself:*



*It is substantial  
existence itself:  
ipsum esse subsistens*

**"To God alone does it  
belong to be His own  
subsistent being. ... for no  
creature is its own  
existence, forasmuch as its  
existence is participated."**

[Summa Theologiae 1, Q 12, art. iv]

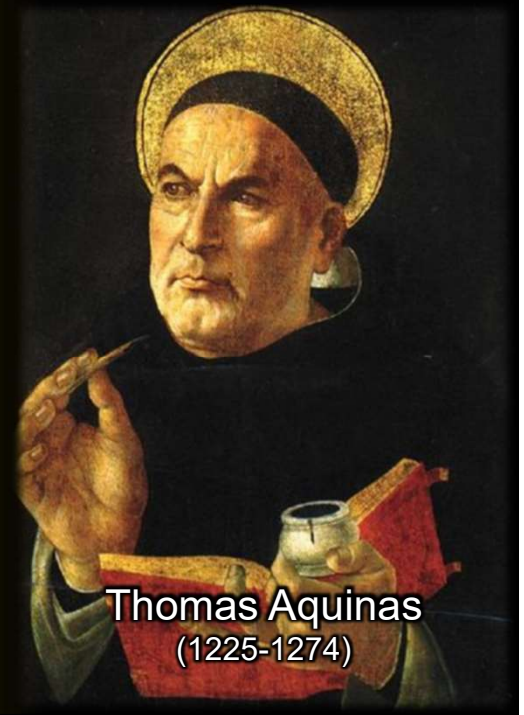


**Thomas Aquinas**  
(1225-1274)



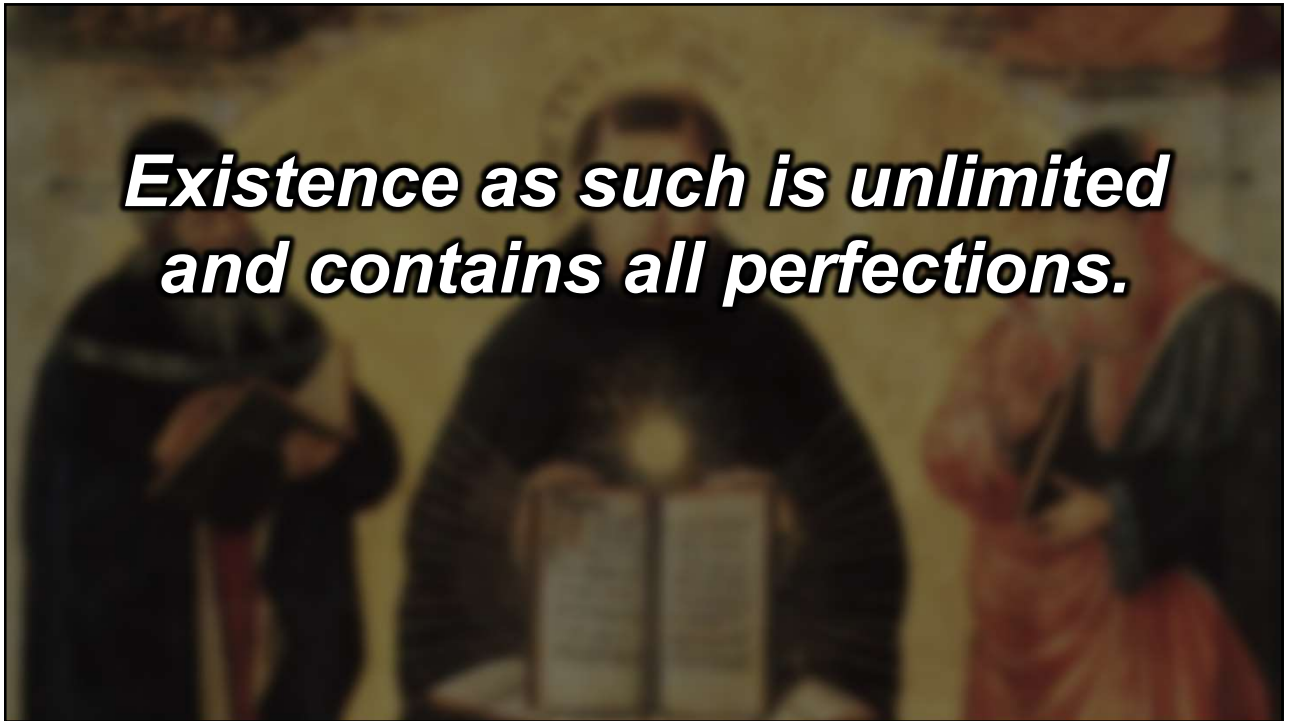
**"Everything that is not pure being has a cause of its being .... It is evident, then, ... that it holds its being from the first being, which is being in all its purity; and this is the first cause, God.**

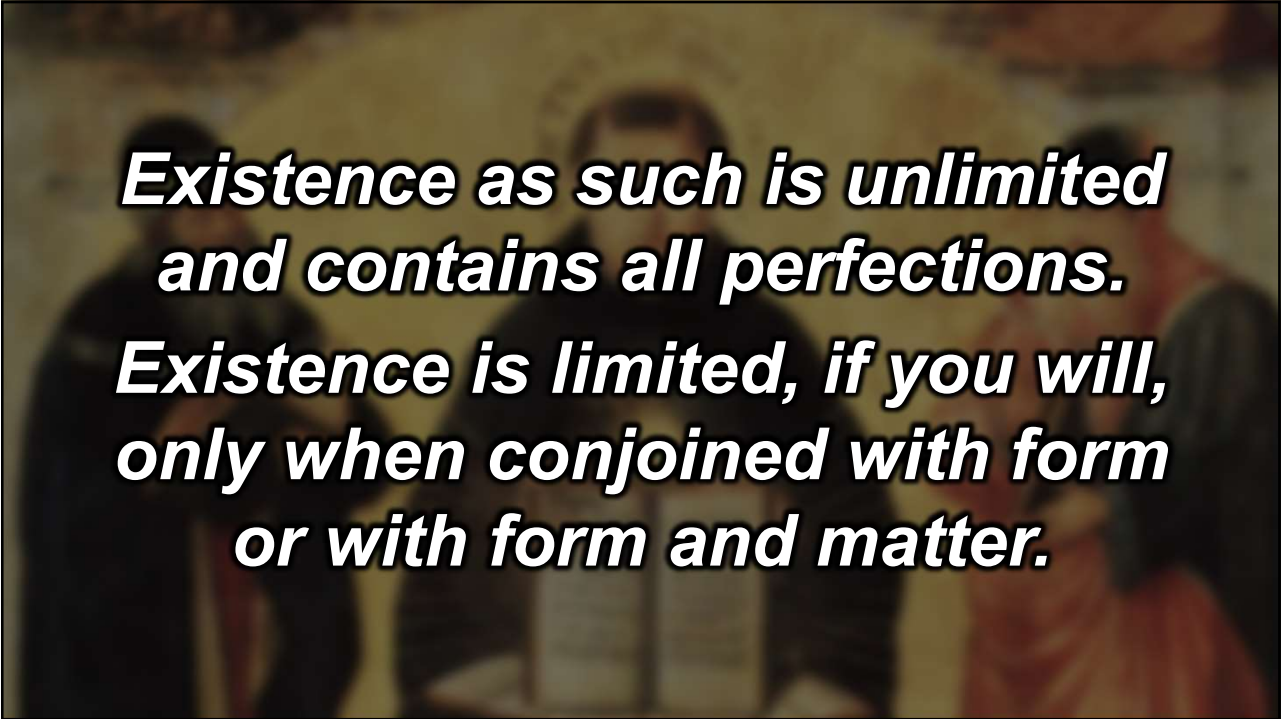
[On Being and Essence, IV, §7, trans. Maurer, 56-57]



