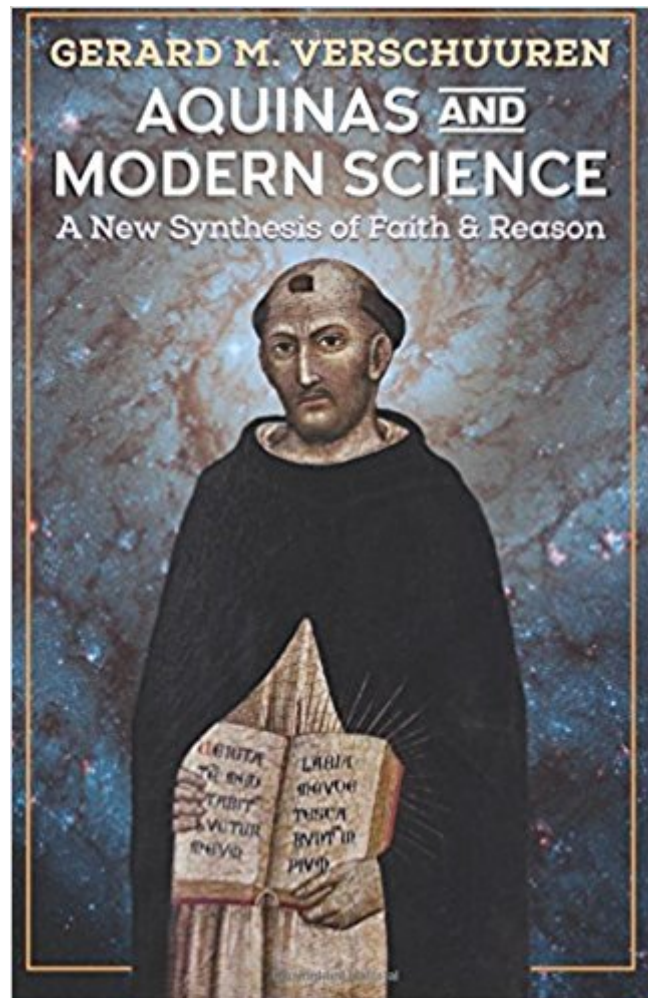




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# Aquinas And Modern Science: A New Synthesis Of Faith And Reason



## Synopsis

We live in a paradoxical time. Science enables us to know more and more, but it seems to be about less and less: we reach into outer space but understand less about our inner space; we create intricate machineries to direct our lives but cannot control ourselves; we see more trees but no longer the forest. Is there a remedy for these dichotomies? Yes, philosophy, which can bring coherence where fragmentation looms, opening vistas no telescope or microscope can ever reach--and especially the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, because for more than seven centuries it has been a beacon of surety in times of uncertainty, confusion, and tribulation. Thomas's 13th-century world was in many ways as turbulent as ours, confronted with an influx of new ideas, rife with dubious philosophies not so different from the skepticism, secularism, and relativism that saturates ours. He understood both the fascination of his contemporaries with new discoveries and the confusions they often brought. No wonder then that his philosophy has been lauded by modern thinkers such as Albert Einstein, David Bohm, Werner Heisenberg, John Searle, and Alasdair MacIntyre--to name but a few. The mission of *Aquinas and Modern Science: A New Synthesis of Faith and Reason* is precisely to invite you on a tour through the richness of Thomas's philosophy in its encounter with the sciences as we know them today. Let his time-tested principles continue to serve as an anchor of intelligibility in a sea of confusing claims.

