





# THOMAS AQUINAS IN 50 PAGES

A LAYMAN'S QUICK  
GUIDE TO THOMISM

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Sacred Scripture citations are generally from the 1899 edition of the Douay-Rheims (Challoner) Bible or the Revised Standard Version-Catholic Edition or a translation of my own rendering.

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## WHY YOU SHOULD READ THIS BOOK

Why should you read a book about Thomas Aquinas?

This is the world's most concise and easy-to-read book on the thought of Saint Thomas Aquinas. It's only 50 pages, so be aware that it is *not* the most thorough treatment. A thorough treatment would be 5,000 pages, but you don't have that much time.

Nevertheless, if you read this short book and understand what it lays out, you will be in the top 0.001% of people in the world who have a working knowledge of the philosophy and theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas. You will have the knowledge to pass a class called "Thomas Aquinas 101," and you will be ready to study Thomas Aquinas at the collegiate level. You will have the building blocks to move forward. At the end of this book, I make practical recommendations for taking it to the next level and recommend the next books to read.

To Jesus through Mary,

Taylor Marshall, Ph.D.

PS: There's a glossary of Thomistic "vocab words" at the end of this book to help you out along the way.

## THE LIFE OF THOMAS OF AQUINO

Thomas Aquinas was born in a castle in the year 1225. He is called “Aquinas” because he was born eight kilometers north of Aquino. Thomas, we might say, was born with a silver spoon in his mouth. His father was the Count of Aquino and his mother was the Countess of Theate. This noble bloodline related Thomas to the Hohenstaufen dynasty of the Holy Roman Empire—a dynasty that includes the infamous Emperor Frederick Barbarossa.

### THOMAS THE CHILD

From infancy, Thomas’s wealthy and noble family began to prepare him for one of the most prominent positions in medieval Europe. He was positioned to become the Abbot of Monte Cassino. Monte Cassino was *the* motherhouse of medieval monasticism. Saint Benedict established his first monastery at Monte Cassino, and all of Europe’s Benedictine monks and nuns looked to Monte Cassino as the spiritual capital for their way of life. To be the Abbot of Monte Cassino was to reign as a prince.

Sinibald, the uncle of Thomas, was the Abbot of Monte Cassino, and Thomas’s father, the brother of Sinibald, had every intention of insuring that his baby boy would one day succeed his brother as abbot. Beginning at the age of five, Thomas began his education at the monastery. A legend says that he was called “the dumb ox” because Thomas was large like an ox, but silent. Many assumed that he was merely a mute, stupid giant, when in fact his large frame housed an immense intellect.

One time his classmates shouted, “Look Thomas! Look outside. A pig is flying! Come and see!” The large boy scampered over to the window and looked outside. The classroom filled with snickers. “Ha! Thomas, are you so dumb as to think that there are pigs flying outside?” The Dumb Ox replied, “I would rather believe that pigs can fly than that my own Christian brothers would lie to me.”

When Thomas was about fourteen, political strife between Pope Gregory IX and Emperor Frederick II led to war in the surrounding region. Since the noble house of Aquino was related to Fredrick II by blood, Thomas’s parents quietly relocated him to Fredrick’s newly established university in Naples.

### HIS TWO EARLY MENTORS AT NAPLES

The University of Naples was a controversial place in the 1200s. It was here that Thomas Aquinas met two men who would change his life forever. On account of these two men, Thomas would thwart his parents’ plans and never become the esteemed Abbot of Monte Cassino.

As a student in Naples, the young Thomas Aquinas fell under the influence of an inspired preacher by the name of John of Saint Julian. John of Saint Julian belonged to a new order of religious that did not identify themselves as “monks,” but rather as “brothers” or “friars.” John of Saint Julian belonged to a new movement, considered fanatical by some, known as the Order of Preachers or “Dominicans.” In 1216, a charismatic and penitent priest by the name of Saint Dominic established a new religious order to revive the Christian faith and reconcile heretics with the Catholic Church. This Order of Preachers was simply that—a brotherhood of itinerant preachers who went from town to town, often barefoot and begging for food. They slept in fields, barns, or wherever they were allowed. Unlike the Benedictine Abbot of Monte Cassino, who rode stately horses and wore jewels and silk, the Dominicans lived a radical life of poverty and preaching. This life of penance appealed to the young Thomas, to the shock of his parents. It just so happened that John of Saint Julian had been appointed as a recruiter of young men for the Order of Preachers.

While in Naples, Thomas also studied under Peter of Ireland—one of the most revered scholars of Europe. Peter tutored the young Thomas in the quadrivium of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music, and exposed him to the texts of the Greek pagan philosopher Aristotle. The writings of Aristotle were often accompanied by commentaries—commentaries written by Muslims and Jews. Christians of this time were divided as to whether these texts should be studied and to what extent they might be reconciled to the Catholic faith.

## **THOMAS AT THE AGE OF 19**

Thomas announced to his family that he would *not* become a Benedictine monk and pursue the abbacy at Monte Cassino. Instead, he would become a Dominican. Now to the ears of his mother, the Countess, this would have been tantamount to becoming a hippie, a beggar, a fanatic, and a social outcast. The Countess would not have her son, a nobleman born in a castle, sleeping in pigsties and preaching to peasants. Yet Thomas was resolute. He would not obey his mother—he would rather obey God.

So, at the age of nineteen, Thomas ran away from home to join the Dominicans in Rome. His mother would have none of it, so she arranged for Thomas to be captured by his brothers. When Thomas stopped for a drink from a brook, his brothers jumped him and carried him back to the castle of Monte San Giovanni Campano. At the castle, his mother held Thomas prisoner for two years.

Now Thomas was not held in a dungeon. Rather, he was under house arrest in the hope that he might finally abandon the idea of becoming a Dominican preacher and embrace his imposed “vocation” of becoming the Abbot of Monte Cassino. To pass the time, this university-educated student spent time tutoring his sisters. He also secretly sent messages to his Dominican friends.

## THOMAS THE VIRGIN & THE MIRACULOUS CORD

The most famous account from this time in Thomas's life recalls how members of his family hired a whore and sent her into Thomas's room in order to seduce him. Perhaps it was thought that a seduction would destroy his sense of vocation and discourage him from joining the fanatical Dominicans. When the prostitute entered the room and attempted to seduce Thomas, he ran to the fireplace, pulled from it a burning log, and lunged toward the terrified whore. When she ran from the room, Thomas used the log to scratch the sign of the cross on the wall. Then, two angels appeared and girded his waste with a miraculous cord that he wore for his entire life. It is said that Thomas Aquinas never struggled with a lustful thought or action from that moment until his death—that he became “an angel in the flesh.”

His pious resolve revealed that Thomas would never renounce his vocation to the Dominicans. His mother, still ashamed that her noble son wanted to become a poor man without rights or privileges, would still not give her blessing. So instead she relented by allowing Thomas to sneak out of a window during the night. This way, Thomas could fulfill his dream of becoming a Dominican, and she could claim, “Well, he escaped from our watch by night and became one of *those Dominicans* against our will.”

## THOMAS GOES TO PARIS

The Dominican order reassigned Thomas to Paris, where he would teach and continue his studies. In Paris, he met the man who would influence him even more than John of Saint Julian and Peter of Ireland—he met Saint Albert the Great. Albert the Great was perhaps the most learned man in the world and was an expert in natural science, history, astronomy, music, Sacred Scripture, philosophy, and theology. Thomas attached himself to Albert and followed him from Paris to Cologne, Germany. In Cologne, Thomas became a professor of Sacred Scripture and wrote commentaries on Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Lamentations. In 1252, Thomas returned to Paris and completed his master's degree in theology. He spent three years writing his four-volume commentary on the *Sentences of Peter Lombard* (*Scriptum super libros Sententiarum*). He also composed his famous philosophical treatise *On Being and Essence* (*De ente et essentia*) during this time.

In the spring semester of 1256, Thomas was appointed regent master in theology at Paris. Both the Dominicans and Franciscans were under attack by certain Church officials, and Thomas set his pen to defending their life of poverty and preaching.

## THE MOST CONTROVERSIAL THEOLOGIAN OF HIS TIME

From 1268 until 1272, Thomas was again the regent master at the University of Paris. During this time, it was Thomas's task to refute those who were using the philosophy of Aristotle to deny certain Christian doctrines, such as the creation of the universe and the immortality of the soul. This extreme philosophical movement was called "Averroism," after the Muslim philosopher Ibn Rushd, known in the West as "Averroës." If you're at a cocktail party and you need to refer to this, the correct way to pronounce the name Averroës is: *Ah ver row ease*.

The Averroists pitted reason against faith. Thomas wished to show that right reason never conflicted with the true faith. Averroism held that reason conflicted with the doctrine of Christ. According to Saint Thomas, this version of Aristotle's philosophy introduced a dangerous bifurcation between philosophy and theology.

Averroists, in their reading of Aristotle, held a number of positions contrary to the faith. For example, they taught that all men shared one single active intellect. This theory introduced pantheism (belief that God is all things) and obscured the Christian doctrine of the soul. Some Catholic theologians at this time felt that the right answer was to abandon Aristotle and philosophy altogether. The threat of the error of Averroism was just too great.

Thomas, on the other hand, held that Aristotle could be reconciled to Christianity in a revised way. In the storm of this controversy, many began to turn against Thomas and accuse him of being an Averroist who was willing to sacrifice the Catholic Faith in exchange for Aristotle. Things were made worse in December 1270, when the bishop of Paris, Etienne Tempier, issued an edict condemning thirteen Aristotelian and Averroistic propositions as heretical and excommunicating anyone who continued to support them. Yet Thomas continued to defend the use of Aristotle against the philosophical errors of Averroists on one side and the concerned theologians on the other. From this crucible, Thomas created what the Catholic Church would recognize as a perfect synthesis between faith and reason.

## THE MYSTICAL DEATH THOMAS AQUINAS

In 1272, Thomas returned to Naples to teach and finish his magnum opus, the *Summa theologiae*. While celebrating the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass on the feast of Saint Nicholas (December 6, 1273), Thomas fell into ecstasy. He heard the voice of Christ speak to him. Christ asked him what he desired, and Thomas replied, "Only you Lord. Only you." Something happened during this vision, but Thomas never spoke of it. His secretary, Reginald of Piperno, begged him to continue his work on the *Summa theologiae*, but he refused, saying: "Reginald, I cannot, because all that I have written seems like straw to me [*mibi videtur ut palea*]." Thomas never wrote or dictated again.

Meanwhile, Pope Gregory X announced the Second Council of Lyon to be held on May 1, 1274. The Pope desired to reconcile the estranged Greek Orthodox bishops into the bosom of the Roman Catholic Church. Knowing that Thomas Aquinas was the greatest mind in Christendom, His Holiness summoned Thomas to attend. However, on his way to the Council, riding on a donkey along the Appian Way, Thomas struck his head on the branch of a fallen tree. He was carried to the monastery of Monte Cassino (perhaps a divinely appointed tribute to his parents' wishes) where he recovered. He set out again only to fall ill.

While resting at the Cistercian Fossanova Abbey he took a turn for the worse. He was given the last rites and asked the monks to read the Cantic of Canticles as he died. He passed on into his eternal reward on March 7, 1274. His last words: "I receive Thee, ransom of my soul. For love of Thee have I studied and kept vigil, toiled, preached, and taught . . ."

Thomas Aquinas was canonized as a saint of the Catholic Church only fifty years after his death. Two centuries later, in 1567, Pope Pius V proclaimed St. Thomas Aquinas a Doctor of the Church and ranked his feast with those of the four great Latin fathers: Ambrose, Augustine of Hippo, Jerome, and Gregory. The world has never since seen his equal. Today he is still studied in every university of the world by Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Muslims, and even atheists. He who was called the Dumb Ox continues to bellow.

## HOW IS PHILOSOPHY DIFFERENT FROM THEOLOGY?

It must be stated at the beginning that philosophy is distinct from theology. Thomas Aquinas would want you to understand this at the outset. Philosophy means “love of wisdom” and theology means “study of God.” Many people assume theology and philosophy are the same thing, or that philosophy is the study of world religions. This is not quite right. Philosophy regards natural knowledge; theology regards supernatural knowledge. We might also say that philosophy pertains only to what we can know by raw reason, whereas theology pertains to truths known through prophecy or divine revelation. When the Greek philosopher Plato discussed whether the human soul existed after death, he was engaged in philosophy—a reasoned argument. However, when Moses spoke of the will of the “God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,” he was engaged in revealing divine truths. This accords with theology. Philosophy does not appeal to prophecies or divinely revealed information—theology does. Philosophy is the body of knowledge that we can know by *reason*. Theology is the body of knowledge that we can know by divine *revelation*.

### CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHERS DON’T ACCEPT THIS

Contemporary philosophers and contemporary theologians operate with the implicit assumption that they are absolutely different from one another and entirely unrelated. Thomas Aquinas did not see it this way. Thomas held the two disciplines as distinct, but not divided and certainly not contradictory. For Thomas, philosophy was the “handmaiden” of theology. This means that the power of reason and the truths known through reason are able to aid and assist men in theology. The key to understanding Thomas Aquinas is seeing philosophy and theology as distinct but not unrelated.

For example, Thomas holds that a pagan living on an island in the middle of nowhere can know the truth that *God exists*. This is something that unaided reason can lead a person to know. It is a philosophical truth that does not require religion. There have been plenty of people in history who believed in one God without the help of the Bible. Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero are examples of pagan thinkers who postulated a highest God who reigned over all. Other philosophical truths include the fact that God is different from creation, that humans are different from other animals, that humans have a soul, and that there are moral laws. *Thou shalt not kill* is a philosophical truth that can be known by reason. Even these moral norms can be known without recourse to religion or the Bible.