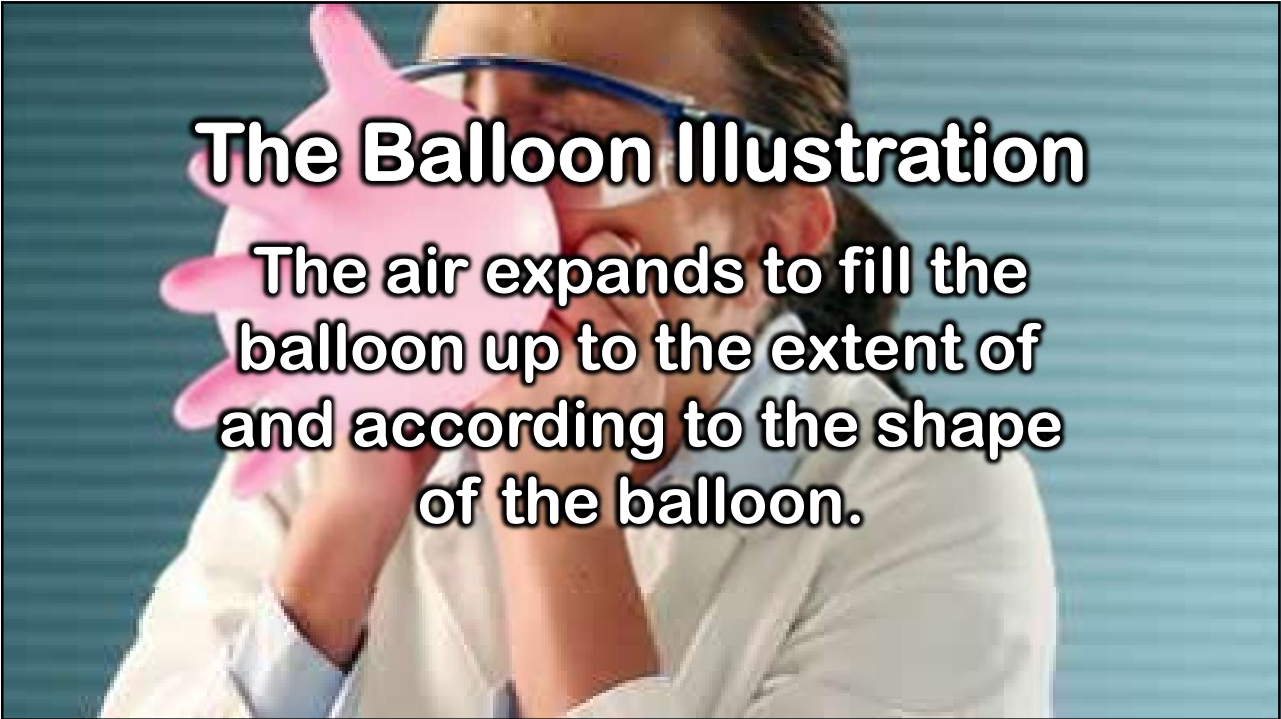
**Thomas Aquinas**  
(1225-1274)

***Existence as such is unlimited and contains all perfections.***





***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**

**The air expands to fill the  
balloon up to the extent of  
and according to the shape  
of the balloon.**



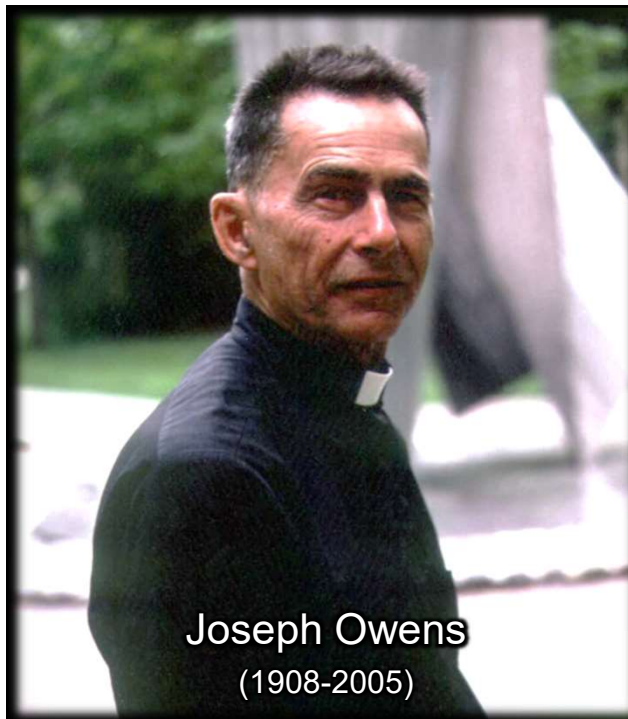
## **The Balloon Illustration**

**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.**



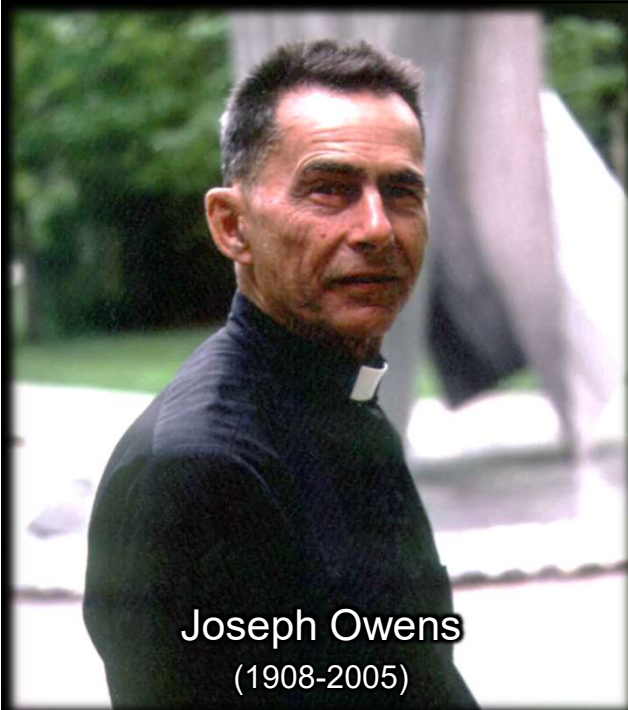
**A human contains  
all the perfections  
of existence up to  
the extent of and  
according to the  
limitations of the  
essence of  
human.**