## Book Information

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FOREWORD by Joseph W. Koterski, S.J., Fordham University  
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"Gerard Verschuuren illustrates the perennial value of Aquinas in the quest for an understanding of the nature of scientific explanation. He offers a clear exposition of the first principles of thought and being, as identified and defended in the work of Aquinas."--JUDE P. DOUGHERTY, Dean Emeritus of the Department of Philosophy, Catholic University of America

"Verschuuren has written an informative, thought-provoking, witty, and irresistibly readable brief for the continuing relevance of Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy to modern science. He is at home in both worlds, and can explain them clearly to those who are not."--STEPHEN M. BARR, Professor in the Department of Physics and Astronomy, Director of the Bartol Research Institute, Researcher in theoretical particle physics, University of Delaware

"I am impressed by the author's knowledge of science and insights into its perfect compatibility with Thomas's commonsense principles, as well as his ability to translate the technical abstractions of both philosophy and science into the language and thought processes of intelligent laymen."--PETER KREEFT, Professor of Philosophy, Boston College

"Gerard Verschuuren here provides a thoughtful account of how the philosophical vision of Aquinas can help us better see the unity of reality, while also appreciating the wide range of scientific disciplines that study reality in its diversity."--JOSEPH W. KOTERSKI, S.J., Associate Professor of Philosophy, Fordham University

"This book is a comprehensive introduction--for students and laypersons alike--to the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, as well as a treasure trove of insightful integrations with contemporary scientific thinking. Even more importantly, the author provides a clear example of what any current Thomist should be trying to do--talk to one's

contemporaries."--JOHN F.X. KNASAS, Professor of Philosophy, Center for Thomistic Studies,  
University of St. Thomas

Good study of Aquinas and his promotion of the rudiments of scientific thought in the 13th century.

Excellent blend of faith and reason. Highly appropriate for teachers of science. Delighted with this book.

Great explication of Thomistic concepts as they relate science. The author uses contemporary English.

The purpose of Gerard Verschuuren's excellent book *Aquinas and Modern Science* is to summarize the metaphysics and epistemology of Thomas Aquinas and then discuss what Aquinas would think about various religious and philosophical questions raised by modern science. He starts with very effective arguments defining and then refuting scientism, which is the belief held by many scientists that science is the best form of knowledge, which ignores the fact that science only deals with material things and has nothing to say about ethics and other values. While many scientists believe that Christianity and other religions are based on superstition, Aquinas clearly demonstrates that reason supports Christianity and the reality of God by a preponderance of the evidence. One nice feature of this book is that it explains that Aquinas posited five causes -- the formal, material, efficient and final causes, and a fifth exemplary cause. Verschuuren also explains the key points of primary and secondary causes in Aquinas's metaphysics, which is a powerful tool. In the chapter on epistemology, the author does a superb job of refuting David Hume's skepticism and his attack on causality. Hume claimed that humans can't be sure of causes, but that's silly, since we experience causation by our own free will. In refuting skepticism, Aquinas held that we know things, and not mental abstractions. In other words, we experience reality through our senses, and we are not stopped from touching reality by our senses. Perhaps the best section of this book is the chapter on Aquinas and Neuroscience, in which several cogent arguments are given showing that the mind is spiritual and not material. For example, one argument is that the qualities of matter such as mass and location have nothing in common with the qualities of ideas and other abstractions, so there is no plausible way that the ideas in our minds could be caused by the matter in the brain. Yes, thoughts could be somehow

recorded in the brain, but the brain's act of understanding those thoughts can't be recorded or generated by mindless neurons. The book gives nine other arguments. In the chapter on Aquinas and Evolutionary Biology, Verschuuren argues that the Intelligent Design theory is misguided in that it seeks intelligent design in various organs of life forms, such as the human eye, when more powerful evidence of intelligent design exists in the laws of nature, the order of the universe, and throughout the universe where all of creation exhibits purpose and ends. What is particularly nice about this book is that it clearly explains profound ideas, and the arguments are fair and correct. Not only that, but that modern-day Thomist, philosopher Peter Kreeft of Boston College, has a blurb on the back cover where he recommends this book. For those who seek wisdom, this book is a treasure.

