

The Intersection of Greek Philosophy and Christianity: An Analysis

Amritha Purohit

The period of thought that we now characterize as “Ancient Greek Philosophy” began with the Pre-Socratics, around the 6th century BCE. Christianity first emerged in the first century with the ministry of Jesus Christ. 600 years of history and the Mediterranean Sea separated Christianity and Ancient Greek Philosophy, but they were eventually connected by the Roman Empire. Christianity as a religion was deeply influenced by ancient Greek philosophical principles, and many of its main principles are imbued with the philosophies of Plato, Aristotle, Socrates, Plotinus, Aquinas, and Augustine, important Greek and Christian philosophers. Despite ancient Christians desire to separate themselves from Greek paganism, Christian theology and Ancient Greek philosophy, at their core, express similarities. Many early philosophers, like Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, explore in their work ideas that are reflected later in the Bible and Christian thought, Christian thinkers like Aquinas and Saint Augustine bring Ancient Greek thought more directly into the Christian worldview.

The Bible is a collection of texts and scriptures depicting and illustrating Christianity. Christianity is a monotheistic religion focusing on Jesus Christ, commonly referred to as the Son of God, and his teachings. Christ is God come to earth as a man. It also has roots in Judaism. Jesus Christ was born in ancient Judea, and at points in the Bible was a preacher, teacher, healer, and prophet, and was also sent down from Heaven to die on the cross for Christians, to take their sins and absolve them. The Bible was made up of the Old Testament and the New Testament. Christians believe that both were divinely inspired. One significant difference between the two was that the Old Testament was much larger than the New Testament; the Old has 39 books in

the Protestant Bible, an additional 7 in the Catholic Bible, and Orthodox Bibles an additional 10.¹ The New Testament has 27 in total. They were also written in different languages and at different times, with the Old Testament taking over 1000 years to write and mostly in Hebrew, while the New Testament being written in Greek, and over a 60 year period.² Greek was the language of scholarship when the New Testament was being written, and many Jews at the time could no longer read Hebrew. It was the most accessible version of the Bible at the time.³ It's important to note that a few chapters of the Old Testament were written in Aramaic, a language that was mostly likely what Jesus spoke day to day.⁴ Most scholars also think that the stories that became the Bible “were disseminated by word of mouth across the centuries, in the form of oral tales and poetry – perhaps as a means of forging a collective identity among the tribes of Israel. Eventually, these stories were collated and written down.”⁵ The Bible believes that the creation of the universe was the logos; “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” This is a view that some philosophers I will discuss agreed with, and some contested.

To understand the foundation of Christianity it is also necessary to have a foundation of Judaism; Judaism helped shape Christianity, and was a religion briefly discussed in the Bible. Judaism dates back nearly 4000 years, and began with is one of the oldest religions in the world.⁶

¹ "WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE OLD TESTAMENT AND THE NEW TESTAMENT?," *Bible Gateway Blog*, entry posted July 28, 2022, accessed June 4, 2024, <https://www.biblegateway.com/blog/2022/07/whats-the-difference-between-the-old-testament-and-the-new-testament/>.

² "WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE," *Bible Gateway Blog*.

³ "In What," *Biblica*.

⁴ "In What Language Was the Bible First Written?," *Biblica*, accessed February 22, 2024, <https://www.biblica.com/resources/bible-faqs/in-what-language-was-the-bible-first-written/>.

⁵ Spencer Mizen, "A History of the Bible: Who Wrote It and When?," *History Extra*, last modified April 7, 2020, accessed February 22, 2024, <https://www.historyextra.com/period/ancient-history/history-bible-origins-who-wrote-when-how-reliable-historical-record/>.

⁶ "Judaism," *History*, last modified January 5, 2018, accessed June 5, 2024, <https://www.history.com/topics/religion/judaism>.

It shares with Christianity, and other monotheistic religions, one God at its center— an “all-knowing, all-powerful and ever-present creator of the universe.”⁷

Christianity also had the great ecumenical councils helping shape its foundations, organizations endorsed by the Church helping clarify what the Church believed to be the right interpretation of Christianity.⁸ The councils established different things at different times, but together came up with rules and what they believed were the correct interpretations of Christianity. The councils were the First Council of Nicaea in 325, the Second Council of Constantinople in 381, the Third Council of Ephesus in 431, the Fourth Council of Chalcedon in 451, the Fifth Council of Constantinople in 553, the Sixth Council of Constantinople from 680–681 and finally, the Seventh Council of Nicaea in 787.⁹ All 7 of the councils convened in modern Turkey. They tried to reach a unified Christian world, and make binding and final decisions for the church. Christianity from then adapted and evolved with the evolution of Christians. Another aspect of the foundations of Christianity, however, begin with the Greek philosophers whose ideas impacted the religion forever, such as Plato.