Joseph Owens  
(1908-2005)

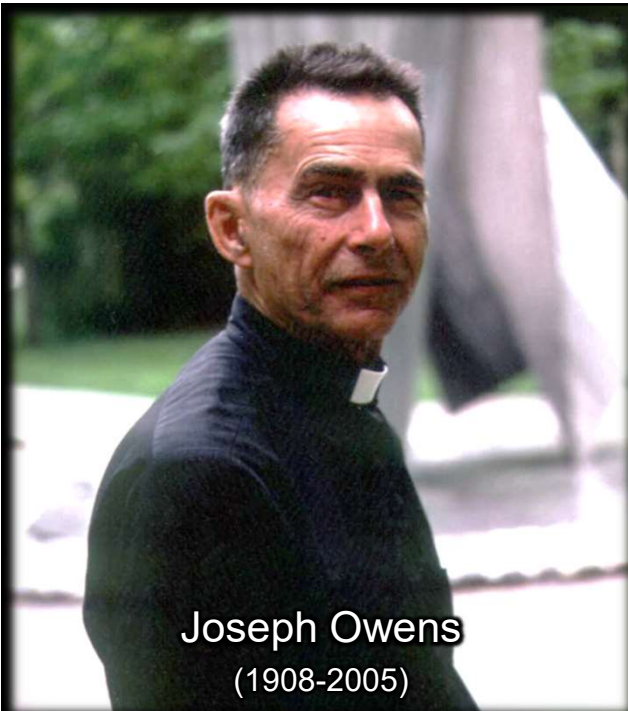
***"An alternate word for  
actuality in this respect  
is "perfection"  
(entelecheia). It was  
used by Aristotle along  
with actuality to  
designate the formal  
elements in the things.***



A portrait of Joseph Owens, a man with short dark hair, wearing a black clerical shirt with a white collar. He is looking slightly to the right. The background is blurred, showing green foliage and a white structure.

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

Joseph Owens  
(1908-2005)

A portrait of Joseph Owens, a man with short dark hair, wearing a black clerical shirt with a white collar. He is looking slightly to the right. The background is blurred, showing green foliage and a white structure.

***"Since existence is required to complete the thing and all the formal elements and activities, it may be aptly called the perfection of all perfections."***

Joseph Owens  
(1908-2005)

[An Interpretation of Existence (Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1968), 52-53]

# perfection

(entelecheia, ἐντελέχεια)

en, ἐν = in

+

telos, τέλος = end, goal

+

echein, ἔχειν = to have

# perfection

(entelecheia, ἐντελέχεια)