## THOMAS AS PHILOSOPHER

Thomas Aquinas identifies these as philosophical truths and expects that a person using right reason can come to know them. Now, Thomas also holds that there are truths that can never be known by reason, but are nevertheless true. For example, Thomas believes *God is the Blessed Trinity* to be a revealed truth. He grants that the Trinity cannot be known by reason alone. It is revealed by God and held by faith. Similarly, *baptism is a sacrament* or *Jesus will come to judge the living and the dead* are theological truths known by revelation and apprehended by faith. Here's a table illustrating the distinction:

### Philosophical Truths Known by Reason

- God exists
- God is one
- Humans have immortal souls
- Do not steal

### Theological Truths Known by Divine Revelation

- Jesus is the Son of God
- Heaven and Hell
- Baptism is a sacrament
- Jesus shall judge the living and the dead

The examples on the left are the philosophical truths known by reason. The examples on the right are theological truths known through Divine Revelation. Thomas Aquinas denotes philosophical truths as “preambles of faith” (*praeambula fidei*). The word *praeambula* comes from the Latin *prae-* meaning “before” and *ambulare* meaning “to walk.” Thus, the “preambles of faith” are those things that “walk or go before faith.”

## WHAT CAN A PAGAN KNOW?

A pagan can know there is a God and know that he has an immortal soul long before he becomes a Christian. For Thomas Aquinas, the theological truths like those in the right column answer the “so what” questions occasioned in the left column. For example, “If there is a God and I have a soul, then what do I do about it?” The philosophical question leads to a theological question.

Recall from the life of Thomas Aquinas how certain philosophers in Paris, the Averroists, had claimed that philosophical truths contradicted theological truths. The Averroists either claimed philosophy was correct and theology was wrong, or they claimed there could somehow be truths that contradicted each other. For Thomas, this could not be true since God is the author of both columns—philosophical truths and theological truths. Both are true and both complement each other. The philosophical truths find fulfillment in the



theological truths. As Thomas says elsewhere, “grace perfects nature.” Thomas might have also said, “theology perfect philosophy.”

Recall also how certain pious Christians, when feeling threatened by the philosophical Averroists, wanted to throw out the left-hand column of philosophical truths. They wanted only theological or religious truths. They even speculated that all truths were granted by a direct and divine illumination so that God had to particularly give grace to the mind even to know such things as “two plus two equals four.” Thomas also resists this religious error to reduce all truth to divine revelation. Instead, he holds that the realms of nature and grace, philosophy and theology, reason and faith are distinct but complementary. He repeatedly uses the term “twofold” to express their relationship to one another.

### **WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY**

In summary then, we have established the following teachings of Thomas Aquinas:

1. Philosophy and theology, like reason and faith, are complementary because God is the author of both.
2. Philosophy pertains to reason alone. Theology pertains to divine revelation.
3. It is the error of the Averroists to privilege philosophy against theology.
4. It is also an error to deny philosophical truths for the sake of defending theology.

# HOW TO THINK LIKE THOMAS AQUINAS

If you are going to study Thomas Aquinas you must first learn how he thinks. Thomas is very interested in how we humans come to know things. The fancy word for “the study of knowing” is *epistemology*. Thomas Aquinas has a pretty simple epistemology or “account for how we know things.”

Thomas thinks in terms of “sciences” or “bodies of knowledge.” We think of science as physics or astronomy. Thomas used the word *scientia* (Latin for “knowledge”) to define bodies of knowledge. These “sciences” are what we would call “subjects” today. For Thomas, the highest “science” is theology, or the study of God’s revelation to man. Thomas holds that all truth comes from God. Consequently, all other “sciences” (for example, philosophy, mathematics, and ethics) are in harmony with theology.<sup>1</sup> As the adage says, “All truth is God’s truth.”

Now theology is different from all the other sciences. Theological discussions begin with God and then descend from him to the world. Philosophy, on the other hand, works in the opposite direction. Philosophical discussions begin with knowledge of the world and then ascend to a very limited and abstract understanding of God.

Thomas breaks down the “sciences” into three major classes: theoretical sciences, practical sciences, and productive sciences. As you may have guessed, theoretical knowledge has to do with thinking about the way things are, whereas practical knowledge has to do with changing the way things are. Here’s another table illustrating the difference:

<b>Theoretical Sciences</b>	<b>Practical Sciences</b>	<b>Productive Sciences</b>
Theology (study of God)	Ethics (study of actions)	Making brownies
Metaphysics (study of existence)	Politics (study of states)	Building bridges
Mathematics (study of numbers)		Brewing beer
		Splitting an atom

Nowadays we only consider things in the third column to be “scientific” because they involve measuring material things. Let’s look at an example that will help you understand the difference. Theoretical sciences contemplate “what” a triangle is, whereas productive sciences think about “how” to make a triangle or how to use a triangle. Here is a table showing the difference between theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge with regard to a triangle:

## **Theoretical Knowledge**

three sides  
three angles  
sum of angles equals  $180^\circ$

## **Productive Knowledge**

triangles are stronger than squares  
triangles are useful for bridges  
triangles are effective arrowheads

Incidentally, Thomas's distinction between theoretical, practical, and productive knowledge relates to his vocation as a Dominican friar. Within the Catholic Church there are those who live a contemplative lifestyle (monks and cloistered nuns) and those that live active or practical lifestyles (bishops, priests, and laypeople). The Dominicans sought to combine both the contemplative and active vocations. Thus, they sought to actually live out a life that embraced theoretical activity and practical activity. This revolutionary approach to Catholicism explains how Thomas Aquinas could be both a mystic and a preacher.

## **YOUR FIVE SENSES ARE THE GATEWAY TO KNOWLEDGE**

Thomas did not believe that man was born with innate knowledge. If you think of your mind as a computer, Thomas held that it came with a blank hard drive. Certainly, the human mind is already oriented to truth. One might continue the analogy and say the mind came with software preinstalled, but no data. That is to say, the computer came with a word processor, but not with any documents. How then do we gain data? Thomas says that we have five inputs from which we gain all knowledge: our senses of sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch. This sense data passes through the senses and into the intellect where it is processed. Data comes in (through the senses). Your operating system processes it (active intellect). Information is then saved on the hard drive (your memory).

## **FORM AND MATTER**

Thomas Aquinas holds that all physical things consist of form and matter. Form is the idea, and matter is the stuff. Take, for example, my wedding band. The form is the circular, short cylinder shape we know as a ring. The matter is gold. When the jeweler imposes the circular "form" on the golden "matter," it becomes a wedding ring. The form is like the idea or shape of a thing, and the matter is that from which it is made. This distinction between form and matter originally came from Plato. Plato's most famous student, Aristotle, then came along and added two more. This is where Thomas Aquinas gets the four causes:

Formal cause (idea)

Material cause (stuff)  
Efficient cause (agent)  
Final cause (purpose)

## **FOUR CAUSES**

“The Four Causes” is one of the most important “Thomas Aquinas concepts” that you can grasp. Without it, you’re stuck in the mud. First of all, do not be confused by the word “cause.” Here the word does not mean cause and effect, it means the reason for something. The final cause is the goal or purpose. The formal cause is the idea of a thing. The material cause is the stuff from which it is made. The efficient cause is the agent. Let’s run through some examples.

### **EXAMPLE: FOUR CAUSES OF A NOVEL**

Take the example of a novel. The formal cause is the story itself. The material cause is the cover, spine, pages, and ink. The efficient cause is the author who literally writes the novel with pen and paper. The final cause is the purpose for which the author writes. The purpose varies from author to author. Some write for fame. Others for money. Some just want to share a good story.

### **EXAMPLE: FOUR CAUSES OF A FOOTBALL STADIUM**

Next, take the example a football stadium. What is the formal cause? It is the idea of the stadium—the blueprint. What is the material cause? The material cause is the stone, concrete, iron, gravel, soil, grass, etc. used to make the stadium. What is the efficient cause? Ultimately the efficient cause would be the one who organizes and pays for the stadium—the team owner. The more proximate efficient cause would be the architect who designs it and, after that, the construction workers who actually pour the concrete and weld the beams. What is the final cause or purpose? It depends. It could be to make money or to enjoy football.

### **EXAMPLE: FOUR CAUSES OF A LASAGNA**

Now let’s take lasagna. The formal cause is the recipe. The material cause is the tomatoes, cheese, pasta, etc. The efficient cause is the cook—your spouse. The formal cause, in this case, is to feed the family in a pleasurable way. Philosophy was never so tasty.

## **USING THE FOUR CAUSES FOR DEFINITIONS**

The four causes are useful tools in assessing what something is. The four causes help you think and speak clearly. For Thomas Aquinas, an adequate definition always includes the four causes. For example, when Thomas gives the definition

for *law*, he defines it as “an ordinance of reason for the common good, made by him who has care of the community, and promulgated.”<sup>ii</sup> The ordinance of reason is the formal cause, and its promulgation in a document is the material cause. The final cause or purpose is the common good. The efficient cause or agent is the magistrate or legislative body that promulgates it.

### **Definition of Law**

ordinance of reason  
promulgated  
made by proper authority  
for the common good

### **Four Causes**

formal cause (idea)  
material cause (stuff)  
efficient cause (agent)  
final cause (purpose)

By including all four causes, a thorough definition of *law* is provided for the reader. This method spilled over into all other sciences. For example, it was used in theology to define such things as sacraments. The formal cause of baptism is the word “I baptized you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” The material cause is the water. The efficient cause is the minister of the sacrament who intends to do what the Church does. The final cause or purpose is to confer grace so as to make a sinner into a Christian. Now that we have come to understand the four causes, we can see how Thomas understands human knowledge in the context of “form” and “matter.”

## **ACTIVE INTELLECT AND THE POTENTIAL INTELLECT**

Thomas quotes Aristotle, saying that the intellect is at first “like a clean tablet on which nothing is written.”<sup>iii</sup> When we are conceived, our intellect has the potential to know things, but it does not yet know things. This is why Thomas claims the intellect has potential. The human intellect always has the potential to grow. God’s intellect does not have the potential to grow. God’s intellect is what Thomas calls “pure act” since God is fully actualized and lacking nothing. God knows everything. He is never surprised.

Now then, the human intellect cannot remain empty forever. It comes to know things. Since the human intellect has the *potential* to know things and then comes to *actually* know things, Thomas teaches that the human intellect is divided into an active intellect and a potential intellect. The active intellect (*intellectus agens*) actualizes something in order to make it intelligible.

## **IN A DARK MUSEUM**

The classic example is the way light relates to sight. Imagine you’re in a museum full of beautiful paintings. They are all there and you are in the gallery—but the lights are off. The paintings are there and your eyes are fully functional, yet you

see nothing. Then someone switches on the lights. The light enables your eyes to see the colors of the paintings. So it is with the intellect. In this analogy, the light is like the active intellect. The active intellect makes sense of the data that is “out there.”

## **STUNG BY A BEE**

Thomas derives most of these distinctions from Aristotle. Aristotle says that the potential intellect receives the “form” of an object, but that the active intellect makes the potential knowledge into actual knowledge.<sup>iv</sup> The active intellect is responsible for abstraction. This is complicated, so let me try to explain it more clearly by outlining the way the intellect works for Thomas:

1. Data enters through the sense faculties (smell of honey, buzzing sound, sharp sting on the face).
2. The active intellect grasps the abstract form of the data (*bee*).
3. The data becomes intelligible (“I’ve been stung by a bee.”).

This is how your mind works. It is a step-by-step process that happens quickly. You usually are not aware of the steps, but they occur.

For Thomas, abstraction is accomplished by the agent intellect when the form is “extracted” from the matter. By making the distinction between the active and potential in the intellect, Thomas preserves the correlation between form and matter in the realm of human understanding. For Thomas, “form” corresponds to “actualization” and “matter” corresponds to “potency.”

## **LASAGNA ENTERING YOUR INTELLECT**

Think back to our example of lasagna. Form is the recipe and matter is the pasta, cheese, tomatoes, etc. The ingredients have the potential to become lasagna, but they are not yet lasagna. However, when the recipe “forms” or “actualizes” the ingredients, you have actual lasagna. Similarly, the active intellect actualizes the sensory data. If the intellect does not receive data through the senses, it has nothing to actualize.

To make matters more complicated, during the life of Thomas Aquinas the philosophical Averroists in Paris and elsewhere were claiming that the active intellect was one substance and not within every human soul. In other words, the active intellect was substantially separate from human souls and something that all humans shared. According to the Averroists, all human minds are using the same active intellect. Aristotle himself may have been ambiguous on this point. However, Thomas Aquinas wanted to insist that each person has his own active intellect. In order to defend this position, he cited Aristotle’s statement, “it is necessary for these differences [namely, the passive and active intellect] to

be in the soul.”<sup>v</sup> Thomas’s interpretation of this problem was convincing, and the Averroists were defeated. As we work through the thought of Thomas Aquinas, you will begin to appreciate how much of his system is an attack on the errors of the Averroists.

# DOES GOD EXIST?

The question of the existence of God may seem like a theological question. After all, it is a question about God, and theology typically covers questions about God. However, the question about the existence of God is actually a philosophical question since it merely asks whether he exists or not. Philosophy only asks whether God exists. It cannot answer questions such as “Who is God and what is his plan for me?”

