**St. Thomas Aquinas’ Synthesis**

**Taught by Brother Brian Dybowski**

**Class Summaries #1 through #34**

**Note: Page references in the Class Summaries refer to the textbook prepared by Brother Brian Dybowski for a philosophy class taught at the College of Santa Fe. The full title of the textbook is Thomistic Synthesis: The Philosopy of St. Thomas Aquinas, His integration of Speculation with Revelation, A Sketch of the Central Dynamics of This Blueprint for Western Civilization**

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**St. Thomas Aquinas Class Summary #1: 8/25/12**

**General Introduction: Situate His Thought in Our World**

Most people never heard of Thomas. But he designed Western Civilization. He solved the major problems that crippled older and larger nations. Seven hundred years ago he stated difficulties clearly, so he could clear them away. After clearing major problems, he tackled medium and minor ones, showing how everything fits together. This success enabled other thinkers to expand yet further, and the rest is history. Without him, our ancestors would have languished, as many other civilizations do. Thomistic thought enabled our ancestors to achieve marvels. Let’s call the time of those achievements the High Middle Ages, 1250-1450. Thinking advanced so far that living conditions improved markedly. These improvements enabled the Renaissance, with its unmatched masterpieces. As we gaze at the artifacts left behind, we gape in awe. The cathedrals, palaces, bridges, sculpture, mosaics, music... These dazzling details flowed from even more awesome philosophic and theological thoughts. Compare those achievements to ours.

No serious person would accuse us of artistic excellence. Rather the reverse. Instead, most people drudge along in deep depression. Many of them seem to be one jolt away from suicide. Our high suicide rate is the hard evidence of general social failure. People kill themselves because they’re profoundly unhappy. In the Middle Ages, suicide was so rare that people had to rationalize it. They had to suppose something extraordinary. They claimed that the devil made them do it: diabolic possession. People of the Middle Ages lived right next to death from war, pestilence, and famine. But they were so happy with their advance toward God that they almost never committed suicide. Nor were many of them addicted to the available drug: alcohol. What made this tremendous difference? Thomas had a lot to do with the relatively happy, suicide-free, Middle Ages.

A quick sketch shows several oppositions between then and today. Then the Church had recently overcome barbaric invasion. From the late 300’s through the 700’s pagans defeated Rome’s armies, and destroyed civilization with savage ferocity. Italy suffered 21 waves of invasion. During these Dark Ages, the Church converted and civilized the invaders. Monks Christianized the barbarians, and gradually educated them. Eventually, monks established universities. Starting around the year 1000, higher education emerged from monasteries, where monks preserved learning securely. Universities shared, spread and developed profound meaning and value for the people attending, mostly monks. This Greco-Roman learning civilized ex-barbarians. University education trained younger monks to replace older ones, and to expand learning more widely. Because reading and writing was rare, cathedrals conveyed meaning and value through sculpture, stained glass, and pictures.

In summary, this prodigious 600-year educational effort transformed pagans into Catholics. These converts realized that they were sinful. But God loved them so much that He sent Jesus to save them from their sins. Their convictions were rough, but solid in Christ’s message through the Church. What a difference from our general condition today. It’s fair to say that the West is de-Christianized, in the wake of de-Catholicizing it.

**Conversion Changed the Barbarians**

Sin remained to plague everyone in the 1200’s. But leaders followed a plan, urging people toward Jesus. Converted barbarians loved Holy Mother Church. They strove to die in the sacraments (confession and extreme unction), and relied on Mother Mary to ease them through death. Even the most heinous criminals sought repentance at the end. Ultimately, the Church inspired and guided them. It was the Age of Faith. Thomas organized the blueprint for expanding this structure. His work grew from universities to the whole Church. So he is responsible for many good effects throughout Christendom. He inspires us to overcome today’s barbaric attacks.

**What Must We Do to Comprehend Thomas’ Work, and Apply It?**

Thomas thought and wrote in Latin, sharpening its highly developed distinctions, expanding its vocabulary, and improving its logic. But Latin is beyond us. So we learn English equivalents. Today’s common understanding of these equivalents differs markedly from what Thomas means. So we must clarify our English vocabulary to approximate what Thomas meant. There are many terms to clarify. But a dozen will get us started.

Then we must think as Thomas thought. He was much more logical than we are. He was much more attuned to reality than we are. So we must stretch a bit. Fortunately, Thomas is very consistent. So we need only a dozen realistic thoughts to follow his arguments. Above all, we must convince ourselves that evidence should guide our thought. Today, most claims float in vague supposition. They are power-terms that gain entry to the guild of power-seekers who control some area you want to enter. That process is not philosophy. Instead, we need reasons to say something. This is a huge shift for us. But we must shift to evidence to keep up with Thomas. Test each statement against evidence. Find reasons to say something. Those reasons must be in your personal experience. This is hard work, but it’s what we really want. When we find reasons, we really appreciate our conclusions. Thomas says clearly what we experience vaguely. To understand this is like coming home!

To seek reasons, Thomas had to emerge from the Platonic view popular in St. Augustine’s work. Among Church thinkers, Augustine led the way about 900 years before Thomas. Augustine is very convincing, but acknowledged that his synthesis was more poetic than philosophical. The basic reason why is Plato’s limited method. Plato used analogy. It’s a quick method, but dirty. Plato could not unify his system because analogies float in vagaries. They relate things, but can’t determine ultimate truth. E.g.: a beloved wife is like a lily. Very poetic, but not very accurate. A beloved husband is like a lion. Same problem. Analogies leave us impressed, but wondering. Reasons settle our doubts. They provide firm foundations for personal experience.

In Plato’s closing years, his student Aristotle solved Plato’s problem with analogy. Aristotle invented logic. Everyone uses logic, but Aristotle formalized its basic operation. With adequate terms for each logical function, he traced logic at work, and perfected this trace to clarify all fundamental sciences. Then he cleared Plato’s difficulties away. Aristotle produced the very first synthesis of all Greek knowledge.

A synthesis changes the elements it unifies. Our example is you synthesizing food. You eat breakfast. In your stomach, you digest this food. You absorb a lot of it, and exhaust the remainder. What you absorb becomes you. It is not tacked on like a band-aid. You synthesize the food by changing it into you. Some of it becomes muscle, some kidney, some blood, some bone. These structural elements remain for quite a while. Some of the food you synthesize becomes glucose (blood sugar), which remains only a short while. You burn it as fuel for muscle movement and other physiological activities. This example shows a synthesis analyzing food into basic parts, then re-unifying them into your life. Philosophy synthesizes when it flows from observation into sensory information, then unifies that information with you. If you begin with what God reveals, analyzing and synthesizing that, then you’re doing theology. In either case, your synthesis lives in you. That’s thrilling!

First, Thomas learned how Aristotle synthesized Greek knowledge. Islamic thinkers in Spain showed how Aristotle achieved this unity. Islam attacked Christianity from both sides of its territory. So no one appreciated them except Thomas and a few other university professors. Thomas distinguished between the many Islamic soldiers and the few Islamic scholars. These Moorish professors brought Aristotle’s thoughts to Spain in Toledo. Aristotle died in 322 BC but his thoughts live on. Western universities had Aristotle’s logic, but no other of his books. Islamic scholars had all Aristotle’s books, translated from Greek to Syrian, and then to Arabic. Much was lost in these translations, but many Islamic philosophers profited from the scraps they got. They provided some of these intriguing scraps to venturesome scholars in Toledo. What Thomas heard from them made great sense to him. So he thought the world accurately, as Aristotle taught in his Logic. Guided by fragmentary knowledge from Islamic scholars, especially Avicenna, Averoes and Avicebron, Thomas resurrected Aristotle. He wrote what Aristotle would have said in his various books. This audacious interpretation, without the actual books, aroused great interest among Western scholars.

William of Moerebecke, a fellow Dominican, walked from Paris to Alexandria to check Thomas’ version with the Greek originals. They matched. This established Thomas as a great philosopher. But it was just a warm-up for greater events. At our stage of development, we will follow by short steps to the ultimate synthesis of philosophy with theology.

**First Steps on the Way to Ultimate Synthesis**

Remember to relate everything to your personal experience. Dwell upon them to be sure that you know basic realities. In the back of your mind, you know you need learning tools. They enable you to learn accurately. Eventually, you speed up accurate learning, and each step is more delightful. The names for these tools are: to know: logic; to express: grammar; to practice: math; and to organize emotions: fine arts.

We also find good things, which we value. If we produce tangible artifacts, we do art/crafts. If we produce good acts, decisions, choices, then we do ethics, which expands into social and political activity.

To isolate meanings for sure, or with certitude, we develop sciences. Modern science is application of math to measures. These give us relatively sure relationships. We can also do natural sciences, which provide more certitude, by taking more regular parts of what we observe, and leaving behind what varies incidentally. These are the sciences Thomas learned from Aristotle. We will look into abstraction (taking the more reliable, and leaving the incidental) in some detail. It is our usual way to think, but we don’t talk about it.

**St. Thomas Aquinas Class Summary #2: 9/1/12**

**A Sketch of how we think**

Thomas insists that our experiences are most important. But we can interpret them in many ways. Philosophers offer hundreds of interpretations. Thomas evaluated dozens available to him, and saw Aristotle’s was the most accurate. Tools of learning come first: the liberal arts. Logic enables us to find the universal, or the *uni*=one; *verso*=turn = the one around which all the others turn. Our English expression is “variation on a theme”. Each dog differs from each other dog. But all differences turn around the same “dogging” of each dog. We naturally universalize. Our minds necessarily work that way. Each dog is a dog, but no cat is a dog. Universals separate different kinds of beings. Once we think a universal, we define it. Once we have two defined universals, we relate them in a mental proposition: cats are not dogs. Once we relate two properly related propositions, we draw a conclusion: Cats are not dogs. Dogs bark. Cats do not bark. Logic lives in our minds.

Once we think those things, we want to express them. Verbal expression requires words, related by rules. Words point toward the mental universals we cherish. Words are wonderful. It’s amazing how much we convey by them. Unfortunately, no words quite express our universals. Language always frustrates us. Heidegger said it well: words are like veils, which reveal what’s beneath, but also hide it. Having nothing better, we use words. Each has its own history, as the Oxford Dictionary relates. Rules for combining words form grammar. Polishing grammar to increase persuasion is rhetoric. Practice applying liberal arts to real things is complicated. So it’s easier to apply our arts to mere mathematical relationships. Math is imminently logical, has its own grammar, and even elegant rhetoric. Math is so extensive that we never finish it. It imitates reality, without messy complications necessary for real things. Those arts refine the mind. What about emotions?

It’s obvious to us that our emotions often run wild, causing great pain. The Fine Arts integrate emotions. Music is perhaps the most obvious integrator. It calms the savage breast. Perhaps you have your favorite calming tune, or symphony, or rhapsody. These very names convey music’s power to reorganize emotions positively. Paintings, sculpture, dance, and poetry also coordinate emotions into relaxing and pleasing harmony. Many people are so sensitive to Fine Arts that they live for them. Whatever your own interest, the arts can help. Each artifact emphasizes beauty, showing the brilliance of lovely sounds, sights, or motions. This emphasis balances the harsh mix of beauty and ugly in ordinary life. It lifts our souls toward Beauty.

Beauty is Good. When we find Good, we strive for it. The goodness or value of each being is a dimension we distinguish from the truth of each being. The being is one, and its truth is its goodness, which is its beauty. But we separate truth from goodness and from beauty to see each one more clearly. This separation allows us to appreciate each one more dearly. By this division, we enjoy each one more delightfully. So we deal with value separately. There are values that we produce. We make tangible things, from meals to computer programs, by arts and crafts. These factive products get their name from *factio*=make. But we also make ourselves. Our acts make us what they are. Our decisions determine our behavior, which forms our character, or our ethical being. Individual ethics shapes moral beings. Together, moral beings determine the morality of the *socios*= gathering, group, or society, and the *politicos*=acting group, or deciding group, or government.

Usually, Americans don’t distinguish these basic kinds of knowledge. Instead, we get right into making money, improving society, ruling people, or other exciting activities. It’s like entering a Nascar race before learning to drive. No wonder we crash so often. Thomas did not deal with the arts of learning directly, since his young students (16 years old) already knew them. Thomas developed morality in great detail, both in natural ways and in light of Christ’s revelation. What we make ourselves by our choices is most important to us.

At last, we arrive at finding meaning. Once we can use our tools, have control of our powers, and are morally aligned with our destiny, we wonder how things work. Our great desire is to know for sure, or certainly. Science is certain knowledge. If we know scientifically, we know what is as it is, and cannot be otherwise. As soon as you hear that, you’re likely to say that is impossible. Listen to yourself. You are certain that you can’t be certain. Thomas took every human being seriously, and would reason with you about your position. Eventually, you would realize that you can’t be certain that you can’t be certain. Moreover, you can’t remain undecided, because you certainly do remain undecided. Confront the popular prejudice that certitude is impossible. If you do, you realize that certitude is rare, but it’s ours. How can we expand our certitude, or science?

The most popular method is by measurement and mathematical relationships. However, measurement is never certain. It varies, shifting back and forth, like temperature changes. Climate change is always happening. Heating and cooling trends characterize the earth. Certitude must come from something else. Indeed, even modern mathematical science rests upon the certitude of observation, logic, and its application to quantity: math. But modern science seldom gets this far toward expressing its roots. Instead, it bounces from one technical marvel to the next. This bounce shows that it is ephemeral. Experts who discover important relationships, like quarks, find mathematical science unsatisfying. So we note a popular approach to certitude, and move on.

Philosophy provides real certitude. The process is universalizing, which we will examine more intently. All universals are general, leaving details behind. The dog, as dog, is neither black nor white, nor any other color to be found among dogs. To universalize “dog”, we must ignore variations within dogs, to find what each and every dog does. This is the one around which other dogs revolve by being different colors. Size similarly varies, as does shape. Gender is less variable, with only 2 possibilities. But dog, as dog, is neither female nor male. When we leave details behind to select the one central act around which details whirl, we abstract. Again, Latin roots account for the English word: *ab*=from; *straho*=take. When you take the universal from the swirl of specifics, you abstract. Abstraction takes some effort, but you do it hundreds of times a day. You’re an expert.

Ordinary abstraction moves from the specific being to the general being. Seeing a strange dog, you ask “what kind of dog is that”. Usually, you know it’s some kind of dog, but you have never seen that breed before. If you’re in doubt, you ask “is that a dog?” You’re sure that it’s an animal. This shows how natural abstraction is: you do it all the time. Once the dog’s owner identifies its rare breed, you know another variation on the dog theme. Starting with material beings, we leave specific material limitations behind, to focus on the general material limitations, in this case, of dog. Our most obvious material limitation is the space that the being occupies. Since it’s our starting point, the science of change from place to place is our oldest, and best developed science. We call it physics, from the Greek word for “stuff”, or matter. Because it’s just space-occupying stuff, or body, that we consider, it’s easy to measure, and fit into mathematical formulae. But we don’t have to do that to do physics. First degree abstraction is most often about bodies moving from place to place.

But abstracting from specific to general material limits applies to a more difficult change: from one kind of substance to another. A simple example is burning paper. The paper is one type of substance, the gas and ash remaining after burning are obviously other types of substance. Substance means a being which is as it is on its own, once it’s created. In Latin: *sub*=under; *stare*=stand. So whatever stands under its own power is a substance. Most substances continue to stand under their own power for quite a while. Others stand pat only for a while. Eventually, they all change. This substance-change led Plato to reject real beings. They must be illusions, since they don’t stand pat. Aristotle thought through this objection. First, our experience can’t deny that paper burns. Then, we must find some account of this obvious change. Aristotle noted that the amount of ash remaining was directly proportion to the amount of paper burned. The weight of the unburnt paper, and the gas and ash remaining turns out to be the same. So the amount of matter remains the same. But the activation of that matter is obviously different, from paper to gas and ash. This analysis of intelligible parts of a substance remains for all such chemical changes. It’s the basis for doing chemistry. It’s highly abstract, but it works.

More abstract still is growth and reproduction. The living substance increases from inside. A dead lump of clay increases size from outside, by adding clay. But a living being transforms what it eats into itself. By some chemical changes the organism grows. The difference is astounding: cells expand from nutrition. More astounding still, organisms reproduce. A zoo full of animals, and a world full of plants grow and reproduce. Aristotle and Thomas noticed that this first degree abstraction is harder to feature, but we manage.

Our final abstraction is yet more difficult. Living beings (organisms) demonstrate their awareness of other beings. The dog chases prey, catches, and consumes it. During the chase, the prey attempts evasive motions, and the dog adapts. All organisms are aware in some way. This change from one awareness to another is psychology. Our natural sciences known by first degree abstraction range from relatively easy changes of bodies from place to place (physics), to changes from substance to substance (chemistry), to changes from size to size (by nutrition/reproduction) (biology), to awareness changes (psychology). In the psychological range of awareness, we see that plants are aware merely of objects. They move along gradients of the objects they need to obtain light, water, and nutrients. They do not move to better locations. But animals do, showing that they are aware of objects, and of their relationships to objects. Humans are aware of these two basic things, plus themselves. Humans are self-aware. They illustrate this self-awareness by questioning themselves, wondering why they wonder as they do. This self-awareness launches them into spiritual activities we shall see next.

**St. Thomas Aquinas Class Summary #3: 9/8/12**

**Our Spiritual Activities**

Because we know that we exist, and question why, it’s obvious that we reflect upon ourselves. This awareness of self is fascinating. Often, we delight in knowing that we know. If we tried to apply mechanics to this experience, we would say that we stand outside ourselves looking at ourselves doing what we’re doing. If you refer to yourself so intimately, you must totally escape matter. The best that matter can do is fold over part of itself. Eg a sheet of paper can fold one half over the other half. But it can’t totally reflect upon itself, because it is limited by its space occupation. So knowing yourself is an excellent example of your spirituality. Only a spirit can self-reflect. You are fully aware of yourself being aware. True, you are not fully aware of all you can do, but that’s a different problem. Your full awareness of yourself sets you apart from all other organisms.

Your spiritual activity expands to question how you can manage to be self-aware. You also spend lots of time wondering about many of the things you know. You can probe into how you learned something, what you learned about it, and what else there is to know about it. When you consider your mother, you find many things you learned, most of them so early in your life that you can’t determine the day. Spirit expands so extensively that you can’t confine it. This blessing is the heart of Thomas’ teaching. You already know so much that you can’t list all that you know. Every separate knowing, or idea is so full that you can’t number all the individuals it includes. By sensing a limited individual cat, you abstract the catting of that cat, and you have the catting of all cats. This is a virtual distinction. You do it in virtue of your mind. You separate the catting of the cat from the individual cat virtually. You could actually separate the cat from its catting, if you killed it. But when you know, you identify with the immaterial catting, without harming the material cat.

All material creatures provide some activity, like catting, limited by some restrictions, or matter. You dispose of the material restrictions virtually, to abstract the universal activity. You do this hundreds of times a day, without thinking twice about it. When you focus upon your abstracting, you see it more clearly. Thomas notes this abstracting, and races all its variations. Because we do it first, and most obviously, we call abstracting from individual limits to general limits: first degree abstraction. Check it out! The catting of the cat is generally limited to material beings, but not specifically limited to any given size, shape, weight... Most people are so comfortable doing first degree abstraction that they want to stay there.

However, all people do second degree abstraction as well. Everyone counts: 1, 2, 3... So everyone escapes from general matter into immaterial relationships. The number two is related to the number one by being twice as many. Twice as many what? Twice as many anything! Moreover, it’s just twice as many, as pure relationship. Now 2 becomes scary for many people. It’s freedom from any material creature bothers many people. Other people delight in this freedom, and prefer relationships to material limitations. Plato is a fine example of a person who preferred math to reality. An example of math’s freedom from matter is the square root of 2. It’s a relationship that doesn’t depend on matter to be understood. To exist, it would have to be material, but you can think it, manipulate it, and delight in it without relating it to any material thing. This 2nd degree abstraction is good practice for our ultimate abstraction. Therefore, the Liberal Arts employ math to free up our minds.

Don’t worry is math scares you, or if you never advanced beyond arithmetic to algebra. You still do 3rd degree abstraction. That’s where our destiny is. When Aristotle invented logic, or formalized the logic that everyone uses all the time, he clarified all the abstractions we do. First, we abstract general material from specific material being: 1st degree. Then we abstract more general relationships from general matter: 2nd degree. Then we abstract being itself from relationships, to do 3rd degree abstraction. First, we get the catting of the cat. Both the catting and the cat require material limits. The catting requires limits to make sense, and to exist. Second, the twoness of 2 cats requires limits to exist, but not to make sense to us. We understand 2-ness without reference to any matter. This refreshing excursion into spiritual being can be delightful. Some people find it scary. But everyone does some math. Everyone also does 3rd degree abstraction, to break entirely away from matter into the being of the cat, which is the same as the being of anything. This being depends upon matter neither to exist nor to make sense to us (be understood). Now we arrive at our true home. We get into spirit as spirit. Here we find God. There are other 3rd degree abstractions, but we skip over them rapidly, because God is so good.