Plato was one of the greatest philosophers of the Greek world. He was a student of Socrates, another philosopher, and his former teacher appears in many of his works. His dialogues are some of the only remaining evidence to the teachings of Socrates. Plato was also a strong believer in dialectic, a form of writing using only dialogue. Through dialectic, people would find an easier path to the truth. One had to prove their point was logical to sway their opponent, challenging assumptions and refining and clarifying their arguments.

⁷ "Religious fact sheets - Judaism," Department of Territory Families, Housing, and Communities, accessed June 5, 2024, https://tfhc.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/252223/nt-judaism-fact-sheet.pdf.

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⁹ "QUICK FACTS," Saint John The Evangelist Orthodox Church.

In Plato's theory of recollection, knowledge is believed to be inherent, acquired through the soul's recollection of innate ideas predating earthly existence. In *Phaedo*, one of his dialogues, he explains that because it's possible to recognize and conjure an object even without having seen it before we must be experiencing it again. We are remembering something the soul already knows. In his *Theory of Forms*, he explains that some concepts are eternal, perfect and unchanging. He asserts that the physical world is not really the 'real' world; instead, the ultimate reality exists beyond our physical world. He regards knowledge to be one of these forms. When you learn something, because there is no new knowledge, you must be remembering something you learned in a past life. He says, "Then, our souls had a previous existence, Simmias, before they took on this human shape. They were independent of our bodies, and they were possessed of intelligence." This argument for a past life also relates to any absolute value, like beauty, goodness, holiness, etc. The absolute values cannot ever change, and are relearned every lifetime as well. The things we take as true now but that change every so often are not eternal and not absolute truths. He brings up true and absolute equality. It's possible, in almost every subject, for something to be equal to someone and unequal to another. If that's true, it can't be the truth because the truth is not subjective. For example, abortion may be fair to some people, but it is immoral to others. Hence, it's not a matter of true equality. By Plato's reasoning, because we know when something isn't true equality, and we can separate true equality from the more mortal, fickle equality, we must have prior knowledge of true equality. Equality is a form of recollection that transcends this life. Unless we immediately forget this knowledge as soon as we obtain it, because of this argument we must be born knowing and continuing to retain the knowledge. "If the soul exists before birth, and if when it proceeds toward life and is born again it must be born from death or the dead state, surely it must also

exist after death, if it must be born again.” Plato’s argument for knowledge and the soul being eternal does share similarities with Christianity. Christianity does believe in the soul being eternal, living immortal in heaven or hell, but not that it ever existed prior to conception. Christianity believes that the soul, once created, will live forever. John 6:40 says, “For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.” Man will live forever in Heaven with God, if they accept God in their heart.

Aristotle (384 BC - 322 BC), was a student of Plato’s and a revered philosopher in his own right. He was born in Stagira, Halkidiki, and left when he was 17-18 to study in Plato’s Academy, staying until he was 38. He eventually became the head of the royal academy of Macedon, where he taught Alexander the Great and two other future kings, Ptolemy and Cassander. Aristotle is famous for many theories, including his ideas on logic, rhetoric, and politics, but a key work of his is his *Metaphysics*, specifically his proof of god. He believed that you could not have an infinite cycle of cause and effect— there had to be a beginning to everything, including the universe. The universe and planets now, however, are in constant motion. He thought that the thing that set off the universe was something outside of the universe itself, something he called the “Prime Mover.” Aristotle’s extreme categorization of the universe was something Christianity also sought to do. In Chapter 7 his *Metaphysics*, he says, “Substance is thought to be present most obviously in bodies. Hence we call animals and plants and their parts substances, and also natural bodies, such as fire, water, earth, etc., and all things which are parts of these or composed of these, either of parts or them or of their totality; e.g. the visible universe and its parts, the stars and moon and sun.”¹⁰ A perishable substance is combined with

¹⁰ Aristotle, "Metaphysics," accessed March 30, 2024, <https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0052%3Abook%3D7>.

matter and is moveable. He then argues for the existence of perishable and imperishable (also called sensible and intelligible) substances that make up the universe, saying if perishable substances were all that existed, the world and time would perish but because they cannot, imperishable substances must also coexist. He also speaks about a third category, substances that “non-physical, non-material, eternal, ‘immovable,’ and ‘unchangeable,’”¹¹ such as numbers or ideas.

