The Arguments of Aquinas is intended for readers with philosophical interests, who may not be specialists in medieval philosophy. Some think that a medieval saint must be, as such, wrong, dated, and boring; others feel that a saint, any saint, must be right, relevant, and inspirational. Both groups are likely to misread Aquinas, if indeed they read him at all. The works of great philosophers are products of their times, but that does not lessen their value for us. We profit by reading the works of St Thomas in the same interested but critical way that we read the works of our contemporaries.

MacIntosh does not hesitate to compare Thomas’s arguments with those of later philosophers as well as with those of his contemporaries and earlier philosophers. He chooses topics from a variety of still interesting problem areas: the existence and attributes of God, including God’s foreknowledge and human free will, causality and the origin of the universe, time and necessity, human souls, angels, and the problem of evil. Additionally, the volume looks at his views on honesty and lying, and on human sexuality, on which he is, as ever, philosophically interesting whether or not we accept his conclusions.

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The Arguments of Aquinas
A Philosophical View

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Some of the material in this book has appeared, typically in a somewhat
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I have used the following abbreviations or short titles for commonly quoted works (full references are given in the Bibliography). All quotations are in English, sometimes, as mentioned in the Preface, with accompanying Latin.

CM: Augustine, *Contra Mendacium; Against Lying*
CSMK: Descartes, René, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 3 vols.
CT: Aquinas, *Compendium theologiae; Compendium of Theology*
De pot: Aquinas, *De Potentia Dei; On the Power of God*
De veritate: Aquinas, *De Veritate; On Truth*
DM: Augustine, *De Mendacio; On Lying*
In Peri: Aquinas, *In Perihermeneias; Commentary on (Aristotle’s) On Interpretation*
Quodl: *Quaestiones Quodlibetales: Quodlibetal (Miscellaneous) Questions*
SGG: Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles; Summa against the Pagans, or On the Truth of the Christian Religion*
ST: Aquinas *Summa Theologiae; Summa of Theology*

St Thomas’s works are standardly referred to by the main section, followed by the subsection in question. For ST, for example, references are by part – 1a (the first part), 1a 2ae (the first part of the second part), 2a 2ae, and so on – question, and article number, followed by ‘c’ for the corpus or body of the article, ‘ad’ for Thomas’s answers to objections, and so on.

When referring to works by authors such as Descartes or Leibniz, whose works may be found in a variety of editions, I have cited the standard editions, but I have also given references by chapter, section, and so on to enable readers of these various editions to find the quotation in question.
St Thomas Aquinas is one of the world’s great philosophers. He was also a devout Christian, and a theologian of penetrating insight. Although he is one of the greatest of philosophers he is also, by those who do not share his faith, greatly unread. Too many philosophers know him only through a reading of the five ways – that is, what amounts to a page or two near the very beginning of the (unfinished) longest of his many works. And of those many, too many have misread him, often drastically. It is rather as if our views of Plato were garnered solely from a quick read through the analogy of the cave, with many deciding on the basis of that reading that the Forms were spatio-temporal.

Because of that confusion, this book, after some introductory background material, begins with a chapter on necessity, followed by chapters on causality, time and motion, and time and infinity – for unless we can use, or at least understand, Thomas’s conceptual tools in these areas, there will be no hope of understanding the proof of God’s existence for which the five ways provided Thomas’s beginning.

In this work, about St Thomas’s arguments, I discuss them not from a theological perspective, but as philosophical arguments. I am not an Aquinas scholar, merely someone who admires Aquinas as a philosopher. I am not writing, particularly, for Aquinas specialists, but rather for philosophers who, without being specialists, would like to know more about the details of Thomas’s arguments. I have of course not attempted to deal with all of Aquinas’s important philosophical arguments here, but the arguments discussed are enough to show Thomas’s philosophical importance, now as then.