Thomas Aquinas assumes, like most philosophers, that the question of God’s existence is one of the primary objects of the philosophical pursuit. Obviously, the existence of God makes an enormous difference in how we perceive the world and one another. Notably, Thomas believes that the existence of God is *not* self-evident. He does not think that God’s existence is known immediately. Rather, one must reason to the conclusion that God exists. This is an important distinction. God’s existence is not self-evident, but it can be demonstrated logically.

Now this may seem contradictory to what we said above about pagans living on an island. If a pagan on an island can rationally come to know that God exists, why would Thomas then say that the existence of God is not self-evident? The problem here is semantic. By self-evident, Thomas means that it cannot be possibly denied.  $2+2=4$  is self-evident and no rational person in the history of the world has denied it. However, the same is not true about God. You have to reason your way along to the conclusion, and people can fail along the logical journey. Consequently there are atheists in the world, even though all the atheists agree that  $2+2=4$ . So one can come to know the existence of God, but it’s not self-evident. It takes some intellectual work.

In order to make this intellectual work easier for us, Thomas provided his famous “five ways” (*quinque viae*) for demonstrating the existence of God. The five ways do not prove the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, but they do demonstrate that what is commonly called “God” is necessary if we are to account for motion, causality, possibility, being, and design.

## FIRST WAY: ARGUMENT FROM MOTION

The first way holds that since all things are in motion, there must be something that is the first “unmoved mover,” which we call God.

## SECOND WAY: ARGUMENT FROM EFFICIENT CAUSES

The second way holds that since we all experience the principle of cause and effect, there must be an initial first cause, which we call God.



### **THIRD WAY: ARGUMENT FROM POSSIBILITY**

The third way observes all things to be contingent, which is to say all things have not always existed and might not always exist. Trees, homes, leaves, people, nations, rocks, rivers, etc. come and go. Yet if this is the case absolutely, then at some point nothing would have existed and thus nothing could come to be. But this is impossible because things do exist. Therefore, there must be “something” that is not contingent and is responsible for the existence of all contingent things. In other words, while things come and go, one thing must remain always the same, and this is God.

### **FOURTH WAY: ARGUMENT FROM DEGREES OF BEING**

The fourth way is difficult to understand. The fourth way observes gradation in all things. Some things are better than others. There is a best of everything in every class. So when it comes to existence, something must be “the best.” With regard to all things that exist there must be one that exists in the greatest and best way—one that is existence itself, and this is God.

### **FIFTH WAY: ARGUMENT FROM DESIGN**

The fifth and last way is perhaps the easiest and most effective argument for God. The fifth argument observes that there is design in creation. It is the old watchmaker argument. Suppose you were walking in the desert and you came upon a golden watch. Would you assume that bits of sand had rubbed together to form gears, crystal, springs, hands, levers, and a wristband all by chance? Or would you rather observe the intricate design of the object and assume a designer had crafted it? The fifth way appeals to the complexities of creation and the design found within it. Seashells display mathematical proportionality. The tilt of the axis of planet earth provides an optimal seasonal change for life. The eyeball is an amazingly efficient optical instrument. Nature displays order and design everywhere. Therefore, there must be one who designed the cosmos, and this is God.

For the sake of simplicity, here is an advanced outline of each of the five ways, taken from the words of Saint Thomas Aquinas in *Summa theologiae* I, q. 2, a. 3:

### **FIRST WAY: ARGUMENT FROM MOTION**

1. Our senses prove some things are in motion.
2. Things move when potential motion becomes actual motion.
3. Only an actual motion can convert a potential motion into an actual motion.
4. Nothing can be at once in both actuality and potentiality in the same respect (i.e., if both actual and potential, it is actual in one respect and potential in

another).

5. Therefore nothing can move itself.
6. Therefore each thing in motion is moved by something else.
7. The sequence of motion cannot extend for infinity.
8. Therefore it is necessary to arrive at a first unmoved mover, put in motion by no other; and this everyone understands to be God.

## **SECOND WAY: ARGUMENT FROM EFFICIENT CAUSES**

1. We perceive a series of efficient causes of things in the world.
2. Nothing exists prior to itself.
3. Therefore nothing is the efficient cause of itself.
4. If a previous efficient cause does not exist, neither does the thing that results.
5. Therefore if the first thing in a series does not exist, nothing in the series exists.
6. The series of efficient causes cannot extend for infinity into the past, for then there would be no things existing now.
7. Therefore it is necessary to admit a first efficient cause, to which everyone gives the name of God.

## **THIRD WAY: ARGUMENT FROM POSSIBILITY**

1. We find in nature things that are possible to be and not to be, that come into being and go out of being, that is, contingent beings.
2. Assume every being is a contingent being.
3. For each contingent being, there is a time it does not exist.
4. Therefore it is impossible for these always to exist.
5. Therefore there could have been a time when no things existed.
6. Therefore at that time there would have been nothing to bring the currently existing contingent beings into existence.
7. Therefore, nothing would be in existence now.
8. We have reached an absurd result from assuming that every being is a contingent being.
9. Therefore not every being is a contingent being.
10. Therefore some being exists of its own necessity, and does not receive its existence from another being, but rather causes them. This all men speak of as God.

## **FOURTH WAY: ARGUMENT FROM DEGREES OF BEING**

1. There is a gradation to be found in things: some are better or worse than others.
2. Predications of degree require reference to the “uttermost” case (for

example, a thing is said to be hotter according as it more nearly resembles that which is hottest).

3. The maximum in any genus is the cause of all in that genus.
4. Therefore there must also be something that is to all beings the cause of their being, goodness, and every other perfection—this we call God.

## **5. FIFTH WAY: ARGUMENT FROM DESIGN**

1. We see that natural bodies work toward some goal, and do not do so by chance.
2. Most natural things lack knowledge.
3. But as an arrow reaches its target because it is directed by an archer, what lacks intelligence achieves goals by being directed by something intelligent.
4. Therefore some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end, and this being we call God.

## **WHAT ABOUT ATHEISTS?**

Now then, if one were to present these five ways for demonstrating the existence of God to an atheist, would he be convinced? Perhaps not. Thomas would reply with the words of the Psalm, “The fool hath said in his heart: There is no God,”<sup>vi</sup> because the five ways are logically sound and inescapable. Thomas says that the atheist is not a logical man because he refuses to acknowledge what is demonstrable. The atheist denies the existence of God for moral reasons, not for philosophical reasons. If Thomas were around today, he would debate atheists by appealing to these points above. As a Dominican, however, he would realize it to be personal sanctity that convinces the unbeliever. This was always the message of Saint Dominic, and it was the way that Thomas lived his life. Usually, atheists or heretics are what they are because of scandal and moral scruples, not because of logical failures.

## **ATHEISTS AND THE MORAL ARGUMENT AGAINST GOD**

When you consider atheists such as Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens, their strongest arguments are “moral arguments” against the existence of God. Why are children sold through human trafficking for prostitution? Why does God allow hurricanes to destroy the innocent? Why do babies die? In reality, these are not arguments about God’s existence, but rather arguments about the goodness of God. The atheist first creates scandal regarding God’s goodness, and then rejects Him.

This atheistic attack requires a theological answer that includes a doctrine of free will, original sin, and divine providence. However, at the end of the day, there is not a sound philosophical answer to the moral arguments against God. The most compelling response is to cast light on the fact that God Himself

entered the world to suffer and die on the cross for the sake of human happiness in eternity. God does not reign like a Turkish Sultan over sin, evil, and death. Rather, God reigns from the cross as a Suffering Servant.

## CAN WE KNOW GOD?

So what can we know about God? According to Thomas Aquinas, we can come to know the general attributes of God. We can know what he is like, but we cannot know him directly because he is beyond us. This means we can know God through reason in two ways. First, we can know him by negation. Second, we can know him by analogy. These two ways are not new. In fact, they are found in the Jewish literature of the Old Testament.

### APOPHASIS: KNOWING GOD THROUGH DENIAL

By using denial or negation, we can accurately say what God is *not*. For example, God is *not* a cat. God is *not* a dog. God is *not* a tree. God is *not* a star. God is *not* a planet. As you can see, this could go on for quite some time! However, it eventually leads to the most general negations. For example, God is not in time or space. We take the Latin word *finis* which means “boundary” and we negate it by adding the negative prefix *in-* to get “infinite.” This form of theology by denial is called *apophasis*, the Greek word for denial.

We can also ask, would the Unmoved Mover who is God ever change? This cannot be the case, because if he changed then he would have been moved or caused and this conflicts with what has already been established. So God is *unchanging*. To be fancy, we take the Latin word *mutabilis*, meaning “changeable,” and again add the negative prefix *in-* to get “immutable” meaning “unchanging.”

### TAYLOR MARSHALL IS NOT A LOG CABIN

We can continue to do this type of thing to describe God. However, we are not truly saying anything positive about him. We are simply saying what he is not. Perhaps you might do the same thing to me. I am not a woman. I am not a child. I am not a dog. I am not an ant. I am not a star. I am not a log cabin. However, even if you came up with a million versions of “Taylor Marshall is *not* (fill in the blank),” you would never really know who I am. Your knowledge of me would be imperfect and unsatisfactory. This, by the way, is exactly the point of Saint Thomas Aquinas, especially in his *Commentary on Boethius’s De Trinitate*. In this work, Thomas distinguishes knowing “that” there is a God and knowing “what” God is. With philosophy and unaided reason, we only know “that” there is a God and have only a knowledge of “what” God is not.

### THE “GOD” OF PLATO

This is a pretty hopeless situation for those who want to have a personal relationship with God. The Greek pre-Christian philosopher Plato spoke of the “Form of the Good” as the highest principle. However, the Form of the Good

was utterly transcendent, and Plato certainly did not believe that a lowly human might have a personal relationship with or knowledge of the Form of the Good. Neither would anyone pray to the Form of the Good. If one ascended from the cave of shadows and perceived the Form of the Good, then he would be enlightened, but such a person would never talk to the Form of the Good or pray to it. He also would not be able to explain “what” it was.

## THE “GOD” OF ARISTOTLE

Likewise, Plato’s disciple Aristotle simply assumed that it was absolutely impossible to have a knowledgeable relationship with the Unmoved Mover of the universe. It was ancient Israel that preserved a belief in a single highest principle that is both all-powerful *and personal*. Here we intersect with theology, not philosophy. Thomas Aquinas acknowledges the limited scope of philosophy, but he also claims we can speak of the general attributes of God even though it is impossible for us to know *what* God truly is. How can Thomas hold this seemingly contradictory position? The answer is found in his doctrine of *analogy*.

## ANALOGY OR “GOD IS LIKE THIS”

The “analogy of being” is the centerpiece of Thomistic philosophy. If one does not understand the analogy of being, one does not understand Thomas Aquinas. It is impossible to penetrate his thought without fully appreciating his doctrine of analogy. In fact, this section of the book in your hands is *the* most important few pages of the entire book, so read carefully and make sure that you understand this before moving on.

We must first understand three fancy philosophical terms: univocal, equivocal, and analogical. Here is another table for simplicity’s sake:

Univocal = same  
Equivocal = different  
Analogical = similar

All rational human beings already understand these three concepts, but it is important for us to fully appreciate the terminology. In order to do so, let us imagine three different philosophers. The first philosopher is named “Ulric the Univocal.” The second philosopher is named “Ezekiel the Equivocal.” The third philosopher is named “Aquinas the Analogical.”

## ULRIC THE UNIVOCAL

Let’s begin with Ulric the Univocal. Pretend that Ulric the Univocal says, “The pasta is perfect.” Here we have “pasta” joined to the word “perfect.” To

understand this in a univocal way would be to assume always and everywhere that “pasta” and “perfect” are absolutely the same. Hence, when Ulric says “pasta” he means “perfect” and when he says “perfect” he means “pasta.”

If Ulric’s statement were entirely univocal then he would also say things like, “Your test was pasta!” or “His golf swing is absolutely pasta.” Ulric the Univocal might also say things like, “May I please have some more marinara sauce on my perfect?” or “Farfalle is my favorite kind of perfect.” Children between the ages of two and three often make these mistakes. Small children do not always pick up the subtlety of language. For example, if you say, “The shirt is big,” they might say, “I want to wear the big.” This is an example of univocity.

By using language univocally, we run into problems. This is especially true when we are engaging in philosophy. If Ulric the Univocal heard someone say, “God is my Father,” he assumes the term “God” and “my father” are one and the same. If Ulric the Univocal understood you univocally, then when he met your father he would address him as “God.” That’s a big problem.

## **EZEKIEL THE EQUIVOCAL**

Let us now turn to Ezekiel the Equivocal. Ezekiel styles himself as a sharp philosopher, and he is aware of all the problems that Ulric the Univocal experiences. Ezekiel the Equivocal takes it upon himself to disprove what everybody says. If his mother says, “This pasta is perfect!” then Ezekiel the Equivocal interrupts her and says, “Perfect is defined as having all the required and desirable elements, qualities, and characteristics, that is, perfect is as good as it is possible to be.” Then Ezekiel the Equivocal squints his eyes and wrinkles his nose as he asks, “Do you really think this pasta meets *that* criteria?” His mother is now a little annoyed. “Well no. I just meant I really like this pasta.” Ezekiel smiles with satisfaction. He has once again clarified a situation.

Another time, he hears his mother say, “God is my rock.” Ezekiel throws his hands in the air. “What? How could God, an infinite being, become your rock? Mom, you’re crazy.” This is why nobody likes Ezekiel the Equivocal. He always points out the fact that our truth claims are equivocal. If someone says, “Look up into the night sky. There’s the Big Dipper!” Ezekiel says, “That’s not a big dipper. It’s just a cluster of stars!” If someone says, “Ezekiel, you’re a pain in the neck!” he simply responds by saying, “How can I be *in* your neck. That’s impossible.”