In the next chapter, he argues that there has to be one original substance, “that this eternal actual substance must be a single prime mover, which, while the source of all process and change, is not itself subject to process or change. This substance does what is the highest form of life ought to do, namely to think.”¹² This prime mover is similar to God in a christian sense. In Book 12 section 1071b of *Metaphysics*, he says, “But motion cannot be either generated or destroyed, for it always existed; nor can time, because there can be no priority or posteriority if there is no time. Hence as time is continuous, so too is motion; for time is either identical with motion or an affection of it. But there is no continuous motion except that which is spatial, of spatial motion only that which is circular... This is evident not merely in theory, but in fact. Therefore the "ultimate heaven" must be eternal. Then there is also something which moves it. And since that which is moved while it moves is intermediate, there is something which moves without being moved; something eternal which is both substance and actuality.”¹³ In essence, the world as we know it is made of perishable and imperishable substances, and the first, original eternal substance is the prime mover, a substance that is able to move without being moved, and

¹¹ "Aristotle's Metaphysics," Angelfire, last modified 2003, accessed April 14, 2024, <https://www.angelfire.com/md2/timewarp/firstphilosophy.html#:~:text=Aristotle%20also%20says%20tha%20eternal,to%20accidental%20causes%20and%20principles>.

¹² E. D. Buckner, "ARISTOTLE ON THE EXISTENCE OF GOD," The Logic Museum, last modified 2010, accessed March 30, 2024, <https://www.logicmuseum.com/ontological/aristotleontological.htm>.

¹³ Aristotle, "Metaphysics."

is the origin of everything. Aristotle's notion of the prime mover is not dissimilar to Plato's Theory of Forms. Like his idea of the soul passing from one life to another unchanged, the Prime Mover cannot be altered.

Plotinus (204/205–269/270 C.E), was a later philosopher. He harbored a distrust of materiality, like many Platonic thinkers and Plato himself, and so did not discuss his place or date of birth, nationality, or ancestry. He was most likely born and raised in Roman Egypt, in Lyco or Lycopolis, and grew up speaking Greek and with a Greek education. He studied under a Platonic philosopher, Ammonius Saccas,¹⁴ and was deeply influenced by him. Plotinus is now regarded as the father of Neoplatonism, (Neo meaning new, and Platonism defined as the philosophy of Plato and his followers.) Neoplatonism was a revival of Platonism, Plato's school of thought. Plotinus developed a complex system for the universe with the One at the center. All modes of being, "whether material or mental, temporal or eternal, are constituted by the expansion or 'overflow' of a single immaterial and impersonal force, which he identifies with the 'One'"¹⁵ The One is perfect, ineffable, indivisible, and cannot be subject to multiplication.¹⁶ It's perfect because it "seeks for nothing, and possesses nothing, and has need of nothing; and being perfect, it overflows, and thus its superabundance produces an Other."¹⁷ Its constant overflow creates the universe, and is the cause of the universe, much like Aristotle's Prime Mover. In John 7:38, Jesus proclaims, "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." By "rivers of living water," Jesus is referring to the Holy Spirit. The

¹⁴ "Plotinus," The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, last modified June 30, 2003, accessed February 22, 2024, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plotinus/>.

¹⁵ Erik Robertson Dodds and John Dillon, "Plotinus, Neoplatonist philosopher," Oxford Classical Dictionary, last modified July 30, 2015, accessed June 1, 2024, <https://oxfordre.com/classics/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780199381135.001.0001/acrefore-9780199381135-e-5136?rskey=3Dvrbo&result=1>.

¹⁶ "Plotinus," The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, last modified June 30, 2003, accessed February 22, 2024, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plotinus/>.

¹⁷ Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (n.p.: Harvard University Press, 1964), [Page 62], <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvjsf71g>.