In many of his works, and in particular in the Summa Theologiae, St Thomas’s method of writing, shaped by the nature of instruction and debate in the medieval university, is a model of philosophical style. For every topic he discusses he first considers the strongest objections that can be made to his position. Often the strongest of these objections result from his own thinking on the matter, but a number of them come from other philosophers in his own religious tradition, or from philosophers in other traditions. In particular his thought owes a great deal to Ibn Rushd (Averroës) and Maimonides (Moses ben Maimon, Thomas’s “Rabbi Moyses”), both by
way of reaction against, and adoption of, their views. Necessarily he was
conscious when writing of the fact that philosophy, including natural phi-
losophy, had flourished longer and more strongly in the Islamic world than
in the post-Roman west, and that just over the natural boundary of the
Pyrenees there was an intellectually vibrant culture which accepted some
but by no means all of the assumptions his co-religionists found natural.
Consequently it will be necessary and helpful from time to time to consider
their views as well as his.

Now I must enter a caveat which should be unnecessary, but I fear is not.
I do not share St Thomas’s faith, and so I believe that many of his central
theological conclusions are false. I also believe that many of the central
conclusions of Aristotle, Ockham, Descartes, Locke, Leibniz, and Kant are
mistaken, often wildly mistaken, and that pretty well all the central con-
clusions of Plato, Spinoza, and Berkeley are, but I do not feel disbarred for
that reason either from writing about, or admiring, these philosophers. All
philosophers make mistakes, and we can learn from their misses as well as
from their hits.3

I do not, in this book, attempt to give a systematic exposition of Thomas’s
theology and its attendant philosophy. To a large extent he does that himself
in the Summa Theologiae and in the Summa Contra Gentiles.4 Rather, I
have attempted to shed some light on some of the philosophical topics that
most puzzled me when, influenced by Arthur Prior and Peter Geach, I began
reading him, puzzles on which the standard commentaries did not always
shed light – or so it seemed to me. Having struggled with the problems I now
have considerably more sympathy with Thomas’s commentators and have,
indeed, drawn heavily on them,5 but I have also attempted to add something
to what has already been written about some of the most important and
difficult areas of St Thomas’s thought.

Because “He was in his primary and official profession a theologian,” Ralph
McInerny and John O’Callaghan indicate, “Many contemporary phi-
losophers are unsure how to read Aquinas.” As they go on to suggest, the
answer is straightforward: He is a theologian of the first rank who is also an
eminent philosopher. Read him as a philosopher!6

Not writing for medieval specialists, I have not hesitated to compare
Thomas’s arguments and conclusions with those of later thinkers, the early
moderns as well as contemporary philosophers, though I try, throughout,
to avoid anachronism. It is, I think, important to see Thomas’s thought
both in his and its historical context, and as something of enduring inter-
est and value. We may not practice our trade in exactly the same way, but
we learn from the great philosophers just as painters learn from the great
masters, though the practice of painting has also altered over time. “The
function of the historian is not to judge but to understand,” said Hugh
Trevor-Roper,7 but the two enterprises are not incompatible, at least in the
history of philosophy.
The arguments on which I concentrate fall into three main groups:

1. Natural philosophy (features of the world and our knowledge of it): necessity, causality, time, and infinity
2. Natural theology: God’s existence, God’s attributes, God’s foreknowledge, and human freedom
3. Human beings, their nature, and attributes: souls and immortality, epistemology, morality and philosophical method

The first section provides us with certain background notions which are important for understanding the discussion in the second section: Thomas’s proofs of God’s existence, and the immediate puzzles about God’s attributes, including his relation to the world of humans, to which they give rise. The third section considers some of central problems about that world and God’s connection to it – problems that, then and now, puzzle philosophers, including those which involve difficulties specific to Thomas’s philosophy.

Notes

2. The Pyrenees are a natural boundary, but in specifying them I do not mean to underplay the importance of Charles Martel’s activities at Tours in 732, and subsequently in Burgundy and the Languedoc, in making them the relevant natural boundary.
3. Tartakower’s ontology enriching remark, “All the mistakes are there, just waiting to be made,” has application outside the field of chess.
4. Weisheipl 1974 (128) points out that the Summa Theologiae was written for beginners (novitios, ST 1a, Prologue), but be that as it may, it is a wonderful source of Thomas’s views.
5. I might mention here that the bibliography contains only works directly cited, but it by no means exhausts the works I have found interesting and helpful.
Introduction