en, ἐν = in

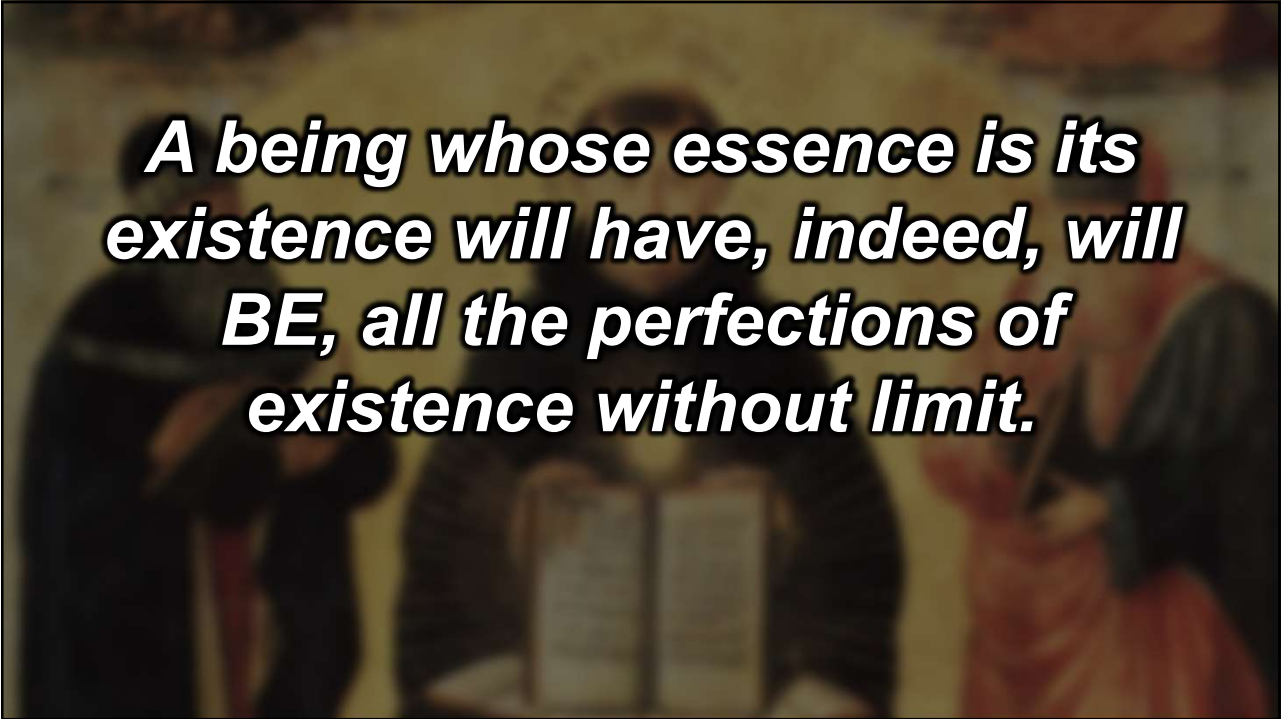
***to have the end or goal in***

telos, τέλος = end, goal

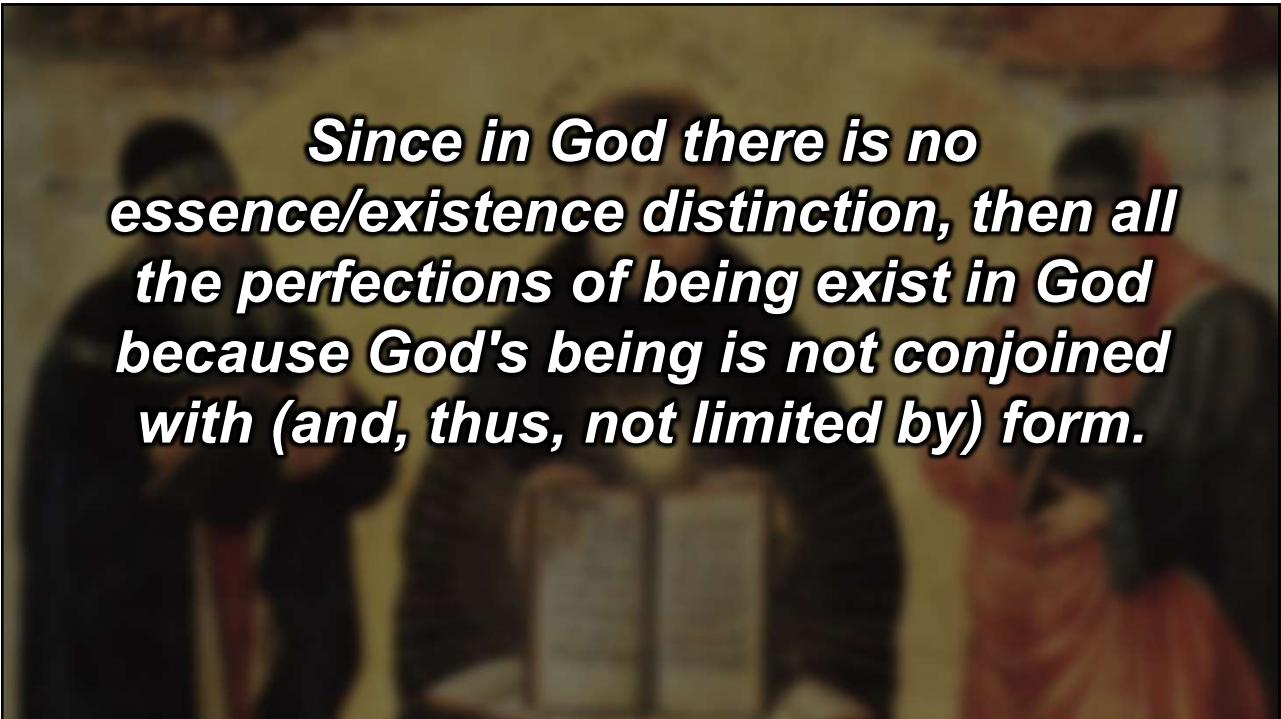
+

echein, ἔχειν = to have





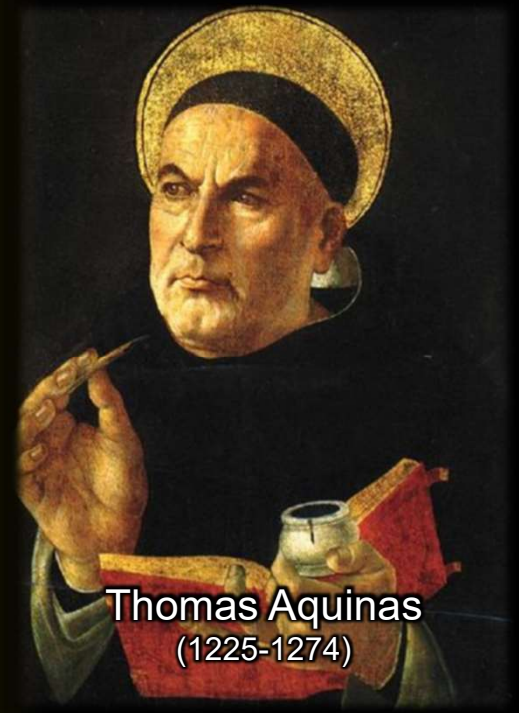
***A being whose essence is its existence will have, indeed, will BE, all the perfections of existence without limit.***



***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.***

**"God is absolute  
form, or rather  
absolute being"**

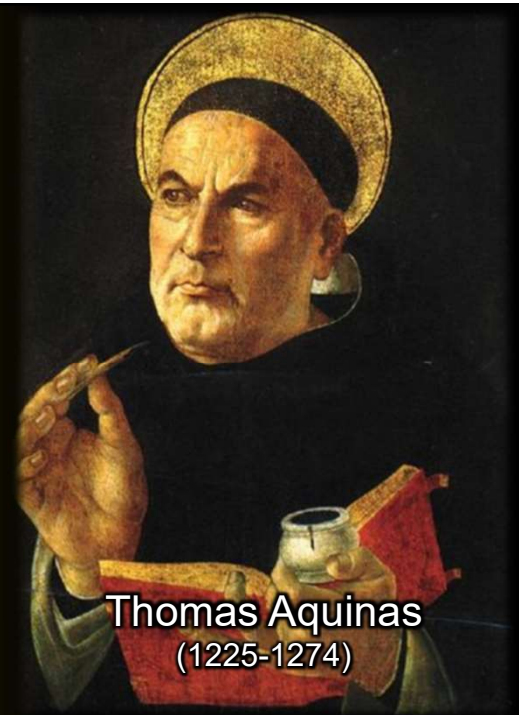
(Deus sit ipsa forma, vel potius ipsum esse). *Summa Theologiae*, I, 3, 2  
and I, 3, 7.



Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

**"God is supremely being,  
inasmuch as His being is  
not determined by any  
nature to which it is  
adjoined; since He is being  
itself, subsistent,  
absolutely undetermined."**

[*Summa Theologiae* I, Q 11, art. iv]



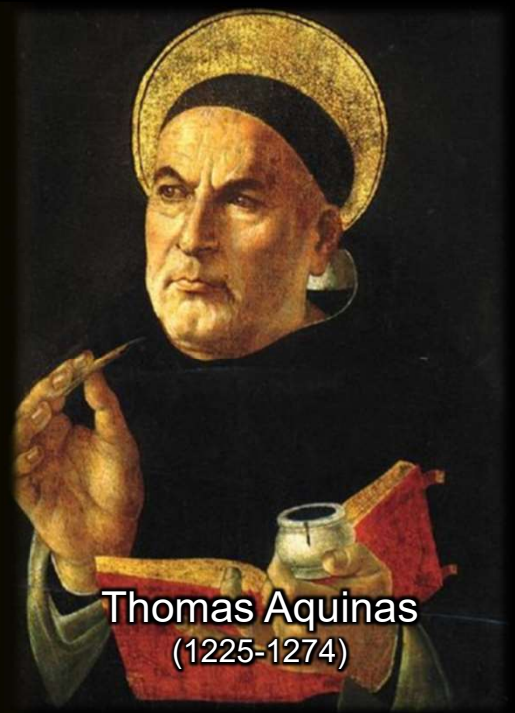
Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)



***An infinite being (i.e., a being whose essence is esse) possesses all perfections in superabundance.***

***"... the perfections following from God to creatures ... pre-exist in God unitedly and simply, whereas in creatures they are received, divided and multiplied."***

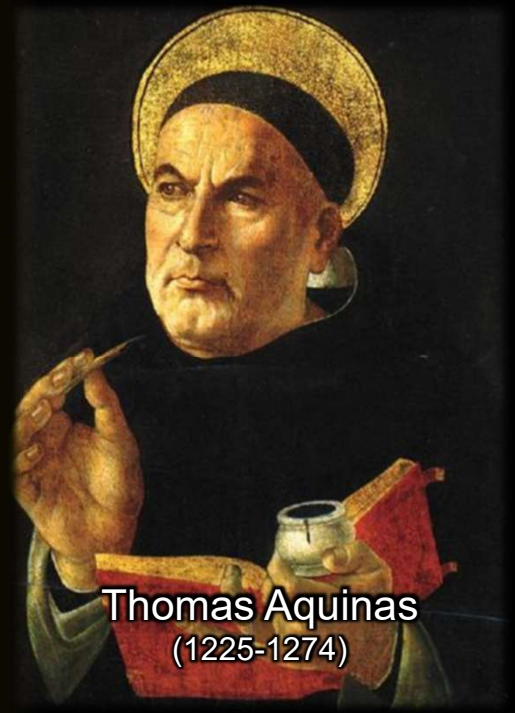
[Summa Theologiae, I, 13, 4]



**Thomas Aquinas**  
(1225-1274)

***"Wherefore it is clear  
that being as we  
understand it here is the  
actuality of all acts, and  
therefore the perfection  
of all perfections."***

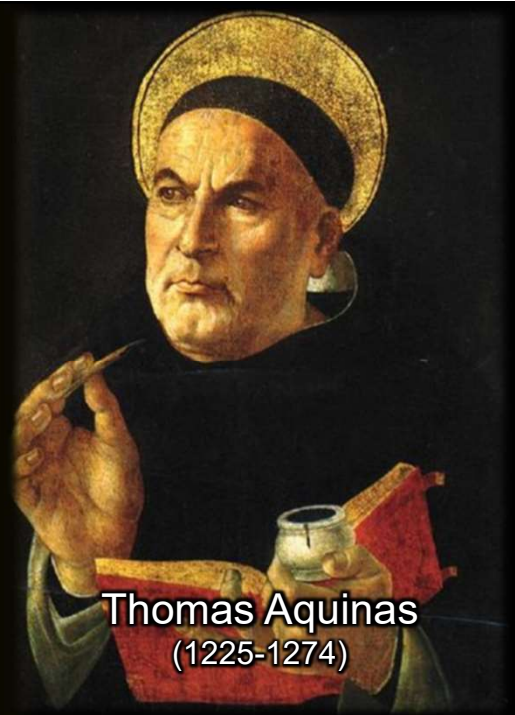
[On the Power of God, VII, 2, ad. 9, trans. English Dominican Fathers (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2004), v. III, p. 12]



Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)

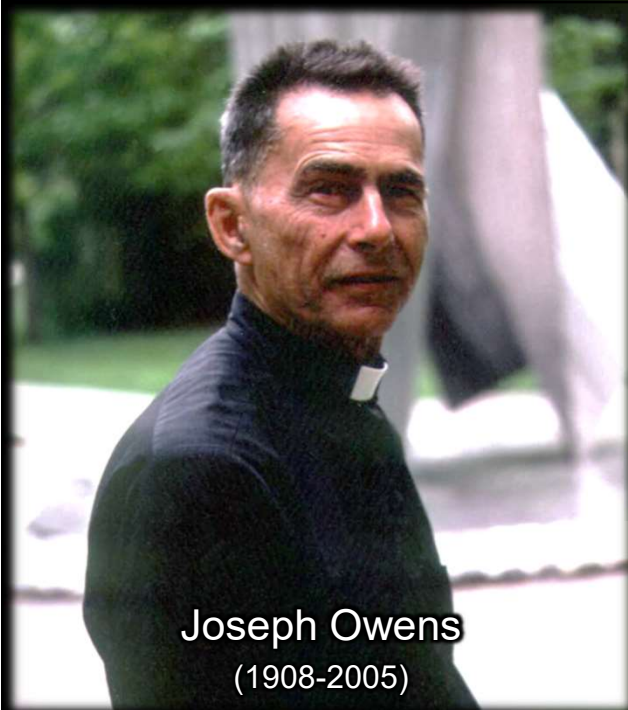
***"All perfections existing  
in creatures divided and  
multiplied, pre-exist in  
God unitedly."***

[Summa Theologiae, I, 13, 5]



Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)





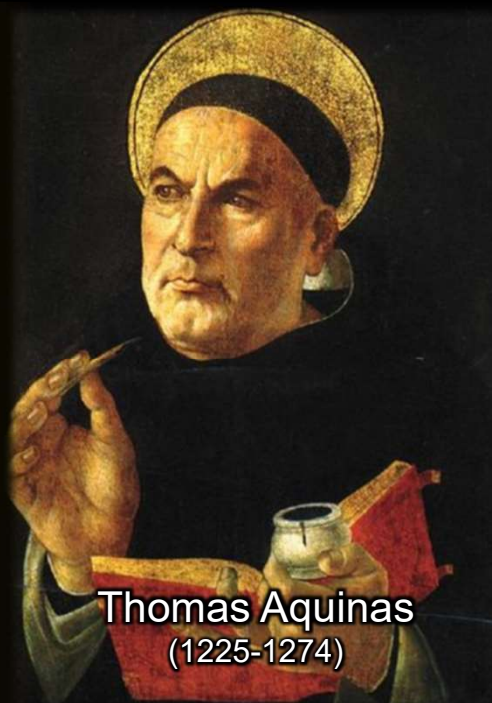
***"Being is conceptualized technically as an act or perfection of a subject. ... It expresses the act or perfection that makes a thing be."***

[An Elementary Christian Metaphysics, (Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1985), 59]