One also carries direct influence from Plato— Plotinus “found it in Plato’s *Republic* where it is named ‘the Idea of the Good’”¹⁸ He also imagined a different Good, as the source of all values.¹⁹ Plotinus also commented on God, saying it was a completely transcendent being as well, being inconceivable, ineffable, and above all else. In fact, “God is equated by Plotinus with the One.”²⁰ The One itself is also similar to Plato’s Idea of Forms— an overreaching, intangible existence that makes up the world. Plotinus made clear that the One should not be labeled either positive or negative attributions; by placing more mortal concepts on God, or the One, we restrain it.²¹ The only thing we can say about the One is that it exists, and it is good.²² It is also simultaneously everything and the cause of everything. The first act of the One was the “first great derived reality,”²³ or the nous, (also called the Intellect.) From the Intellect comes the soul, which orders and forms the material universe.²⁴ He believed that there was ultimately a truth one wanted to attain, and it was not by reason alone one could reach this truth. The final journey is one of faith; an ineffable journey of soul. He says in his *Enneads*, “Only by a leap can we reach to this One which is to be pure of all else, halting sharp in fear of slipping ever so little aside and impinging on the dual: for if we fail of the centre, we are in a duality which does not even include The authentic One but belongs on both sides, to the later order.”²⁵ Only with a leap of faith can we reach the One, and subsequently God. Plotinus also thought that one needed to be enlightened and purified to ascend to God. For Plotinus, “the combination of moral purification and

¹⁸ "Plotinus," The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

¹⁹ Dodds and Dillon, "Plotinus, Neoplatonist," Oxford Classical Dictionary.

²⁰ Antonio Panovski, "Plotinus' Theory of Emanations: How Do Things Come into Being?," The Collector, last modified October 13, 2023, accessed June 1, 2024, <https://medium.com/@jlke45/the-ineffable-in-nagarjuna-and-plotinus-151b0aa83665>.

²¹ Panovski, "Plotinus' Theory," The Collector.

²² Panovski, "Plotinus' Theory," The Collector.

²³ "Plotinus and his philosophy," Britannica.

²⁴ "Plotinus and his philosophy," Britannica.

²⁵ Plotinus, "FIFTH TRACTATE. THAT THE INTELLECTUAL BEINGS ARE NOT OUTSIDE THE INTELLECTUAL-PRINCIPLE: AND ON THE NATURE OF THE GOOD.," Christian Classics Ethereal Library, accessed June 4, 2024, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/plotinus/enneads.vi.v.html>.

intellectual enlightenment, which only Platonic philosophy as he understood it could give, was the only way to union with the Good.”²⁶ To ascend from the Soul to the Intellect, and finally, to the One, is through awakening a new awareness.²⁷ In the Bible, the most important way to ascend to heaven after death is by accepting Christianity and God into your heart, thus enlightening yourself. The soul rejoins God after death. Christianity also believes that reason, one of the things Plotinus thought paved the way for enlightenment, is a gift from God. In Thessalonians 4:17, the Bible says, “We who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.” The Bible, in John 3:13, goes on to say, “The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all.” This eventual union with the Lord in heaven is a focal point of Christianity.

Augustine of Hippo, (13 November 354 - 28 August 430), was a later Christian philosopher. He was “perhaps the greatest Christian philosopher of Antiquity and certainly the one who exerted the deepest and most lasting influence.”²⁸ He was born in Roman Africa, in Thagaste, which is now in Algeria, and was made a Christian convert very early on.²⁹ He studied grammar and rhetoric in school, hoping to find a well-paying job in “higher imperial education.”³⁰ He had a son with his long term mistress of 14 years. Augustine became a Manichaean a little later in his life. Manichaeism is a philosophically inundated dualistic religion focusing on salvation through “special knowledge of spiritual truths.”³¹ Life in this world is, to a

²⁶ "Plotinus and his philosophy," Britannica, accessed June 4, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Platonism/Plotinus-and-his-philosophy>.

²⁷ "Plotinus and his philosophy," Britannica.

²⁸ "Saint Augustine," The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, last modified September 29, 2019, accessed February 8, 2024, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/augustine/>.

²⁹ "Saint Augustine," The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

³⁰ "Saint Augustine," The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

³¹ "Manichaeism," Britannica, accessed May 30, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Manichaeism>.