The longest Tyranny that ever sway’d,
Was that wherein our Ancestors betray’d
Their free-born Reason to the Stagirite,
And made his Torch their universal Light.
(Dryden\(^1\))

St Thomas was a philosopher in a particular historical context. He was born into a faith which he seems never to have doubted, and he was influenced, philosophically, by past philosophers as well as those who became his mentors and contemporaries. Among these the most important was, of course, Aristotle, but Aquinas kept his “free-born reason” intact throughout his many interactions with Aristotle. John Ackrill remarked, “it seems to me both enjoyable and rewarding to engage in philosophical argument with Aristotle,”\(^2\) and that was Thomas’s approach: Although Aristotle is supreme, he is not infallible, and there are others whose views are also important.

In particular there were the philosophers to whom he was introduced as a young student. As Herbert McCabe notes in “A Sermon for St Thomas,”

When he was fifteen . . . he was lucky enough to be sent to school to the part-Islamic university of Naples, the first secular university of Europe, set up by the excommunicated Frederick II to train his imperial officials and to oppose the pious papal places in Bologna and Paris. There Thomas met an Irishman called Peter who introduced him to the exciting, pagan, deeply un-Christian new books that were banned by the Church in Paris but were being published under Frederick’s protection in Naples, the translations of Aristotle.\(^3\)

One of the topics Thomas would have been taught by Peter was logic, one of the three subjects of the medieval university’s introductory trivium of logic, rhetoric, and grammar. “The sword of God’s word is forged by grammar, sharpened by logic, burnished by rhetoric, but only theology can use it,” said Robert Sorbon.\(^4\)
Introduced early to logic, Thomas takes for granted our familiar theorems or rules of sentential logic, including the basic theorems of normal modal sentential logics. In addition he would have been introduced to supposition theory, which for present purposes we may think of as including some of our derivation rules of predicate logic, plus some sophisticated, if occasionally cloudy, portions of a theory of reference.

Thomas was also familiar with Aristotelian views on syllogistic inferences. Like his contemporary, the logician Peter of Spain, Thomas agrees with Aristotle in treating universal affirmative and negative sentences (A and E sentences) as contraries—that is, they cannot be conjointly true, but they can be conjointly false. “All bears are black” and “No bears are black” cannot both be true, but they can be (and are) both false. It follows that universal affirmative sentences have existential import—that is, their subject classes have members. Consequently Thomas allows straightforward deductions of I sentences from the corresponding A sentences.

Our contemporary interpretation by contrast gives existential import to particular sentences, both affirmative and negative, but not to universal sentences. Our convention makes “All round squares are elliptical” true; the medieval convention makes it false. There is also a contemporary view that sentences with empty subject classes are perfectly fine as sentences, but since they fail to make an assertion, they are neither true nor false. There are, clearly, arguments to be made for all three views; all that need concern us here is that the medieval convention gives existential import to universal affirmatives, and so allows derivations such as “All frogs are green. Therefore some frogs are green.”

From an early age Thomas would have known Latin, as well as the Italian vernacular in which he was later to preach when in Italy. He did not speak French, and he “knew practically no Greek, except for a few technical words and phrases.” That is, with respect to Aristotle, whom he admired greatly but not uncritically, Thomas was in precisely the position that many readers today are in with respect to Thomas himself. He relied on translations to read Aristotle; many readers today rely on translations to read St Thomas. And just as Thomas had more, and better, translations available than readers of a generation or two before him, so readers today have, often at their very fingertips, more and better translations than were available in the recent past. As the bibliography shows, I have made use of various translations, for St Thomas and other authors, sometimes altering them slightly in order to bring out a point clearly.

The texts to which Thomas was introduced by Peter and the other masters at Naples were the result of what began as a transmission process, and culminated in a translation process. By and large the Romans, although they did make some translations from the Greek, knew Greek, and so did not need translations. The result was that when a time arrived when the interested parties did not know Greek, a great deal of knowledge was unavailable.