**Aristotle’s Way From Theoretical God to Actual God**

Plato’s analogy read: from shadows to cat; cat to Cat (Ideal); Cat to One. This could be, but remained theoretical. Surely it is theoretical because the 15 year old boy who weighs 150 will not become the actual 30 year old man who weighs 300. Aristotle had adequate proof that shadows were actual absences of light, with regular changes (lawful size changes), and cats were actual beings. The ideal Cat is a real human’s real abstraction. But it exists in the human who knows cats. It is not beyond creation. At base, everyone knows that God exists. Around the age 7, each person proves God’s existence to himself. Aristotle knew that God would be Pure Being, or the actual Being found by 3rd degree abstraction. What Aristotle needed was definite connection to personal experience of external reality. Then Aristotle could move from belief, through probable existence of God, to solid proof that God exists. Everything has God’s fingerprints all over it. But Aristotle found the most obvious and definite proof in the most observable change: motion.

Change is the most obvious of all activities in creation. Change distinguishes the sciences. Our most obvious change is motion, or bodies changing places. Aristotle analyzed motion, and followed that motion to its necessary source. Then Aristotle had proof that God is the necessary being, the source of motion. Thomas noticed the same differences, and made the same distinctions. Aristotle made a virtual distinction, just like our 1st degree abstraction of “catting” from a living cat. Thomas, lacking Aristotle’s expression of this distinction in his book Physics, figured it out for himself. You did the same, but did not identify the distinction. If I mention it, you see it immediately. It’s the difference between not-yet moving and already moving. You’re familiar with a body at rest. It is not yet moving at all. When it begins to move, it is already moving from its former location to another place. Keeping this distinction going with the motion is your great achievement. Instant by instant, the moving body was in one place, but quickly passed through it to another, and so on through many places. Stop motion photos catch the moving body in a set of these places. The moving body continually changes place as it travels. Motion requires a body, and an act to move it. Focus upon a rock, as a prime example.

While the body moves, it has not-yet arrived at its next position. But as we watch, it already moves to that position. It’s easier to think this process than to express it. It’s even easier to see this process. So watch a body move through several positions, until you really “see” it move. Then you can conceive of that motion. As your conception clarifies, you can say something about what’s happening. Words aren’t as clear as ideas. You think more clearly than you speak, as you have often noted. So you want to focus on the motion. Then notice your experience of that motion. Finally find the virtual difference between the body not-yet in its new position, and the body already there. The not-yet is a limitation. Since it is not something, you can’t see it. But you notice that bodies are not-yet where they go. This act of overcoming this limitation is something. It’s something positive, but it’s not the body. So you need to separate it from the negative not-yet, and the positive body. Clearly, the body is the substance, or being which exists on its own. The not-yet moving is relative to the movement. Each of them is relative to the substantial body. The not-yet moving and the actually moving are virtual beings, which exist in virtue of the motion. They are what you know about motion by thinking. Once you make this distinction, you join Aristotle and Thomas, as they discover the key to creation.

Aristotle’s analysis, resurrected by Thomas, flows from this single distinction. As a body moves, it advances from not-yet at the next location to actually there. This flow continues as long as the body moves. If you dwell upon any given motion, then abstract, you see all motion. Every step of motion is the moving body going from a position, which is not-yet the next position, to the next position. It actually gets there. Activation carries it on to that location. This is the key. You universalize from any movement to all movement. Once you understand the universal, you can express it in a definition. Not-yet is a bit awkward, so we call it potency. Actually is a bit long, so we call it act. Then, **motion is the act of a body in potency, as long as it is in potency**. That universal expression escapes from specific restrictions that limit all individual motions. It is therefore more reliable than any definite motion. It frees us from all restricted movements. We now know motion as it is itself.

Rocks need movers to move. But don’t cats move themselves? In fact, they do, once their movers get them started. Then cats, and other organisms, shift gears from resting to moving. But all organisms need movers to initiate their lives. Mom and pop cat must start the motion. So we know that nothing moves itself. Whatever is moved is moved by another. The universe is full of changes; change from one location to another is activated body changing place. This is the central happening. Focus now on any given moving body.

Whatever moves that body is either moved by another or not. If it’s moved by another, it needs a mover. Back an uncounted number of steps, we must find a mover not moved by another. Without this necessary being, no movement can happen. When Aristotle found this Pure Act, utterly without any not-yet (potency), he was astounded. Men call this Pure Act God. He necessarily exists. He accounts for the motion we observe.

**St. Thomas Aquinas Class Summary #4: 9/22/12**

**How St. Thomas Uses This Act-Potency Distinction**

Thomas noticed that Pure Act, the Unmoved Mover, or God, is the most real of all real things. Around us, we see many mixtures of act and not-yet (potency). They all leave one partly-activated state to another. Each change overcomes some not-yet, which momentarily impedes the motion we see. A body advances from its former place to its subsequent place. Local motion is a puzzle for us to solve. We solve it by noticing it is a flow from not-yet to actually moved. The Pure Act gets motion going. Each of us found Pure Act when we were about seven years old. Naturally, we did not call it Pure Act. Once we demonstrated the necessity of this Creator, we relaxed in creation. Nothing serious bothered us for some years. Secure in His care, we explored His products, delighted to the max. In later years, especially adolescence, shocks destroyed this delight. Each of us endured his personal trauma. Each of us adjusted differently. If we can recall our first demonstration of Necessary Pure Act, we re-live the innocent delight of emerging into creation, fresh to our young eyes.

If we can’t recall, and reenter fresh creation, we can limp forward, no matter how wounded we are. Even if we must look through our pain, we notice that Pure Act is necessary. He must initiate myriad motions around us. His necessity sustains all the non-necessary beings that we see. Non-necessary beings are contingent. This word combines Latin *con*=with, and *tingo*=I touch. This combo expresses the divine touch of creation. With this touch, the creature now exists. Creation means making something exist from nothing. Creation does not use raw material. Only Pure Act can create. No creature can create. Instead, creatures can rearrange what God creates. Creatures can manipulate His pre-existing creatures. We are mere image and likeness of our Creator. When we delight in rearranging things, we imitate God’s more magnificent work. Another feature of creation that helps us realize we can’t do it is: the creator must sustain whatever He creates instant by instant. As creation is on-going, and our attention is not, clearly we can’t create. Only the Being Who is Fully Act, without any not-yet (potency) suffices to create the changing beings we observe.

Once Thomas analyzed bodies moving from place to place, he discovered the difference between act and not-yet (potency) This distinction opens creation to ultimate analysis: showing the necessity of Pure Act. Of all Thomas’s discoveries, this is the most productive. A few examples of this production appear in his *Shorter Summa*, or summary of his master-work. It begins: “Regarding the unity of the divine essence, we must first believe that God exists. This is a truth clearly known by reason. We observe that all things that move are moved by other things, the lower by the higher. The elements are moved by heavenly bodies. Among the elements themselves, the stronger moves the weaker. Even among the heavenly bodies, the lower are set in motion by the higher. This process cannot be traced back into infinity. For everything that is moved by another is a sort of instrument of the first mover. Therefore, if a first mover is lacking, all things that move will be instruments. But if the series of movers and things moved is infinite, there can be no first mover. In such a case, these infinitely many movers, and things moved, will all be instruments. But even the unlearned perceive how ridiculous it is to suppose that instruments move, unless they are set in motion by some principal agent. This would be like fancying that, in building a bed, the saw or the hatchet performs its functions without the carpenter. Accordingly, there must be a first mover that is above all the rest. This being we call God.” 9

“We clearly infer from this that God, who moves all things, must Himself be immovable. If He, being the 1st mover, were Himself moved, He would have to be moved either by Himself, or by another. He cannot be moved by another, for then there would have to be some mover prior to Him, which is against the very idea of a first mover. If He is moved by Himself, this can be conceived in 2 ways: 1) that He is mover and moved in the same respect, or 2) that He is a mover in one respect, and moved in another respect.

“The 1st alternative is ruled out. For everything that is moved is, to that extend, in potency (not yet moving), and whatever moves is in act (already moving). Therefore, if God is both mover and moved in the same respect, He has to be in potency and in act in the same respect, which is impossible. (A being can’t both not-yet move and already move.)

“The 2nd alternative is also impossible. If one part were moving, and another were moved, there would be no first mover Himself as such, but only by reason of that part of Him which moves. But what is *per se* is prior to that which is not *per se*. Hence here cannot be a first mover at all, if this perfection is attributed to a being by reason of a part of that being. Accordingly, the first mover must be altogether immovable.

“Among things that are moved, and that also move, the following may also be considered. All motion is observed to proceed from something immobile, ie from something that is not moved according to the particular species (kind) of motion in question. Thus we see that alterations, generations, & corruptions occurring in lower bodies are reduced, as to their first mover, to a heavenly body that is not itself moved according to the species (kind) of motion, since it is incapable of being generated, but rather is incorruptible & unalterable. Therefore, the 1st principle (source) of all motion must be absolutely immobile.” 10

*Bro. Brian’s comment: Thomas gives a reason that is perfectly reasonable. Unfortunately, we may not follow his reasoning. Perhaps this account will help: if you move a pencil, your motion is quite different from the pencil’s motion. So it is a different kind of motion. For short, philosophers say it is a different “species”, meaning any kind of anything. It’s an easy step to take. But we need to know the direction in which to step. Thomas then turns to all types of motions: all types of changes. These include chemical and biological changes. They too advance from not-yet altered to altered. They go from not-yet generated to generated; from not-yet corrupted to corrupted. They all boil down to activating the not-yet activated. The act-potency distinction is the basic pattern of all change. Therefore, the riot of changes we see must come from a being beyond all change. The reason for His being beyond is that He’s fully activated. As Pure Act, there’s nothing more to do. Considering places, He’s everywhere. So he can’t go anywhere. So He’s immobile. Thomas explores more about God:*

“The further conclusion is evident: that God is eternal. For everything that begins to be, or that ceases to be, is affected in this way through motion, or change. But we have just shown that God is absolutely immobile. Consequently He is eternal.”

“The same line of reasoning clearly shows that God necessarily exists. For everything that has the possibility of being and of not being, is mutable. But God is absolutely immutable, as has been demonstrated. Therefore it is impossible for God to be and not to be. But anything that exists in such a way that it is impossible for it not to exist, is necessarily Being itself, *ipsum esse*. Necessary existence, and impossibility of non-existence, mean one and the same thing. Therefore God must necessarily exist.

“Moreover, everything that has a possibility of being and of not being, needs something else to make it be. As far as it itself is concerned, it is indifferent with regard to either alternative. But that which causes another thing to be is prior to that thing. Hence something exists prior to that which has the possibility of being and of not being. However nothing is prior to God. Therefore it is impossible for Him to be and not to be. Of necessity, He must be. And since there are some necessary things that have a cause of their necessity, a cause that must be prior to them, God who is the first of all , has no cause of His own necessity. Therefore it is necessary for God to be through Himself. 12

*Comment: being is our usual word for actually existing. Non-being is our simple way to say not-yet existing. So this demonstration logically unfolds what the act-potency distinction means. As you think the difference between already and not-yet, you see all these relations that Thomas mentions. Your mental words are much clearer than any language words. The miracle is that language words point rather effectively to mental words. Therefore, we communicate. Each of us is in the image and likeness of the Word.*

“From all of this it is evident that God exists always. For whatever necessarily exists, always exists. It is impossible for a thing that has no possibility of not being, not to be. Hence such a thing is never without existence. But it is necessary for God to be, as has been shown. Therefore God exists always. Again, nothing begins to be or ceases to be, except through motion or change. But God is absolutely immutable, as has been proved. Therefore, it is impossible for Him ever to have begun to be or cease to be.

Likewise, if anything that has not always existed begins to be, it needs some cause for its existence. Nothing brings itself forth from potency to act, or from non-being to being. But God can have no cause of His being, since He is the first Being. A cause is prior to whatever is caused. Of necessity, therefore, God must always have existed.

“Furthermore, whatever pertains to anyone in some other way than by reason of an external cause, pertains to him of himself. But existence does not come to God from any external cause, since such a cause would have to be prior to Him. Therefore God has existence of Himself: *per se ipsum*. But what exists *per se* exists always and necessarily. Therefore God exists always.

*Comment: Thomas shows that God is forever the same, as Pure Act, must be utterly simple (together), so that his essence is to exist. All this is what you know when you know Him as Pure Act. How magnificent!*

**St. Thomas Aquinas Class Summary #5: 9/22/12**

**Advantages of Aristotle’s Synthesis for St. Thomas, & for Us**

Aristotle synthesized all Greek knowledge. What is a synthesis? The word reflects a person making a *syn* = with *thesis* = statement. The synthesizer fits statements together. Some such fittings produce poetry, to delight & inform. Aristotle’s synthesis united all major truths that Greeks knew. This synthesis is like a living organism, because every part mutually reinforces every other part. E.g.: your lungs inhale oxygen, and exhale carbon dioxide. That oxygen reciprocally oxidizes glucose, to nourish each lung-cell. These cells serve every other cell in your body. We summarize this process by saying that your soul activates all that happens in your body. How all that works is still under investigation, but you’re sure that each cell contributes its bit to your overall health. Similarly, Aristotle showed how every truth worked with each other one to reinforce them all.

All this reinforcement flows through observable change, which is fundamentally act and not-yet interaction. Every motion requires an actor to initiate the change, as we noticed. This “act”-“not-yet” dynamic is the center, or the *uni* = one, around everything *verso* = turns. It is the universal activation. Knowing that universal enables us to unite all truth into a living unit. Aristotle’s system is less clunky than an organism, and less vulnerable to damage and death. When Thomas reconstructed Aristotle’s synthesis, he could finally unify all philosophy. If we imagine what a synthesis looks like, act overcoming not-yet is the heartbeat of the system. It’s the most central understanding for Thomas. As a preview of coming attractions, it’s also the center for Thomas’ more complete synthesis of philosophy with theology.

So the positive act, overcoming the negative not-yet is center to see the whole wholely. That’s wonderful! But it’s so different from what we usually think that we may have to reflect a bit. We learn by interacting personally with what’s happening. The more we interact with individual changes, the more we learn how basic (universal) change works. When we throw out specific limitations on the more fundamental happening, we abstract act, the universal behind all motion. That’s relatively easy, because act is positive. It’s happening out there with every change. Not-yet is more difficult, because it is negative. It is nothing of itself. It is totally virtual as it is. For most people, it’s too abstract. But once we abstract to it, we see its necessity. We thereby solve problems that plague philosophers down the centuries. Sad to say, most philosophers fail to solve the problem of change. When you do, you join an elite group. Aristotle and Aquinas wait to welcome you into this group. They anticipate your personal experience of act and not-yet (potency).

By understanding act overcoming not-yet, thinkers recognize the necessity of the Original Act. This Pure Act, lacking nothing, is in no way not-yet. Only such a being could create. Only such a being is entire. Only such a being makes sense. Only such a being satisfies our deepest longing. Aristotle overcame Plato’s problem, as we shall see, by knowing act and not-yet (A-N). By logic, Aristotle surmounted the weakness of the analogical method, and found the Necessary Pure Act. Knowing the Creator solves our most basic problem. After that, subsequent problems are minor, and relatively easily solved. By contrast, people who do not solve this most basic problem remain frustrated. No one wants to be forever frustrated. Everyone wants to figure out act and not-yet. All advantages follow from that. Thomas excelled precisely because he built from this base.

**Historical Sketch of Thomas Resurrecting Aristotle**

Chapter 2 of our text shows the steps from identifying the necessity of Pure Act to thinking differently. All people abstract in 3 ways. They identify the act of bodily creatures first, so this is the 1st degree of abstraction. Everyone also does math, which is further removed from material limitations, as the 2nd degree. Each of us also thinks of being beyond relationships, in the 3rd degree. However, we seldom distinguish these degrees, and hardly ever talk about 3rd degree abstraction. It’s so far removed from material limitations, that we call it separation. On one hand, we do it often, but on the other hand, it scares us because the prime separated being is God.

He is so complete, so real, so different from passing material things, that we often panic at the thought of Him. Yet He is our Source and Our Destiny. He is our most desired friend, our greatest love. However, we can’t find His love by philosophy. Aristotle considered Him to be way beyond all material creation. We contemplate Him, but He ignores us. Only Christ can complete our view of God. Only Christ is revelation in the flesh. But Aristotle lived 3 centuries before Christ’s revelation. We who know what Jesus revealed are way ahead of Aristotle. We need to separate our theology from our philosophy. Look at Pure Act without Christ’s teaching, and the merely metaphysical God is far away and unresponsive. Aristotle assumed that Pure Act activated a pure spirit, which activated less pure spirits, and so on for 56 spirits before the last spirit was so impure that he could create the material universe. This emphasis upon the transcendence of God is reasonable, but foreign to us, who bask in the imminence of God that Jesus reveals. Think back in time to identify with Aristotle.

Then fast-forward through time to see that Alexander the Great expanded his empire throughout the known world. Alex died young, and his successors strove to be “number one”, plunging Greece into ruin. The Romans took over the world, and reorganized it. This world is the territory around the Mediterranean Sea, which became “our lake” for Romans. During the 500 years of Rome’s corporate existence, she grew from a coalition of neighboring tribes into a mighty empire. But inner decay brought Rome down. The evidence for this is the sack of Rome in 410 AD. Barbarians roamed the land. Some Roman legions stationed far away came back to protect parts of Italy for a while. After a while, barbarians destroyed Roman rule. The world descended into darkness. We could say the Dark Ages began in 410, and extended until 1000 AD. There’s reason to say the Dark Ages continued until 1200. Whatever the date, 6-8 centuries were dark.

The only light during this time came from Followers of Christ. Known as Catholics since 107, when St. Ignatius of Antioch so named them, these people built monasteries, where men could focus on God. Monks advanced from several centers into barbaric lands. Since almost every land was in barbarian hands, this task was immense. Benedictines did most of this converting, aided by Celtic monks from Ireland, and Orthodox monks from the East. It was a glorious several centuries. The result was an almost entirely Catholic Europe. Everyone considered the Church “Holy Mother”. Everyone went to priests for guidance. Only some kings refused council from bishops. The Pope emerged as spiritual ruler of all Europe. He often settled national disputes.

By Thomas’ time, most of Europe was Catholic, though most of the people were still rather barbaric. Church leaders were embroiled in practical disputes, especially protecting Catholics from marauding Muslims. This was not the time to resurrect Aristotle, tainted as he was by Muslim learning. But Thomas did it because Aristotle provided the greatest light available. Though many of Aristotle’s conclusions were errors, his foundation was solid. Albert the Great taught Thomas Aristotle’s logic, and general world view. Thomas filled in the blanks to reconstruct Aristotle’s unknown books. See pp 16-17 for a few of the errors Aristotle promoted. Focus on Aristotle’s main points: logic, Pure Act, and the metaphysics that follows from such an unlimited being. That’s what Thomas did, with magnificent results.

Inspired by Aristotle’s synthesis of speculation (from *speculo* = I see), or natural reason, Thomas decided to expand it to include revelation. Speculation arises from observing nature, and produces philosophy. There is no end to speculation. But the main points can be learned rather quickly, and the rest is icing on the cake. Thomas realized that speculation is not complete, the main issues are settled. God’s revelation, coming more directly from God, can protect & guide speculation. What God reveals enables us to do theology (*theos* = God; *logos* = science). Because we can do some of each, and they interrelate, the 2 must synthesize. Thomas noted that the truth is ultimately one, so philosophical and theological truths must combine.

Thomas fit speculation and revelation together into unified knowledge, the Thomistic Synthesis. It is an integral whole, each part mutually enlightening each other part. Thomas was a theologian on his knees, a contemplative whose prayer-life infused his writings. When asked how he learned all this, Thomas acknowledged: “at the foot of the cross”. Thomas did not share his prayer with us, but he did share the results of his prayer in his writings, both philosophical (commentaries on Aristotle’s books), and theological (commentaries on Scripture, and his summaries of conclusions from revealed truths).

Since we can’t read Thomas’ lengthy presentation to find his synthesis, we show a few steps to follow to see his unification. As we noticed by analyzing motion, God created the world. History also provides the man Jesus. He revealed God to us by His life. Christ also revealed God by His teaching. Between the two, we have revelation in its clearest form. God provides both creation & revelation. So they must reinforce each other. It’s un-godly of God to contradict Himself. These 2 sets of truth must synthesize. 18 In prayer, Thomas saw this clearly. He let reality be in him as it was in itself. That’s how to learn. Having learned that Pure Act is the unifying center of Aristotle’s synthesis, Thomas noticed that Pure Act was God. But God reveals.