Manichee, “unbearably painful and radically evil.”³² The soul, which “shares in the nature as God,”³³ and thus comes from a transcendent world, has fallen into a terrible world, and must be saved by intelligence and the spirit. To gain knowledge about the self is to recover the true self, and by seeing the self you are able to see the soul.³⁴ He had a few problems with Christianity, like being unable to conceive of God due to His transcendent nature and his own materialism, the leap of faith Christianity required that Manicheism did not (he thought of Manicheism as being reliant on reason as opposed to faith.) Finally, Christianity’s relationship with Evil raised questions. He asked, “Where then is evil? What is its origin? How did it steal into the world?... Where then does evil come from, if God made all things and, because he is good, made them good too?”³⁵ Manicheism’s view of Evil also allowed for his “sinful tendencies (especially sexual.)”³⁶ He followed Machinchaicism for about 9 years, and then traveled to Milan. It was there he became better acquainted with a Neoplatonist version of Christianity, which he found “intellectually more satisfactory than Manicheism.”³⁷ At the time, Christianity lacked a “moral philosophy,”³⁸ although it contained many moral orders and warnings. Augustine was among the first to try and provide this.³⁹ His later work was influenced by his time as a Manichee, such as his belief that humans are “essentially souls, using their bodies as a means to achieve their spiritual ends.”⁴⁰ Augustine was among the first to try and provide this.⁴¹ This is a developed

³² Manichaeism," Britannica.

³³ "Manichaeism," Britannica.

³⁴ "Manichaeism," Britannica.

³⁵ Kenneth Samples, "Exploring Manichaeism: St. Augustine, Part 3," Reasons to Believe, last modified June 26, 2012, accessed May 30, 2024,

https://reasons.org/explore/blogs/blog_channel/exploring-manichaeism-st-augustine-part-3.

³⁶ Samples, "Exploring Manichaeism," Reasons to Believe.

³⁷ "Saint Augustine," The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

³⁸ St. Augustine," Britannica.

³⁹ St. Augustine," Britannica.

⁴⁰ "St. Augustine," Britannica, accessed May 30, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/ethics-philosophy/St-Augustine>.

⁴¹ St. Augustine," Britannica.

strand of Plato's philosophies. Despite this, the objective of life remains happiness, or eudaimonia, as Aristotle thought of it. Contrary to Aristotle, Augustine thought of true happiness coming after death, during the soul's reunion with God.⁴² Christianity, as a result, developed the Platonic idea of "the relative inferiority of bodily pleasures."⁴³ The Bible also speaks extensively about joy after death, with the rejoining of souls and God. In John 16:22, Jesus says, "And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you...I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father." In Luke 23:39, to a thief and his friend facing the same death sentence as Jesus, the Bible says, "And one of the malefactors which were hanging railed on him, saying "If thou be Christ, save thyself and us...And he said unto jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee. Today shalt thou be with me in paradise." Jesus describes life after death as "paradise," and after death Christians will be with a joy no man can take away.

Augustine also believed in the original sin, the sin that man carries because of Adam eating the apple of knowledge in the Garden of Eden, and human's natural tendency to sin because of this. "That we are not untouched by lust is our fault— not the result of God's will but the consequence of something that we have done...for the original sin that stains every one of us is not only a sin that inheres in our individual origins— that is, in the sexual arousal that enabled our parents to conceive us— but also a sin that may be traced back to the couple in whom our whole race originates."⁴⁴ In the Bible, Psalm 51:5, it says, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me." In Ephesians 2:3, it says, "All of us also lived

⁴² "St. Augustine," Britannica.

⁴³ "St. Augustine," Britannica.

⁴⁴ Stephen Greenblatt, "How St. Augustine Invented Sex," *The New Yorker*, last modified June 12, 2017, accessed May 30, 2024, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/06/19/how-st-augustine-invented-sex>.

among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.” By our nature passed down by the original father and mother, we are deserving of God’s anger. Augustine often used this as an excuse for his lustful nature. The original sin justifies eternal damnation. He believed that the grace of God was needed to deliver us from evil. As Augustine said “in a sermon in 404, “he took flesh from the lump of our mortality, yes, and he too took to himself the death which was the penalty for sin, but didn’t take the sin; instead with the merciful intention of delivering us from sin, he handed over that flesh of his to death.””⁴⁵ This was the crux of his Christian theology.⁴⁶

As previously mentioned, Augustine took deep inspiration from Neoplatonic and Platonic thinking. His reading of Plotinus spurred his conversion to Christianity. He says in his Confessions IX, “certain books of the Platonists...and therein I read, not indeed in the same words, but to the selfsame effect, enforced by many and various reasons, that, *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made. That which was made by Him is life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in darkness; and the darkness comprehends it not. ...He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. But that He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe in His name.* This I did not read there..Likewise, I found in those writings, said in diverse and multiple ways, that *the Son has the form of the Father and that it*