The need for translation resulted from the collapse of the Roman Empire—but how did the possibility of such translation arise? How did the various
texts become available? For works from classical Greece a key figure is Nestorius, patriarch of Constantinople from 428 to 431, who held views on the nature of Christ that, for political mixed with theological reasons, were condemned as heretical by the Council of Ephesus in 431 (some fifty or sixty years before the births of Boethius and Philoponus). Nestorians moved initially to Syria, and then to Persia, forming the nucleus of a continuing community using Syriac as its literary and liturgical language. They took with them a large number of classical Greek texts which were then translated into Syriac.

Meanwhile (perhaps in the fourth century – the date is uncertain) Calcidas translated and commented upon the first half of Plato’s *Timaeus*, and early in the sixth century Boethius began his programme of translating all of Aristotle into Latin. Boethius had barely started his task, having translated most of Aristotle’s work on logic, when he ran afoul of other officials at the court of Theodoric, king of the Ostrogoths, and was imprisoned and subsequently executed on a charge of treason. He might in any case not have finished his project. John Marenbon suggests that

Boethius seems to have become so engrossed in his role as an expositor of logic, not limiting himself to a single commentary on each work, and writing extra textbooks, that it is hard not to see it as having diverted him . . . from his more grandiose scheme.\(^{13}\)

*The Consolation of Philosophy*, with its philosophically important discussion of, among other topics, time, eternity, and God’s foreknowledge, was composed by Boethius in prison while awaiting execution.

In the century after the exile of the Nestorians Mohammed (c. 570–632) was born, left his message, and died. In 762–764, a little over a century after Mohammed’s death, Abu-Jafar, Caliph al-Mansur (“the victorious,” Caliph 754–775, d. 775), moved his capital from Damascus to Baghdad, and the process of translation into Arabic which had begun earlier in his reign intensified. This process continued under Harun al-Rashid (786–809), and finally, under Harun’s son al-Ma’mun (813–833), what amounted to a formal research centre, the “House of Wisdom,” was established, with Nestorians providing the bulk of its members.\(^{14}\)

The works of primary interest to the translators were initially pragmatic ones: treatises on astrology, medicine, logic, and mathematics. But partly as a result of the growth of interest in Islamic theology, the list quickly expanded to include the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle and their followers.

One of the major translators was Hunain ibn Ishaq (d. c. 875), and as a result of the efforts initiated by him, by the end of the tenth century a great many of the Greek philosophical and scientific works we now have were available in Arabic, though not in Latin.

After Boethius’s death in 524, translation of philosophical and scientific works directly from Greek to Latin ceased for about six centuries, with
two slight exceptions. There were a number of medical translations in Italy, particularly in Ravenna, between the fifth and sixth centuries, and in the ninth century John Scotus Eriugena (fl. 850) made translations from pseudo-Dionysius at the request of Charles the Bald.\textsuperscript{15}

A precondition at the time for successful translation was the existence of places where there were local bi- or tri-lingual speakers who could (i) themselves translate texts; (ii) collaborate with a would be translator, sometimes by translating into a shared vernacular tongue; (iii) act as a language tutor for the person who wanted to translate. In Thomas’s youth, the two most important such areas were al-Andalus (effectively, what is now Spain) and Sicily. Sicily, which had been under Muslim, Byzantine, and Norman control, had a population in which Greek, Arabic, and Latin were all represented. Spain, with its flourishing Muslim culture, proved to be an excellent centre for potential translators.

In al-Andalus there were communities of Mozarabs, Christians whose culture and literary language were Arabic. There was also a population bilingual in Arabic and the growing romance dialect which was to become Spanish, and also, less commonly, among the clergy, there was bilingualism in Arabic and Latin. As a result of the Muslim conquest, manuscripts were available. Under the Umayyad amirs, especially al-Rahman III (912–961) and al Hakan II (961–976), the Royal Library at Córdoba grew impressively. One estimate put the number of volumes at 400,000. How exactly the manuscripts reached the western parts of the Islamic empire is not well understood.\textsuperscript{16}