If we had considered Pure Act and God to be separate, we should correct that error, and see that the same Being is center of speculation and revelation. These centers merge. Synthesis follows as the night the day. If that’s too abstract for people, Thomas notes that truth is the center of speculation, and Jesus called Himself The Truth. Here’s a more palpable identity of the unifying centers of philosophy and theology. So when we see clearly, we see that the unification of speculation and revelation is obvious. How about that!

**St. Thomas Aquinas Class Summary #6: 10/6/12**

**A Synthesis Unifies Everything, in General : Text, starting on page 19:**

Once Thomas recognized that the core of Aristotle’s synthesis, the integrating point, was Pure Act, he realized that everything in that synthesis relates to that point. All changes are variations of act overcoming the limits of not-yet. All parts of the synthesis reinforce each other by interacting. Thomas saw the same dynamic in revelation. From Abraham through the prophets God leads His people through a mass of confusing events. Expressing them is even more confusing. These accounts of faith-development through covenants with God puzzle us until Christ “explains the Scriptures”, Lk 24:27; 24:32: 24:45. Indeed, Jesus said that Scripture “spoke of him”, Jn 5:39. Christ is the integrating point, the center of revelation. He is revelation in the flesh. St. John emphasizes, Jn 1:1-10, that Jesus is the Logos, the Word of God Act. Thomas saw revelation synthesized in Christ. Then Thomas recognized that Christ is the Pure Act. Therefore speculation and revelation synthesize on the same point. The dynamic of each is the same, so the same Act activates all knowledge.

Our part of this immense synthesis is to know and love God. God built us to enjoy perfect ecstasy in perfect harmony with Pure Act. Along the way to eternal ecstasy, we enjoy partial ecstasies, ending all too soon. But each of them reminds us why we exist: to freely glorify God by knowing & loving Him through His gift of Christ-life. Our free choice to accept Jesus enables clarity, and satisfaction through supernatural faith, hope, and love. After advancing this way on earth, we enjoy eternal ecstasy in union with God.

The Devil is in the details. Indeed he is. Details confuse and discourage us. That’s why philosophers and theologians focus first upon generalities. We observe maddening changes. But the universe remains unified. It is a single system. It is the largest creature, the *uni* = one, around which all creatures *verso* = turn. Everything revolves around and in the universe. The fact that everyone conceives the universe shows that everyone thinks big. All of us think as large as the universe is. Unfortunately, we don’t think consistently. But we can be sure the universe exists. When we delve into details, we find existing beings cease to exist, and new ones come to be. Even the universe once did not exist, as the Big Bang shows. Details come and go. The Devil is in the details, because we get fiendishly confused. But God is in reliable generalities. He’s also in details, making them exist.

Yet people murmur. Under their breath, they complain about details that won’t behave, that won’t fit in generalizations. As we noticed, many of Aristotle’s conclusions were false. Murmurers use those errors to attack all of Aristotle’s work. Thomas saw through those minor problems. First, Thomas admitted they were problems, then Thomas corrected some of them. Thomas left some uncorrected. So even his synthesis has errors that people could murmur about. But murmuring wastes time. It’s better to identify an error, then correct it. If I can do neither, I should keep quiet. Complaining discourages me, and others, and improves nothing. We shall compare a few murmurs to solutions, to clarify the Thomistic Synthesis.

**Change**

For sure, change confuses us. Certainly, we’re mired in change. Without a doubt, it’s hard for us to manage things that change. Variation plagues us. That’s why Aristotle and Thomas concentrated upon change. It is problematic, but it also enables us to know. Both of these synthesizers recognized: As a thing is, so does it act. Its change identifies it. Its very activity is what it is. This is a huge source of understanding, so we call it a principle, from the Greek *princeps* = head. As ideas flow from the head, so conclusions flow from a principle. Our hairy old example is cat. Variations of cat abound. But they all rotate around the simple “catting” of each and every cat. Since we can’t express this activity any better, we call it “catting”. Everyone abstracts this one central act from the mass of incidental activities we see in cats. It’s the simplicity behind the diverting diversity exhibited by the unending supply of cats. Any single cat also suffers unending change, initiated by glorious birth, and terminated by inglorious death.

Perhaps the “catting” of cats is too abstract. Consider, instead, the water, evaporated by sunshine into fog, rising into cloud, blown against a nearby mountain, where it rains. The water runs down the mountainside, and empties into the sea. Behind the uncounted details of changing water is the simple water-cycle. All change, however superficially confusing, boils down to a simple pattern. This pattern is a condensed set of steps that applies to all superficial changes, with incidental variations. We abstract by removing incidental variations to see the core change, which is constant. Thus we find regularity behind confusing change.

The name for our process is wonder. Children wonder most obviously and simply. You know what wonder is, but can’t express it. A few pointers include: wonder opens to what’s happening, allowing change to change us. As we become the change, we evaluate it to see what part of the change is not necessary. Since water evaporates every day, no specific day matters to evaporation. Since evaporation temperature varies, we know that no specific temperature, within its range, is necessary for evaporation. Since you do all this quickly, we pass over it quickly, to conclude that wonder includes remembering like events, and abstracting what is constant from many variations. Then you are one with the inner pattern, the regular, reliable change at the center of water evaporation. This identity is the reason for certitude. There’s no mistaking what’s happening, when you know it. Often we can’t tell the difference between knowing it, believing it, remembering something about it, and imagining it. To help distinguish between these possibilities, you know that water is wet. Use that as your criterion for whether you know or believe. You must believe that you will live after you die. You remember that a politician said he would serve you, if elected. You imagine knowing all about St. Thomas.

Our goal is to know the basics of Thomistic thinking as we know that water is wet. To get there, we must dig into our deep experiences. Then we abstract basic patterns. The most basic is that all change is the activation of something that previously was not yet. When we really know that motion is the act of a body that is not yet finished acting, we are as sure of that as we are that water is wet. Then we follow Thomas closely. Then we identify with the truth we know. This identity came easily to Adam and Eve before they ate that apple. After the apple, their children have trouble learning truth, and even more trouble loving good. Instead of simply opening ourselves to truth and goodness, we try to impose our wills upon everything. Original Sin is rebellion.

That’s why we end up with fragments (p 23). To see the whole wholely, we must let go of fragments, and wonder about all that’s happening. Aristotle did it first, then Thomas did it. Both were philosophers, or lovers of wisdom. Unfamiliar as we are with wisdom, we struggle to emerge from practical thinking about the parts partially. If we extend ourselves toward the whole, we leave the crowd behind. That’s dangerous, but rewarding. The reward is increasing insight, deeper knowledge, and eventually the synthesis. At this synthesis, we find each bit of knowledge reinforcing every other bit. All these truths are good. The central truth is the central good, or God. Therefore, we often refer to Truth and Goodness Himself. There is no better reward.

**Helpful Hints From Human Understanding** (p 24)

Because all this is so different from daily activities, repetition helps us accept these strange principles. First, change is the basis for understanding. Second, as a thing changes so it is. Third, we learn what-is by changing as it changes. What-is is what it is by changing in its natural way. Water wets naturally. All water wets what it touches, even though water’s other qualities vary a lot. When we let water be as it is, it is as it is in us. Then we are certain of what it is. Certitude is important because most of our neighbors deny certitude. They raise obnoxious objections to all truth. To protect our pursuit of truth, we review knowing.

A piece of paper is as it is all by itself. It continues to exist even if we lose track of it. It subsists once it exists, until it ceases to subsist. So we call it a substance. The world is full of uncountable substances. We know millions of them. Take paper as an example. We know it. Somehow we are identical with it. Bodies can’t manage identity. Bodies always remain separate from each other. Only spirit unites, because only spirit is free of boundary limits. This is the law of impenetrability of matter. So our knowing is some form of spirit-ing. It is doing in our knowing way what the paper does in its material way. The papering of the paper papers our spirit. Obviously, it does not paper our matter: we do not become paper materially. Instead, our spiriting spirits as the matter-less papering papers. Out there among pieces of paper, the papering is common to all the limited pieces of paper. The same commonality exists in our spirits. This spiritual papering spiritually papers our spirit.

Once we understand papering, we can produce paper at will. We so know it, that we can make it on a desert island. Spirit escapes limitations, so our spiritual knowing enables us to manipulate wood to separate its cellulose fibers, combine them with water, pour them into flat containers, let the water evaporate, and produce paper. We don’t care about the technology, only about the proof that we become paper when we know it. From this becoming, we can produce paper, should the need arise. Our knowledge is transportable precisely because it does not occupy space, or suffer other limitations, like time. Spirit escapes limits, p 25. When the spiritual act of any being activates us as it is, we now act as it acts, so we are as it is. We are what we know.

We are what we know without ceasing to be what we are. Knowing a sheet of paper does not reduce us to an 8.5 by 11 inch page. So you are the paper in a different way than you are yourself. You are yourself substantially: materially and spiritually. You are the paper intentionally: only spiritually. Thinking this way joins us to Thomas, so that we can think more as he thought. It’s also great for other purposes, since it’s thinking reality.

**St. Thomas Aquinas Class Summary #7: 10/13/12**

**A Synthesis Unites Our Familiar Acts: Starting on page 25:**

Generally, we memorize lots of facts, then use them to answer specific questions. Eg: we remember the day of the week. When Ed asks what day it is, we say Saturday. Fact-answers satisfy almost all needs. Remembering is relatively easy. It summarizes active creatures activating us (p 25), so that we and the acts are one. Memorized facts are supremely useful, and right at the tip of our tongue. If we can’t find a fact first-off, we search our storehouse of memories, and usually find it fast. If not, we look it up in some reference collection. This process suffices for most needs. If we recognize that facts are abstractions from experience, we see along with Thomas. First the cat activates our senses. This sensory identity enables us to know the cat’s appearances. Appearances suffice for most of our needs. Next we abstract from appearances to find meaning. That is intellectual identity with the universal “catting” of the cat. It completes our cognitive reception, or knowledge. We know the cat as the cat is, because the cat’s being is its activity, which activates our senses, and then our intellect. All we do is abstract, or drop activities specific to some cats, and retain activities universal to **all** cats.

If we see the difference between facts as they exist in substances outside us and facts as they exist in us, we distinguish between substantial being and intentional being. Eg: the catting in a given cat activates a given amount of matter, with all its intrinsic limits for that cat. Our knowledge of the catting of the cat activates us without the given cat’s matter (limits). It’s the exact same catting, but is spiritual rather than material in us. As a quick check of the evidence, when we know the cat, we don’t gain the cat’s weight, become its color, grow fur and a tail. This difference is obvious to us. We consider it here because our education imposes on us a false notion of knowledge. This false theory is mechanical, emphasizing light rays, nerves, brain activity… All that falderal is so confusing that we can’t follow Thomas. So let’s divest ourselves of our false education. It’s true that the mechanics occur, and are sometimes useful for healing. But none of those mechanical steps reaches from matter to consciousness. Failing to emerge from matter into spirit (consciousness), our learned men insist that material mechanics **is** consciousness. Intellectuals commit themselves to this principle: if it isn’t mechanics, it does not exist. That principle eliminates knowledge. But we have personal knowledge. In spite of our education, we are sure that machines know nothing. Pressed to this point, some professors insist that computers do know, so **there**! Recalling this impasse, you remember how heated our experts get. If logic fails, pound the table! You know their exhausting argument through step after mechanical step. And you know that it fails to explain our knowledge. Thomas explains it by **the** central principle: act determines being: as a thing is so does it act. If you are so papered by knowing paper that you can make paper from scratch, you must **be** the paper. Similarly, all genuine knowledge is the known’s act activating the knower. So activated, the knower **is** the known.

As Thomas did, we must give the devil his due, and admit that our analysis skips the mechanical steps. These steps can help medical personnel cure injuries and congenital defects. The point is not to denigrate either process, but to integrate them. That is Thomas’ way, difficult as it is. Take all facts into account. As we account for all the facts, we admit that we know things, like cats, that we cannot produce, like paper. So our demonstration of knowing paper by producing it is limited to products. What about cats?

Failing to produce cats does not mean we don’t become cats by knowledge. Thomas uses an indirect demonstration to show this (p 26). Its short form is: if you deny that knowing cat is being cat, then what do you mean by cat? If you insist that your knowledge is just properties like the black color of that black cat, then what about white cats? You see immediately that this indirect demonstration shows that every person must refer to the activity of the cat, and must have it to refer to it. If they are so activated, then they **are** the cat, in the intentional way of being. If a person is not identical with the catting of the cat, then the most he can say is: “What are you talking about?” If he attempts to deny that I am identical with the cat’s catting, he claims to know what I know, and to know that it’s wrong. Most thinkers avoid these claims like the plague. Instead, they say that there’s a difference between my knowledge of the cat and the cat. The thinker thereby admits that he knows both what I know and the cat. Then he compares them, and finds a difference. Behind his bluster, he’s using his identity with my knowledge and his identity with the cat, to identify with their difference. 26

But Thomas already did that, and noted that the cats’ activity activates the material limits in the cat, and activates my mind (spiritually) in me. That’s a difference whose activity the objecting thinker is identical with. If he denies it, then what is he talking about? This extended examination may help us realize that even people who deny identity of knowledge, use it to deny it.

Another dodge is to claim that knowledge only approximates the known being. If so, how can this thinker know the known being, to see that knowledge only approximates it? It’s exhausting to consider these details, but exhaustion is not demonstration. Giving up, because we are tired, is not knowing. Thomas finishes the knowing project by integrating everything around the Pure Act, Who activates creatures like cats. That activation is an echo of Pure Act. In His image and likeness, we vibrate to His act, through this echo. The basic reason why knowing is so delightful is that we vibrate in harmony with Pure Act. Since He is Love, we love His loving us through any activity we know. Learning is a foretaste of heaven. Thanking God for His act that activates us, and becoming increasingly activated by this activity is bliss. What integration! What a synthesis!

**How Liberal Arts Liberate Us**

If we knew what Thomas’ students knew, we could skip this section, because we’d be fully prepared. But our education skipped this truly important teaching. So we review the liberation that education could provide. It’s not difficult, because the school of hard knocks taught us the basics. With a few examples, and some consistent terms, we can identify our hitherto unnamed learning. Certitude is identifying with the action of the known being. But we have many doubts about learning. Like Plato’s hero, we’re shackled in the dark cave, with a few shadows on the wall. 29

Consider any learning you achieved. You remember that you found some order, or a pattern, or a plan, that summarized the general action common to all the confusing variations on that act. Your success is the result of logical analysis. Everyone uses informal logic. Formal logic improves our natural uninformed logic by clarifying and systematizing what we naturally do right. System prevents logical fallacies, thereby increasing our accuracy and speed. Logic removes many doubts that once bogged us down. Free from these restrictions, we succeed more often, and enjoy thinking more.

The Greek word *logos* points to a dozen important meanings. First, logos means word. But the word that is true is the most valuable, so logos stands for truth, and for the truest of all words: science. To Thomas, science was certitude. This is the opposite of modern science, which is probability, due to self-correcting measurement. Certitude is identity with what is, as it is, and because of what it is. That’s strange to us. But it follows directly from identity with the known. If I am what I know, then I am certain. Science adds to this certainty the reasons why the thing is as it is, and cannot be otherwise. For Thomas, science is not only being what the known is, but knowing why the known is as it is, and no other way. That improves measuremental science, which is hypothesis-testing, or successive approximations of what’s happening. This form of learning is what Thomas called dialectic. It can find facts and relationships. Logic tells us the difference between probability and certitude by identifying causes. First, we find regular relationships. Behind these regularities lurk causes. If we tease them out, we learn the cause. Then we can be certain that a cause will produce its effect.

Thomas finds causes so often, that he appears to be angelic. As we read Thomas, we see him finding causes. That sight sharpens our ability to dig out causes. So reading his works teaches us logic. As we learn it, we think more accurately, quickly, and easily, which is delightful. Once we learn logic, we progress to expressing it accurately (grammar), then expressing it convincingly (rhetoric). These are the Big Three, or *Trivium*. 30 They liberate our basic abilities. After learning them, we apply them to arithmetic, astronomy, geometry, and music (*Quadrivium*). These arts are ideal because they are all mental, requiring no material. So we can do them quickly and easily, solving many problems in a short time. After a brief review of logic, p 31-37, we find that we have been doing it all our lives. Thomas does it so perfectly that we never notice it; it never intrudes on his discussion. He applies it seamlessly, without distracting from learning what he teaches. This encourages us to dive into his work. To clear the way for this dive, we learn his basic principles, define his basic terms, and emphasize his dynamic understanding of creation. Then we can follow all his teaching.

Thomas updated Aristotle’s references to liberal arts, but presumed that his 16-year-old students were proficient in them. We are not proficient, but can remember bits and pieces of these arts, learned in life’s hard knocks. If we coordinate them we can launch with Thomas into philosophy and theology.

**Summary:** in the *Trivium* logic clarifies our thinking; grammar clarifies our verbal expression; rhetoric clarifies our combination of sentences into convincing arguments. The *Quadrium* practices these Big Three in mathematical relationships, 2 of them purely math (arith. & geom.), and two applied (astron. & music). Had we grown up with these Big Seven arts, we would have progressed more smoothly. Still we can progress, & shall.

**St. Thomas Aquinas Class Summary #8: 10/20/12**

**A Synthesis Is necessarily Logical: Starting on page 31:**

Remember, we are experts at informal logic, or problem-solving. But we can solve more problems by formalizing our solving process. As we read Thomas, his free-flowing logic may stump us. Because we’re not accustomed to his strict argument, we wonder where his conclusion came from. Therefore, let’s do Logic 101.

Remember: you are logical. But trash-thinking is so common among us that we fall from our logical level into the power-struggle around us. Mostly, we want short-cuts, and zingers that blow opponents away. If we play the power game that way, we destroy the competition. Alternately, we play the “soft” power game of appearing nice at all times, from all angles, but still get our way. Neither method fits our innate dignity. Thomas endured such attacks during public debates. But he rose above them by personal interest in his opponents, respecting them even if they disrespected him. In high school you discovered that this noble approach usually left you crushed and gasping. In spite of that experience, we want to learn Thomas’ way. So we take opponents seriously. The first logical step is to find what these opponents mean by terms they use. When you seek a definition for “abortion”, for example, you discover that opponents insist it’s “freedom of choice”. This discourages you, and may convince you that your opponents won’t really discuss. In most cases, you’re probably right. So we must add to Thomas’ logic a previous principle: discuss with people who will discuss. Don’t shout with those who aren’t discussing. Shouting matches accomplish nothing. It’s wrestling with pigs.

If you find someone serious about discussion, listen to their spiel. Most people are pent-up because no one has listened to them in years. Such a repressed person will pour out his guts, and relieve himself of so much resentment that hours may evaporate. Thomas would listen, and maybe buy the gusher a beer. The first step toward logic is to assure the person that you respect him, and want to know his position. If he unloads dozens of positions, ask which is most important to him. One position at a time is another logical step.

In the flood of words, find his important one. While he’s resting from his spiel, ask whether he means that abortion kills a living human. He may deny that vehemently. Then ask what abortion means. This respectful drive toward definition seems like a great waste of time. But remember that respect is rare among us. So he must test the reality of your respect. That takes time. Once the person sees your real respect, he may unload another grievance-list. OK. Hopefully, he calms down, and gets to a real discussion.

A real discussion requires defined terms. Abortion does stop the life of the unborn. Is the unborn human or just a mass of cells? Is the human a person at the time of death? Here people can use Thomas against us by insisting that he taught that there are vegetable, animal and rational souls, in that order. They are indeed in that order in nature. But each being has only one soul from start to finish. Therefore, Thomas would define the unborn offspring of a human mother to be human. Come to think of it, what else could it be? This is so distressful for baby killers, that they must distract us. They claim Thomas didn’t know modern biology. That’s a fact. We who can see sperm and ovum unite, in technicolor moving pictures, have more facts, but the same definitions. After thrashing out these distractions, we define abortion as killing a human being. We define human as a rational animal. Person is the being’s agent, or intelligent decider and doer. Intelligence is the act of universalizing. Universalizing is abstracting the action from distracting variations. Notice how important your work on Thomas’ terms has been. Some weeks ago, these words would mean nothing, or very little, to you.