⁴⁵ James K.A Smith, "How Augustine responded to the problem of evil without solving it," Christian Century, last modified October 2019, accessed May 31, 2024, <https://www.christiancentury.org/article/critical-essay/how-augustine-responded-problem-evil-without-solving-it#:~:text=As%20Augustine%20put%20it%20in,God%20doesn't%20abstractly%20solve.>

⁴⁶ "Saint Augustine," The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

was not a shame to judge oneself equal to God for having the same nature as him."⁴⁷ He, in essence, is saying that the books of the Neoplatonists are Christianity without Christ.

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) was a devout Italian Christian philosopher. He was born in the Kingdom of Sicily, and began his early education at the Benedictine monastery at Montecassino, where his religious studies began, as well as his studies into philosophy, church history, and law. He was offered to the church as a young boy in the hopes of his becoming an oblate.⁴⁸ He was forced to return to his family after the emperor expelled the monks due to their overwhelming loyalties to the pope, and he continued his education in the University of Naples.⁴⁹ From there he decided to become a friar, someone who preached and taught Christ, as opposed to his previous, more sedentary monastic life.⁵⁰ He was a major proponent of natural theology, a type of theology focused on providing sound arguments for religious concepts based on reason and science. His work is best summarized as the "integration into Christian thought of the recently discovered Aristotelian philosophy, in competition with the integration of Platonic thought effected by the Fathers of the Church during the first 12 centuries of the Christian Era...[his] work accomplished an evangelical awakening to the need for a cultural and spiritual renewal not only in the lives of individual men but also throughout the church."⁵¹ His logical, rational way of approaching God and his insistence on categorization was very similar to Aristotle. In *Summa Theologica*, one of his works, he divided the world into three parts— Man, God, and Christ. It was intended to be a logical, rational, beginners instruction on the Christian

⁴⁷ Augustine Of Hippo, "Confessions Book 7," trans. Ángel Custodio Vega Rodríguez Custodio Vega Rodríguez, ed. José Rodríguez Díez, *Augustine.it*, accessed May 30, 2024, https://www.augustinus.it/spagnolo/confessiononi/conf_07_libro.htm#:~:text=Tambi%C3%A9n%20le%C3%AD%20en%20estos%20libros,y%20habit%C3%B3%20entre%20nosotros14.

⁴⁸ Marie-Dominique Chenu, "St. Thomas Aquinas," *Britannica*, last modified April 29, 2024, accessed June 6, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Thomas-Aquinas>.

⁴⁹ Chenu, "St. Thomas," *Britannica*.

⁵⁰ Chenu, "St. Thomas," *Britannica*.

⁵¹ Chenu, "St. Thomas," *Britannica*.

faith and truth, and is still heavily referenced. It is a series of questions, followed by answers and replies to any objections. The Summa Theologica is unfinished, due to his death in 1274. The Summa Theologica changed how people saw Christianity; it was one of the first times faith and the Lord could be introduced with a grounding in the sciences. Philosophical reason, to Aquinas, was both a “source of divine truth and an aid in exonerating the intellectual credibility of those doctrines at the heart of the Christian faith.”⁵² One must come to know God through reason and sacred teaching. He devised a system that used two steps to reason through the truth of God. The first part of his reasoning was building off of facts people knew were to be true; he then used the effects of his first reasonings to build his second. He used “rational demonstration,”⁵³ a “form of reasoning that yields conclusions that are necessary and certain for those who know the truth of the demonstration’s premises. Reasoning of this sort will enable us to know, for example, that God exists.”⁵⁴ It will also demonstrate certain values of God, like his eternity, immaterialism, etc.⁵⁵ He says, “Demonstration can be made in two ways: One is through the cause, and is called “a priori,” and this is to argue from what is prior absolutely. The other is through the effect, and is called a demonstration “a posteriori”; this is to argue from what is prior relatively only to us”⁵⁶

Aquinas thought there to be several ways to demonstrate God’s existence. He posed objections to even putting God through his system of reasoning in the first place. His most important being that God’s existence was self-evident,⁵⁷ and any attempts to rationalize His existence was unnecessary, as well as faith cannot be rationalized. He explains, “ a statement is