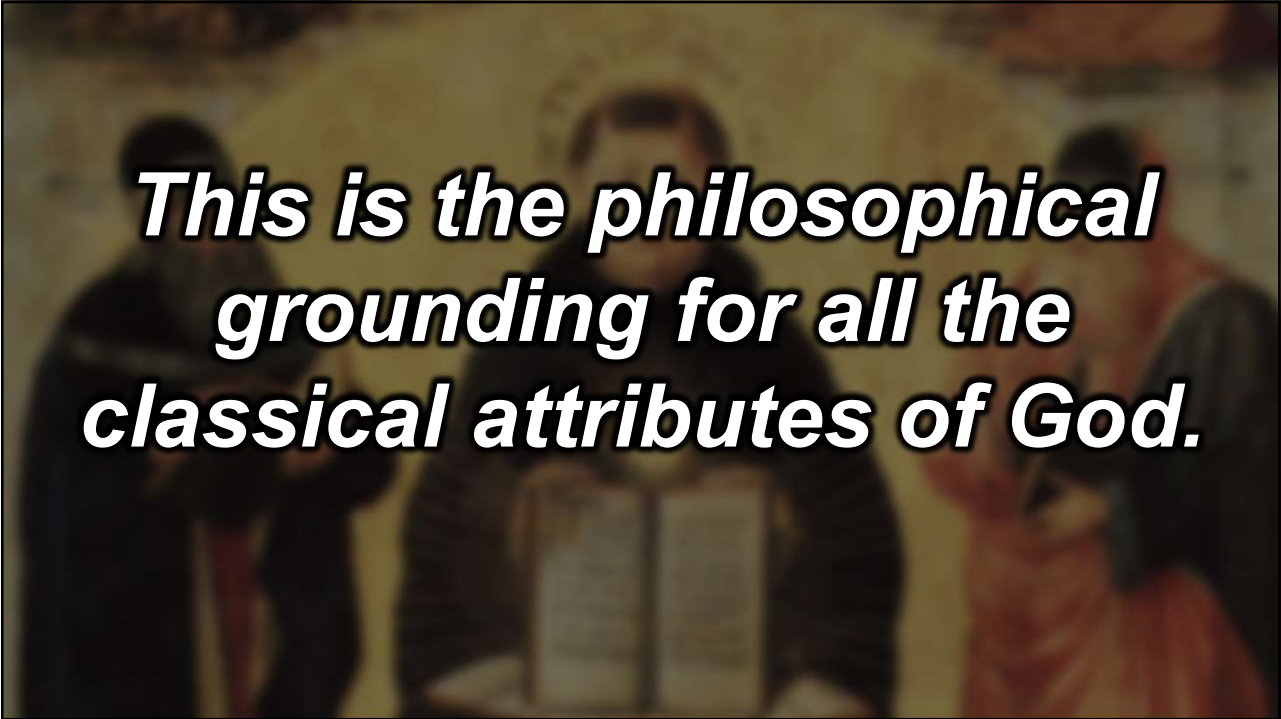
Joseph Owens  
(1908-2005)

***"Nothing of the perfection of being can be wanting to Him who is subsisting being itself."***

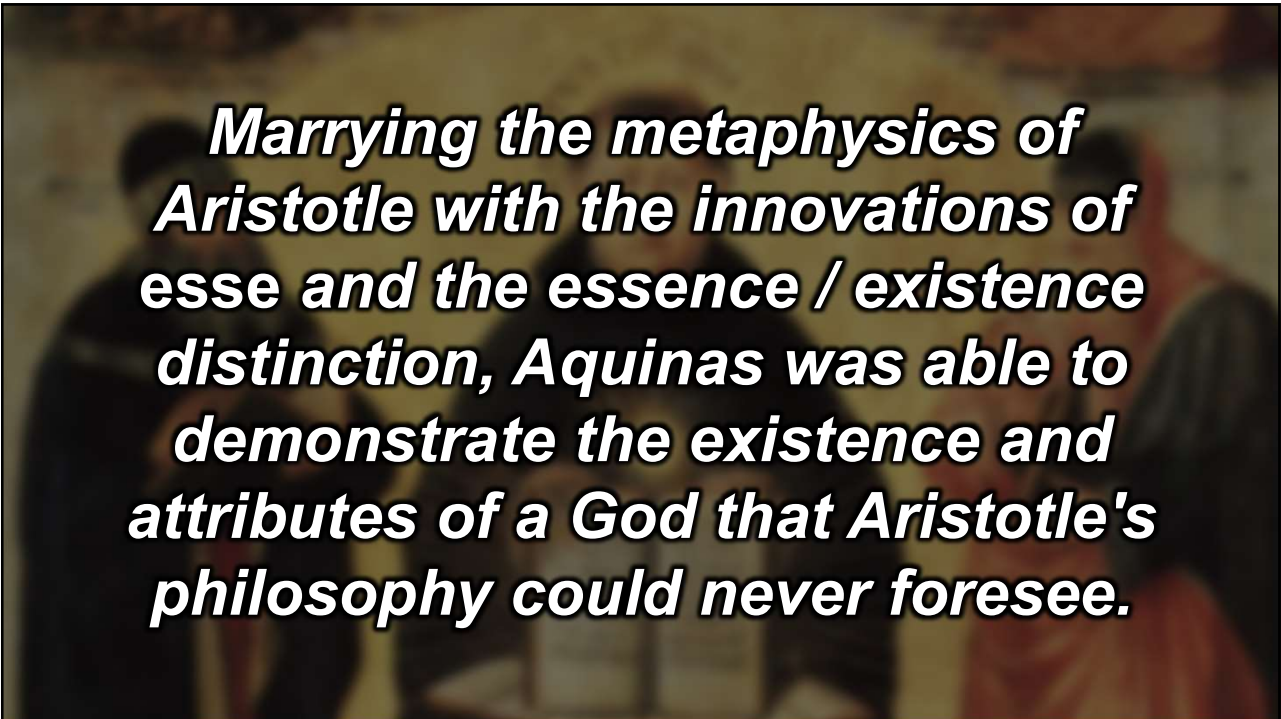
[Summa Theologiae, I, 4, 2, ad. 3]



Thomas Aquinas  
(1225-1274)