Having read hundreds of books by and about St. Thomas Aquinas and having just finished this one, I feel obligated to try to bring this remarkable book to the attention of any potential readers interested in St. Thomas, in science, in philosophy, and in truth in general. Dr. Verschuuren's analysis echoes that of St. Albert the Great, patron of scientists, in its sweeping breadth of hard and social sciences from physics to biology, to sociology, to neuroscience and more, with the kind of depth of philosophical penetration St. Thomas, patron of scholars, was so known for. The book rigorously applies Thomas' approach to the principles for causation to all of these fields. With a personal background in neuropsychology I was particularly impressed with his presentation of a full ten arguments for why the mental is not the neural. All in all, this is an unusually thought-provoking book, written in an engaging style that entertains the mind as it stimulates the neurons. I'll refer to it again and again in the future and I highly recommend it.

What did Aquinas know about modern science. Very little no doubt. If you asked Aquinas his opinions on general relativity, he would not know what you were talking about. What about the Big Bang Theory? What about evolution? Oh he would know some basic ideas of what we call physics and such today, but this was a man who was a monk and lived when people thought the Earth was the center of the universe. What hath Aquinas to do with modern science? Quite a lot actually. You see, part of the problem is we enter into the discussion thinking often that science is the supreme field. Why not? It's what's been ingrained into us. "People in the past today believed in miracles, but we know that they didn't happen. We live in a world of science." If you want an expert on any subject for a TV show, bring in a scientist. A scientist is automatically assumed to be the beacon of knowledge and wisdom. None of this is meant as anti-science. Many scientists are no doubt very

knowledgeable and wise people. The problem is that science has its limits. Bring it out of its area and put it where it has no business and it does a lot of damage. Much of the problems in discussions about science today are not so much about the data as they are the metaphysics behind the data. That's a dirty word today. Metaphysics is often seen as "Studying things that are nonsense" or just a catch-all term for "the supernatural" or something of that sort. Those who mock metaphysics though have their own metaphysics that they are doing, and it's quite normally a bad one in that case. Metaphysics is the study of being as being. How does existence work and function? All that is science is a part of this existence and so Aquinas, the great metaphysician, has something to say. He can't tell you about evolution, but he can tell you about substances and potential and change. He can't tell you about the Big Bang Theory, but he can tell you about potential and actuality. He can't tell you about DNA, but he can tell you about formal, material, efficient, final, instrumental, and exemplar causes. If we study science with all of those in mind, then Aquinas can believe it or not shed a lot of light. Thankfully, Verschuuren has written a great book on this. The knowledge he brings is highly impressive. He has a great love of Aquinas and familiarity with him and his metaphysics, yet also looks to be highly read in the scientific literature. But isn't Aquinas's view all about faith? Not at all. Faith and reason were not opposed to Aquinas. He would say that there are things known by revelation and things known without, but we must never make the two contradict. While Aquinas did believe the Earth was the center of the universe, he was going with the science of his time. If he thought the science today was overwhelming, he would also agree with that. Verschuuren gives us an introduction to the metaphysics that is simple enough for the layman to understand. My only puzzle here was when talking about causes why the instrumental cause was left out. I consider this one highly important to understanding many cosmological debates and such, but it seemed to be forgotten. While many will see a war between science and religion, Aquinas would not. What about evolution? If it is true, Aquinas would have no problem. Evolution is one thing becoming something else. It is not nothing becoming something, which is entirely different. There is also the question of areas like neurology and such. How does the brain work? What about the mind-body problem? Aquinas has something to say in each case. Even something like NDEs receive something from Aquinas. Finally, what about government? Here, Aquinas might have some more experience. What would Aquinas say about our constitutional freedoms today? What would he say about the role of money in our culture? What would he say about our rights? I leave Aquinas's positions for the readers to find in this book that should be read. Today, scientists are trying to understand our world by looking through telescopes and microscopes and other such tools, which they should do. Maybe they should look through old Aquinas as well

and see if they can bring out treasures of old instead of just new. In Christ, Nick Peters Deeper Waters Apologetics

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