⁵² "Aquinas: Philosophical Theology," Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, accessed June 6, 2024, <https://iep.utm.edu/thomas-aquinas-political-theology/#:~:text=Not%20only%20does%20Aquinas%20think,%20rather%20a%20simple%20being.>

⁵³ "Aquinas: Philosophical," Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

⁵⁴ Aquinas: Philosophical," Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

⁵⁵ "Aquinas: Philosophical," Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

⁵⁶ Thomas Aquinas, "QUESTION 2: THE EXISTENCE OF GOD," Aquinas 101 The Thomistic Institute, accessed June 6, 2024, <https://aquinas101.thomisticinstitute.org/st-ia-q-2.>

⁵⁷ Aquinas, "QUESTION 2: THE EXISTENCE," Aquinas 101 The Thomistic Institute.

self-evident if its predicate is contained in the essence of the subject.”⁵⁸ Aquinas provided rationale for God despite these objections in his *Summa Theologica*. His arguments are, “1) motion; 2) the existence of efficient causes; 3) the reality of contingency; 4) the different grades of perfection in the natural order; and 5) the end-directed activity of natural objects.”⁵⁹

For motion, his argument is very similar, if not the argument for the Prime Mover. It is that if the world is in constant motion, there had to have been a beginning to the movement, a first mover, or God.⁶⁰

For the existence of efficient causes, his argument is the same as the first, being that everything cannot be a cause of itself; there has to be a first cause. The first efficient cause, therefore, has to be God.⁶¹

His argument from the contingency of the world is that, if there is a possibility of something not existing at some time, the object in question cannot exist at some time. Thus, if it is possible for everything not to exist, nothing can exist. But because we live in a world with things that do exist, there has to be a precedent to all things that exist, so that objects can exist now. There has to be something that does not have the possibility of not existing, and is necessary for the existence of all other things. Every necessary thing has its necessity caused by something else. Because, like causes and motion, there cannot be an infinite cycle of causation for necessary things, there has to be the first necessary thing, God.⁶²

His fourth reason has a distinct influence from Plato. He argues, because people have different gradations of values like beauty and goodness, there has to be one true good, or one true

⁵⁸ "Aquinas: Philosophical," Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

⁵⁹ "Aquinas: Philosophical," Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

⁶⁰ Aquinas, "QUESTION 2: THE EXISTENCE," Aquinas 101 The Thomistic Institute.

⁶¹ Aquinas, "QUESTION 2: THE EXISTENCE," Aquinas 101 The Thomistic Institute.

⁶² Aquinas, "QUESTION 2: THE EXISTENCE," Aquinas 101 The Thomistic Institute.

beauty that allows for people to have relative versions of the value. This entity that encompasses the true version of these values is God.⁶³

His final argument for the existence of God is that all inanimate and non-intelligent objects seem to instinctively act towards their best possible purpose, even if they are not aware of their doing so. These objects strive for their purpose not by chance, but are guided by an omniscient being possessing knowledge and intelligence. This omniscient, omnipotent being directing all objects is God.⁶⁴

Aquinas agreed with Augustine in that faith was needed to truly find God—reason, he posited, could only take you so far, but a revelation was what brought you to the light. “For although natural reason can establish the existence of a perfect being, it is incapable of establishing many of the features that distinctively characterize the Christian God, such as God’s triune nature and God’s incarnation as a human being. Here is a place where philosophy alone, unaided by revelation, fails to yield an adequate theology.”⁶⁵ Although Aquinas believed in rational, logical discovery of God, he also believed that it could not completely prove God; faith and faith alone could bridge the final gap. Thomas Aquinas was a central figure in the evolution of Christianity. He brought reason into the Church, making it easier for non-believers to find God through Aristotelian methods.

Ancient Greek philosophy deeply impacted Christianity, forever shaping the course of history. Aristotle and Plato were the catalysts of the evolution of the religion, with later philosophers taking inspiration. The philosophers with the greatest impact were Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Saint Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas. Through their efforts and beliefs, Christianity

⁶³ Aquinas, "QUESTION 2: THE EXISTENCE," Aquinas 101 The Thomistic Institute.

⁶⁴ Aquinas, "QUESTION 2: THE EXISTENCE," Aquinas 101 The Thomistic Institute.

⁶⁵ "Thomas Aquinas," The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, last modified December 7, 2022, accessed February 8, 2024, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aquinas/>.

developed more rational and philosophical groundings. They merged the ancient world with the modern, and created Christianity as we know it today.

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