Thomas reminds us that each definition has a deeper pattern: a general group to which the defined being belongs, and a difference that sets it apart from the group. Each of these parts is better known than the defined being. In the case of abortion, the general part is killing. Since we can kill many organisms, we need to specify what we kill. It’s a human in the inter-uterine developmental process. These necessary parts are the genus and specific difference. Each should be more general than the thing defined, therefore better known. A full definition would include the four causes of the being, but we’ll skip that in Logic 101.

With key terms properly defined, the discussers know what they’re talking about. Such agreement is so precious that achieving it tends to thrill people. The lasting value of this formalization is that it fits all definitions. First, clarify all key definitions for yourself, then you can share them with others. If they’re shared, discussion can proceed. The next step is to relate defined beings to one another as they actually relate. If we know what evil is (the absence of the good that should be there), we can affirm that: Abortion is evil. This relationship is true, and very important. Abortion is the absence of the life that should be there. Notice the clarity shining from simple logic! The way to more truths lies open. The relationship is a distinction between the related beings, followed by their real connection: abortion is evil.

Each distinction expresses a human judgment. Each definition expresses a human universalization. Now that we’ve used these processes a few times, with consistent names, we clarify basic logic. How we achieve accurate judgments? On the way to the process, I notice that my desires are usually illogical. So an important logic rule is to set desires aside when judging. Instead, judgments should express experience with the beings. If that experience is lacking, we can either get it (which may be impossible in the time available), or seek it from one who has it. This is the usual approach. We seek an expert. Sad to say, many experts lie. After a few sad experiences, we realize that rich people hire experts to promote rich interests. Getting true judgments is not easy, but well worth the effort. Thomas has more true judgments than anyone else except Jesus. We learn from both.

They teach us that we combine and contrast new judgments with older judgments that are more obviously true. What is true is true all around. Truth forms a synthesis by agreeing with all other true distinctions (judgments). All synthetic judgments mutually reinforce each other. They shine light upon each other. If we find a contradiction (one judgment directly opposing another), one of the contradictories is false. If we find differences, both judgments can be true, and need adjustment in some way. The simplest adjustment is to find the definitions used for the differing judgments. If these definitions differ, differences follow. An example is the definition of murder. One definition is “a human kills another human being”. Another definition is “a human being kills an innocent human being”. The difference is vast. By the latter definition, self defense unto the attacker’s death is not murder. By the former definition, it is. Self-defense = preventing an attacker from killing the defender. You see that proper definitions prevent confusing self-defense with murder.

True judgments follow more readily from logically clear thinking. Moreover, we can generate true conclusions from previously known true judgments. Eg Abortion is evil. Ed procures an abortion. Therefore: Ed does evil. The famous syllogism enables us to use true, related, judgments to find a true conclusion. Many of these conclusions are new to us. Such reasoning is our main way to learn. We call it demonstration. For now, we leave demonstration with this simple description. Now that you’re alert to it, you will find demonstrations throughout Thomas. He is the prime practitioner of proof by demonstration from evidence.

Because of his respect for opponents, Thomas always asked why each one came to any conclusion. If the reason warranted the conclusion, Thomas adopted it. That’s why he adopted many of Aristotle’s conclusions. For a thinker, a conclusion is as true as its supporting reasons. These reasons are expressed in judgments, joined in a valid syllogism. We will not examine invalid syllogisms, which abound. You can find them, and accounts of what’s wrong with them, in standard logic texts, like *Formal Logic*, by John Mourant, published by McMillian. It covers traditional logic. Leibniz expanded logic into symbols. George Boole (1815-1864) and Augustus de Morgan (1806-1878) expanded symbolic relationships. After that, many contributions established a mathematical logic. You can find a good description in *Symbolic Logic*, by L. Susan Stebbing, published by Harper.

Thomas used traditional logic, which is enough for us. Fortunately, each of us, without formal logic, has thought the main thoughts common to all humans. We can logically develop them as Thomas did. An example is stepwise progression from any obvious thing to its more universal basis. If a robin flies by, you realize it. You identify with it as a specific, individual robin. It lives only a short while. So the more reliable known being is “robin” as such, or the species. But robins could become extinct, leaving more other birds. Your logical process advances from the given robin to robins “robining”, to birds “birding”. Notice that birds are more general, more universal, therefore more stable. They are less dependent upon details that specify a given kind of bird. You universalize, or abstract, on your own. In the rush of life, we still know these more enduring levels of existence. That’s comforting. No wonder that philosophers love to dwell upon these more reliable universal ways to be.

Behind bird is animal, including birds and other organisms. Basic to animal is body, including animate and inanimate space-occupiers. Body is less reliable than creature, including bodily and spiritual beings. Finally, creatures don’t have to be, but being must be. As children, we delighted in following a given robin back to its basis in being. We even realized that the original being must be everything all at once. Since everything includes person, we might call it Being. A few exercises like these show us that Thomas is doing what we did before we got confused with the power-game. Yes, Thomas speaks in unfamiliar terms, and does logic in unfamiliar ways. But we can familiarize ourselves with logic, and discover that Thomas is doing what we love to do. If we return to basic logic, we can follow his steps, and learn what he means. More importantly, we learn why.

**St. Thomas Aquinas Class Summary #9: 10/27/12**

**From Logic to Science: Starting on page 34:**

Logic never ends, but we move on to apply it. You say that you see motion. Check that thoroughly. Do you actually see motion? What color is it? What size? Instead, you see a body moving. So we can’t see motion itself, only the moving body. Motion is a fine example of an immaterial being. It’s an activity which doesn’t occupy space. Nor can we see, hear, smell, taste, or feel it. It is non-sensible. Thomas saw this and distinguished between what-is and what occupies space. With practice, we can too. It takes practice, because most of our activity is manipulating space-occupiers, or bodies. Most of our speech is about manipulating bodies.

Dwell in the difference between activity of material bodies and the bodies themselves. Then you see that activity is some kind of being, but is not material being. The most interesting things are immaterial. Sensation starts our knowing process. Aristotle: “Nothing is in the mind that was not first in the senses”. After sensing, you abstract from immaterial sensory-activity to the more completely immaterial meaning-activity. That’s satisfying. What’s we love is immaterial. But immaterial activities can overwhelm us. There are so many and so various that we confuse them. Confusion about immaterial activity of matter can damage us.

But identifying with these immaterial activities satisfies us best. That’s why we pursue the Thomistic Synthesis. After all, our destiny is to be with God, the Ultimate Spirit, in full-blast spiritual union. When we’re totally active on Total Act, we’re totally satisfied in ecstasy.

Reflections on immaterial being show us that some beings exist, and some don’t (p 34). Among those which exist, some activate matter, and some don’t. Among nonexistent beings, some could exist, and some could not. Among those that could exist, some once existed, and others have not. This is logic at work, distinguishing clearly. You can provide all sorts of examples for each kind of being. The most important Being is God, Whose existence is the necessary cause of unnecessary (contingent) beings: creatures. Consider the analogy of vibration standing for existence. Then, God is all vibration, in utter simplicity. Creatures are partial vibrations. They are complex. Indeed, the simplest of them all, angels, are compounds of how-they-are (essence) and that-they-are (existence). We’re even more compound because both our essence and our existence are further complicated by matter. To be human is to be spirit-matter, or acting matter, or spirited flesh. That-we-are (existence) is also spirited flesh. Jesus taught us that our eternal existence will be resurrected flesh, thoroughly spirited, so we can do what He did after Easter.

Like kids at the zoo, we romp around the Thomistic Synthesis, never quite seeing it all, but delighting in flashes of insight. Logical skills enable us to see more. 35 Once in, we find that Thomas is strictly logical. That means that he defines his terms at the start. These definitions express the immaterial meaning that we know, but seldom say. Notice that immaterial meaning is not nuts and bolts, cannot be measured, and therefore is not part of modern science. Today’s science limits itself to mechanical parts. Instead of knowing the being, scientists measure it. No wonder that scientists pine for meaning, and frequently admit that their achievements mean nothing. They agonize, and often cry for help. So we don’t want to make their mistake. We won’t limit ourselves to mechanizing what’s happening, measuring it, and fitting mathematical formulas to measurements. This process starves the human mind, so we avoid it. Like the plague, we avoid it.

Modern thinkers also continue DesCartes’ mistake. He called his thoughts real, while doubting everything else. This mistake is too harmful to indulge. It’s quite tempting, because our thoughts are identical with objects known. This is a good reason to confuse our knowledge of the birding of the bird with the bird itself. Another good reason is that we organize our thoughts into artificial systems, or theories, that are often more orderly than the real world. We can ignore difficulties, and produce highly-ordered schemas of reality. They satisfy more because they avoid reality’s actual problems. However, the real world imposes itself upon us through the cloud of theory. So we eventually must change our thoughts, making them coincide with the ongoing activity we seek to know. To live in reality, we must be realistic.

E.g. penguins “bird” by flying in water, but can’t fly in air. Bats “bat” by flying in air, but are not birds. So we must adjust to what’s happening, 36-37. We must abstract, judge, & relate judgments as acting as beings act. We express these acts in definitions, statements & demonstrations. By practice, we improve, advancing toward Thomas’ high standard. On the way, he encourages and guides us. 37 In reality, things fit, as if they were folded together. In Latin, fold = *plico*, and together = *in*, which we change to “im” to say implicate. Our delight is to ex-plicate, or unfold what’s folded together. When we explicate, we explain. That’s our glory, as image & likeness of God. Explication includes definition, judgment, and demonstration. Doing this takes split seconds. Talking about it takes much longer. This delay bothers us, but we can use it to develop effective conversation. Remember that Thomas explained in public debate. He slowed down to talk persuasively. So can we.

When we think, we unfold what-is into its parts. This is analysis. These parts can be mechanical, if we need to manipulate bodies effectively. But those parts which are more interesting are immaterial: the inner workings of beings. These inner activities are more fundamental, more reliable, and more satisfying. Often we are so tired after analysis, that we stop thinking before we complete our thought by putting the parts back together into the whole that’s happening out there. 38 That’s synthesizing, and completes thought.

In summary, our romp through the Thomistic zoo provides five realizations. They require our attention because we usually skip them. 1) Change is the key to reality. 2) As a thing acts, so it is. 3) We know a thing if and only if it does to us what it does to itself when it is what it is. We are what we know. 4) If we know a being, there is no difference between what that being is and what we know it to be. 5) The known being, if it is material, differs from us by its own material limits, or its body. The known being, if it is immaterial, differs from us by its different existence. To now an angel’s essence is to be its essence intentionally. But the knower is not the angel’s existence. These basic principles distinguish Thomistic thinking from most of our learning. If you activate them logically, you’re ready to ramble through the Thomistic Synthesis again, more intensely. 38

**Chapter 4:Further Distinctions**

Scientists insist that science is measured mechanics. This notion limits science to successive approximations by hypothesis testing. Science must be self-corrective because this method is mostly error. This old notion fails to attain certitude. Instead, each measurement is an error, requiring error-minimizing by statistics. Both measuring and minimizing are confusion. Most practicing scientists don’t even understand these methods. Nor do they understand how to test guesses, or hypotheses. So they disappoint themselves. Thomas does something completely different. Once we see that difference, we emerge from confusion into confidence, even certitude.

To express emerging, we use words. Science is a fine example. Scientists say that they measure objectively to get lawful formulas. Actually, measurement is necessarily error-ridden. Statistics minimizes errors in complicated and obscure ways. Worse still, measurement is totally outside the thing we want to know. It can’t get inside to the thing’s act. It precludes knowing by confining itself to a measurable surface.

By contrast Thomas says that science is certitude. Certitude means that what we know is what the thing does. What it does is what it is. So certitude is identity with the known’s act. Thomas expands this to knowledge of the reasons to be. His science is so certain that the being can’t be otherwise than as we know it to be. All of us want just that. Thomas achieved just that. Down the 700 years since his achievement, great thinkers noticed his certitude, and strove to learn at least some of it. As you read Thomas, you see lots of certitude. What examples of indubitable surety does he provide? 39 Change is the basis of reality. We know many changes. Different changes require different ways to learn. As the visible body changes its place, we trace its motion against its background. Certainly, when it was at rest, it was not moving. To actually move, a mover had to activate it. It surely overcame its rest to start moving. These expressions of certitude encourage us to learn more.

Consider a more mysterious change. A bike out in the rain remains in place, but rusts. How did it manage to do that? For sure, what used to be iron is now rust. Whatever made the iron to be iron, its “ironing” ceased to “iron” some of its surface, which is now “rusting”. Rust crumbles. Iron endures. These are certain experiences. Abstract to the space-occupation itself. This is undifferentiated stuff. Yesterday it was iron. Today it’s rust. So the consistent amount of stuff, its matter, remains. But it’s a different **kind** of thing. So the act changes from “ironing” to “rusting. The form “forms” the stuff to be iron or rust. Certainly, what was iron is now rust, so the “ironing” ceased, and the “rusting” began. This must be, is certain, is science. When chemists give their account, they give theories & strange names. Then they give numbers, & mathematical formulae. Is this understanding? Check out the two sciences. If we need to prevent rust, modern science, with its obscure steps may help. If we want certitude, use Thomas’ science. It’s more understandable to know that what formed the iron ceases to form some of it, which is now formed by whatever forms rust. The indeterminate space-occupier, or matter, remains. The “ironing” ceases in that matter. The “rusting” activates that matter. The result is the rust we see. Chemists trace this change. They show that the amount of matter is the same before and after the change. But they miss the meaning. Similarly, act accounts for biological and psychological change. These meanings are appropriately general, rather than practical. So we can’t make a buck with them. But we can understand what’s happening. The act activates the organism in more ways than changes of kind act. Organisms do much more than inorganic chemicals. Life itself is wonderful. Growth and reproduction amaze us. Wow!

**St. Thomas Aquinas Class Summary #10: 11/3/12**

**Science a la Thomas: Starting on page 41:**

Many people celebrate modern science (applied math) because of its admirable technical achievements. No one wants to relinquish the control that this technology provides. But there is no matching understanding of nature in modern science. In contrast, Thomas comprehended the reasons why natural things are as they are. A quick example is the wide array of modern sciences out there; more than we can count. Thomas would welcome all those facts, but arrange them differently. He saw 4 natural sciences. They differ by the type of change they track. Place to place change is Physics. Subdivisions include Geology, or earth movements, Atomic Physics, or particle movements, & Astronomy, or heavenly body movements. With Thomas’ clear-cut distinction: body moving from one place to another, we can focus on physics. Then we can understand its reasons to be as it is.

The second natural motion is more obscure: from one kind of substance to another kind. Kind to kind change is Chemistry. Substantial change escapes our attention, as you probably noticed in the previous handout. All of us can see chemical changes, but few of us can track its steps. Modern chemists rely upon precise weight-measurements to trace changes. That’s boring. So most people tire quickly and pursue interesting things.

Thomas wondered deeply about nature’s third motion: size to size by internal growth. All organisms grow. This interior size-to-size change is Biology. That it occurs is obvious, but how it occurs is obscure. Tht organisms produce offspring is even more astounding. It’s easy to observe growth and reproduction, but hard to identify internal steps causing these external changes. So we can take it as an example of natural science.

Thomas revived and revised Aristotle’s natural biology. Obviously, the organism is a unit, a whole. Equally obviously, it acts. This activity is the unifying soul of the organism. It is the living of the living being. Better understood than expressed, life is the activity of the active organism. If we find a body that might be alive, we observe it more closely. If it moves muscles, we know it lives. If it’s not moving, we might prod it to check its vitality. If it responds to our prod by moving, we know that it’s alive. These basic experiences show us, for example, the cat’s soul acting. Soul is obvious when we kill a cat. Death separates the cat’s soul from its body. Prodding fails to irritate a dead cat. Its death illustrates the difference between be-soul-ed cat and un-be-soul-ed cat. In this sense, everyone knows what a cat’s soul is, and uses this knowledge to deal effectively with cats. Once the cat’s soul is gone, the *corpus delecti* no longer is a cat. It ceases to “cat”. It begins to rot. So we bury it before its stench bothers us. The soul of the cat is obvious. Thomas found it for the same reasons we do

Thomas also found three types of organisms: vegetative, animated, and human. Each acts in different biological ways. Those ways show most clearly in the fourth natural science, or change from one awareness to another. Awareness-change is Psychology. The psychological difference between the 3 types of organisms illustrates their intrinsic distinctions. Vegetative organisms are aware merely of objects, like gravity, light, and water. They grow along a gradient of these objects. Animals are aware not only of objects but also of their relationships to those objects. They demonstrate this awareness by seeking missing objects: they animate. Humans are aware of objects and their relationships to these objects, but show a third awareness: of themselves being aware. Therefore humans question their awareness, inquire into why they are aware, and delve into fascinating mental factors. Universals interest us most. They illustrate self-awareness by summarizing all that is reliable about a group of individuals we know. E.g. the catting of the cat acts in all cats. It “cats’ all cats. It makes all cats “cat”.

Biology is complicated enough, but Psychology is the mother of all complications. Aristotle figured out these fundamental sciences, and Thomas resurrected them by thinking the world logically. Everyone who finds what’s happening takes these logical steps. It’s a wide, wonderful world out there. No wonder that thinkers love to think it. Thomas engages this world. But instead of hanging up in its nooks and crannies, he sees the whole wholely. This is his synthesis. Its integrating center is act. As a thing acts, so it is. Knowing is acting as the thing acts. Human souls, activated by the be-ing of beings, become those acts mentally. This intentional being is what the “known” is. The acts are the same, but the limitations differ Thomas helps us become what we know, all the way from dust to God. He integrates all that is into one. Get past words to meanings,& we see it too.

**Facts Are Not Enough: We Seek Reasons**

For sure, we can bog down in facts. There are more out there than we can grasp. Un-integrated facts weight upon us like a load of bricks. When Thomas integrated all facts into a synthesis, he was the universe unified. Integration infuses lifeless facts with life. Integration transforms, e.g., a load of bricks into a horse. No longer impeding our progress, facts prance along with us. Eventually, we learn to ride that horse. Then we proceed faster, easier, and more territory. Integrated knowledge enhances knowing. The vitality of integration is the “reason to be”. Once we know the reason for a cat’s activity, we escape that cat’s limitations, and include all cat activities that are essential. Every action reflects the act overcoming the not-yet. E.g. selective breeding can activate some cat acts which had not-yet been. Similarly, we can train cats to do tricks. Thus Psychology is the activation of awareness that was not-yet actualized. This act-not-yet dynamic, integrates all natural sciences .

That insight vitalizes all the facts that once were dead in your mind. Then you formally seek the reason for each change. Notice: you informally sought reasons all along. Without official support you gave up on reasons, and did what the others were doing, bogging down in meaningless facts. But that was yesterday. Today, you rouse your pursuit of reasons. The proximate reason for the kitten is reproduction, set off by ma and pa cat. Right off the bat, you see that reasons are not bodies, not substances. Ma and pa cat are tangible bodies, each subsisting on its own, once created. But reproduction is a process. We know it by abstracting from sensing bodies in act. This process is natural. We excel at it. But we seldom mention it. So we need to dwell on abstracting.

The main reason for distinguishing act from motion is that it’s different. It’s more fundamental. Motion is one of the many acts that creatures do. To identify motion is to know it as a kind of act. This distinction helps to clarify our daily activities. For example, we separate corn husks from corn cobs. Then we cook the cobs, and throw away the husks. Once the corn on the cobs is cooked, we further separate the edible corn from the inedible cobs, which we throw away. These are real distinctions because they really separate real substances from each other. Some substance is edible, but much of the corn-in-shuck is inedible. So we must separate real edible corn from real inedible parts. That separation is a real distinction, of real substances.