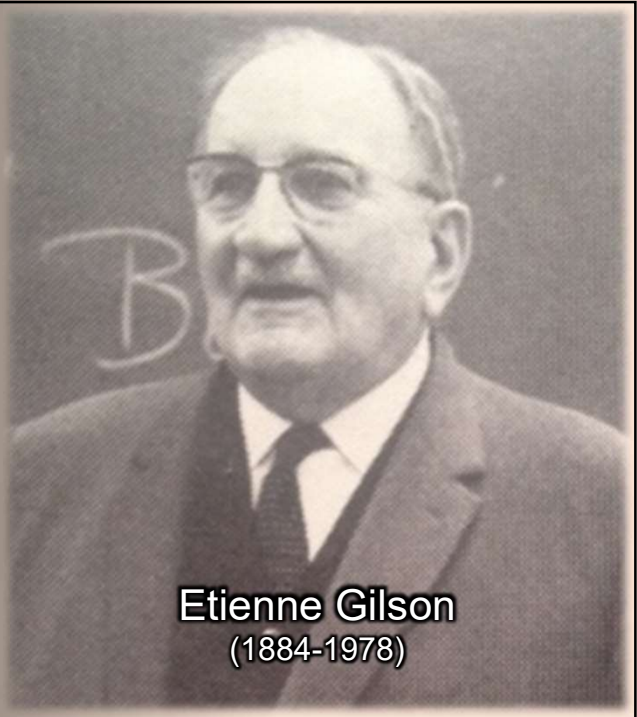
***This is the philosophical  
grounding for all the  
classical attributes of God.***



***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.***

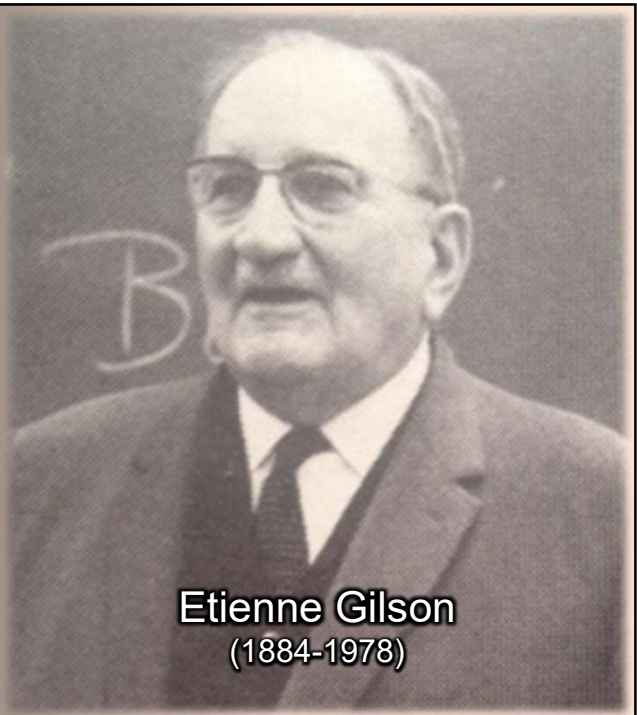


**"Thomism was not the upshot of a better understanding of Aristotle. It did not come out of Aristotelianism by way of evolution, but of revolution.**



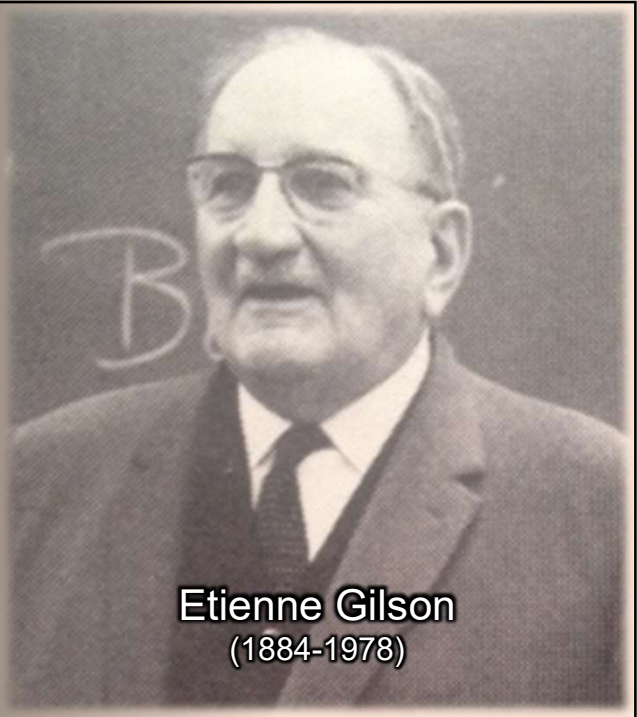
**Etienne Gilson**  
(1884-1978)

**"Thomas uses the language of Aristotle everywhere to make the Philosopher say that there is only one God, the pure Act of Being, Creator of the world, infinite and omnipotent, a providence for all that which is, intimately present to every one of his creatures, especially to men, every one of whom is endowed with a personally immortal soul naturally able to survive the death of its body.**



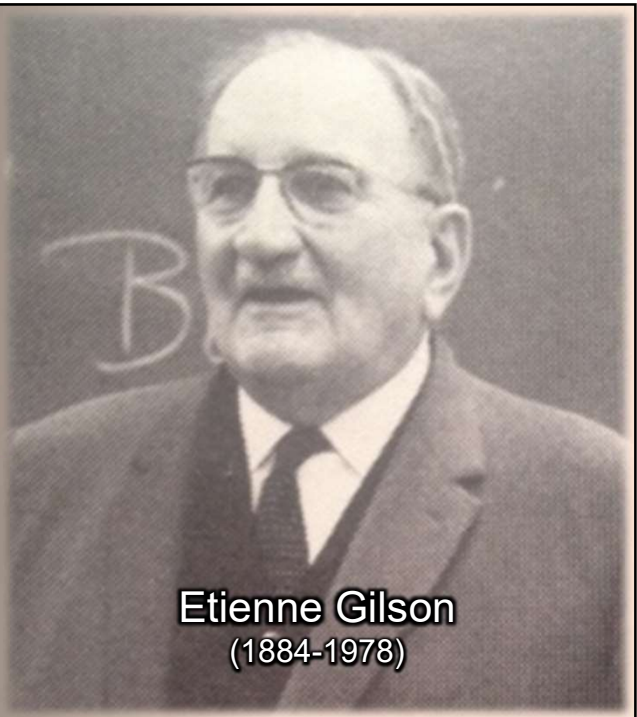
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Etienne Gilson  
(1884-1978)

