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# The Christian Philosophy Of St Thomas Aquinas

## THE CHRISTIAN PHILOSOPHY OF **ST. THOMAS AQUINAS**



by Etienne Gilson



## Synopsis

In this final edition of his classic study of St. Thomas Aquinas, Etienne Gilson presents the sweeping range and organic unity of Thomistic philosophical thought. Gilson demonstrates that Aquinas drew from a wide spectrum of sources in the development of his thought—*from Aristotle to the Arabic and Jewish philosophers of his time, as well as from Christian writers*. What results is an insightful introduction to the thought of Aquinas and the Scholastic philosophy of the Middle Ages. *—*

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

—[A]s the only English version of any edition of *Le Thomisme*, and therefore for years a kind of manual for North American students approaching Aquinas, the book deserves recirculation. With it appears the masterful —*Œ*Catalogue of St. Thomas—*Œ* Works—*Œ* prepared by the Rev. I. T. Eschmann to accompany Shook—*Œ* translation and available nowhere else. . . . [I]ts overview of principles and conclusions in the history of the texts has not been surpassed.—*—*The Philosophical Quarterly —[This volume presents] L. K. Shook—*Œ* English translation of the final version of the late Etienne Gilson—*Œ* (1884—*Œ* 1978) classic overview of the Christian philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas. . . . Gilson was one of the pioneers, in the early part of [the twentieth] century, of medieval philosophy in general and the work of Aquinas in particular. He sought to restore to the study of Aquinas—*Œ* texts an historical sensitivity, thus rescuing them from the near canonical status accorded in the well-intentioned but inhibiting late nineteenth-century papal revival of Thomistic studies and

preserved in the so-called “manual theology” of the seminar curriculum. . . . The endnotes are an invaluable resource, as is the still unsurpassed catalogue of Aquinas’ works compiled by Eschmann and

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If you just want the skinny on what Aquinas thought about this and that, across the entire sweep of his writings, without descending the various metaphysical rabbit-holes requisite to argue those stances, you can’t do better than Gilson in this volume. Of course, given Aquinas’ massive scope, the skinny is not so skinny after all. All the more reason to start here before moving on to one or other of those rabbit-holes.

Starting from the sensible moving to the intelligible then to being as act itself and back again. Gilson has produced a masterful “synthesis” of St. Thomas philosophy, though he never actually wrote one. There is a lot that is familiar here. In this book it is all presented in its comprehensive whole. Everything fits and is in support of everything else. In “essence”; the point is given that the philosophy itself deals with essence as the ineffable act it is and is therefore positioned to address any future considerations due to its and their living nature. And so it has, and is as solid and impeccable as it was in the thirteenth century. I especially enjoyed the chapter on religious life. Clear, concise, solid, based upon reason itself. Summa too big? read this.

Gilson’s work on the philosophical side of Aquinas is a masterful work. It reflects a very mature appreciation of Aquinas, which serves as a very good basis for his exposition of the philosophical side of Aquinas’s theological work. Make no mistake, it takes a very focused reading to appreciate the extremely subtle insights that lay at the heart of Aquinas’s reflections on Being. Without such a disciplined readying the exposition will dissolve into seeming endless, nuanced abstractions that even Gilson will not be able to surmount for you. Bringing such dedication to the reading will reward you with nothing less than Beauty and a true appreciation for why Aquinas is “Saint Thomas Aquinas”.

This reader sees that the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas Aquinas is indeed the *Summit Theologica* -- and, that Etienne Gilson is, perhaps, the clearest and sharpest proponent [still available] of St. Thomas Aquinas -- and, that “The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas” by

Etienne Gilson is, perhaps, the best single work [still available] on this topic. To amplify on the impact of Thomism [and most especially as demonstrated by Etienne Gilson via this work], I quote from the start, middle and ending of an earlier edition's dust-jacket +++ "St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1279) is the medieval mind at its finest, its most powerful and its most modern. Never before -- and possibly never since -- in the history of man's quest for knowledge of God and the universe has any one man produced such a profound and original synthesis of philosophies. The sweeping range and organic unity of Thomistic thought is a philosophical system created by a thinker of genius. ""Drawing from pagan, Mohammadan and Jewish sources in addition to Christian writers and the Bible, his broad vision combines in one synthesis the metaphysical principles of reality, its inward structure, the nature of man, the principle of his moral and civil conduct and the solution of his destiny. This Doctrinal statement -- written in the form of the *Summa Theologica* -- was fraught with incalculable philosophical, moral and religious consequences. ""A synthesis of faith and reason, of moral and political science, and of Hellenism and Christianity, the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas stands as one of the greatest achievements of human thought, and the brilliant culmination of the Scholastic philosophy of the Middle Ages. ""Etienne Gilson's incomparable scholarship combines the insight of a philosopher and a theologian with the sensibilities of a dedicated artist."

As the other reviewers have said, this book is truly a classic, and like most of Gilson's opus is well worth reading by anyone interested in philosophy. Particularly strong are the early chapters on being (ontology) and on Aquinas's famous proofs of the existence of God. Gilson wants to convince as well as explain, so the tone can be a little tendentious at times, but generally his prose is lucid, even lyrical. Also, in my opinion the final chapter somewhat blurs the distinction between Thomism and saving faith. Ultimately, however, this book fully succeeds in getting under the skin of Thomistic philosophy. After reading it, you may never see "things" in quite the same way.

Gilson has exceptional skill in explaining difficult philosophical concepts. He lays out the existential foundations of St. Thomas Aquinas' thought and makes a compelling case that "the metaphysical positions of Aquinas are still far ahead of what is considered most progressive in the philosophical thought of our own times." Gilson relates the thought of Aquinas to that of his predecessors, especially Aristotle and Augustine. Although this book can be difficult reading at times, the reader will be rewarded by the effort.

Thanks

Clear. Concise. Masterful. A true classic. If you want to understand Aquinas, read Gilson's book first. Then read it three more times.

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