But we also make virtual distinctions, as you just did while reading those words. There was no corn in your sight. You did it all in your head. In virtue of your power to abstract from substantial corn, you virtually distinguish. These mental separations do not bother the corn you’re thinking about. There are no real shucks left over after virtual separation. Perhaps more strikingly, when you virtually distinguish the cat’s soul from its body, the cat remains alive. If you really distinguish a cat’s soul from its body you kill it. 42 You’re so good at virtual distinctions that you make millions of them every day, and think nothing of it. Some of these virtual separations affect your daily life profoundly. Thomas uses them regularly. To follow his thought, you must virtually distinguish rather rapidly. As you practice virtual distinctions, you do them rapidly, accurately, and with great delight. Then you talk about act just as Thomas did, as **virtually** distinct from a body moving, iron rusting, corn growing, or yourself learning. These acts activate specific creatures, in the examples given. They are the knowable acts. Without virtual distinction, you substitute one substance for another, e.g: define salt as NaCl. 43

Aristotle, 2,400 years ago, Thomas 700 years ago, and Michael Polanyi 50 years ago, identify the salting of the salt as genuine knowledge. 44 We too can trust our silent or “tacit” knowledge. With practice, we become confident of our real knowledge. Then we can laugh at elaborate efforts to substitute fancy words for knowledge. 45 Then we understand how words express these virtual distinctions. For example: “color” is not the cat. Different cats can have different colors. So we know that the usual range of colors is incidental to the catting of the cat. Aristotle called these incidental aspects of creatures “accidents”. 45 These are not collisions, or dropping a coffee cup. Substances exist on their own, but accidents do not. Instead, they are modifications of substances. Accidents do not exist in substances to modify them. Instead, accidents modify substances incidentally. Many of these accidents change regularly, like your weight, along with your waist-line. Trust your knowledge of accidents in this ancient sense of non-substantial differences among substantial beings. They merely “go along with” the beings of interest. By extension, you see how collisions “go along with” the intended moves. This wider view illustrates that “the soul is Aristotelian” because Aristotle tells us what we actually do. 46

The reason why accidents merely “go along with” substances is that substances remain what they are, while what goes along with them changes. E.g. you remain the same substance, though your weight changes. This stability is so important that we profit from reviewing a popular claim: nothing remains true over time. If that statement were true, it would have to remain true over time. As Bertrand Russel noted: if it is true, then it is false. 46 Why is it popular? Because many people are discouraged. They flop around from one contrary statement to another until they give up. Thomas offers a positive alternative. Find the reasons why things are as they are. That’s satisfying. It builds courage to seek greater truths about more important things. Eventually, we act as Aristotle did 2,400 years ago, & Thomas 700 years ago, & Polanyi 50 years ago. Truth is consistent. What’s true is true all around. So one truth reinforces another. Each truth shines light on each other one. These are ways to express the glory of a synthesis. Expect to be amazed, as Thomas shows us mutually enlightening truths.

**St. Thomas Aquinas Class Summary #11: 11/10/12**

**Science Shows Nature’s Organization & Logical Structure: Starting on page 47:**

Aristotle noticed nature’s organization. He expressed necessary differences as categories. Thomas learned these categories in Aristotle’s Logic. Both philosophers saw that we all use them, without naming them. You notice that they come naturally. They show reality’s basic groups, obvious from common experience. That’s why Thomas calls Aristotle “The Philosopher”. Would-be philosophers hang up on one or another theory, preferring concepts to the world. We emphasize the basics to harmonize with Thomas’ dynamic synthesis.

As a thing is, so does it act. If it acts independently, it acts on its own. It stands under its own act, or it subsists. Our English word mispronounces the Latin *sub stare* = under to stand. If it stands under its own active power, it is a substance. Such a being acts reliably, or continues to act for a while. Thomas acknowledges that substances endure for different times. Time is a way for creatures to be. Their existence is possible because of time. But time is incidental to their acts. Time tells us nothing about the act itself. Long ago, we noticed that substances vary in more ways than we can count, but remain the same substances. Eg cats come in various colors, sizes, shapes, but are nonetheless cats. Their substance is the same, though their observable characteristics vary a lot. We ask “what” about so many things that we want to organize what “what” means. 47

The main “what” about any thing is its substance. But we ask “what” questions about non-substantial things, like color. Without a basic organization of the kinds of “whats” we seek, we confuse them. Our simplest division is between a thing in itself, and a thing in another. Not all of things are substantial. Our first clear cut is to separate what is in itself and what is in another. What is in itself is the substance. A cat’s most important act is to “cat”. Many other things modify this act in many ways. These accidents are not independent beings. They don’t subsist. But they do alter something about substances. For clarity’s sake, the substance of the cat is the catting of the cat. An accident is an act in a cat which is not the cat, but changes the way the cat cats. Accidents come in several varieties. Some are in the cat. These are in the cat’s nature. Cats must have natural accidents. These are required, in general, for the cat to be a cat. But they vary, in particular, to distinguish specific cats. Eg al cats need some general size. Each cat has its own size. These are modifications of natural qualities.

Some accidents are outside the cat’s nature. They modify the cat, but are not necessary to the cat’s intrinsic being. They are not what the cat **is**. However, they do act to modify the cat. For example, all cats must be for some time. Yes, creatures exist in time, but time is not in their nature. These examples show how natural these differences are. You’ve used them in all your thinking. The mind is Aristotelian.

Modifications of the cat in the cat’s nature can modify absolutely (without exception), or relatively. Eg: cats absolutely must be some quantity, and must have a lot of qualities, like color. Cats change quantity and quality as they grow. Starting as single-cell organisms, they grow inside mother cat for some months, then emerge, to grow for several years. Then their quantity usually declines. Throughout this quantitative change, their color may remain the same, but other qualities definitely change, like their speed of chasing mice. As you think about this, you find familiar thinking activities. Use your most striking examples to remember these processes. Then you advance from superficial sensation of facts to profound comprehension of principles. Thomas called the quantity “matter”, and the quality “form”. Relative modifications in the cat’s nature include its parents, who are observable sources of its nature. These relations naturally follow from the cat’s nature. 48

Outside the cat’s nature, we find a riot of accidents. But some are completely, while others are only partially outside. Completely outside the cat we find both measured and not-measured modifications. Measured ones are either in time or place. Creatures exist within moment-to-moment changes, or time. A specific time for a cat would be its preferred suppertime. The family may dine at 6, but the cat makes a racket at 5. It won’t shut up until fed. The category “when” is well known, and important, though completely outside the cat. Also place is important for bodily creatures like cat. Simply “where” is the actual space around the cat. Relative place is the cat’s disposal of its bodily parts. In the same place, it can stand, lie down, stretch out… This is the category “position”. You see that corporeal beings require these categories. Angels have no place. Completely outside the cat, but not measured would be a body’s attire, like the Halloween outfit kids put on cats. Partially outside the being, are acts that originate in the cat but extend into space, like running or jumping. These are “actions”. Also partially outside are actions done to the cat, like petting it or kicking it. These are “passions”. You see that there are 10 categories. They help us organize the many impressions that beset us. They allow Thomas to keep track of a wild variety of impressive activities. 48

All these distinctions are virtual, since we can’t actually separate a cat’s paternal relations from the cat itself. We can actually separate a cat’s matter from its form; that would kill the cat. Mostly, we think these separations. If we clarify them, so they correspond to their actual modifications, analyze the cat. Then we synthesize the knowledge back into the cat’s original unity. Having analyzed and synthesized, we know any cat better. In fact, we zoom along so rapidly that analyzing one cat suffices for all cats. By age 3, we usually know cat well.

Thomas can zoom along much faster than we, because he uses his basic tools efficiently. With study, we too become proficient. Then we speed up, and our accuracy improves. We like that, so we enjoy all this work. Thomas was delighted to figure these things out. To teach others, he had to express them consistently. That requires both teacher and student to use these categories. Fortunately, these categories come naturally to us. 49

However, we can learn more about these categories. Relation is a fine example. Among creatures, all relationships are two-way. Eg: the parent cat births the offspring cat. But God’s creation differs. His relation to us is quite different from creature-to-creature relation. Fascinating possibilities arise! It’s not enough for us to revel in creation. For all its fascination, we long for more than this universe. St. Augustine said it well: “The heart is restless until it rests in you, O Lord.” Because Thomas perfected his natural sciences, he could see through creatures to their Source. They all proclaim God’s glory. The more we see God’s glory in a mere cat, the more we long for God Himself. Enough teasing, let’s unite with God! Creatures exist in God’s loving care. Substances exist. They have substance. But we also see through them, as if they were transparent. They function like the words you read on this page, both existent and pointing to something better. 50 Let’s appreciate words.

Our teachers told us to express ourselves precisely. Can anyone do that? Can we exactly describe something? Not really. The example of a car wreck reminds us of the differences between what we observed & what we can say. It’s even more discouraging to hear witnesses describe the same wreck. Our knowledge is more vast than any verbal expression of it. Yet authorities insist: “If you can’t say it, you don’t know it”. Examine that a minute, and you see that they mean that we have not memorized their approved way to say something. 51 When we examine their statements, we find defects. The authorities themselves change them regularly.

So it behooves us to clarify what language can do. Primary knowledge is internal. Our experience is beyond expression. Our reflection upon our experience can’t be spoken. Thomas calls our experience of water being wet our “mental word” for “water is wet”. Linguistic expression of this mental word in spoken words falls short of our knowledge. Ponder that a while, and you will agree with Thomas: your verbal expressions always fall short of your understanding. That’s why you write and rewrite your speech, yet never convey what you intended to say. Our intentional identity with beings is important. This identifying activity includes so many things that we can’t express them all. Spoken words explicate our implicit knowledge, but only partially. Heidegger put it well when he said that all words are veils. They simultaneously reveal something of our understanding, but hide most of it. So we say only fragments of what we know. 51 Spoken words are inadequate.

Witgenstein exhausted the study of language without finding any content there. Language is a tool to express various things, but only a few of the things we know. So we rejoice when a linguistic expression impresses us, but we do not expect to “say everything clearly”. Language is successive approximations toward improved expression. As we approximate, we follow three paths. Thomas expressed their simple and enduring value.

A word can sound the same and mean the same. This is univocal usage of that word. In a short talk, we can maintain univocal usage. But longer discussions drift from univocality. They necessarily drift away. Why? Because we make language to do quick jobs. It’s too hard to foresee long-term variations. No term remains univocal in all contexts. But we definitely don’t want to use words that sound the same and mean different things. This equivocal usage is a lie. Finally, a word can sound the same, but mean different things **which are related**. For example, we say that he went like a lamb, when we mean he went peacefully. “Lamb” is more striking. All language is analogical, like this usage. Eg “now” is analogous to all the nows we use it for. Similarly, “good” applies analogously to rocks, cats, humans, justice, angels, and God. Each is good, but differently good. 52

If we identify what we naturally do, separate it to formally identify it, then put it back into context, we know best. This is abstraction. We do it millions of times a day. If we abstract consistently, we find catagories that sustain us internally. Expressing these abstractions in language sustains us externally, and helps us encourage others by verbal communication. True, words do not adequately express ideas. Nor do ideas adequately express experiences. But each process approximates the next more abstract activity. Eventually we follow this abstract activity back to more stable activities. Eventually, we find the most abstract of all beings, Who is the most reliable and stable. He is our Source and our Destiny, toward whom the Thomistic Synthesis strives.

**St. Thomas Aquinas Class Summary #12: 11/17/12**

**Reality Is As It Is: We Know It: How to Express Our Knowledge: Virtual Distinctions 53:**

Our internal knowledge is reliable, so we do what we do well. But organizing our knowledge is difficult, so we seldom do it well. Instead, we make more distinctions than we use. Most our work is wasted. If we reflect upon our acts, we can keep track of them, put them in order, & use them. If we focus on what we actually do, we overcome our usual distraction. Then we can unify more knowledge, more rapidly, and more confidently, enjoying it more. On one hand, we know some things very well. On the other hand, many things puzzle us, and even upset us, because we don’t know what we ought to know about them. Death is a fine example.

Though we never answer all our specific questions about death, we can grasp its general act. When a dog dies, it obviously stops dogging. There’s the key to the puzzle: the dog’s sustaining activity ceases. Its substantial act, that kept it dogging, no longer acts. Distracting **amounts** of action don’t matter. For years, the dog declined, running and jumping less each year. Perhaps it hadn’t run or jumped for the past year. These incidental differences, while true, merely modify the continued dogging of the dog. Focus upon this basic act, and you can solve the basic puzzle. The difference between substance & accidents dismisses distracting modifications, so we see the act modified. In this case, distinguish between the dogging of the dog, and how much dogging it does. As we abstract more completely, we focus more clearly. By death, the dogging of that dog ceased. 54

Something remains: the dog-corpse. It is no longer the dog. The dog is dead. The residue is not a dog. Soon it begins to rot. There was a dog dogging. We knew that dog-substance. That dog was deprived of its dogging, and some other activity took over. Track the main events. The dog “dogged” for quite a while, then ceased dogging. Other terms, like the dog’s soul are accurate, but distracting. Why? Because we may mistake the soul to be another substance. By virtue, or power of our abstraction, we distinguish the dogging of the dog from the dog. Virtual distinctions leave the dog alive. Actual distinction of the dogging from the dog kill it. As we practice several reflections upon this event, we unite with the event accurately. The dog’s death **is** the deprivation of the dog’s dogging. Yes, death deprives the dog of its soul, but this expression is a step removed from the event. If we take another step, we risk another error. This error is to imagine the “soul” as a substance. It is not a substance, but only an activity **by** which a substance (the dog) subsisted. The dogging act is its essence, or to-be.

Yes, we make virtual distinctions naturally. But, no, we do not speak them enough to use our natural ability. So we talk about distinctions repeatedly, to gain confidence in our natural act of distinguishing. If we follow through, thinking consistently about what we do naturally, we solve more problems, and settle into reality. Once we regularly use virtual distinctions, we do what Thomas does. As we adopt the natural science that Thomas resurrected from Aristotle, we see how natural it is, and imitate Thomas. We don’t really care about dying dogs. But if we grasp the natural dying process of a measly dog, then we can advance to transubstantiation of bread to Christ’s body. They are analogous acts. Everything in Thomas’ synthesis unifies through activity. It is as if everything revolves around act, and relates through act to everything else.

The dog dogs until it dies. Then it ceases to be. However, it leaves a corpse behind. The corpse is corpsing. The difference between dogging and corpsing is a substantial change. The virtually distinct dogging of the dog actually becomes distinct. The virtually distinct corpsing of the corpse becomes actual. Our understanding is much more clear than our expression. That’s what Heidegger meant by: language reveals by veiling. But language is the house of being. Because it is what we build to express what we know. Yes, we know it best by our mental words, but we need our verbal words to communicate. The important thing is that we keep our natural distinguishing process intact, and express it accurately, so that our words point to things. 54

Have we suffered from distractions? Have we started a problem, only to branch off into related problems? For sure! Thomas stays with the problem he starts until he finishes it. We probably jump from one interesting problem to another, solving nothing. So we skip “who killed the dog?” That frees us to solve “what is death?”. Obviously, the dogging of the dog is positive, and the ceasing of this dogging is negative. You see the same pattern that we emphasized to know motion. So the process is analogous. The difference between substantial change and motion is new negative element: only so much dogging occurred in the dog. It weighed only so much, occupied only so much space, and did only its specific dogging. While the dog lived, these specific limitations modified the dog. They trace the substantial change. When the larger negation of dogging occurred, the dog ceased its dogging, but its specific limitations, its residue, remained. For some time after death, the corpse weighed what the dog weighed. The positive dogging of the dog extended through the specific amount of living dog. They were two distinct aspects of the one living substance.

The dogging was the positive aspect. The amount dogged, or the specific limits to the dogging, were the negative aspects of the dog. Thomas calls the positive aspect the form, or the soul. He calls the negative aspect the matter. We now express the dying dynamic, or cessation of dogging, & start of corpsing, in those terms. The form of that dog ceased to activate the matter of that dog. The dog subsisted as a union of positive dogging and negative amount of dogging. That dog dogged only a limited amount. Neither of these components exist alone. Our distinction between them is virtual. There is no dogging without an amount dogged. There is no amount of dog without dogging. So, there is no form without matter. There is no matter without form. Evidence for form is act. Eg: the dogging of the dog shows the form: dogging. Evidence for matter is the residual, the remainder, after substantial change. Eg: the corpse of the dog, which is now corpsing instead of dogging. If we understand the act, we comprehend what Thomas says. His terms are supremely useful also. We follow Thomas if we know these basic scientific acts, and the words referring to them.

Substantial change, in the case of our well-worn dog, is the cessation of its dogging, and the immediate corpsing of its corpse. The matter of the dog ceases to be dogged, and begins to corpse. Remember that there is no independent matter, nor independent dogging and corpsing. Virtual distinctions focus on the acts which once dogged the dog, then corpse the corpse. The residue from dogging is the amount of the corpsing. So, generally, substantial change is the deprivation of one form, and its immediate replacement by another form, activating the same matter. If we say this to ourselves in several accurate ways, we find a way to say substantial change that fits our experience of it. Many people understand the process, but use different terms. Others come to know the process in this practice. For them, the light of understanding explodes. For others, it dawns. Either way, it shines for us. Thomas expressed this light in several ways, most emphatically for the Eucharist.

We emphasize that substantial change is instantaneous. It takes no time in itself. We could quibble about death because many organs remain fresh enough to transplant. They work in the organism receiving them about as well as in the organ donating them. But that’s not out topic. Shifting from one problem to the other leaves us in the dark. Instead, consolidate our understanding of substantial change. Thomas teaches to finish one problem before launching into another. One more emphasis! Virtual distinctions identify principles, not substances. Each principle is a source of understanding rather than an existing substance. Principles or virtual distinctions do not run around on their own. Beware our confusing tendency to treat principles as if they were substances. Whitehead calls this the “fallacy of misplaced concreteness”. The dog is concrete. The corpse is concrete. The substantial change, the forms, the matter, and the deprivation of forms, are all principles. They’re merely virtual 56

This account of substantial change satisfies our most basic desire to understand. It sees the whole of change from one substance to another, and it sees it wholely. However, it ignores thousands of details. It is scientific because it provides the reasons why substantial change is as it is, and can’t be otherwise. But details do change, and can be otherwise. So the philosopher, as philosopher, can’t help cure a sick dog. A veterinarian, as master of details, can improve the dog’s health. The philosopher knows the whole, but may be totally ignorant of health details. All too often, the vet knows the details, but is totally ignorant of substantial change. Often, the vet knows substantial change, even if he can’t express it. Repeated observation of death taught him.

Thomas advances from what’s happening in nature to what God reveals. To advance into divine territory accurately, he needs accurate natural science. So do we. Though we don’t need all of natural science, we do need the basics. We also need to advance by evidence. Therefore we need to review these simple changes. They provide evidence that remains through millennia. The advantage to certitude is that it’s always what it is. As we advance, we ramble through the same topic a few times, adding a bit here and there, to emphasize the basics and the evidence. Eg: it’s necessary that the dog dogged. If not, it would have catted, or ratted… If the dog continued to dog, it never would have corpsed. If it began to corpse, it died. Necessarily, it changed substance. 57

Similarly, we review motion, to solidify natural science, and prepare for question 1 of Thomas’ Summa.

Thomas is amazed by the reality of bodies. Creation makes an awesome difference. As bodies move, they break into our awareness as puzzles to solve. A specific motion begins, continues, and ends. All motion is basically the same. So if we understand any motion, we know them all. As we review what we learned about motion, its actuality sinks into us, impressing us more and more. In awe of this natural act, we prepare to define it, and to follow it to its source. Then our words expressing it follow motion’s actual act. Watching a body move unites us with all that moves. That leads to the original mover of motion itself. Something is behind all this observable motion! 57 Thomas first considers technical points like whether we can know the source of motion. We can skip them to focus on science launching into God. Prepare for the proofs of God’s necessity.

**St. Thomas Aquinas Class Summary #13: 12/1/12**

**Visual and Auditory Examples of Invisible and Inaudible Virtual Distinctions: All We Have Read:**

Though we’re experts at thinking, our thoughts are private. Our best work is hardly known even to us. Seldom do we express our common thoughts, and even less often do we employ common terms for anything important. Common thoughts and terms are for superficial things like: shut the door. But about our soul’s most important acts, our private thoughts and terms stay secret. Tangible objects, like doors, are common, ordinary, and relatively clear. But intangible objects, like God, our souls, and how to unify with God, are somehow clouded. Some primal misunderstanding cripples us, preventing clear thought and expression.

When Adam committed Original Sin, he darkened his intellect by a lie, weakened his will by choosing himself, and smashed his emotions by directing them against himself. In Eden, God and Adam enjoyed a unity more profound than we can understand. By disobeying God, Adam lied, saying that he was better than God. To lie, Adam had to overwhelm his intellect, blind it, and bind it to his lie. We inherit this darkened intellect. Like a smashed mirror, it reflects some of reality accurately, but all split up into pieces. Usually, we know only the parts, partly. We want to unify these fragments into an integrated intellect. Then it will reflect the whole, wholely. St. Thomas integrates so well that we can learn marvels from him. He also strengthens his weak will by deciding again and again for God. If we follow suit, we will get our acts together, integrating more and more of the shards we inherited from Adam and Eve. Similarly, we want to tame our wild emotions, harnessing them to our unified purpose. What a delight it is to function in unison! Start by praying to act well, then act well.

This evening, we start with parts we can see, and analyze them. Shifting our sensory focus shows how our minds work. Mental activities are reliable, while tangible objects pass quickly away. After a few views of the dancing string, focused upon its reliable activities, we follow the analogy to mental acts. There’s too much activity to focus on all of it. So we “freeze” the activity into its necessary constituents. Notice that constituents constitute the substance. They are not isolated as separate substances. Instead, they account for the substance we study. They are the reliable acts which endure as individual beings pass away. So these constituents are the most worthy elements of the substance. The dancing string forms a visible, tangible, 3-d substance. That sausage-like substance comes and goes. It comes to exist from a stationary string, exists for a while, and ceases to exist. Like all creatures, it is for a while. All that while, it depends upon other beings causing it to exist. These beings exist in a chain of partial causes, all of which depend upon the Uncaused Cause. The universe is *uni*, or one, around which all the other creatures turn, or *verso*. All our words point to these realities.