## **AQUINAS THE ANALOGICAL**

So far, we have found the philosophic methods of both Ulric the Univocal and Ezekiel the Equivocal to be unsatisfying. Ulric is confused about pasta and perfection and Ezekiel is right, but just downright annoying. Fortunately, we have Aquinas the Analogical to solve our problem.

Aquinas walks over to Ezekiel the Equivocal and says: “You know, Ezekiel the Equivocal, you’re on the right track, but you have forgotten the principle of analogy. When your mom says, ‘God is my rock,’ she means it by way of analogy. She means God is *like* a rock. God is strong. When someone says, ‘You’re a pain in the neck,’ what he means is you are *like* a pain in the neck. Literally speaking, it is false. You are not in his neck. But analogically, it is true. You really are annoying, just like a pain in the neck.”

You see, Thomas insists on the principle of analogy. This is true whenever we speak about existence (*metaphysics*) and when we speak about knowing the truth (*epistemology*). The best way is to speak in terms of analogy. This is especially the case when it comes to God. It is true that anything we say about God is not fully accurate. If I say, “God is perfect,” then Ezekiel the Equivocal is going to interrupt and say my finite and human notion of “perfection” is insufficient in describing God’s perfection. Ezekiel would be correct, by the way.

When I say ice cream, pasta, or a golf swing is perfect, this is a far cry from the absolute perfection of God. Since I know my human notion of “perfect” is insufficient, I simply respond analogically: “Well God’s perfection is *similar* (*analogical*) to an earthly example in perfection, but in a much greater way.” In summary, then, Ezekiel the Equivocal is technically correct, but he is dismissed since he does not fully appreciate how we speak of things being *similar* or *analogical* to each other.

## “I AM WHO I AM” = GOD

Now that we understand analogy, it is time to use it in understanding the concept of *being*. In order to avoid all confusion, we need to revert to the Latin terms that Thomas Aquinas uses. The reason for this is that English terms carry baggage for most readers, and it is easier if we use these two old terms. So take a deep breath. We’re going to be using Latin terms. But it’s easy. You won’t have any trouble with it all:

*esse* = Latin for “to be.”

It is usually translated as “being” or “existence.”

*essentia* = Latin for “what a thing is.”

It is usually translated as “essence.”

Now then, if we recall the five ways for demonstrating the existence of God, the fourth way reveals that there must be a “greatest” when it comes to “being” or “existence.” The greatest way of existing would be existence itself, and this we call “God.” So then, God is being Himself. God is not caused or created, he just



is. God is existence. Thomas Aquinas holds that *God's identity is being itself* is a philosophical truth that is further confirmed by theology when the Bible relates the following about God: "God said to Moses: I AM WHO I AM. He said: Thus shalt thou say to the children of Israel: HE WHO IS, hath sent me to you."<sup>vii</sup>

## **GOD IS HIS EXISTENCE**

I am who I am. So then, God is existence. He is who He is. Even without the Bible, a rational human can discern, using the fourth way, that God is pure existence. Nothing created God. Nothing brought God about. God simply is.

According to Thomas Aquinas, God is existence and everything else exists in God. A rock exists because it shares in God's existence. An ocean exists because it shares in God's existence. This, then, raises the question: Is God also everything that exists?

Thomas answers that God cannot be everything that exists because things in the universe come in and out of existence. They change. They move. Yet God does not change. God does not move. So then, the difference between God and everything else is that God's *esse* and *essentia* (his existence and essence) are one and the same, whereas this is not true for everything else. What does this mean?

## **GOD VS. A TYRANNOSAURUS REX**

Let's look at the Latin again. Take another deep breath. You can understand this. *Esse* means "existence" and *essentia* means "essence." *Esse* refers to whether something exists or not. *Essentia* refers to what something is. For example, the *essentia* of a Tyrannosaurus Rex is a non-avian, bipedal, carnivorous dinosaur with a massive head, small forelimbs, and large powerful hind limbs. The *essentia* is "what" a Tyrannosaurus Rex is.

Now let's talk about its *esse* or existence. The Tyrannosaurus Rex no longer exists. It is extinct. We have its bones. We know what it is. We can explain its essence. But the species no longer exists. Here we see that the *esse* and the *essentia* of the Tyrannosaurs Rex are not one and the same. This is also true for every created thing. "What it is" (*essentia* or essence) does not depend on "whether it exists" (*esse* or existence). All created things could cease to exist, just like the Tyrannosaurs Rex. The only exception is God, because God is uncreated.

God is the only exception because he is the fountainhead of all being. What is the *essentia* of God? It is his *esse*. What is God? God is "to be" or the Being One. The definition of God is being itself. This is the key to the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas: God's *essentia* = God's *esse*. This is not true of a Tyrannosaurs Rex. It is not true of a star because the star came to be and will one day burn out. It is not true of an angel because angels came to be. It is not true of

humans. It is only true of God. Only in God are *essentia* and *esse* one and the same. To be existence is to be God. “I am who I am” is thus the name of God for both philosophy and theology. What does this have to do with the concept of analogy? It has everything to do with it. Let’s put it all together.

## **GOD, CREATION, AND THE ANALOGY OF BEING**

Since God is existence in itself and we humans only participate in God’s existence, there is an infinite chasm between God and humanity. For Thomas Aquinas, we can only come to know things through our senses—sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch. Yet God is invisible and intangible so God cannot be known naturally. Here is how Thomas explains it:

Hence from the knowledge of sensible things the whole power of God cannot be known; nor therefore can His essence be seen. But because they are His effects and depend on their cause, we can be led from them so far as to know of God “whether He exists,” and to know of Him what must necessarily belong to Him, as the first cause of all things, exceeding all things caused by Him. (*Summa theologiae* I, q. 12, a. 12)

To be strict, then, we can know absolutely nothing about God because God is beyond the senses. To make matters worse, God is an infinite being and being itself, whereas we are finite, earthly, and only participate in his being. Here is where our annoying friend Ezekiel the Equivocal comes along and rightly claims that absolutely *anything* that we say about God is equivocal. That is, nothing we say about God can be 100% true on the philosophical level. If we say, “God is best,” then it can be shown that our finite human notion of “best” fails to adequately describe God. If we say, “God is love,” then it can be shown that our finite human notion of “love” fails to adequately describe God. There is a great chasm between God and us, and we cannot ever bridge the chasm.

So what do we do? Does Ezekiel the Equivocal get the last word? According to Thomas, he does not. This is because Thomas Aquinas brings in the principle of the analogy of being. God’s essence is his existence. We share in his existence. We exist because he called us into existence. Therefore, since we participate in him, we can have an analogous knowledge of God. So when I say, “God is love,” that should be understood as, “God is like our human love but in an infinitely higher way.” When I say, “God is perfect,” that should be understood analogously, as in, “God is like our notion of perfection but infinitely more so.” By insisting on analogy and “similarity,” we can avoid the

annoying Ezekiel the Equivocal. We can speak meaningfully about God without getting bogged down in literalism.

## THE 8 ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Since knowledge of God is impossible for us, we can only know God by negation and by analogy. So then, what can we say about God through reason? Although the list is not strict, Thomas lists eight general attributes of God that can be known from reason by way of negation:

### 1) DOES GOD HAVE PARTS?

God does not have parts because he is not created. He is not a composite of existence and essence because for God these are one and the same. He is also not a composite of form and matter. He is not built like a physical body or a machine. He is without parts. You cannot speak of “part of God” or even “half of God.” God doesn’t have parts that can be separated for measurement. In Latin, the fancy word for “not having parts” is *simplex*. The word likely derives from a combination of *sine* (“without”) and *plex* (“fold”), meaning “without folds.” The opposite word *complex* means “with folds.” Thus, God is without parts. He is simple. God is *simple* (*Summa theologiae* I, q. 3).

### 2) DOES GOD HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO IMPROVE?

No, God cannot improve. Aristotle noted that to be perfect is to be fully actualized. If you could possibly run faster than you are currently running, then you’re not running perfectly. So the question here is whether God is fully actualized or whether he has potential to be even better than he is. According to the third way and fourth way, God is most fully actualized. There is nothing lacking in him. So then, since we deny potentiality in God (he can never improve), we say he is perfect. God is *perfect* (*Summa theologiae* I, q. 4).

### 3) IS THERE ANYTHING MORE DESIRABLE THAN GOD?

According to Aristotle, a good is something desired. Now is there anything more desirable than God—the First Cause and final goal of the entire universe? Is a candy bar more desirable? No. Is a car more desirable? No. Is an angel more desirable? No. God is greater than all these things. So God is the *greatest good* (*Summa theologiae* I, q. 5-6).

### 4) IS GOD LIMITED IN ANY WAY?

The second way defines God as the First Efficient Cause of all things. As such, God is not limited by time, space, or any other form of finitude. Thus, God is *infinite* (*Summa theologiae* I, q. 7).

## 5) IS GOD LIMITED BY LOCATION?

God is not limited to a certain place. Using the first way, we know that God is the Unmoved Mover. Since God does not move, he is not here and then later there. He does not move from location to location. Rather, since he is the efficient cause, he is present always and everywhere. Consequently, God is everywhere or *omnipresent* (*Summa theologiae* I, q. 8).

## 6) DOES GOD CHANGE?

God does not change. Change is related to motion, and God is the Unmoved Mover. Furthermore, change entails a lack of perfection. If God changed, he would either become better or worse. However, as we saw in the question about God's perfection, God has no potential to become better. He is already best; he cannot change or *mutate*. He is therefore *immutable* (*Summa theologiae* I, q. 9).

## 7) CAN GOD BE MEASURED BY TIME?

Thomas defines *eternal* as something not measurable by time. Now time is intimately related to change since the two go hand in hand. So then, Thomas assumes the eternity of God naturally follows from the immutability of God. It is also obvious, if God is the Unmoved Mover, that he is not in the chain of events flowing through time. God is therefore *eternal* (*Summa theologiae* I, q. 10).

## 8) CAN GOD BE MORE THAN ONE?

God cannot be more than one God. Thomas sums up with a one-two punch based on God's simplicity and infinity. Since God is without parts (simple), he cannot be divided. Moreover, he is unbounded (infinite). It follows then that there can only be one God. There can only be one Unmoved Mover and only one First Cause. There cannot be multiple First Causes. So then God is *one* (*Summa theologiae* I, 11).

These eight attributes, as you can see, follow from the five ways of demonstrating God. We did not appeal to the Bible, to saints, or to Church documents to reach these conclusions. These attributes are, in a sense, contained in the definitions of the five ways. Now that we have established what the uncreated God is not (for example, not finite and not changing), let's examine the way in which humans know created things through sensation.

## WHAT IS AN ANGEL?

Saint Thomas Aquinas is known as the Angelic Doctor. He is *angelic* for three reasons: his purity, his intellect, and his advanced teaching about angels. Angels may not seem like a philosophical topic, but for the ancient philosophers, the concept of what we call an “angel” was important. It is a question about whether there are intellects or minds that exist without material bodies. In the West, we call these “angels.” In other places they are called spirits, ghosts, gods, demigods, daemons, or devils. In philosophy, they are called “intellectual separate substances.” The idea of “intellectual separate substances” arose from the philosophical conclusion that stars, planets, and forces of nature would be ruled by God through the intermediary agency of creatures less than God but greater than humans and animals. The pagans especially believed that the movement of the spheres and heavenly bodies depended on pure spirits. Thomas Aquinas’s knowledge of the angels derives not so much from the pagan philosophers, but from Sacred Scripture, the Church Fathers, and from his reasoned conclusions about the hierarchy of the universe.

## HOW MANY ANGELS CAN DANCE ON THE HEAD OF A PIN?

Have you ever heard someone say, “Well that’s as ridiculous as arguing over how many angels can dance on the head of a pin!” If you hear someone say this, you’ll know that he is not a Thomist. The answer to the question, “How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?” is extremely important because the answer provides us with everything we need to know about angelic nature. It is not a stupid question of curiosity. Instead, it is a thought-experiment that touches on the very nature of angelic intellects. In brief, the question raises a discussion over whether angels have material or physical bodies.

If I ask, “How many college students can fit into this Volkswagon?” I’m assuming college students have physical bodies and the Volkswagon has a limited physical volume. When I ask, “How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?” I am juxtaposing a physical space—the head of a pin—with a non-physical reality—angels. This introduces a problem. Angels, being “separate substances” do not take up any space. Zero space, to be exact. So then, there are two possible answers:

1. “No angel can dance on the head of the pin since an angel cannot be *on* the physical head of a physical pin.”
2. “All the angels can dance on the head of a pin because they would all be able to ‘fit’ in that location since they do not take up any space.”

If someone answered by saying, “Hmmm. Angels are pretty small. They’re sort of like butterflies. So probably only two could fit on the head of pin,” then this person would miss the point of the question, which is: Angels do not have material bodies!

## **DO ANGELS HAVE MATTER?**

Thomas Aquinas ran into a philosophical problem regarding angels as “intellectual separate substances.” All things on earth are composed of form and matter. I am a soul (form) and body (matter). My wedding band is a ring-shape (form) and gold (matter). A book is a story (form) captured with paper and ink (matter). This is the general rule of the composition of things on earth. This is why angels are so philosophically troubling. They break the rule! Angels are not material. They are not composed of form and matter. They are form alone. Thomas Aquinas has a lot of explaining to do.

Now some philosophers took the easy way out. They said, “Oh, this is easy. Angels are composed of form and matter, except they are made of a special ‘spiritual matter’ that is non-physical.” Thomas does not believe this is a good argument. However, by denying the materiality of angels, Thomas could be accused of turning angels into gods. What would make angels different from God?