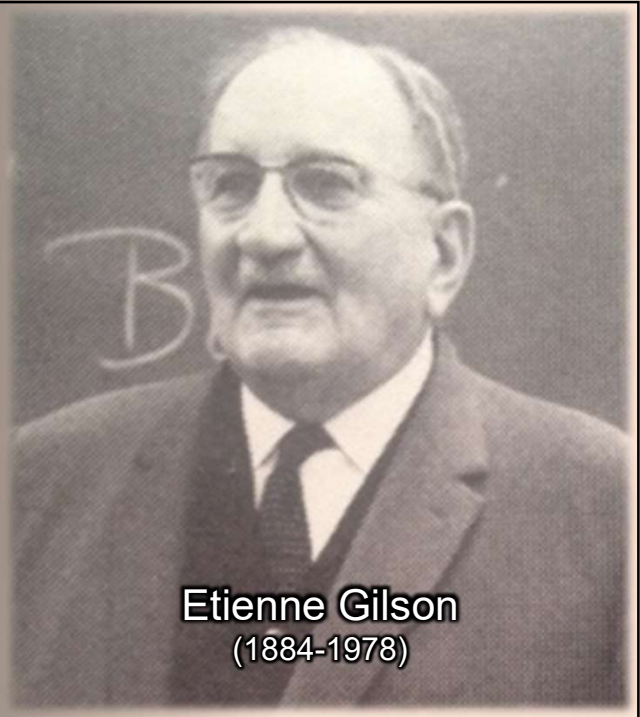
"The best way to make Aristotle say so many things he never said was not to show that, had he understood himself better than he did, he would have said them. For indeed Aristotle seems to have understood himself pretty well.



Etienne Gilson  
(1884-1978)

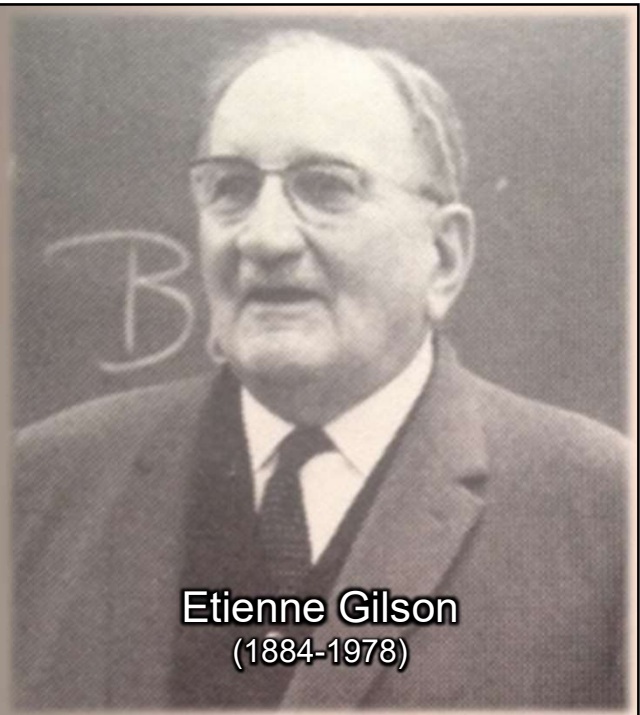


**"He has said what he had to say,  
given the meaning which he  
himself attributed to the  
principles of his own philosophy.  
Even the dialectical acumen of  
Saint Thomas Aquinas could not  
have extracted from the  
principles of Aristotle more than  
what they could possibly yield.**



**Etienne Gilson**  
(1884-1978)

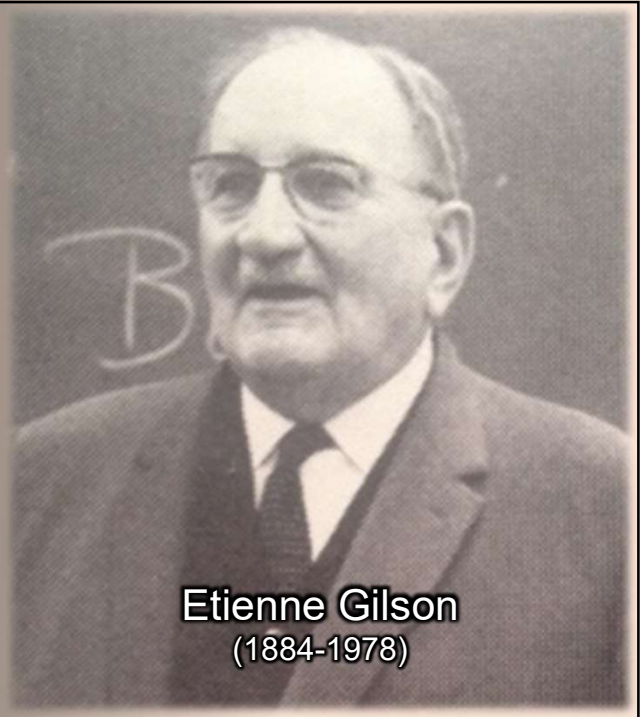
**"The true reason why his  
conclusions were different from  
those of Aristotle was that his  
own principles themselves were  
different. ...**



**Etienne Gilson**  
(1884-1978)

**"In order to metamorphose the doctrine of Aristotle, Thomas has ascribed a new meaning to the principles of Aristotle. As a philosophy, Thomism is essentially a metaphysics. It is a revolution in the history of the metaphysical interpretation of the first principle, which is "being."**

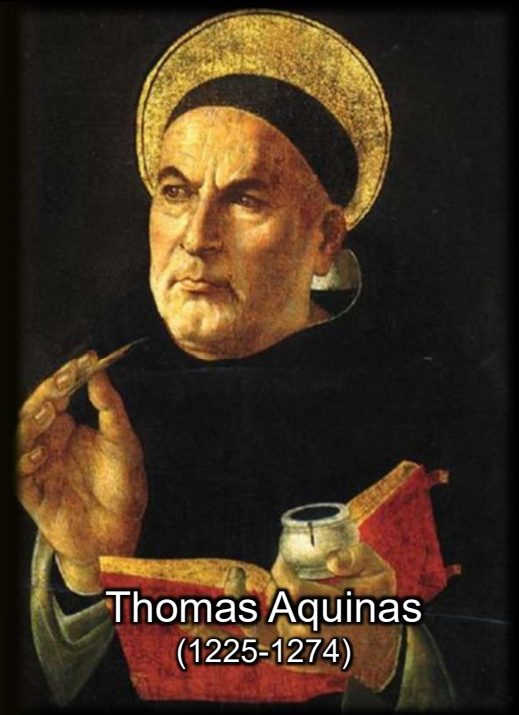
[Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy*, 365]



**Etienne Gilson**  
(1884-1978)

***"All men  
know this to  
be God."***

[*Summa Theologiae* I, 2, 3]



**Thomas Aquinas**  
(1225-1274)





***And God said to Moses,  
"I AM WHO I AM." And He  
said, "Thus you shall say to  
the children of Israel, 'I AM  
has sent me to you.'"***

***Exodus 3:13 - 14***