We need words to substitute for realities, so we can refer to them quickly. If every time we wanted our listener to think of cat, we had to hand him a cat, we could not communicate. Words are definitely not the things they refer to, but they refer to things so well that we communicate. This demonstration helps us follow words to the realities they denote. The dancing string denotes any substance. Its activity means the dogging of the dog, for example. The string represents the limit to the dogging of the dog, or the matter which cuts the dogging down to just what an individual dog does. We have no problem distinguishing all these elements, focused by the strobe light. It flashes just long enough to catch the string in its consistent place, and again to catch it again. Our distinction is virtual, since it does not actually stop the string’s vibration. Turning off the motor makes the actual distinction. When we think, we do what the strobe does, only mentally instead of flashing a light. We make millions of virtual distinctions by abstracting. They provide constituents or the virtually distinct principles by which we understand the vibrations of the string of the dogging of the dog. These principles constitute the dancing string as dancing, just as dog form and matter constitute the dog. They are not other substances, but sources of substances. They are virtually distinct as long as the string dances, or the dog dogs. If we turn the motor off, the dancing string “dies”, or ceases to dance. It then becomes the corpse of the dancing string. Similarly, killing the dog separated its dogging from the residue which limited the dogging to just that dog. Then we have a dog corpse left behind. The entire substantial change unfolds in mechanical analog before our eyes. That helps us to think the meaning of substantial change, and to focus upon what’s happening as it happens.

When we connect these differences, we see the mechanical representation of how we think. As we dwell upon how we think, we become more realistic, and emerge into the universe more fully. The more we recognize our thought, the more at home with it we become. Then we follow Thomas into reality. It’s a struggle because advertisements twist words into lies. Similarly, political lies pollute us, distract us, and too often confine us. As we emerge from these economic and political traps, we purify our thought, and then our speech. Then we relax more entirely into God’s love, which is the main act behind all these minor acts.

Vibrating tuning forks represent how acts that we sense activate our senses. These acts are the same in the dog that we see and in the eye we see them with. Like tuning forks picking up their specific vibrations from a nearby vibrating fork, our eyes pick up more than one frequency. Our eyes differ from paired tuning forks by picking up a wide range of visual vibrations. Similarly, our ears pick up more than a single sound frequency. Across the range that we can hear, we pick up every sound frequency. In like manner, we smell a wide range of odors, taste many flavors, and receive many tactile vibrations. All sensation works like nearby tuning forks sharing vibrations. That’s the main reason why sensations are completely accurate, inside their limits.

A notable limit is that sensations convey only appearances. Appearances can be deceiving. The smiling politician appears to be our friend and confidant. His honeyed words promise great benefits. None of these appearances are real, as we learn to our regret. Therefore, we must pierce appearances to find their more reliable acts, or their meaning. If we abstract from appearance to meaning, we recognize the family dog behind its spray-painted red coat. We do this often. The more we see beneath appearances, the more our intellects read between the lines. Meaning is the deeper vibration, the more common, therefore more reliable, act of the acting being. It’s the dogging of the dog. It’s better known, because it is more reliable than dogging in the Dalmatian or Dachshund way. It’s our understanding of wave, from the specific wave we see. Abstracting from details overcomes sensory limitations. So our vibrating folks remind us how our minds tune in to the act acting.

These examples go from words to what words represent. As one tuning fork tunes in to another, we see identity of vibration. Beyond the limits of material forks, we see our identity with anything we know. Whatever its act is, we are, when we know it. The dogging of the dog dogs us when we know dog. A tuning fork is limited to one frequency. But our identity with known things is completely unlimited. That’s why we learn new things so rapidly and perfectly. Our actualized knowledge is limited, but our ability to know is infinite. That’s why St. Augustine said “the soul is restless until it rests in God”. Only Infinite God fills our infinite need for Act.

When we vibrate in harmony with a dog, we know that dog. We also know all dogs, as further abstracted from that dog. We also know all mammals, further abstracted from all dogs. Similarly, we know all animals, from that that mammal. Our abstractions continue into being itself. All this is familiar to us when we are young. But what we call education knocks all that out of us. In its place, we learn doubts, confusions, & power-phrases that win us prizes. That evacuation sucks out our natural knowledge. Those memorized phrases drag us down from God, miring us in mud. St. Thomas lifts us up. If we accept our natural knowledge, and follow it with Thomas, we escape complications, and contemplate. That’s why we meet: to gain confidence in our knowledge, then to expand it into the fullness of the Thomistic Synthesis.

If you insist that we can’t make a buck that way, you’re right. It’s not about muscling our way ahead of sophists who contend for power. It’s about truth. Truth vibrates in harmony with Truth Himself. Every step toward a specific truth advances us to Truth. The more we advance, we more we go home, with the Truth Who is our source and our destiny. From the examples we experienced, we see it’s vibrating as He vibrates. This is the ultimate intentional being. Proximate intentional being, like knowing a dog, is identity with the known dog. Its dogging in its substance is our dogging in our knowledge. As the vibration of the tuning fork vibrated its tuned fork, so the dog dogs us. Knowing God is our most important act. We want God to “God” us. We want to act as Act acts. We want Truth to truth us. This is our ultimate acting, as Act Himself acts. There’s no higher harmony.

There is nothing better to do, nothing more complete. Compared to vibrating in harmony with God, all our other acts are inadequate. The disappointment we find when we choose creatures shows that we’re made for God. “The heart is restless...” Thomas helps us to dog as a dog dogs. That’s not enough. So we abstract to the essence of every creature, then select the most complete act. Advancing step by step, we climb from one creature to its superior. That process advances to The Superior. There’s no other act as satisfying for us. So we want to get on with it. As we go, we abstract reliable acts from passing acts, identify with them, and enjoy the steps that we take. But all these joys end. Each is a bit frustrating, because none attain our ultimate goal. But each step strengthens us for more, so that we can finally commit ourselves to Pure Act. Once we’ve done our best, He will take us across the infinite divide unto Himself. It’s a long way from the dancing string to God, but it’s the same kind of activity. Following the dancing string to its constituent, most simple, vibration, is what we do to know anything. The dogging of the dog is the same abstraction as strobe-light focusing on a simple vibration wave. This abstraction reunites us with our original knowledge. If we survive what passes for education, we can regain with our childhood certitude. Then we get our acts together into unity. We see the whole wholely, by our natural learning, and advance toward God. This is the purpose of the Thomistic Synthesis. I love it!

**St. Thomas Aquinas Class Summary #14: 12/8/12**

**Review of Motion In Light of the Mechanical Model of the Dancing String, from p 57**

As the Dancing String showed, our virtual distinctions did not disturb the dancing of the string. Instead, the flashing light (strobe) enabled us to see the string at one of its many positions. Thus we abstracted from the other positions, to see the string’s essence. Essence means “to-be”. We saw the string in its being, without the blur of its rotating through many different places. In fact, it rotated so rapidly that it effectively occupied all the places on the surface, presenting a solid. When we touched the dancing string, we felt how solid it was. For a century, physicists used that analogy to describe solids. They are mostly empty space. Thompson’s analysis of gold showed that solid atoms constituted only 1/10,000 of its volume. In each atom, solid protons, neutrons and electrons were only 1/10,000 of its own volume. If gold, famous for its density, is only 1/10,000 of 1/10/000 of its observable volume, then its matter is mostly missing. Matter is almost non-existent, as physicists knew in 1925. Matter is vanishingly small. That’s why Thompson concluded his book by saying: “I began this research convinced that the universe is a giant clock. I conclude that it’s a giant thought.” See *Structure of the Universe*.

Materialists try to impose matter upon us, but there’s no matter there. Further research shows that supposedly solid protons are mostly empty space, made up of quarks. Contemporary physics insists that quarks are mostly empty space, composed of even smaller particles, perhaps “strings”. That brings us back to the dancing string, showing what a wonderful analogy it is to present physical theory. What’s reliable is spiritual activity. Aristotle called it “act”. Thomas recognized the truth of that basic reality. It is what is. It resembles thought more than matter. It is free of the limits that we mean by “matter”. Matter is the “not yet”, or the restriction on act. All creation is restricted acts. Their limits constitute surfaces. The dancing string was limited by the visible string. As it buzzed around, we could not isolate it by looking. With the strobe, we could see the string in one place per flash. The light caught the string in (roughly) the same place every time it flashed. That “froze” the string in the identical position it occupied each rotation. Thereby, we saw what we naturally thought about the string. The light made visual what was virtual to us. By virtue of the flashing light, we saw optically what we could “see” mentally by virtue of abstracting. By thought we take the significant motion from the insignificant motion. This *ab*=from *straho*=take shows the “to be”, or essence of wave motion. The blur is the variation on the theme of the wave’s simplest motion. In this case, it is the rotation of that wave about its longitudinal axis.

Thus, the dancing string shows us how we abstract, how we distinguish what’s regular from its variations, how the meaning accounts for the appearances, and how virtual distinction occurs naturally. That’s how we find the necessary meaning of what’s happening. As we abstract virtually distinct factors which make the event happen, we understand it in its own terms. Hopefully, you follow these contacts to your actual thought processes. As you enjoy your ability to abstract, you gain confidence to abstract more often. That’s following Thomas into the simplicity of his thought. You abstract all the way down to the most fundamental distinction possible. There, you see the difference between positive act and negative “not-yet” (potency). Confidence in this natural knowledge enables you to go anywhere in Thomistic thought. You can then understand anything Thomas wrote. Naturally, there are additional details you will need to learn, particularly about Scripture. But the center of all Thomistic thought is the act-potency distinction. Everything reflects it. To understanding anything, you must first analyze it. When you break it into its more understandable parts, you see how it works. Then you synthesize it, or put it back into working order. This is genuine knowledge. It’s all based on the primal distinction of act from “not-yet” (potency).

If you had not learned errors, you would do this natural job on your own. But our schools impose a nasty set of errors upon us. So you must unlearn them, then begin to think naturally. Hopefully, the dancing string helps you to do just that. It provides a mechanical model of our spiritual acts of thinking. Your thoughts identify with each act at the center of whatever you know. If it’s our well-worn dog that you know, you abstract its act from its blur of variations in any given dog. Even more variations occur in many dogs. But you see directly the “dog-ing” of each dog, just like you saw the “waving” of the wave in the dancing string. New variations on that theme may distract you for a moment, but they do not changing the basic “doging”. This identity means that the doging of the dog out there is the same as the doging of the dog in you. The act is exactly the same. But the material restrictions that make the dog a substance do not make the knowledge of a dog into a substance. Instead, that doging is spiritual, without matter. You identify with it immaterially, or spiritually. You are the dog intentionally, rather than substantially. So knowing the dog does not restrict you to its size, shape, or furry surface.

Knowledge of the dancing string abstracts from the 6-foot by 1/32 inch string, vibrating in space. All knowledge, or thought, escapes spatial limitations. That’s why Thompson’s research showed the universe was a giant thought instead of a giant clock. Machinery is incidental to the more important spiritual set of relationships that a machine expresses. This applies to clocks, computers, and any machine we might subsequently invent. In the computer, it’s the software that counts. The software expresses the thought that drives the computer. Material components change as we find more effective parts. Our first electronic computer, the Univac, used vacuum tubes. They were too hot and inefficient. The next generation hardware used transistors. Again, the heat and speed was inadequate for designers’ thought. Our present hardware is silicon chips of microscopic switches using less electricity and processing much faster. Still more improvements are in the works. The universe is much more like a giant thought than a giant clock. Therefore, you will see marvelous technical improvements.

**Applications to Thomas’ Synthesis**

Our first review of motion showed that its basic components, elements that we distinguish virtually, are act and “not-yet”. “Not-yet” expresses the negativity of restriction. Our most obvious starting point is a body. It moves from place to place. While it is in place A, it is not-yet in place B. If it moves, it is no longer in place A. Quite probably, it is not-yet in place B either. It is at the first intermediate place on its way to B. It’s no-longer at place A. This is a deprivation of being there. When first we studied motion, we skipped this deprivation because it was obvious. More complicated changes require us to identify deprivation, or the lack of the act that was acting before. For example, the dog dying, ceases to dog. Thomas starts with the simplest motion: from place to place. As the body begins to move from place A, it is no longer there, but not-yet at its destination, place B. Its intermediary place is not itself significant. It is merely a step on the way. If the body moves rapidly, we do not even see a blur. The dancing string is a fine example of movement so rapid that we do not directly detect it. Instead, the wave seems to be a solid. It looks like a rounded set of sausages, and feels that way.

A slow-moving body clearly moves across the background. It body occupies successive places in the line of motion, until it reaches its destination at place B. Science teaches complicated ways to analyze this motion by measurements & math. Those ways confuse us. Science says it’s really math. Instead, really, it is a body actually occupying different places on its way to its destination. We want to know why it occupies different places. Obviously, something must move the body, to activate it. That activity must come from outside. How do we know that? Because without activation, the body has no “moving act”. Instead, it just sits there. 57 When activated, the body begins to move. This shows that it now has act that it formerly lacked. This act is not itself visible. It’s only virtually distinct from the body. By virtue of our thought, we know the act is acting. It is obvious from the moving body. That obviousness illustrates our basic distinction of act from “not-yet”. It is the center of created beings. They are on their way somewhere. Bodies most obviously move. Motion is the chief characteristic of the universe. Each motion is act overcoming the limit of “not-yet” moving. This overcoming continues until all the “not-yet” is overcome. At that point, the body reaches its destination, arriving at point B.

You say that all this is too simple to consider. It’s indeed simple, but well worth considering. If we consider it completely, then we learn the simple working of the world. It is the center of Thomistic Synthesis, the unifying **one** around which all creation revolves. The activated body loses its first position. We see this deprivation of place. Subsequent spaces that the body momentarily occupies also lose the body as its motion continues. Each step repeats the same process of activating the body’s advance from place to place. Simple motion ends at its destination. Each step along the way illustrates the activation of the body through places until it is completely activated at its final place. When we think this way, motion makes sense. Then we rest by understanding motion’s basic dynamic. This identity with motion satisfies our desire to know how it works.

That satisfaction thrills all by itself. However, it’s merely the first step to trace more interesting motions. Physics traces motions to their basic acts. Just as we saw, optically, the basic waving of the dancing string, we abstract other motions. A quick example is the rotation of the earth about its polar axis. When we trace it, we see why day differs from night. We also discover why it appears that the sun rotates around the earth. As we grew up, we advanced from “sun rotates around earth” to “earth rotates on its axis”. The meaning is different, but the appearances are exactly the same. Many complicated place-to-place motions remain for physicists to trace, but we get the picture. Physics is not finished. It’s complete when physicists get past math to reality.

Motion is the act of a body which is not-yet finished acting. This is a real definition because it expresses a less-known activity in terms of better-known acts and restrictions. It leaves unanswered questions like “why does motion occur?” Fortunately, Thomas answers these questions in an integrated way that we will see next.

**St. Thomas Aquinas Class Summary #15: 12/15/12**

**How Motion Shows the Necessity of an Unmoved Mover, from p 59**

God’s existence rouses lots of buzz. Opinions range from “God is obvious” to “God can’t exist. When Thomas engaged this question, all educated people agreed that God existed. Each village had its atheist. As today, they thrived on controversy. Denouncing God entertained many people, who bought drinks for the noisy atheist. Thomas calmly examines whether we can know God’s existence. We follow suit. Thomas respected each person, giving us excellent example. Jesus teaches us exactly that approach to His beloved brothers.

In his *Summa Theologica*, Thomas first considers what Theology is, devoting 11 pages in the Maretti edition to a reasoned definition. This Latin text boils down to: Theology is the science of God. Natural Theology uses observable evidence, while Supernatural Theology uses God’s revelation. Natural Theology does not suppose God’s existence, but Supernatural Theology does. Thomas combines the two. His synthesis uses observable evidence to prepare for faith in God’s revelation. Though most people of his time did not question whether God existed, Thomas realized that it was a valid question. Accordingly, he devotes 2.5 pages to whether we could know about an existing God. Down the ages, most people agree that he proves that God is not immediately evident. No neon signs announce His presence. Instead, God made us intelligent, and expects us to use that gift to figure out what’s happening. Then Thomas gives 5 ways to realize the necessity of God’s existence, in the following 2.5 pages. Most folks agree that each way proves God’s existence.

Since 1910, symbolic logic has proliferated among philosophers. Its ins and outs are much more complicated than traditional logic. Since Aristotle articulated it 2,400 years ago, logic has been essentially the same. But during the late 1800’s and early 1900’s, logicians found many improvements. Some new standards are so strict that all “proofs” disappear. Some people claim that God disappears with them. Instead, some logicians cast doubt upon all logic. It’s well worth skipping those complications. Bertrand Russell became so confused that he doubted all certitude. Definitely, doubts about certitude can’t be certain. Doubts are more plague than profit. If Thomas were debating these points with today’s confused philosophers, he would respect their plight, but clarify their positions, and guide them forth from doubt to certitude. We show little respect for a person if we leave him in confusion. Like Thomas, we seek to balance respect with truth. For now we skip all that trouble, and go directly to reasons why every person can know that God necessarily exists.

**Common, Everyday Experience**

Around the age of seven, each person discovers reality beyond himself. Out there, events follow patterns. Among variations, we find regularities, even causes, which necessarily produce their effects. At age seven, extravagant possibilities don’t distract us. The difference between imagination and reality comes clear at age 7. Reality fascinates us. Return for a moment to your bright-eyed seventh year. Notice how you sought causes. You might even remember how certitude glistened in the light of reason. All effects require causes. From nothing comes nothing. You can’t get something from nothing. These simple truths attracted you to the greatest of all wonders: things that pass away quickly can’t explain themselves. Change all around you requires an Unchanging Source. Even now, echoes of your original thought inspire you. Following specific changes that struck you as amazing, you recognized how inadequate changing beings are. They require the necessary Unchanging Source. Most people are so convinced by this simple understanding that they never consider it again.

That is fair enough. Most folks take their young thoughts for granted. If anyone questions God’s existence, most people wonder what’s wrong with the questioner. This seems odd to almost everyone. But philosophers question everything that occurs to them, demanding more detailed reasoning about many strange things. Many people have such loving relationships with God that they consider any investigation of His existence to be blasphemy. This too is fair enough. If we care for people’s sensibilities, we can accept those who experience God as a tender, loving, surety. Even those who see God as ferocious are acceptable, because experience promotes justice to the forefront of man’s experience. There we must admit that justice is altogether too rare. This prevalence of evil hinders acceptance of God. Many atheists complain about injustice, saying that all this evil is incompatible with God. That’s also fair enough. It shows the high esteem that these atheists have for God, and their high objection to evil. From these admirable positions an honest person advances into God’s presence.

**Thomas’ Reasons for God’s Necessity**

Great teacher that he is, Thomas lays a firm foundation. In the *Summa*, he passes quickly over the difference between three types of knowing. He does this because he previously prepared his students in philosophy class. Without that previous preparation, we must consider those differences now. As you recall from our earlier distinctions, we abstract by taking the more reliable generality from the vague and various details. Our first abstraction is from detailed limits to general limits, or from detailed matter to general matter. This abstraction gets us from a specific example of a bodily being to that kind of corporeal being. Thus we go from this cat to “catting” in this first degree abstraction. While that knowledge is vast, it is limited to bodily things, 59. Obviously, we get past bodies to numbers and geometrical shapes. This second degree abstraction leaves matter entirely behind, to focus on relationships. Mathematics is totally detached from corporeal creation. That detachment chills most people, but mathematically oriented people love the freedom it provides. Mathematicians insist that their world is much bigger than corporeal creation, and they are right. But the third degree of abstraction provides still greater freedom, from relationships to being as being. When we leave relationships aside to contemplate being itself, we attain the ultimate reliable knowledge.

By this abstraction, we surpass both material restrictions and relationships’ limitations. When we free our thought into being as being is, we can consider the square circle, and laugh. The square circle is a being that can’t be. But we know it precisely as an impossibility. It’s enjoyable because of its incongruity, like a married bachelor, or dry water, or a certain doubt. These examples show that everybody does metaphysics. So we might as well know how we do it, and why it’s our most certain knowledge. The basic reason is that we leave unreliable variations behind to consider being as it is. That consideration shows us why a square can not be a circle Abstraction frees us from limitations, first of matter, then of relationship. A material thing is stuck inside its surface, where it remains even if it moves. Even when it moves, it’s stuck wherever it is, and can’t be elsewhere. Each body is isolated from each other, or impenetrable. The most one body can do is smack its surface against another body’s surface. These restrictions pain us. So we long to escape these limits.