## **ARE ANGELS GODS OF SOME SORT?**

Thomas replies that angels are distinct from God. Whereas God’s essence is his existence (God’s *essentia* = God’s *esse*), this is not the case for angels. The *essentia* of an angel is not to exist, since angels have a beginning in their creation by God. Angels owe their existence to God. So they are distinct from God in this important way.

This raises a further problem for Thomas Aquinas. If every angel has the same form (angel-ness), then there could only be one angel since there is nothing material to separate them. So Thomas solves the problem by saying that every single angel has his own unique form. That is, every single angel is his own species of angel. On earth, every human person belongs to the human species and we are differentiated by our bodies. However, in heaven every single angel is his own species. There is not one single “angelic species.” According to Thomas, if there are one billion angels, then there are one billion different “species” or “forms” of angels. Thus, every angel is formally distinct from every other angel.

## **HOW ANGELS FILL THE GAP BETWEEN GOD AND HUMANS**

Important theological writings by an author known as Dionysius the Areopagite appeared in the fifth century.<sup>viii</sup> The Areopagite blends the philosophy of Plato

with the writings of the New Testament. As a result, the Areopagite has a wonderful theology of angels—what we call angelology.

Thomas Aquinas, therefore, relies heavily on Dionysius the Areopagite. The Areopagite provides the most thorough philosophical analysis of angels of the early Christian era. Writing as a Christian, the Areopagite seeks to provide a rational account for the nature and role of angelic beings. The Areopagite assumes angels fit rightly into the hierarchy of being since the perfection of the universe entails intellectual creatures that can know the First Cause, who is God. However, human persons know through the body and have a limited ability to know. This leaves a giant gap between God and humanity. Since the hierarchy of beings is continuous, there would need to be special creatures who could know God in a more direct way, without being required to know through sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. These would be angelic beings.

Angels = Spiritual only  
Humans = Spiritual & Physical  
Animals = Physical only

Humans notice that we are spiritual and physical but that animals and plants are only physical. So then, should not there be something created that is only spiritual? These “only spiritual” things are angels.

## **ANGELS THINK DIFFERENTLY THAN WE DO**

Humans know by abstracting data received through physical sense organs. You hear the buzzing, you see the yellow and black insect, and you may feel a sting. You add up all that sense data and you come to know what it is—a bee. Angels don't do it like this.

How, then, do angels know? Angels know that which is intelligible immediately and purely. They receive a mode of knowing that is proportionate to their form or species (remember each angel has his own form or species). Unlike God, the angel has a finite, limited essence. While God knows all things, the angel does not know all things through its own angelic nature.<sup>ix</sup> Unlike humans, the angels do not go through a *process* of knowing. They do not abstract ideas from sensory data.

Angels never think through anything. This is why we say that angels have “non-discursive” knowledge. The word discursive means “proceeding by argument or reasoning.” Humans have discussions that eventually lead to moments in which someone says, “Aha! Now I finally understand it!” Angels never do that.



Angels think through innate forms. All angels, each one differing by the design of God, receive forms into their angelic substances by which they know things. Angels have purely formal knowledge. Whereas humans know and learn the idea of “triangle” by drawing them with pencils and describing them with our words (material representation), angels just know “triangle” without reference to pictures or description. We humans come to know what “sphere” is when someone compares it to a ball or to a globe. Yet the angel innately knows “sphereness.” The angel does not abstract the idea of “sphereness” out of a physical ball or globe. So when we consider the minds of angels, we should be in awe. In comparison to humans, the minds of angels are like the Internet, and our human minds are like a calculator from the early 1980s. There’s a big difference between us and them. This is especially scary when you consider that demons (fallen, evil angels) have massive intellects. We’ll come to that in just a little bit.

## **THE MYSTERIOUS HIERARCHY OF ANGELS**

Thomas Aquinas then surprises us by saying an angel is lower by its having more forms given to it. We might expect the exact opposite. Would it not be the case that the angel with the most innate forms would be the best and most intelligent angel? Not so, says Thomas. According to him, the highest angels are most simple in that they know intelligible essences as proceeding from the God who is perfectly simple. These angels only think of God. Below these highest angels are those that know intelligible essences of the most universal *created* causes. Below these midrange angels are those that know intelligible essences applied to particular causes. Just in case you are curious, guardian angels are the absolute lowest angels in the hierarchy since they are concerned with those things that are truly mundane—protecting and guiding lowly humans!

### **First Hierarchy**

Angels of the First Hierarchy consider intelligible things in God alone, and therefore have the least amount of innate forms within them.

- 1) Seraphim
- 2) Cherubim
- 3) Thrones

### **Second Hierarchy**

Angels of the Second Hierarchy consider the most universal causes and principles of creation.

- 4) Dominations
- 5) Virtues
- 6) Powers

### **Third Hierarchy**

Angels of the Third Hierarchy consider intelligible things in particular effects and thus have the most innate forms within them.

- 7) Principalities
- 8) Archangels
- 9) Angels

The higher angels illuminate the lower angels and so on and so forth. Yet as the knowledge gets passed down the chain, it gets broken up and becomes less and less simple.

### **WHAT EACH RANK OF ANGEL DOES**

1. The greatest angels are the Seraphim since they consider God's goodness as the goal of all creatures. For this reason they are called *seraphim*. Seraph means "burning," and they are continually burning with the love of God.
2. Next are the Cherubim, who consider God's goodness as it applies to creation—the providence of God.
3. Third are the Thrones, who contemplate how the goodness of God is reflected in divine judgments.

The Second or Middle Angelic Hierarchy considers the universal causes of creation:

4. The fourth level of angels, called Dominations, organizes and decrees what should be done by the lower angels.
5. The fifth level of angels, Virtues, confers the causes of energy for these commands to be filled. Thus, the Virtues are responsible for the highest powers within the cosmos—the gravitational pull of orbits and the burning of suns and stars.
6. The sixth level, belonging to those angels called Powers, protects the operation of the cosmos.

The Third Angelic Hierarchy is concerned with earthly matters:

7. The seventh level of angelic Principalities governs human matters—the general welfare of nations and the common good.
8. The eighth level of Archangels mediates messages between God and humans. Only these lower angels communicate with humans. For example, Saint Michael the Archangel protects the people of God, and

Saint Gabriel the Archangel delivered special messages to Daniel and the Blessed Virgin Mary.

9. At last we reach the ninth and lowest level. The Angels are those who protect humans and bring less important messages. These lowest angels need more innate forms than any other form of higher angel in order to relate to humans.

That there should be mediating, immaterial intelligences between God and humans relates to multiplicity of innate forms and angelic knowledge.

In conclusion, Thomas Aquinas dealt a deathblow to ancient Greek philosophy by applying his concept of the analogy of being to angels. For the ancient polytheistic pagans, the world was divided into immaterial and material. Anything immaterial was considered divine—gods and goddesses. Anything material was considered earthly—humans, animals, plants, and things. By applying the analogy of being, Thomas makes a distinction within the realm of the immaterial. Thomas divides the immaterial world itself between divine (God who exists of Himself) and the immaterial non-divine angels (who get their existence from God).<sup>x</sup> Angels are immaterial, but they are *not* God. They are distinct from God in one important way: For God, his *essentia* is his *esse*. God exists of himself. Angels are immaterial but still owe their existence to God. So Thomas can agree with ancient Greek philosophy about immaterial intellectual agents “floating” around up there. However, unlike the ancient Greeks, Thomas is able to distinguish the angels from gods and reserve the title “God” to one alone. This saves Thomas from polytheism.

## HOW THE EVIL ANGELS BECAME DEMONS

Thomas teaches that there are good angels and bad angels. The bifurcation of angels into good angels (like Saint Michael) and bad angels (like Satan) is discussed by Saint Thomas at *Summa theologiae* I, qq. 63-64. Following passages from the Old and New Testaments, Thomas teaches that the angels were tested. Some angels adhered to God and were rewarded with the beatific vision of God’s essence (good angels), and some rebelled and lost grace (bad angels or demons). According to Christian tradition, Satan was once a seraph and the highest angel of all. Go back and consult the list of angels above.

A defect appeared in the bad angels. Thomas cites Job 4:18: “In His angels, He found wickedness.” When they were first created, the angels did not have the beatific vision of God’s essence. They were literally blind to the vision of God. They were first tested (some say by a vision of Christ incarnate in Mary, see Revelation chapter 12), and certain angels could not accept serving God if it entailed serving a lower species—namely the human species.

Thomas quotes Saint Augustine who says the devil “is not a fornicator nor a drunkard nor anything of the like sort, yet he is proud and envious.”<sup>xi</sup> Lucifer

and one-third of the angels fell on account of pride and envy. Thomas explains that the devil wanted to be God. He cites Isaiah 14:13-14: "I will ascend into Heaven . . . I will be like the Most High." Saint Augustine also confirms that Satan "wished to be called God."<sup>xii</sup> Saint Augustine relates the fall of the evil angels to the book of Genesis: "And God saw the light that it was good, and he divided the light from the darkness" (Genesis 1:4). Thomas picks up this allegory from Augustine, and identifies the separation here as the division of the good angels from the bad angels who became "dark."<sup>xiii</sup>

All this means that the devils are not *naturally* wicked. God did not give certain angels a wicked nature. Just like humans, God originally made angels good and then some of them chose to become evil. By choosing themselves, rather than God as their final cause, the demons thwarted their angelic natures. They became dark and turned in on themselves. Although they do not have lust for material objects, the demons have spiritual greed. They desire to be God; they desire to be worshiped. This is the final and eternal decision of their free wills.

We must now turn to humans, who have also fallen by free will. However, unlike angels, humans can be redeemed. Let's take a look at the reasons for this.

## HUMANS: ARE WE ANGELS OR BEASTS?

We have moved logically from God to angels. Now we turn our attention to the oddest creatures of all: humans. A human is less than an angel and greater than a beast. The human has an immaterial soul that can think and in abstract forms, which are known to the angels. Our soul is immortal and will live forever—just as angels and demons will live on forever.

Yet, humans also have hair, eyes, and teeth like a cow, a dog, or a mouse. We eat food and defecate just like all the other animals. If we do not wash, we stink. Things can go terribly wrong with our bodies. Our bodies can be broken. Our skin can be slashed. Our organs can be infected by disease. We die just like the frog and the ant. In this regard, we are not like angels at all. We are rather like the beasts.

So the human person straddles both the spiritual world and the physical world. In his soul, he resembles an angel. In his body, he resembles a beast. He is stretched out between heaven and earth. If we consider the great hierarchy of being with God at the top, followed by angels, then humans come next by virtue of their intellect. The ancient philosophers denoted humans as “rational animals.” We are physical animals but distinct in that we have rational intellects.

## DO ANIMALS HAVE SOULS?

We say that other animals think, and this is somewhat true. Nevertheless, animals (dolphins, gorillas, elephants, dogs, etc.) do not engage in abstract intellection. They may be able to identify a triangle sign, but they cannot abstract the idea of “triangle” like a human can. For this reason, only humans are rational.

Humans can make long, complicated arguments based on abstract ideas. We can use abstract ideas (for example, triangles) and employ them to make strong bridges and buildings. Because we have intellects, humans are able to advance over time. Anyone who tells you that dolphins or gorillas are just as rational as humans probably does not understand what the word “rational” means. Dolphins and gorillas have emotions to be sure, but they cannot engage in abstraction.

A human can solve a long geometric problem because he is able to abstract the concepts and put them back together. This complicated procedure cannot be performed by any other animal. The reason for this is that only humans have *intellectual souls*.

## THE HIERARCHY OF YOUR SOUL

What is a soul? The Greeks used the word *psyche* for soul, and the Romans called it the *anima*. Aristotle also referred to the “soul” as the life-principle of any living

thing. For him, plants have “nutritive souls,” animals have “sensitive souls,” and humans have “rational souls.”

<b>Plants</b>	Nutritive soul	Life principle that enables an organism to nourish itself and reproduce.
<b>Animals</b>	Sensitive soul	Life principle that enables an organism to sense and move around.
<b>Humans</b>	Rational soul	Life principle that enables an organism to think, contemplates, and live in society.

Now the soul of the human is hierarchical. The highest power in the soul is the intellect. Next there is the will. Below the will are the passions. The passions fall into two categories: the concupiscible appetite and the irascible appetite. These passions relate to the human body. Angels also have an intellect and will, but they do not have the passions. To understand passions, think in terms of appetites, emotions, or bodily instincts.

The concupiscible passions relate to personal survival (desires for food, drink, and sleep) and the survival of the human species (desire for sexual intercourse). The irascible passions also relate to personal survival when it comes to situations that require “fight or flight.” These passions involve anger and fear. If you suddenly come across a wolf, you must either fight it or run away. So then, the hierarchy of the human soul looks like this:

Intellect  
Will  
Passions

## THE HUMAN SOUL AS A HORSE-DRAWN CHARIOT

Plato gave us a good image for this arrangement. He compared the soul to a horse-drawn chariot.<sup>xiv</sup> The man in the chariot is the intellect. The chariot is pulled by two winged horses—one horse is the concupiscible appetite and the other horse is the irascible appetite.<sup>xv</sup> The will is the reins in the hand of the charioteer. If the charioteer uses the reins correctly, he can steer the horses wherever he desires. If he lets go of the reins (lets go of his will), then the horses will go crazy and drag his chariot all over the place.