The society was one in which Jews, Christians, and Muslims could and did live in peace: Conditions for major translation into Latin were now in place. Much of the translation into Latin occurred in Spain. Toledo, to which the centre of translating activity shifted in the second half of the twelfth century, was home to a number of translators, the most influential of whom was Gerard of Cremona (c. 1114–c. 1187) who, his friends and disciples wrote shortly after his death, had been

trained from childhood at centres of philosophical study and had come to a knowledge of all that was known to the Latins; but for the love of the Almagest, which he could not find at all among the Latins, he went to Toledo; there, seeing the abundance of books in Arabic on every subject, and regretting the poverty of the Latins in these things, he learned the Arabic language, in order to be able to translate. In this way, combining both languages and science, . . . he passed on the Arabic literature in the manner of a wise man who, wandering through a green field, links up a crown of flowers, made from not just any, but from the prettiest; to the end of his life, he continued to transmit to the Latin world (as if to his own beloved heir) whatsoever books he thought finest, in many subjects, as accurately and as plainly as he could.\textsuperscript{17}
Gerard translated Ptolemy as well as many other works on astronomy and mathematics – including Euclid, al-Kwarizmi, al-Kindi (De aspectibus), and Theodosius (On the sphere), Aristotle (Posterior Analytics, Physics, De Caelo, On Generation and Corruption, etc.), al Farabi, Galen, and Ibn Sinā.

It is perhaps worth noticing in passing that Córdoba was the birthplace of both Maimonides and Ibn Rushd, from Thomas’s point of view the most important twelfth century non-Christian philosophers. In his early education perhaps the most important translator was Michael Scot (1175?–1235), who began translating in Toledo but moved to the court of Frederick II, where he translated among others Aristotle’s De Animalibus, Ibn Sinā’s De Animalibus (a portion of his translation was dedicated to Frederick II), and Ibn Rushd’s Great Commentary on the De Caelo.

As a result, as Weisheipl notes, “At a time when Parisian students were forbidden to study Aristotle’s natural philosophy and metaphysics, Thomas was studying the libri naturales and most probably the Metaphysics as well.” Also importantly, he had access to major works by Muslim philosophers, and by Jewish philosophers, particularly Maimonides.

We find Thomas, then, as a young man, versed in the works of Aristotle, Maimonides, Ibn Sinā, Ghazālī, Ibn Rushd, and others; he was already by Parisian standards extremely well educated, and well prepared to become a major figure in the philosophical world, then and now.

Notes
1 Dryden 1663.
2 Ackrill 1981, 2.
3 McCabe 1987, 236. On Peter of Ireland, see further Crowe 1956 and 1969 and, particularly for his influence on Aquinas, Dunne 2006.
4 MS. lat. 15971, f. 198, Bibliothèque Nationale, quoted Haskins 1929, 46. Haskins notes that the ascription to Sorbon is conjectural.
5 See Chapter 1, “Necessity and possibility,” for discussion.
6 See further Spade 1982. A helpful bibliography for supposition theory can be found by following the links at www.ontology.co, maintained by Raul Corazzon (last accessed September 12, 2016).
7 That this Peter, a Spanish Dominican, was Pope John XXI is now considered a misidentification. See Copenhaver, Normore, and Parsons 2014, 5–9, for details.
8 A and E sentences are universal affirmative (“All philosophers are wise”) and universal negative (“No philosophers are wise”) sentences. I and O sentences are particular affirmative (“Some philosophers are wise”) and particular negative (“Some philosophers are not wise”) sentences. The labels A, E, I, O are a mnemonic using the first two vowels of the verbs of affirmation and denial, affirmo and nego.
9 Weisheipl 1974, 163.
10 The same is true, of course, for his knowledge of Islamic philosophy and philosophers, as it is for many students of philosophy today.
11 Where there might be a problem with the translations I offer, I have typically given the original parenthetically or in a footnote.
12 Lindberg 1992, 164.
13 Marenbon 2016.
6 Introduction

14 Lindberg 1992, chapters 7–9, on which I am drawing here, provides a very helpful account of the transmission process.
15 Eriugena's own interesting works, and particularly his unorthodox views on animal souls, will be noticed in more detail in Chapter 9.
16 See Davidson 1987 for a variety of plausible suggestions.
18 Weisheipl 1974, 15. On the very important Michael Scot, who managed to incur the displeasure of both Roger Bacon and Dante, see Burnett 1994, d’Alverny 1994, and Burman 2000.
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