Mathematicians escape them entirely by thinking relationships. But each relationship is itself limiting. Being to the right of something confines that something to be to the left. Being twice as large can’t be three times as large. Only that relationship is possible, out of an infinity of others. So we long to escape even further from restricting relationships. In being as it is, the only limit is “as it is not”. This does limit every angel to not be another angel. That restriction is much less than relations impose. But being is not limited to created beings. Somehow we know that Being-to-the-Max is totally unlimited. This Unlimited Himself it absolutely free. No borders bother Being as Such. 60 This is what we want. Now, does it exist?

Aristotle knew these distinctions. Plato related them in his analogical way. But Aristotle invented logic to get from analogy to necessity. Thomas resurrected all this, and developed a series of proofs that start with Aristotle’s analysis of motion, and go beyond. Once Aristotle knew that the Unmoved Mover was necessary, he knew he could know beyond physics. In Greek beyond=*meta*, and physics=*phusis*, so we launch into metaphysics once we prove God’s existence. God is the Strictly Metaphysical Being, the fullness of Being As It Is. 60

**The Proof Itself**

There are many ways to express the proof from motion. I give several on page 61. Here is another way to say the knowledge that we all have. As we look around, we see things going from place to place. To get moving they need a mover. This mover needs its mover. Body must move body. The series of moved movers is vast. There are many moved movers between the moved body we see and the first mover. But we can safely ignore this multiplicity. Why? Because each moved mover is the same as any other in its being moved. Being moved is being moved, whatever the details of the movers may be. So, however many intermediates, they all need a previous mover. This previous mover is either moved or not. If it is moved, it needs a previous mover. So the first mover necessarily is unmoved. If we find that what we called the first mover is actually moved, we acknowledge our mistake, and consider the first mover. It must be unmoved.

Harking back to our analysis of motion, we realize that motion is a body partly activated and partly unactivated, or not-yet activated. As long as this part-to-part relationship continues, the body moves. The first mover, as unmoved, has no parts: one activated and the other not-yet activated. So it must be all activated. It could also be all not-yet activated. If it were all not-yet activated, then it’s completely without act, and can’t move anything. This being could not be the first mover. Instead, the all-activated, or Pure Act, must be the Unmoved Mover. This being is beyond the universe. This being all men call God.

As usual, our thoughts are more clear than our speech. Thinking what’s written is much more enlightening than reading it. As you think more logically, you see more entirely that this expression proves the existence of God. Glorious, isn’t it? Aristotle saw it so clearly that it stunned him. May you enjoy it totally! After you recover from this stunning reality, we’ll check out some details, and see other demonstrations of God’s necessity.

**St. Thomas Aquinas Class Summary #16: 12/29/12**

**Some of the Meaning of God’s Necessity, from p 62**

Aristotle did what we did. Around the age of 7, he realized the necessity of God’s existence. Naturally, at 7, he did not know what God’s necessity meant. Quite simply, when we’re young we haven’t enough experience. Back then, we were happy to rest in God’s loving care, then scamper off to investigate His creation. We’re so busy absorbing what’s happening that we don’t finish our experiences. Instead, we jump from one wonder to another, without connecting them. Later, we coordinate important facts. In the struggle to live, we become cautious. Perhaps we repeat a party-line from some powerful group. If we do, then we cease to wonder, and began to plot. As we plot, we cultivate friends and enemies. They contribute to, or detract from our power. This seems to be more important than wonder. Most of us stop doing philosophy. Some of us seek power. But most of us just struggle to survive. That’s a handful, a challenge hard to manage.

Today we can revive our philosophical life. Some great thinkers never abandoned wonder. Aristotle and Thomas are prime examples of people who wondered like children all their lives, and thereby perfected wisdom as much as possible this side of death. Thank God for their wonder, comprehension, and magnificent articulation of penetrating and integrating thought. Aristotle identified God’s necessity from the most obvious change: motion. Thereafter, he studied God, as God shows Himself in creation. Notes from that study appear in the book *Metaphysics*. Thomas reconstructed that book by thinking the world. But he advanced beyond Aristotle’s adventure. Revelation led Thomas forward. Jesus shows us more about God than creation manifests. Jesus was God in the flesh. He advances our knowledge by leaps and bounds over creation’s manifestation. Christ brings God-in-act to us, directly. As we accept Jesus, especially in the Mass, we live His Divine Life. All sacraments engage us in God. Baptism jump-starts our Divine life, and the other 6 sacraments extend and develop it, bringing us ever more to One. God gives us His life. If we accept it, then we live as He lives. We see more of Him.

Because Thomas lived Christ-life, he experienced vastly more than Aristotle. Thomas recognized how superior revelation is to speculation, so his faith guided his philosophy. As we follow Thomas, we recognize more about God’s existence than Aristotle could. It’s so exciting to follow God’s invitation into Life that we easily get drunk on the thrill. So it’s better to plod along, step by step, reason by reason, to remain sober. This is Thomas’ way, supporting every claim with evidence we can all see. Even searchers who do not have the gift of faith can reason with Catholic beliefs. Mortimer Adler was a recent example of a non-believer who reasoned with Thomas remarkably well. He practiced the Thomistic Syntheses for 40 years, before receiving our Faith-gift, then joining the Church. He slogged from non-practicing Jew, to agnostic, to atheist, to theist, to Catholic. This is a rough road, that few can endure. But following it brought him home.

He did what we do: watch the action. Keep act in sight, and you trace necessity. Acting beings alert you to basic activation. The catting is more important than passing cats. The articulation of catting is secondary, and varies wildly. When we open to activation, near-by creatures activate us. This identity with them enables us to find the more reliable act behind them. They come and go, but Pure Act Is. When we vibrate in harmony with Pure Act, we do our most important act. Then we see creation more clearly, in light of its Creator. Aristotle did that in his way, and Thomas in a much more complete way. Each was momentarily overwhelmed by Pure Act’s activity. His activity is complete. No limits mar Pure Act. The Unmoved Mover depends on nothing. God is Entire. Everything else lacks something. The trouble with creatures is their part-ness. They express some of Wholeness, but only a part. This creature-fragment entices us because it resembles God. It’s got His fingerprints all over it. But it disappoints us because it’s not God. As Augustine says, we’re restless until we rest in God.

The positive side of creatures is that they come from God, and lead us to God. If we keep them in perspective, we can ride them to God. That’s what Aristotle and Thomas did. Vibrating in harmony with creatures leads us to vibrate in harmony with God. Creature-harmony whets our appetite for God-harmony. The difference between harmony with All, and harmony with mere parts, staggers us, 62. We gasp because we can’t think God. He has no limits to trace, no act to abstract from not-yet. Nothing we do advances from His existence to His essence. Thomas reminds us of this difficulty in the first chapters of the Summa. Our most basic drive to God is frustrated here below. Jesus shows us that following Him relieves that frustration partially. In His footsteps, we advance towards God. Aristotle saw the whole wholely, but could not go far toward God. Thomas improves holistic theory with wholesome practice, by following Christ. No doubt, we want to do the same. Therefore, we advance from philosophy to approach God, *Theos*, theologically. Philosophy shows His existence. If we echo the Word, living in love as Jesus demonstrated here on earth, then the Holy Spirit advances us.

Living Christ-life satisfied Thomas’ basic needs enough to carry on, to take the next steps. Contemplating the entirety of speculation and revelation, he overcame many intellectual problems. The most pressing problem is: how did this changing world come to be? Change expresses dissatisfaction. The changing being was not at rest in its previous position. It was in relative rest before it was moving. But it was not in ultimate rest, from which it would never depart. This tension between relative and ultimate rest drives us to wonder how change can be. Aged 7, it’s enough to know that relative change must have an ultimate source and destination. Thomas, in his maturity, sought more complete explanations. He derived them by acting along with change, becoming it, so that change informed him. As a thing is so does it act. When Thomas let changing beings activate him, he became their acts. These acts show changing beings. Necessarily, their inadequate changes demand an adequate source. Thomas lived these acts so entirely that he could express Aristotle’s demonstration of God’s necessity even more completely. 63 Moreover, he showed other ways to find necessary connections between relative acts and their ultimate Source in Pure Act. Why develop other ways to God?

Individuals differ from one another, so some take place-to-place motion as most important, while others prefer other transmogrifications. Some like kind-to-kind chemical changes; others size-to-size biological alterations. Yet others prefer psychological, sociological, or artistic variations. Whichever change a person selects, all refer back to the ultimate Source. Thomas demonstrates this with his famous 5 proofs in the *Summa Theologica*, and 16 in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*. Through these improvements and extensions of Aristotle’s demonstration, Thomas clarifies how act shines through limits to identify necessary Pure Act. As you concentrate upon act in its several specifications, you clarify your understanding of Act Itself, which everyone calls God.

Proof means connecting the observed changes with their intermediary causes, back to ultimate cause. The more required these causes are, the more clear the proof. So a proof bridges the gap between what we see and what causes what we see. Thus evidence supports conclusion. That’s all proof means. Complicated relationships that recently distracted logicians and mathematicians don’t matter to us. Even those experts tire of them. After their complicated exertions, they eat supper. They lead simple lives, like we do. They get back to what’s happening. Basically what’s happing with motion is: Things move. Each moving body needs a mover. The long series of intermediate movers needs a first mover. This first mover can’t be moved by another. So it must not be moving, though it moves others. If not moving, it is not part act and part not-yet. It must be all act, or Pure Act, or the Source, the Perfect Being, or God. However we say it, the meaning is the same.

Thomas notes that many people prefer being to motion. They wonder how beings came to be. It’s obvious that things exist. Just as obvious: they did not always exist. We see many come into existence, and cease to exist. Obviously, things that come and go do not exist on their own. They came into existence from another. This other either came to exist or not. If it came to exist, it came from another. But passing existence on can’t continue for infinity. Continuation merely repeats our original problem. So the ultimate source of existence exists on its own. It is Existence, the source of all comes to exist. This is God. 64

Remember that verbal expressions fall short of our knowledge. We manage verbal expressions precisely because they’re limited. We speak or write them. We start and stop them. These limitations, like a veil, show what is beneath fairly well, but not exactly. As they reveal, they also conceal. That’s why we provide several “veils” expressing different aspects of the action beneath them. Each one clarifies something hidden by a previous “veil”. All Thomas’ proofs emphasize different primal acts observed in creation. Everything created is inadequate, but comes from the Adequate. That’s why each creature relates back to the Adequate, and can lead us back to the Adequate. Whether we start from the act of motion or existence, all act traces back to Pure Act.

This Ultimate Act is perfectly simple. His Essence is to Exist. His Essence is His Existence. God is not divided. But all creatures have at least one division. Angels are the simplest creatures, but their essence is not their existence. Their essence is what they are. Their existence is that they are. God unites these parts into an angel. Before God united the angel’s essence with its existence, that angel did not exist. Before God created that angel, it was possible but not actual. God actualized the angel. Once actualized, the angel exists forever after. Cats come and go, angels are forever. So are humans. That’s what we mean by “immortal soul”. But humans have more parts than angels. First parts: essence and existence. Our essence divides unto body and soul. Bodies have multiple parts, while human souls are units, with multiple powers. So we can isolate many parts for humans, 2 parts for angels, and no parts for God. His absolute simplicity means no limits. So we call Him infinite. We call Him perfect. We know by abstracting act from its limitations. In that way we discover that God exists. But what He is surpasses us. His simplicity escapes out ability to know His essence. But we can love Him.

**St. Thomas Aquinas Class Summary #17: 1/5/13**

**Other Ways to God’s Necessity, from p 64**

Proving God’s necessary existence is our greatest intellectual achievement. While some folks delight in these demonstrations, we must admit that many more people prefer loving God, Whose Love is more clear to them. Intellectual proof is marvelous for thoughtful people. But few people are thoughtful. So we are not surprised to find that these proofs leave most people cold. Still, as these proofs excite thoughtful folks, we have sufficient reason to complete them. As we express these demonstrations, notice that the thoughts remain the same, even though the words we use change markedly. Our eternal destiny is to contemplate God in Truth and Love. When we reach eternity, we will contemplate Him beyond words. Here below, we struggle with major problems. At the very least, they distract us. Often, they devastate us. Our darkened intellect condemns most of us to constant confusion. Personal lies added to that dismal condition commit us to errors that sink our attempts to think. Therefore, Thomas seems angelic as he sails gloriously through his demonstrations of God’s necessity.

Perhaps his sailing tempts us to envy Thomas. Spanish thinkers warn us well: *La envidia mata* = envy kills. Many people try to motivate themselves by envy. They lash themselves with jealous flames. Their effort counter-produces, i.e. it produces just the opposite of their desire. Envy wears them out, instead of invigorating them. Envy is exquisitely exhausting turmoil. Though it rouses us from torpor, it is more harmful than productive. Some people emphasize envy so much that they cramp up. Envy cripples them, killing their spirits. Instead, we want to emulate Thomas, to do what he does. If we concentrate on the existing act that impresses us, we can follow it to its Source. These simple steps enable Thomas to sail. If we take them, we sail along with him.

Many people expect a lot from creatures, until they discover how fleeting, fragile, and unstable they are. No creatures **have** to be, not even the universe. Without the Big Bang, nothing would be here. An impressive way to enquire about this is: “Why is there something, rather than nothing?” People impressed with tenuous creatures, that need not be at all, ask that question. Thomas uses this striking experience for his third proof of God’s necessity. Among several ways to say this proof, all begin with the obvious fact that things are contingent. They come and go. For a while a cat did not exist. Then it existed for a while. Then it died. This succession of beings is obvious. Each contingent being depends for its existence upon some pre-existing being. This pre-existing being is either contingent or not. There is a chain of contingent beings causing others to exist. It may be long, but this chain must end. Unless there is a first, there can’t be a second, on down to the cat we observe. So the first cause of contingent beings can’t be contingent. Instead, it is necessary; It necessarily exists. 65

Behind these words are our thoughts. They shine more clearly than words can say. These demonstrations show stability behind slip-sliding observed changes. Many people are disgusted that things come and go. Sartre is so discouraged by contingency that he declares “the world is absurd”. That’s desperate! Instead, changing illustrates a stable Source. That Source is unity coordinating diversity. So we find stability, and can relax. From this vantage point, the world seems bound for perfection. That trend impresses many people. So Thomas uses it for his fourth proof. Some things become more and more perfect. This is obvious. More perfection is more being because perfection is action. As a thing acts, so it **is**. What becomes more perfect can’t get more being from nothing. Nothing is the absence of being. So this observed perfection comes from another being. This other is either perfect or not. If it is not perfect, it restates the problem. So we must take more steps to the Source. The ultimate perfecter is not perfected by another. So the ultimate perfecter is Perfection Himself, alias God.

Thomas sees that all limited activity flows from the Central Act, or Pure Act, or Perfection. This Source activates all that acts. Thomas sails because he eliminates distractions. Everything changing comes from the same Source. In a few steps, Thomas traces the act that impresses us back to Pure Act. In his fifth proof, Thomas considers how impressive purpose is. At first, we find no purpose in diversity, say, of biological life. The many different kinds, called species, drive us crazy. They seem to have no rhyme or reason. Their purpose is missing. Often, we say that we can’t see their design. Design is like purpose. But first we think of a purpose to achieve, then we design something to achieve it. Therefore purpose is more basic. Design comes after purpose, whether that design is a set of acts, or instruments to achieve those acts. Thomas starts with the base. Some things unfold to achieve a purpose. That’s obvious. Equally obvious, these things are not themselves the purpose, inasmuch as they unfold toward that purpose. So to have a purpose is to get it from another. This other has another purpose or not. If it has another purpose, we’ve taken another step toward the first, but not arrived. There’s no point repeating or transposing the problem. An infinite series of unfolding purposes would have no first, therefore no second, etc. So there must be a First Proposer who has no other purpose, an Ultimate Proposer.

These five proofs bring us home. Contemplating the Being Who Is fascinates us. As we wonder about Him, we realize more and more why He must be simple, perfect, with all His other attributes. When we reflect on these five proofs, we enjoy our most perfect thinking. Because God is infinite, we never finish enjoying thinking about Him. In fact, our eternity will be high-speed, unified, thinking and loving God. We will be increasingly active in harmony with Pure Act. Our most delightful moments here below are contemplating God. It is good to “wallow” in these delights, to soak them up. All the great philosophers count similar demonstrations as their most perfect thinking. By contrast, thinkers who fail to enjoy similar demonstrations envy so much that they well nigh kill themselves. Recently, we’ve seen their flailing against themselves and all nearby folks.

But we emphasize the positive, and sketch Thomas bolstering his speculation by revelation. In the Old Testament, God tells Moses: “I am Who Am”, Ex 3:14. In the New Testament, Jesus said: “Before Abraham came to be, I Am”, Jn 8:58. The Greek words in the Septuagint Exodos are *ego emi* = I am. The very same words appear in the original Greek of the New Testament, in Jn 8:58. Revelation delivers effortlessly what philosophers labor hard to show. 66 Throughout the Old Testament, God’s followers struggled against idolatry. They strove to worship the One God Who Is. Torah (the first 5 Old Testament books), Prophets, Psalms and Wisdom books all celebrate His being. Thomas synthesizes speculation and revelation, showing their inner harmony. This is the synthesis expressed in the *Summa Theologica*, and throughout his other writings.

Venturing into Thomas’ *Summa Contra Gentiles* = Summary Against Non-Catholics, we see Thomas address Jewish & Mohammedan philosophers. Revelation won’t help, as his auditors reject either the New Testament or both Testaments. Here, Thomas uses only what we see out there in creation. One of the visible things out there is the frustration of diversity. Plato so hated diversity that he called it illusion, meaning it’s not really real. Diversity distracts us. Some people love distractions. Some hate them unto death. Ancient philosophers like Democritus and Heraclitus listed many defects flowing from diversity. A philosopher from around 600 AD, Pseudo-Dionysius, offers a way to see the One from the many. There are many things, obviously. Why are there so many? If one is adequate, others are superfluous. But, obviously, a superfluity exists. None of them are adequate. Since none of our observed beings are adequate, each needs some source which is more adequate. This source is either one or many. If many, then inadequacy continues. Since we can’t have an infinite series of many sources, there must be One Ultimate Source, or God. Properly thought, disgusting diversity leads to Unity.

As a preview of coming attractions, think about the conclusion: God **is**. God **exists**. Connect this conclusion to Thomas’ starting points. Each impressive aspect of creation **is**, or **exists**. Even if, like diversity, creation changes, it **is changing**. This really **existing** starting point may be obscure at first. Focus on **existing** change, and keep it in mind as we go along. It’s especially helpful for our next consideration from *Summa Contra..*.

Many people find truth impressive. So Thomas enlightens their interest. There **is** some truth, obviously. There **is** some error, obviously. This mixture of truth and error here below challenges us. It’s a problem, a conflict of contradictories. Since truth does not always exist, it needs a source. This source is either pure truth, or not. If the source is not pure, we need another step to find the **first**. Since we can’t have an infinite series of displacements, the ultimate source is Pure Truth, or God. 67 This argument appeals particularly to philosophers.

We see that many impressive events urge us on to find God behind them. Reality extends beyond our experience of it, which extends beyond our conception of our experience. What we conceive is way beyond what we can express. So Thomas thrills us with his clear expressions. In *Summa Contra Gentiles*, he devotes nine full chapters to understanding our human experiences that lead us to demonstrate God’s necessity. Thomas accomplished much more than we can sketch here. Learning his important principles, you can sail into his work.

He notices people who are duly impressed by governors. Obviously, some discords are resolved, or governed. There must be a governor to establish this order. This governor is either governed or not. If this governor is governed, we merely displace the problem a step. Since infinite displacement is impossible, there must be an ultimate governor, who is not governed. This Pure Governor is God. 67

Similarly, many people are impressed with such goods as steak and potatoes, or, vegans, with asparagus… Obviously, some things are good, while others are less good. Some less-good things improve, as better good beings improve them. These improvers are either improved or not. If improved, the same problem exists. Since this problem can’t be infinite, there must be an Ultimate Improver, Who is Pure Good: God.

By now, you see that any existing being owes its existence to an ultimate other, Who is Existence. Naturally, He must exist. Whatever existing part of the universe attracts us, we can follow it to God. How wonderful it is to think through various distractions to our most important conclusion. Thank God for this ability!