Our intellect, like a trained charioteer, is supposed to govern our passions through the reign of the will. If we let go of our will, we lose control and our passions take over. We become obsessed with sex, food, money, power, anger, revenge, or fear. The horses run wild and the chariot gets dragged behind. However, if the intellect holds a firm grip on the reins of the will and controls and tames the horses of passion, he can win races and travel to all lands. He becomes the master of his destiny.

Thomas Aquinas has a similar idea with regard to the human soul. Since we are animal-like, we experience the passions of pleasure (food and sex) and also the passions of fear and anger. Unlike animals, we can say no to our passions, since we possess rational souls. A dog might start mating with a strange dog, but humans can temper their libidos—even completely if they desire. Incidentally, Thomas Aquinas and other medievals pointed to the vocation of celibacy as ultimate proof that man can conquer his passions perfectly. Similarly, a mother bear may kill a hiker who comes between her and her cub. Yet, a human mother is able to abstract and reason as to whether killing someone is the appropriate act with regard to an unsuspecting hiker.

## **WHY YOU KEEP EATING ICE CREAM**

As you sit down with a spoon and a frozen pint of ice cream, you take a few bites. Soon you are halfway through the pint and you think to yourself, “This is ridiculous. I need to stop eating this.” Yet there is this sense of *resistance* within you. You know that you do not need that many empty calories, but you keep digging into that pint of *Cherry Garcia* with its creamy texture, delicious cherries, and fudge flakes.

The same thing happens with chips and salsa at a Mexican restaurant. You’re hungry so you start with a few chips. Then you order your *Presidente* enchilada dinner. Then you keep eating chips and salsa. Soon you think, “Man, I’m getting full. I should stop eating chips so that I can eat my meal.” But you keep eating chips. Why?

Finally, your enchilada dinner arrives. The server says, “Be careful, the plate is hot. Don’t touch it.” And what do you do? You touch the plate and burn your finger. Why are you engaging in illogical behavior? The answer is your passions are out of control.

## **GETTING TO KNOW YOUR 11 PASSIONS**

Thomas explains that there are eleven passions of the human soul—six passions in the concupiscible appetite and five passions in the irascible appetite.<sup>xvi</sup> The concupiscible passions regard the absolute good. The irascible passions regard the restricted good—that which is difficult. Thus, the concupiscible precedes

the irascible.<sup>xvii</sup> To put it another way, if the concupiscible and the irascible were in a truck, the concupiscible would drive and the irascible would ride shotgun.

Now the passions exist in pairs as contraries or opposites.

**Concupiscible passions with opposites:**

love and hatred  
desire and aversion  
joy and sadness

**Irascible passions with opposites:**

hope and despair  
fear and daring  
anger, which has no opposite passion

How do the concupiscible passions operate? The movements of the human appetite are forces of attraction. The concupiscible passions relate to a good or evil considered absolutely.

Any time you feel the desire to eat a pint of *Cherry Garcia* ice cream, commit adultery, hate your boss, or avoid confessing your sins, your concupiscible passions are stirring. If you want to fight someone at a bar or give the bird to someone who cut you off, then you are experiencing your irascible passions. The passions are not evil in themselves, though. Let's take a look at how they operate correctly.

**HOW THE PASSIONS SHOULD WORK**

When a good presents itself, there is love; when an evil presents itself, there is hatred. This forms our first pair: love and hatred. Next, if the good is not yet able to be possessed, the appetite moves to the attainment of that good. This is the passion of desire. If it is evil, then the passion is its contrary, aversion. This forms our second pair: desire and aversion. Last of all, when the good is finally attained, the appetite rests and this is called joy. The contrary is sadness. Consequently the last concupiscible pair is joy and sadness.

Next, we examine the five irascible passions, which regard that which is difficult or arduous. With regard to a good not attained we have hope. The contrary is despair. This forms the first pair. Next, when evil is approaching we experience either fear of the evil or the contrary passion of daring. This forms the second irascible pair: fear and daring. We would expect one last "passion pair" to conform to the pattern, but here Thomas breaks the outline and lists anger as the fifth and last irascible passion *without an opposite*. Why?

The last set of irascible passions is with respect of a good obtained. Now when a good is obtained, there is no irascible passion because there is nothing



arduous in being at rest. However, when the opposite in the case, that is, when an evil is already present, this does give rise to the passion of anger. This is why anger is not paired with an opposite.

## **ARE PASSIONS GOOD OR BAD?**

The ancient Stoics believed the passions were evil. They observed the human person to be a rational creature, and further observed that whenever things went wrong in the moral life, the passions were involved. So the Stoics looked to the passions as the evil within the human soul. Good living, taught the Stoics, consisted in denying the passions. Evil living consisted in giving the passion free reign.

Those who followed Aristotle taught that the passions could be good when subjected to right reasons. Thomas Aquinas disagrees with the Stoics and agrees with the Aristotelians because Thomas understands a “moral act” as entailing the intellect and the will. Accordingly, the passions considered by themselves are not good or evil. However, if the passions are considered as subject to the intellect and will, the passions can be judged as morally good or evil.<sup>xviii</sup>

## **CHILDREN AND PASSIONS**

Think about the passions with regard to children. According to Thomas Aquinas, children are ruled by their passions until they attain to the age of reason. At the age of reason, the child’s intellect and will are developed enough to function. Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas say that this occurs in the human soul around seven years of age.

Children desire and have aversions to all manner of irrational things. They have desire for a special blanket. Without the blanket, they are fearful. They are fearful of things for no reason. They are often irrationally daring—children at play do not consider that they can get hurt or die. Adults, who are fully rational, guide and correct the children. Moreover, we do not think it is “morally wrong” for a child to have a desire for candy and an aversion to broccoli. A small boy may have a desire to play with a burning candle. Since the little boy does not yet have a developed intellect and will, he does not think, “Fire can be very painful and destructive. If I play carelessly with this burning candle, I might burn myself or burn down this house. This will endanger people and so it is a morally evil act. I won’t do it.” No, the child is drawn by its brilliance and will play with fire unless a rational adult prohibits him. The passions are at play within little humans whether or not the intellect and will are developed.<sup>xix</sup>

People are easily confused about the passions. Here’s why. Today, everyone assumes “being passionate” is always a good thing; however, it can also be very bad. The passions can be good if they are submitted to reason, and God

designed them to be that way. Yet when the passions overcome the intellect and will, bad things happen.

### **BOXING WITH YOUR PASSIONS**

Take boxing as an example. Boxing is a physical sport that requires intellectual discipline in a number of ways. First, the mind needs to pace the body and decide where and exactly when to punch the opponent. The intellect must observe timing, fatigue, patterns, and openings. The intellect communicates actions through the will. Sometimes the passion of anger appears in a boxer. He is right to be passionate as he boxes. If, however, the intellect of the boxer becomes clouded with anger, his intellect will lose control. He may also acquire too much aversion to pain. He might begin to make foolish punches and open himself up to loss. We call this “losing your cool,” and it simply refers to the moment in which the passion of anger overcomes the human intellect.

### **PLAYING GOLF WITH YOUR PASSIONS**

Playing golf is another example. The professional golfer measures distance, judges wind patterns, inspects the turf, and calculates the lie of the green. His mind is constantly engaged so his will can properly execute each swing and putt. Now imagine the professional golfer is being stalked by an obsessed fan. The fan writes him and says he is going to shoot him on the eighteenth green during the next televised tournament. The professional golfer doesn't take it seriously, but as he plays, he begins to worry about getting to the eighteenth hole. He becomes fearful. His fear begins to overtake his intellect and will. He starts to slice the ball and miss easy putts. The passion of fear takes over. In this case, his fear is understandable. However, the passions do not always accurately conform to reality.

Someone can be passionate about food in a good way. However, if someone's desire for food becomes irrational—that is, he begins to eat more than his body needs—bad things happen. Gluttony. Heartburn. Lack of sleep. Weight gain. Obesity. Most people who eat too much know eating so many calories is not healthy, yet their passions overrun their intellects whenever the dessert cart rolls up to the table.

In order to resist that dessert cart, one has to begin patterns of behavior. The ethical theory of Thomas Aquinas is based on these patterns of behavior. Good patterns are called *virtues*. Bad patterns are called *vices*. Thomas Aquinas, then, proposes for us an ethics of virtue.

# HOW CAN YOU BECOME VIRTUOUS?

As we learned in the last section, people run into trouble when their passions overtake their intellect. So how do we overcome these troubles? The answer is by virtue.

What is a virtue? We might recall from an earlier chapter that Thomas Aquinas considers a perfect definition to include all four causes: final, formal, material, and efficient. So Thomas appeals to a definition of “virtue” given by Saint Augustine: “Virtue is a good quality of the mind by which we live righteously, of which no one can make bad use, which God works in us, without us.”<sup>xx</sup>

Here is how virtue breaks down as a definition with the four causes:

## FOURFOLD DEFINITION OF VIRTUE

Formal cause	“good quality”
Material cause	“of the mind”
Efficient cause	“God who works in us”
Final cause	“to live righteously”

Simply stated, virtues are good patterns or habits. It is a good deed when you help an elderly lady cross the street. It is not a virtue, it is a deed. However, if you are accustomed to helping the elderly at all times, then this habit is a “virtue.” Similarly, if you punch the old lady, you have committed a sin. Now then, if you fight and abuse old people all the time, you have acquired a “vice.”

Virtues, then, are good patterns and vices are evil patterns. Just like jogging or lifting weights, the moral life gets easier and more powerful if you habituate your soul to doing good things. According to Thomas Aquinas, the fourfold hierarchy of the soul is perfected by four corresponding virtues.

Intellect	Prudence
Will	Justice
Irascible Passions	Fortitude
Concupiscible Passions	Temperance

## FOUR NATURAL OR “CARDINAL” VIRTUES

The four virtues that perfect the natural soul are called natural virtues or “cardinal virtues.” The original arrangement of these virtues can be found in the writings of Plato.<sup>xxi</sup> They are also found in the biblical book of Wisdom: “She

teacheth temperance, and prudence, and justice, and fortitude, which are such things as men can have nothing more profitable in life” (Wisdom 8:7).

The Roman politician and philosopher Cicero (106-43 BC) popularized the fourfold virtue arrangement: “Virtue may be defined as a habit of mind [*animi*] in harmony with reason and the order of nature. It has four parts: prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance.”<sup>xxii</sup>

## SYMBOLIZING THE VIRTUES

In the fourth century, Saint Ambrose of Milan codified Cicero’s four virtues by calling them the “cardinal virtues.” The word *cardo* in Latin means “hinge” or “axis.” The idea is that everything *turns* on these four virtues. These cardinal virtues became enshrined in the Western moral tradition. They are often depicted in art allegorically with the following symbols:

Prudence: book, mirror, scrolls

Justice: sword, balance and scales, crown

Fortitude: armor, club, lion, palm branch, tower, yoke broken column

Temperance: vegetables, wheel, fish, cup, wine and water

I remember the four cardinal virtues by this unusual acronym: PJFT or “peanut-butter, jelly, French toast.” If you picture a red *cardinal* eating a peanut-butter & jelly French toast, you’ll never forget the cardinal virtues again.

## PRUDENCE

Prudence is the habit of proper decision making. Thomas Aquinas cites Saint Augustine’s definition as accurate: “Prudence is the knowledge of what to seek and what to avoid.”<sup>xxiii</sup> He also cites Saint Isidore, who writes: “A prudent man is one who sees as it were from afar, for his sight is keen, and he foresees the event of uncertainties.”<sup>xxiv</sup> Now prudence is not merely a perfection of the intellect, but it assumes everything below it, including the will. Aristotle explains prudence as “something more than a merely rational habit.”<sup>xxv</sup> The poet Dante Alighieri in his *Divine Comedy* describes prudence allegorically as having three eyes, since prudence allows man to see more clearly and act accordingly. We will discuss how the human soul discerns right actions from evil actions in the next chapter.

## JUSTICE

Thomas Aquinas writes more on justice than he does the other virtues. The virtue of justice derives its name from the Latin word *iustus* meaning “right.” Aristotle explains that “all are agreed in giving the name of ‘justice’ to the habit

which makes men capable of doing just actions.”<sup>xxvi</sup> In brief, justice is giving each person his due. This includes our family and friends, our community, our leaders, our nation, and even God himself.

Sins against justice include things like murder, injury, theft, gossip, cursing, vengeance, and cheating. To be a just person entails being fair in all your dealings and being grateful to your benefactors. If someone does a job for you, you pay him the right amount. If you rent a house, you pay on time. If you receive a loan, you pay it back. If someone gives you a gift, you thank the person. Thomas also states that justice requires us to be friendly and generous with others.<sup>xxvii</sup> Justice applies to ourselves as well. If we brag about ourselves, we are giving undue attention to ourselves—a sin against justice.

## **FORTITUDE**

Fortitude is the virtue that perfects our irascible appetites. Cicero writes that “fortitude is deliberate facing of dangers and bearing of toils.”<sup>xxviii</sup> Thomas Aquinas sees martyrdom as the greatest act of fortitude since martyrdom overcomes the fear of death itself for the sake of man’s final goal—God.

Fortitude is opposed to fear on one hand, but it is also opposed to the other extreme: daring. For example, cliff diving in uncharted waters would be an overextension of fearlessness. Also, a man who provokes deadly animals for no reason would sin against fortitude. These cases are contrary to fortitude because these acts do not observe the mean between being timid and being foolish.

A person with the virtue of fortitude is courageous. He is strong but not prideful. He is what we call a “go-getter,” and he does not falsely fear rejection. For this reason, his life is marked by perseverance. Those who exhibit fortitude also possess patience, which is the opposite of anger.

