

Aquinas and Sartre: On Freedom, Personal Identity, and the Possibility of Happiness

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Thomas Aquinas and Jean-Paul Sartre are usually identified with completely different philosophical traditions: intellectualism and voluntarism. In this original study, Stephen Wang shows, instead, that there are some profound similarities in their understanding of freedom and human identity. Aquinas gives far more scope than is generally acknowledged to the open-endedness of reason in human deliberation, and argues that we can transform ourselves in quite radical ways through our choices. Sartre famously emphasizes the radical nature of choice, but also develops a subtle account of rationality and of the factual limits we encounter in the world and in ourselves. And in both thinkers the heart of human freedom lies in our ability to choose the goals we are seeking, as we search for an elusive fulfilment that lies beyond the confines of our temporal experience.

This important study will interest Aquinas and Sartre scholars, as well as general readers seeking an introduction to their thought. It will also be invaluable for philosophers seeking fresh perspectives on questions of freedom, happiness, personal identity, act theory, meta-ethics, and theories of the self.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Stephen Wang lectures in philosophy and systematic theology at Allen Hall, London, and is visiting lecturer in moral philosophy at St Mary's University College, Twickenham.

PRAISE FOR THE BOOK:

"This provocative book juxtaposes two philosophers normally associated with radically different perspectives.... The book's strength lies in its clear and nuanced explanation of highly complex ideas, demonstrating even more care by providing original language citations for key terms.... Overall, this clearly written analysis offers important insights into political anthropology, action theory, existentialism, and Thomistic studies." ? A. W. Klink, *Choice*

"Wang articulates with astonishing clarity, precision, and subtlety the common features of Aquinas' and Sartre's accounts of the meaning of human existence, the process of human understanding, freedom, and the pursuit of happiness." ? Severin Kitanov, *Religious Studies Review*

"This provocative book juxtaposes two philosophers normally associated with radically different perspectives. Wang finds areas of similarity and convergence between Aquinas and Sartre in their focus on identity and action theory. The book's strength lies in its clear and nuanced explication of highly complex ideas, demonstrating even more care by providing original language citations for key terms. . . . Overall, this clearly written analysis offers important insights into philosophical anthropology, action theory, existentialism, and Thomistic studies. . . . Recommended." ? A. W. Klink, *Duke University*

"[A] well-written volume." ?Eileen C. Sweeney, Journal of the History of Philosophy

"A brilliant and original piece of work. Under Wang's probing examination Aquinas and Sartre emerge as ideal commentators on each other's work. Rarely have I seen such a combination of genuine scholarship and interpretative flair, in such a readable prose."?Timothy McDermott, editor of *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Philosophical Writings*

"Stephen Wang is exceptionally well-placed to discuss the intriguing and unexpected relationship between Sartre's existentialism and Aquinas's apparent 'essentialism,' and to show the common ground they share over issues such as responsibility, freedom, and even happiness. This book is stimulating, clearly written, and highly original."?Christina Howells, University of Oxford, editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Sartre*

"A major contribution to the appreciation of both authors."?Thomas Flynn, Emory University, author of *Sartre, Foucault, and Historical Reason*

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