## **TEMPERANCE**

The virtue of temperance is that habit that perfects the concupiscible desires for food, drink, and sex. Aristotle explains that “temperance is properly about desires of pleasures of touch.”<sup>xxix</sup> Thomas Aquinas says that sins against temperance are the most disgraceful sins since they make us most like the irrational beasts.<sup>xxx</sup> Sins against temperance are gluttony, drunkenness, and every form of lustful act: seduction, rape, adultery, fornication, incest, and sodomy. For Thomas, temperance also moderates against thinking about sexual relations.

The temperate person eats only those calories that he needs. He drinks in moderation and never becomes drunk. He is chaste in his thoughts, speech, and actions. Thomas also says that speaking and dressing modestly pertains to the virtue of temperance.

## **SUPERNATURAL THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES**

The four cardinal virtues are “natural” in that anyone can foster these right habits so as to become a virtuous person. Someone who makes good decisions (prudence), gives everyone their due (justice), proves courageous (fortitude), and moderates the drive for pleasures (temperance) is a virtuous person. However, Thomas Aquinas holds that there are three *supernatural* virtues that exceed man’s natural capacities: faith, hope, and charity. These three supernatural virtues cannot be cultivated by a natural man but come exclusively from Jesus Christ through the Catholic Church. These three supernatural virtues are therefore called “theological virtues.” Thomas teaches that these are given in Christian baptism and strengthened through the sacraments of the Catholic Church.

## **VIRTUE OF FAITH**

Faith is the belief or trust in all the teachings of Jesus Christ given to the Twelve Apostles. This is the “faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3). Thomas states that this teaching is summarized in the fourteen articles of the Apostles’ Creed—seven articles pertaining to the Godhead, and seven articles pertaining to the human nature of Christ.<sup>xxxii</sup>

### **SEVEN ARTICLES PERTAINING TO THE GODHEAD**

1. God is One “I believe in God”
2. Father “the Father Almighty”
3. Son “and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord”
4. Holy Spirit “I believe in the Holy Spirit”
5. Nature (Creation) “Creator of heaven and earth”
6. Grace (Redemption) “the holy Catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins”
7. Glory (Glorification) “the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.”

### **SEVEN ARTICLES PERTAINING TO CHRIST’S HUMAN NATURE**

1. Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
2. born of the Virgin Mary,
3. suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried;
4. He descended into hell.
5. On the third day He arose again from the dead;
6. He ascended into heaven,
7. and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

These fourteen articles are articulated and arranged in the Apostles' Creed, which has been rightly and validly ratified as the true faith of Christ by the Pope, who has the duty of drawing up a Creed of what ought to be believed always and everywhere: "It belongs to the sole authority of the Sovereign Pontiff to publish a new edition of the symbol, as do all other matters which concern the whole Church such as to convoke a general council and so forth."<sup>xxxii</sup> If someone believes everything taught by Christ and the Apostles, he has the supernatural virtue of faith.

## **VIRTUE OF HOPE**

Hope is the second theological virtue and its object is everlasting happiness. Hope applies the truths of the virtue of faith to the self. It is one thing to believe Jesus Christ died on the cross for sinners. However, it is another thing to believe that this sacrifice applies to me personally and that I might attain the eternal happiness of Heaven. This personal application of the faith is the virtue of hope. One can sin against hope by going to two extremes. On the one hand, someone might falsely believe there is no hope for him with regard to attaining heaven. This is the sin of despair. On the other hand, someone might falsely assume he will enter Heaven regardless of or without the grace of God. This is the sin of presumption.

## **VIRTUE OF CHARITY**

The third and highest theological virtue is charity or love. The object of charity is God and our neighbor. The virtue of charity leads us to love God and others. Charity brings about joy, peace, mercy, and acts of kindness. Charity is opposed to hatred, strife, sloth, envy, discord, sedition, and scandal. Like faith and hope, this supernatural charity is only possible by grace. In order to ascend to the divine life of eternal beatitude in Heaven, one must die with the virtues of faith, hope, and charity in the soul.

One can have faith (believe all the right things), but not have hope or charity. One can also have faith (believe all the right things) and have hope (personal hope for eternal life), but not have charity. All this means that one can believe the right things but not love God or love his neighbor. Such a person, says Thomas Aquinas, will not go to Heaven since faith must be formed by love.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

## **VIRTUE ETHICS**

Since Thomas Aquinas defines virtue as a quality or habit of the soul, the person that is virtuous must be habituated rightly. Thomas reasons this way because he understands ethics as something natural to human nature. Human nature comes

endowed with certain powers. These powers act toward objects. Here's a diagram for clarity.

nature > powers > actions > objects

Now habits perfect the powers belonging to human nature. The intellect is rightly formed by the virtue of prudence. The virtue is rightly formed by the habit of justice. The irascible passions are rightly formed by the virtue of fortitude, and the concupiscible passions are rightly formed by the virtue of temperance. A good person is not merely one who does a good deed—he is one who is practiced in good deeds.

Ethics is thus a learned and applied life of virtue. Nowadays, college freshmen are typically exposed to situational ethics in introductory philosophy courses. They are usually given difficult, even impossible, moral dilemmas and then asked to solve them. For example:

An out of control train containing one thousand adults is heading toward a cliff. Yet the train track leading to the cliff forks. However, at the opposite fork there are one hundred infants tied to the tracks. You stand at the fork with a lever. If you leave the lever in the original position, the runaway train will fly over the cliff and the one thousand adults will die. If you move the lever to the opposition position, you will divert the runaway train away from the cliff, but this will lead to the train running over the one hundred innocent infants. What do you do?

These kinds of “philosophical experiments” are misguided and juvenile. Their ultimate aim is to lead students into a form of utilitarianism—choosing the most useful option—or into a form of consequentialism—choosing the option with best-foreseen outcome. Both schools are very dangerous.

The fact of the matter is that human persons are rarely presented with an extreme moral dilemma like the one depicted above concerning the runaway train. The moral life is one of small everyday decisions that add up over time to big decisions. According to Thomas Aquinas, virtuous people are the only ones who can rightly make the big moral decisions of life, because only virtue allows someone to perceive and act according to virtue. This is because every moral act involves up to hundreds of bits of information and several different options—not merely two. These decisions also require experience.

If Thomas Aquinas were teaching a class full of college freshman, he would not present them with a simplistic runaway train dilemma with two limited decisions. Rather, he would likely state the following:



Listen, as you grow older you will be faced with many difficult challenges in life. You will be required to make difficult moral decisions. How will you know what to do? You begin now by making small right decisions every single day. It's like lifting weights. Do not worry yourself with the question: "Will I be strong enough to bench press a five-hundred-pound telephone poll to free a pinned child?" Instead, begin by bench pressing 135 lbs. three times a week to build your strength for anything that might happen. Do not ask yourself, "How will I win the Olympic gold medal in the mile?" Instead, begin running every day. Then you will come closer to attaining it.

This is the moral life. Begin by doing small things well. Actively form your conscience. Seek the truth. Do not darken your intellect. Submit your passions to right reason. Do this every day, 365 days per year. If you fail, keep trying. Forty years from now, if you are a general of an army in a tough spot, then and only then will you know what to do and when to do it. But the ability to make that right decision begins with the ability to make small right decisions.

This is virtue ethics. How do you keep your temper from flaring up? You begin by doing things you do not like to do so as to learn patience. How do you become prudent? Start by making a prudent decision—do not sleep in and skip class. Get up and get dressed. Start exercising. Do you want to become just? Do not ever lie. Say "thank you" to your waiter. Open the doors for people. Soon you will become habituated to performing good deeds. Over years, you will become virtuous and see more clearly than others. These virtues will have strengthened your natural human faculties.

The virtues are as old as Aristotle. However, Thomas Aquinas integrated the cardinal virtues and the theological virtues by applying his maxim "grace perfects nature." The four cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance are perfected by the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity. In the *Summa theologiae*, Thomas begins with the three theological virtues and then descends to the four cardinal virtues. This ordering and integration amplifies the reality of grace perfecting nature. That which is supernatural provides fulfillment for that which is natural.

## NATURAL LAW AND GOVERNMENT

The title of my Ph.D. dissertation is “Thomas Aquinas on Natural Law and the Twofold Beatitude of Humanity.” Natural law is my favorite topic in Thomas. It is my favorite because it is the most necessary for our time.

Natural law is not the same as the “laws of nature.” The laws of nature are things like gravity. Natural law is an inward inclination toward the good and away from evil. It is a natural operating system. Thomas explicitly teaches that it is not chiefly a set of moral commandments (see *Summa theologiae* I-II q. 94, a. 2). Rather, it is an inclination humans have toward the good.

Before he introduces natural law, Thomas speaks of the “eternal law.” Eternal law is the divine governance of all created things. We might think of it as divine providence. Natural law is the way in which rational animals (human beings) participate in God’s eternal law.

As we grow and learn more and more things through our five senses, we begin to associate information with our inward inclination toward the good. We experience justice and injustice. We begin to associate stealing cookies with “wrong” and paying wages as “right.” Soon our inner “software” begins to arrange data into a clear set of commands. What emerges is something like the Ten Commandments in our souls. These are the primary precepts of natural law.

Now then, Thomas realizes this doesn’t always work out. In fact, Thomas is explicit that natural law is not sufficient for guiding humans—especially when humans are plagued with original sin and what he calls the “law of sin.” This law of sin (derived from Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Romans 5–7) is what Catholic theology identifies as “concupiscence.” It’s our sinful tendency to be ruled by our passions and not by our intellect.

Not only do we humans have to struggle with the “law of sin” or “concupiscence,” but we may also have negative social pressures. A child raised by Satanists is not going to rightly associate the moral data that she receives as a child. Although natural law can never be suppressed in any human, as Thomas teaches, the emerging precepts can be confused and erased. So it is possible for a child to grow up with the false opinion that sex before marriage is permissible or that polygamy is permissible.

Returning to our prior analogy, the software (natural law) is always working, but the data being input can be jumbled and confused. This is one of the several reasons why natural law, by itself, is never enough. However, it does provide the basis in every human soul for a moral code.

## ARE STOP SIGNS MORALLY BINDING?

Saint Thomas begins to build on natural law. He says that humans naturally begin to expand on the precepts of natural law for the common good of society. We create “human law.” Human law, like all law, must conform to the four causes:

Formal Cause: A law must be reasonable

Material Cause: promulgated in public so that people know about it

Efficient Cause: by a proper authority, such as a king or legislature

Final Cause: for the Common Good.

So we can take something from the natural law, such as *Thou shalt not kill*, and create more laws to insure that killing does not happen. For example, *Thou shalt not speed in a school zone* is just a practical expansion of *Thou shalt not kill* applied to a certain situation.

Likewise, *Stop at a red light* is established by humans to protect human life. If we didn't have stoplights, we would crash into each other and people would die painful deaths. Think about it in the context of the four causes above. It's reasonable to have people obey stoplights. All Americans know about it and how to respond. Drivers Education classes teach new drivers this principle. The laws about stoplights have been promulgated by proper authorities. Last of all, stoplights are for the common good. This reveals a just law.

And of course, there are arbitrary elements to it. We could change the colors of the lights. Purple could mean “stop.” Orange could mean “prepare to stop.” Blue could mean “go.” If the government promulgated it, then this would become binding. It wouldn't be prudent to do so, but it could happen. There is nothing eternally true about “green light means go.” Human laws are like that. However, “green light means go” is based on natural law. It is part of a system that tries to save human lives.

## IS THE BIBLE BINDING BY LAW?

We now move to what Saint Thomas calls “divine law.” Divine law is given by God through public revelation. If Moses, a prophet, Jesus Christ, or an Apostle taught something, it belongs to divine law. Baptism belongs to divine law. Natural law is never going to come up with the following: “In order to receive the remission of sins and sanctifying grace, it is necessary to receive a washing of water over the head while someone says, ‘I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.’”

Not even Socrates, Plato, or Aristotle would have come up with that law. Why? It was a law revealed by God through a divine oracle: either through a prophet, through an apostle, or by the Son of God Himself. As such, divine laws only apply to those who have been incorporated into the true religion of

God. Before Christ, those were the followers of Abraham and Moses. After Christ, it is the Christians. Divine law, unlike natural law, is not immediately and universally binding because it requires the response of supernatural faith, something not everyone has. For example, the divine laws about going to confession or receiving the Holy Eucharist do not apply to a Hindu.

Let me now correct the biggest distortion of Saint Thomas's teaching on divine law. The fact that divine law does not apply to a Hindu does not mean divine law has nothing to offer the Hindu. This is not a theology of religious indifference. The Son of God explicitly stated numerous times that the divine law of the Gospel (which Thomas calls "the New Law") should be made universal (or *catholic*) through prayer and persuasion by those who bear the name of Christian. The New Law of the Gospel fulfills what was lacking in the natural law. It is required that every Christian seek to prayerfully persuade every man and woman on earth to enter into the New Law of Christ.

Christ established the Catholic Church with her hierarchy and sacraments to ensure that the New Law would be offered to all nations until the end of time. Of course, if an entire nation accepted Christ (for example, medieval France), then that nation could in fact enforce the divine law on her subjects. So Thomas believes a citizen in such a country could be civically punished for blaspheming the name of Christ. In such a Catholic country, Thomas believes heresy should be a crime punishable by law (see *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 11, a. 3). In such Catholic countries, non-Christians such as Jews or Muslims would not be expected to observe the divine law, but they would have to honor the religion of the majority. This is Thomas's doctrine of Church and State; he certainly did *not* believe in Thomas Jefferson's separation of the two. Although they shared the name Thomas, they did not share the same political theory.

# HOW TO BEGIN WITH SAINT THOMAS

You now have the basic knowledge that you need to read and understand Saint Thomas Aquinas. You might consider joining the New Saint Thomas Institute to take online theology classes with Dr. Marshall online. Tuition is ridiculous affordable and there are over one thousand members from over twenty four nations studying inside the New Saint Thomas Institute. Learn more at:

[newsaintthomas.com](http://newsaintthomas.com)

## HOW TO BEGIN THE *SUMMA THEOLOGIAE* OF SAINT THOMAS

Now you need to begin reading the *Summa theologiae* on your own. It can be confusing. Here's how it works:

**First**, Thomas lists “objections” to his own position, which objections he doesn't really believe. There can be two or more of these.

**Second**, Thomas rejects the “objections” by listing his “*sed contra*” or “but on the contrary.”

**Third**, Thomas gives his response.

**Fourth**, Thomas refutes each of the objections he listed at the beginning of the article.

The best way is to read each article in order. However, beginners sometimes feel more comfortable skipping the initial objections and just going straight to the “On the contrary” and his response. I would recommend you begin this way. You can practice by going to [NewAdvent.org](http://NewAdvent.org) and exploring the *Summa theologiae* there.

I'd recommend you start in Part III, which is about Christ and the seven sacraments. Begin with something simple like baptism to get the hang of it.

Now let's look at some recommended books . . .

## LIST OF BOOKS ON AQUINAS FOR BEGINNERS

*The Dumb Ox* by G.K. Chesterton is the very first book you should read. In my opinion it is the best biography of Saint Thomas ever written. Short, entertaining, and well written.

*Guide to Thomas Aquinas* by Josef Pieper. After you read Chesterton's biography, *The Dumb Ox*, begin reading the *Summa* and start reading this book.

*A Summa of the Summa* by Peter Kreeft. If you don't want to overwhelm yourself with the four-volume *Summa*, start here.

*A First Glance at St. Thomas (A Handbook for Peeping Thomists)* by Ralph McInerny. McInerny was one of the greatest Thomists of the 20th century. This is also a good intro.

*Theology and Sanity* by Frank Sheed. This is a very good one-volume work to get you started from a Catholic point of view.

*Back to Virtue: Traditional Moral Wisdom for Modern Moral Confusion* by Peter Kreeft. This is great if you're looking to begin with ethics.

*Companion to the Summa* by Walter Farrell, O.P. This is out of print and I have never used it, but it is highly recommended by people whom I respect.

*Aristotle for Everybody: Difficult Thought Made Easy* by Mortimer Adler. If you want to prepare yourself for Aristotle, start here. Then begin reading Aristotle's *Categories* and then Aristotle's *Physics*. If you're feeling brave, read Aquinas's commentary on the *Physics* as you go along.

## YOUR VOCAB LIST FOR THOMAS AQUINAS

**accident** – That which is not of the essence of something. An accident does not exist in itself but in another as in a subject. It is not a thing but the mode of a thing. Of the nine categories of accident, relation, quality, and quantity are the most important. For example, “being six foot tall” is not essential to being human. It is a “quality” of a human subject and thus accidental.

**act** – An action based upon a habit which is an expression of the virtue courage, e.g., a courageous act. An act of a faculty is the use of the faculty. (See habit)

**agent** – An entity that does something, e.g., an intellectual agent (a person) or a natural agent. Human beings and other mortal living beings have a source of motion or action in themselves.

**appetite** – Appetite is in inclination or bent to a good. Thomas says “the essential meaning of the good is that it provides a terminus for appetite.” See also rational appetite; sense appetite; irascible appetite; concupiscible appetite; natural appetite. The word *appetitus* is Thomas’s translation for Aristotle’s *orexis*.

**art** – The intellectual virtue that consists of knowledge how to produce things, e.g. architecture, rhetoric.

**beatific vision** – The intuitive knowledge of God which produces heavenly beatitude. As defined by the Church, the souls of the just “see the divine essence by an intuitive vision and face-to-face, so that the divine essence is known immediately, showing itself plainly, clearly, and openly, and not immediately through any creature” (Denzinger 1000-2). Moreover, the souls of the saints “clearly behold God, one and triune, as He is” (Denzinger 1304-6). It is called vision in the mind by analogy with bodily sight, which is the most comprehensive of human sense faculties; it is called beatific because it produces happiness in the will and the whole being. As a result of this immediate vision of God, the blessed share in the divine happiness, where the beatitude of the Trinity is (humanly speaking) the consequence of God’s perfect knowledge of his infinite goodness. The beatific vision is also enjoyed by the angels, and was possessed by Christ in his human nature even while he was in his mortal life on earth.

**beatitude** – Blessedness, happiness. Blessedness as the enduring possession of perfect good. Supernatural beatitude is the perfect happiness enjoyed by a nature raised by grace and the light of glory to the eternal vision of God.

**concomitant of an end** – Something that always accompanies the achievement of an end, which is however distinct from the end.

**concupiscible** – An aspect of sense appetite; the appetite for possessions and pleasures of the flesh.

**contemplation** – The operation of the intellect or understanding when it attends to a known object for the sake of attending to it; human beings must acquire the knowledge of an object before they can contemplate the object.

**delight** – Pleasure which necessarily accompanies the possession of a good.

**desire** – That act by which the will tends toward what it does not yet possess.

**end** – The determinate effect toward which an agent tends.

**epistemology** – The study of how we know things.

**esse** – Existence. In Latin, it means “to be.”

**essentia or essence** – What a thing is. The internal principle whereby a thing is what it is and not something else. Sometimes essence is said to be the same thing as being, but being merely, affirming that a thing is, without specifying its perfections. Essence is not quite the same as nature, which adds to essence the notion of activity, i.e., nature is the essence in action. Or again essence is substance, but not all essences are substantial because accidents also have an essence.

**faculty** – A power or potentiality that resides in an organ (e.g., the faculty of sight in the eye) or in the soul (intellect, the will, the imagination, irascible appetite).

**felicity** – Happiness. This is Thomas’s word for what Aristotle calls *eudaimonia*. See beatitude above.

**habit** – Equivalent to Aristotle’s term “state” (as in “state of character”); a readiness or disposition to act or behave in a certain way. There are physical habits, such as flexibility or strength; moral habits such as moral virtues and vices; and intellectual habits such as intellectual virtues and vices. Most habits are acquired through repeated activity of a certain type.

**incommunicable** – Divine perfection that can be possessed by God alone, as his infinity, omniscience, or omnipresence.

**incomprehensible** – That which cannot be fully understood. God is said to be incomprehensible because only he is infinitely perfect and no finite mind can exhaustively understand the infinite. The Church teaches that God is incomprehensible (Denzinger 800). Although not comprehensible, God is not unintelligible. He can be known, here by faith and hereafter by sight. But neither on earth nor in heaven can he be totally known in the fullness of his own comprehensive knowledge of himself. “God whose Being is infinite, is infinitely knowable. No created understanding can, however, know God in an infinite manner” (*Summa theologiae*, I, q. 12, a. 7).



**intellect** – What is highest in a rational creation. The human intellect is one aspect of the human soul, which in turn is one aspect of the whole human being. Angels and God are pure intellects.

**intelligent agent** – An agent that determines the end for itself, e.g., by conceiving something as good.

**intellectual substance** – A substance whose proper operation is the act of understanding; includes angels and human beings.

**intellectual virtue** – A praiseworthy intellectual habit, e.g., prudence, knowledge, art.

**irascible appetite** – An aspect of sense appetite; desire for victory, honor, status, revenge.

**irrational animals** – Nonhuman mortal living beings.

**love** – The act of will by which the good is desired when it is lacking (imperfect love) and in which the good is possessed when it is present (perfect love).

**metaphysics** – The study of being as being. Metaphysics usually investigates the nature of God, angels, human souls, and forms.

**moral virtues** – The four good moral habits: prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance. Also called “cardinal virtues.”

**natural agent** – A plant, animal, or basic element that seeks an end without requiring consciousness of the end.

**natural appetite** – Appetite found in things “lacking knowledge entirely”; appears to refer at least to plants but perhaps also nonliving beings since “all things desire to be.”

**nature** – The essence of a being considered as the principle of activity. Also the substance of a thing as distinguished from its properties, considered as the source of its operations. Nature is also definable in contrast to its opposites from a variety of viewpoints. In contrast with God, it is the created universe. In contrast to the life and operations of divine grace, it is that to which a human person has claim, as creature, as distinct from a share in God's own life, which is the supernatural.

**operation** – Related to habit; an activation or actualization of a habit.

**passions** – The eleven human emotions below the intellect and will, such as anger.

**person** – A suppositum (see below) with a rational nature.

**pleasures of the flesh** – Concupiscible pleasures associated with eating, drinking, and sex; contrasted with pleasures associated with irascible appetite (Plato's *thumos* or “spirited principle”) and with the intellect or rational part of the person.

**proper good** – The good toward which a being of a certain type naturally aims, given its highest and most essential characteristic.

**prudence** – Equivalent to Aristotle's practical wisdom; the intellectual habit enabling its possessor to deliberate well and make prudent choices; prudence is only found in persons who possess the moral virtues.

**quidditas or quidity** – “What-ness.” The essence of anything, answering to the question “What is it?” In scholastic terminology, it is the definition of something.

**rational appetite** – Thomas’s definition of the will; found only in beings with an intellectual or rational nature.

**secondary perfection** – The use of a moral or intellectual virtue; the virtue itself would be a “first” or “primary” perfection.

**sense appetite** – Appetite found in beings with “sensory knowledge,” by which Thomas seems to mean the capacity for acquiring information by means of sense perception.

**speculation** – The operation of pure knowing; another name for contemplation.

**substance** – A being whose essence requires that it exist in itself. It is an *ens per se* (a being by itself) or *ens in se* (a being in itself). It is commonly distinguished from an accident, whose essence is to exist in another, that is, in a substance.

**suppositum** – An individual substance. If the suppositum is gifted with reason, it is called a person; otherwise it is called a thing.

**ultimate end** – That toward which an agent tends, which is not a means (for that agent) toward any further end.

**understanding** – The faculty with which one contemplates what one knows. In humans the understanding is also the faculty with which we inquire, deliberate, choose, and acquire knowledge. Deliberating and choosing are practical uses of the understanding. Acquiring scientific knowledge and contemplating what we know are speculative or theoretical uses of the understanding. See intellect, intellectual substance.

**vice** – A bad habit.

**virtue** – A good habit.

**will** – Rational appetite for the end. Thomists recognize three types of appetite in human beings: rational (the will); irascible (appetite for honor, status, glory, revenge); and concupiscible (appetite for possessions and pleasures of the flesh). The degree to which one is morally virtuous determines the degree to which his will is rightly oriented. Three acts of the will must be distinguished: desire, love, and delight.

## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>i</sup> *Summa theologiae* Ia, q. 1, a., ad 2.
- <sup>ii</sup> *Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 90, aa. 1-4.
- <sup>iii</sup> Aristotle, *De Anima* iii, 4. cf. *STh* I, q. 79, a. 2.
- <sup>iv</sup> The Averroists held that the active intellect was God and was the same in all men. See *Metaphysics*, Book XII, ch.7-10, in which Aristotle appears to equate the active intellect with the “unmoved mover.”
- <sup>v</sup> Aristotle, *De Anima* iii, 5.
- <sup>vi</sup> Psalm 13:1.
- <sup>vii</sup> Exodus 3:14.
- <sup>viii</sup> Nearly all scholars believe that the works attributed to Dionysius the Areopagite are the pseudonymous writings of a Christian Neo-Platonist. The origin of these works is not our interest here. We shall merely refer to him as the Areopagite.
- <sup>ix</sup> Thomas Aquinas holds that good angels can know nearly all things since, after the fall of Lucifer, all good angels see the beatific vision of God’s essence. The evil angels do not have the beatific vision, so they know much less.
- <sup>x</sup> See Thomas Aquinas *De substantiis separatis* for more details.
- <sup>xi</sup> *City of God*, 14, 3.
- <sup>xii</sup> *Concerning the Old Testament*, 113.
- <sup>xiii</sup> *Summa theologiae* I, q. 63, a. 5, ad 2.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus* 246a-254e.
- <sup>xv</sup> Incidentally, Plato saw the “concupiscible horse” as ignoble and the “irascible horse” as noble. See *Phaedrus* 246b.
- <sup>xvi</sup> *Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 23, a. 4.
- <sup>xvii</sup> *Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 25, a. 1.
- <sup>xviii</sup> *Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 24, a. 1.
- <sup>xix</sup> Incidentally, children are disciplined by appealing to their passions. Rewards or punishments are set forth in order to habituate certain acts, such as saying “Please” and “Thank you.” When adults dispose children to right action, they are preparing them to be rightly submitted to right reason when they are older. This is called “good parenting.” If a parent does not dispose a child to right actions, then the child is said to become “spoiled.”
- <sup>xx</sup> *Summa theologiae* I-II q. 55 a. 4. See Augustine, *De libero arbitrio*, 2, 19.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Plato, *Protagoras* 330b.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Cicero, *De Inventione* 2, 53.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Augustine, QQ. lxxxiii, qu. 61.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae* x.

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- xxv Aristotle, *Ethics* vi, 5.  
xxvi Aristotle, *Ethics* v, 1.  
xxvii *Summa theologiae* II-II, qq. 7, 114-119).  
xxviii Cicero, *Rhetorica ad Herennium* ii.  
xxix Aristotle, *Ethics* iii, 10.  
xxx *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 142, a. 4.  
xxxi *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 1, a. 8.  
xxxii *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 1, a. 10.  
xxxiii *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 23, a. 7-8.