**St. Thomas Aquinas Class Summary #18: 1/12/13**

**Some Ways to God’s Necessity Get There, Others Don’t (from p 68)**

Every existing reality opens into God’s necessity. Beauty is a new example for us. Hans Urs Von Bal-thasar elaborates an extensive theology of beauty. Beauty exists. We find it in varying degrees from most beautiful to most ugly. But the beauty we see evanesces all too soon. Sadly, our experience of existing beauty is limited. So we know that the beauty we observe is not all that beauty can be. Because beauty really exists in its limited way around us, we can trace it back to its Origin, which must be Beauty Itself, or God. Millions of teenage boys trace some steps in this process from the bratty girl next door to the beauty they marry.

This final proof illustrates the basic structure of all proofs of God’s necessity. We must begin in existing being. If we do not atart with what exists, we are not even in the ballpark of existence, so we can’t conclude to any other existing being. If we start with theory, we must end in theory, instead of arriving at an existing being. Modern terminology for this basic understanding is “mode”, or way to be. If we trace existing beings, we can find an existing being. If we trace relationships, we end in relationships, instead of being. The most famous of these relationship-to-relationship arguments is St. Anselm’s. 68 Mathematicians love this relationship. That’s why it became so popular among them back in the 1000’s. If we consider the most perfect possible being, we see that it’s “that than which nothing greater can be thought”. It is greater to exist than not to exist. This greatest being must exist. We call it God. Its elegance enthralls us. It’s powerful because it’s simple.

Even non-mathematicians are impressed by this demonstration. They see magic. As Thomas showed, “that than which nothing greater can be thought” is merely a supposition. It’s merely mental. It shines brilliantly in mind, but does not emerge into reality. It is not in the ballpark of existence. To advance from non-being to being is impossible for us. We can’t get something from nothing, we can’t get existence from supposition. Thomas develops this thought in *Summa Theologica*, First Part, Question 2, Article 1. As we strive to comprehend Thomas, we realize that his terminology was popular in 1250, but no longer is. So we read what he says, but aren’t sure what propositions are. Worse still, we can’t distinguish essence from existence. If we could, Thomas’ words would be clear. His clarity even startles us. If we enter his context, we see his blazing clarity. Then we know why he’s the Angelic Doctor. Soon, we’ll analyze his very words.

Meanwhile, we struggle to learn his terms and distinctions. Let’s practice disposing of sophistic arguments, like Rene Descartes’ *cogito ergo sum*. Mathematician that he was, Descartes loved relationships. When he was delirious in a fever, and near death, his vision of God assured him that clear and distinct ideas were true on God’s authority. If God authorizes my ideas (thoughts that I think), then God exists. This “if, then” reasoning is our modern standard. But “if, then” reasoning is obviously supposition. Using it helps us advance to more probable suppositions. A famous example is Galileo’s supposition that the earth revolved around the sun. But he assumed that the sun was stationary. More accurate suppositions say that the sun is moving rapidly. Today we say that the earth revolves around this moving sun. Science must be “self-corrective” because so many of its suppositions are inadequate. Usually we gaze glassy-eyed at new scientific discoveries. Their frequency and divergence from previous suppositions stupefy us. Suppositions slip in and out of fashion. This type of “if, then” reasoning forever changes. So it’s not the most effective way to think. Thomas thinks more consistently.

He was our first existentialist, writing a book on the difference between essence and existence. Essence is what a thing is, if it exists. You are quite familiar with dinosaur essence, though none have existed for about 60 million years. Existence affirms that a thing exists. Dinosaurs don’t, but you do. This distinction between essence and existence is so simple that most people overlook it. Yet we use this difference many times a day. Plans for the weekend express the essence of what we hope will exist. Your plan to ski Santa Fe may or may not come true. It’s true if it exists, or actually happens. Using our experience of this distinction, we realize that suppositions exist only in our imaginations. They look pretty there, but are not actually acting yet. When they happen, their existence often falls short of our planned essence. These experiences show the fundamental difference between essence & existence. When you sit down to supper, you can’t eat planned food, only existing food. See act and not-yet here? It’s the basis, the core distinction, showing us the central Act around which all revolves.

Philosophy and theology are about existing beings. They trace what happens. This is the opposite pole from suppositions, which may or may not exist. For example, some people delight in their images, or suppositions. Ultimately, such a person says: “I alone exist”. But if he alone existed, he could not tell us, since we don’t exist. The fancy term for this claim comes from the Latin *solo ipse* = alone myself = solipsism. Fortunately, this claim crashes when the solipsist sits down to supper. At least the food exists. Similarly, whenever he interacts with other people, he acts as if they exist. 69 So we reject Anselm’s ontological argument, Descartes’ transcendental argument for God’s existence, and the solipsist’s *solo ipse* claim. None emerges from the mode of thought to the mode of being. None goes beyond an image into reality.

What about Augustine’s argument that God illumines us to know Him? While he expresses a neat summary of experiencing God, he does not start from a common experience. Some people know that God illumines them, but not many folks have that experience. A proof must start with a universal experience, which everyone has. E.g. nobody fails to notice that bodies move from place to place. Since hardly anyone experiences God’s illumination, it’s not a good starting point. Moreover, the illumination supposedly proves God’s existence in a single step. A proof requires several steps, to show at least one reason. So it will not qualify as a demonstration of God’s necessity. However, most people are not logical, so they respond warmly to Augustine’s expression of God’s loving interaction. Proof doesn’t matter to most people. Experience is everything. Let such people be.

Most people experience that “everyone” believes in God. That majority opinion is enough for such folks. However, it’s not a proof of necessity. Instead it merely asserts that lots of people believe in God. That’s a fact, rather than a proof. It’s a close cousin to affirming “everyone’s” religious experience. It’s widespread, indeed. But there are some people who deny experiencing religion. They do not recognize any personal inclination to *re* = again *ligo* = I tie, or tie-back or bind-back myself to God. So they don’t participate in the starting point, and can’t advance from it. People who love to join groups are impressed, but knowing that many folks worship God is not a reason to affirm that God exists. Each proof gives reasons why God exists, and can’t not-exist. 70

Emmanuel Kant provides a “proof” from responsibility. Definitely, we are responsible to someone. This someone is responsible to someone else. There can’t be an infinite set of persons to be responsible to, so the First is God. What could be wrong with that argument? Responsibility is a relationship. If it were a real being, we would proceed from existing being to Existing Being. Since responsibility is mere relationship, it doesn’t reach existence. The most a relationship can do is modify an existing being. If Kant had started with existing people, begetting other people, his argument would have arrived at an Original Begetter.

Some people are very polite. They can’t stand offending anyone. Showing Kant’s mistake must offend Kant. So polite people will not clear up these errors. But someone has to clean up the mess. Someone must affirm what’s true. Isn’t it impolite to let Kant stew in his error? Genuine politeness is pointing out his mistake. Thomas quite politely corrects his opponents, because he loves them, and wants them to improve. The more each person improves, the closer he gets to God. Really polite people want everyone to advance to God.

These days, folks debate the argument from design. “Only God can make a tree”. This conclusion to Joyce Kilmer’s poem touches our hearts. Somehow we love to find God’s fingerprints all over His creations. Anything that impresses us reminds us of God. Awe and wonder take us to the One Awesome Being. We shortcut all this by saying that creatures are designed, and God’s the designer. Very neat. But it’s not a proof because it starts in an abstract pattern, called a design. If it started with a designed being that exists, we could follow existence. But a design is not an existing being. Bishop Butler insisted that if we found a clock, we’d be correct to insist upon a clockmaker. But that’s arguing from an existing clock. The good bishop forsakes this existing being, and jumps to an abstract design. His attempt to shortcut the argument derails it instead. Many clever people expose this destruction. Then they claim that all religious people are stupid, producing such mistaken arguments. David Dennet calls atheists “brights” as opposed to “darks” like Bishop Butler. Given that few people put all these arguments into order, Dennet and Co. get away with these false accusations.

They insist that these mistaken views of some theists represent all theists. Thomas shows us how to be “bright” theists. Then we can help people think for themselves, and think correctly. As St. Ireneaus pointed out 1700 years ago, “the glory of God is man fully alive”. So we come alive to our greatest intellectual achievement: demonstrating the necessity of God. And we learn the reasons why various demonstrations are proofs. By clarifying our thoughts, we reject false proofs. Ultimately, we can know the reasons why some proofs prove, while other “proofs” fail. In its clearest way, the Thomistic Synthesis expresses these proofs. As Thomas shows, God is the perfect being. Therefore he is the most knowable being of all. We know creatures precisely because they are chips off the Old Block. They are true because they express Truth Himself. In the other spiritual dimension, they are good because they express Goodness Himself. Their oneness expresses in a minor way the One Himself. His pure act activates them. A duck pictures this activity. Above water, not a feather moves. Underwater, it’s paddling along, leaving ripples behind. God is like the duck, but much better. Creatures are like the ripples left behind. God activates all that acts. His central reality unifies everything. Nothing is more real.

**St. Thomas Aquinas Class Summary #19: 1/19/13**

**God’s Integrity Ensures Truth’s Unity (from p 72)**

Skipping the historical background about Thomas, on p 72, we go to p 73. One of the most important truths Thomas sees is the integrity of God. His Unity assures us that all positive activities integrate. All that is comes from the One, and goes back to the One. Along the way, diversity diverts us, and frequently destroys us. But behind all this superficial conflict, the universe remains unified. Astounding unity keeps volcanoes from exploding everything, and hurricanes from blowing it all away. Droughts devastate parts of the world, while floods swamp other parts. But, on the whole, the earth remains stable. Beyond the earth, entire galaxies collide, atomizing each other. Yet the universe remains stable. Recent discoveries show that our universe expands at breakneck speed. Exploding supernovae spew matter forth. Black holes suck up nearby matter. Yet astronomy shows astounding order behind all this chaos. Thomas didn’t know these marvels, but would have enjoyed them. The Big Bang exploded at just the right temperature, suggesting that God orchestrated it precisely for us humans. Thomas concluded the same with the evidence available to him 700 years ago. Providence reigns.

The unity visible throughout creation convinced Thomas that whatever is true is true all around. Errors look true from just one perspective. Shift your view, and errors obviously collapse. God’s integrity supports truth’s all-around truthfulness. Therefore, whatever is true in philosophy fits whatever’s true in theology. In fact, these two studies must unify, because the same Integrity produces each. God activates the act that informs us when we know. We identify with ultimately unified activities whether we know by speculation or by revelation.

Thomas outlines how speculation and revelation interact in *De Trinitate*, (On the Trinity), question 2, article 3. The three main interactions are: 1. philosophy demonstrates some simple truths upon which theology builds (e.g. God’s existence, His oneness ...); 2. philosophy relates theological truths to more obvious philosophical truths, to explain theology more clearly; 3. philosophy dismantles fallacious arguments against theological truths. This is the blueprint for *Summa Theologica*. As we jettison errors, and live in truth more completely, we see what an excellent teacher Thomas is. The order he presents unifies the fragments, showing their truth.

We know cats directly. But God is Something Else. God is so different from His creatures, that we can’t cognize Him the way we do creatures. In *Metaphysics*, Aristotle describes us well: “Though we know very little about the higher substances, we love what little we know more than all the knowledge we have of lower substances”. Thomas quotes Aristotle in *Summa Contra Gentiles* Book I, chapter 5, article 5. It’s such a valuable insight that we profit by pondering it. And to think that a pagan stated it! Aristotle was closer to God than many so-called churchmen. What’s important about this wondering is that we can’t know God directly. Delightful as knowledge of creatures is, it frustrates us. Because we long for much more than any creature can provide, each creature tantalizes us, only to let us down. Seeking God, we find only creatures. Though they disappoint us, they do hint at God. We follow these hints to demonstrate that God exists. That’s marvelous, and we should exalt our success. But what **is** He? How do we **unite** with God? Our limitations keep us from the Infinite.

Knowing creatures identifies us with them. Loving creatures identifies us with them in a different way. For example, you know your mother. You must know something about her before your love her. However, you do not comprehend your mother. It’s as if you knew **that** she exists, but don’t know **what** she is. This analogy enlightens our dilemma with God. Dwell upon this difference. Then you will identify with the problem Thomas addresses. It is so urgent for us to solve that we gasp. The necessity of God’s existence we can comprehend. But God is too simple for us to grasp intellectually. His essence is His existence. We can’t be that simple. But we can love God’s simplicity. We are fascinated by **what** He is, even though we know only **that** He is. 73

Philosophy takes us to God’s necessity. Thereafter, philosophy flounders. Fortunately, God reveals Himself by interacting with us. Philosophy prepares us for theology. Aristotle noted the same. In the final chapter of his Physics, he demonstrates God’s necessity. Then he goes beyond (*meta*) physics (*phusis*) into metaphysics. Even there, philosophy fails to reach Abraham’s revealed experience. The entire Old Testament revelation pales next to Revelation in the Flesh, Who Jesus is. Philosophy advances like the one-legged man hopping. Theology also hops. But Thomas uses both philosophy and theology to walk rapidly and surely on both legs. Walking is controlled falling. The right leg catches our fall from the left leg enabling us to go where we want. This mutual support from each leg stabilizes our forward-falling into gainful, often graceful, motion. Thomas’ blend of philosophy and theology enables him to glide forward while others limp.

Aristotle’s forward-fall overemphasized God’s purity. So Aristotle’s God despised matter as we hate mud. God’s interaction with His Chosen People corrects that fall, enabling us to advance into a more truthful comprehension of God’s creation. God is so Pure an Act that He transcends His transcendence to be with us. He is imminent to us. Come to think of it, that’s necessary, because unless God sustained our being, we would cease to be. Speculation and revelation mutually inspire each other to exalt truth. We fall forward from our philosophical foot onto theological foot. Mutual corrections keep us going by integrating speculation with revelation. Jesus expresses this ultimate integration by **being** One God-man. Christ unites divinity with humanity. Philosophy could not deduce these realities. Theology provides them. See 74.

So we mark time by Christ’s coming. It’s the most important event ever. Though we don’t understand everything about it, nothing is more fascinating than God coming to us. His incarnation fulfills creation. It’s the ultimate reason why the Big Bang exploded. The Incarnation makes sense of the flying fragments from creation. God synthesized Himself with His Beloved creatures. Thomas saw some of this integrity, and expressed a lot of what he saw. Because Pure Act acted, everything is basically dynamic. Inspiring isn’t it! Our act of knowing lets the created being act in us. As that action activates us, we become the creature’s act. Eg, when we know the circle circling, we become the circle circling, and know it’s act, or its to-be, or its essence. Thrilling as that is, we want more. Concidering carburetors, there are more acting parts to know, and to connect in their acting sequence. This more challenging study takes longer, but leaves us longing for more. Computers are still more difficult to comprehend. Their acts and sequence lead us into more possibilities, but still leave us short of our basic desire. Ultimately, we want God. His Pure Act is the Source and Destiny of all act. Only His Infinity is enough.

God simultaneously surpasses us and suffuses us with more desire for Him. Walking with both legs, we use philosophy and theology to advance into His Pure Act. Though we can finish creatures, learning everything about a circle for example, we forever re-start learning God. He’s forever fascinating. He’s the One we want. So if we don’t finish learning all He is, that’s just fine. In fact, creatures bore us. Only Infinity intrigues us. We’ll never run out of God’s surprises. His Infinity is just what we’ll explore eternally. Mental expansion is forever, heart expansion is forever, as my knowing and loving advance without end toward ultimate harmony with God.

As Aristotle pointed out in *Nicomachean Ethics*, knowing and loving merge in contemplation. Thomas expands that insight to show how revelation induces contemplation. Total harmony with Pure Act is our destiny. If we pursue it, we contemplate (pray) more, and become more active by every contemplative act. Jesus shows us that God is love. St. John develops this revelation in his gospel and epistles. Jesus taught St. John: “I came that you may be one, as I and the Father are one”, Jn 17:11. As Jesus, the Son is one with His Father, we should be One. God invites us to live His Life. Little unities of knowing and loving creatures prepare us for this Big Unity with God. This is the dynamic, the heartbeat of the universe. No wonder the Thomistic Synthesis includes so much. It imitates God’s unification of everything. 76

If we do our utmost to show God’s necessity, we can integrate this achievement with revelation, and stride forth with both legs into God’s Unity. If we can’t get going through speculation, we can believe, and limp a bit, but keep going forward. Belief actualizes us. Our best friend, God, told us that He loves us. He is the most believable of all Persons. So He must love us. We see confirmation of this belief again and again. This confirmation can be the blessings God provides. It can be the support He gives us to get through grave suffering. With faith, we see God’s Providence everywhere. Wisdom brings increasing confirmation of God’s love. Some people specialize in loving, while others emphasize knowing. Thomas recommends even strides forward with each. In *Summa Contra Gentiles*, ch 7, he shows the integrity of knowing and loving. In summary, he says that what we know is so clear that its opposite is unbelievable. Eg, a circle is the set of points equidistant from its center. This is so clear that we can’t think of it as false. Superficially, we could think that revelation is false. Eg, we could deny that God became man. But Jesus revealed Himself as God-man, and we know that God is Pure Truth. Since the Activator of the circle is the Activator of the Incarnation, neither can be false. If I mix up my thinking, I can confuse myself, and forget their integrity. I correct that confusion by seeing their unity.

Thomas continues: Furthermore, what the teacher introduces into the student’s soul is in the teacher’s soul, unless the teacher teaches fiction. God doesn’t do that. So what God teaches us is in His Wisdom. He teaches us basic principles, like the whole is greater than any of its parts. These principles are in His Divine Wisdom. So whatever opposes these principles opposes Divine Wisdom, and can’t come from God. Whatever comes from His revelation comes from His Divine Wisdom, so it can’t oppose our basic principles. So revelation and speculation, coming from Divine Wisdom, fit perfectly together. If we find some conclusions that don’t fit, those conclusions are false. Thomas sympathizes with those people who find revelation overwhelming. Much that God reveals is too much for us. Yes. But too much truth is still true. It’s synthetic, and delightful.

**St. Thomas Aquinas Class Summary #20: 2/2/13**

**Minor Details Concerning Proofs of God’s Necessity (from p 77)**

Many people suffocate on details. “The devil is in the details” is a useful cliché because small defects derail grand plans. Projects flounder from: “fly in ointment”, “pebble in shoe”, “grain of sand in gear”. Seven astronauts died in a rocket explosion from a negligible gasket freezing in a minute liquid oxygen leak. Though we like to ignore them, details are important. God’s necessity is our most vital knowledge. So we care for details that might derail its demonstration. The basic principle for this care is “what is true is true all around”. Each truth fits every truth. Properly applied, this principle helps us acquire and appreciate more truth. Sadly, we can misapply this principle to cast false aspersions on truths. Every tool can help, or, by misapplication, hurt. You witness that today when an organized group of atheists attack God’s necessity. Thomas faced similar attacks. His defense can educate and inspire us to handle today’s detailed attacks.

Quickly review his demonstration from motion. Moving bodies exist. Nothing moves of itself. Each moving body requires some mover to move it. Most of these movers are themselves bodies. But each intermediate moving body merely displaces the problem of motion’s source. An infinite set of moving movers is impossible. Why? Because infinite means “no limit”. “No limit” means without a first. If here is no first mover, then there is no second, no third, and no motion at all. There obviously is motion. So a first mover is necessary. This unmoved mover is beyond limits that afflict intermediary movers. It is Pure Act, activating all that acts, or God.

In our simplicity, we think this argument is unassailable. True enough. But people assail it. They attack the rather obvious truth that “everything moved is moved by another”. They also insist that an infinite series of causes exists. Thomas seems to have ice water in his veins when he confronts these attacks. So we imitate Thomas when we deal with “no mover is necessary”. Organisms seem to move themselves. Perhaps everything does. Wonder of wonders. Are organisms examples of self-movers? 78

The great advantage of the synthesis is that everything rebounds to the same start, and reiterates the same main activity. Motion is the activation of a not-yet activated body. A not-yet moving body remains as it is: motionless. If a body moves, some other body activates it. As we savor that reality, we find many ways to express it. If a body is inert, it remains inert, until activated by an active being. If it were already activated, it would be moving. If it is not moving, it’s not activated. Deeper wondering into what’s happening shows act activating not-yet active bodies. These expressions approach the truth. They apply well to rocks.

But what about cats? Surely, they seem to move themselves. No other being needs to activate the cat. It wakes up, stretches, and sashays off. Like cats, all organisms move themselves from rest. Closer observation of their rest shows they not totally resting. The cat breathes, circulates blood, digests mice, moves its eyes under its lids, etc. True, its local motion ceases, but many other motions occur. It’s as if its motor keeps running in those other ways, while it shifts from place-to-place motion to remaining in place. Moving power is in “neutral” while the cat rests. Details show that the cat is not entirely motionless, only relatively motionless.

The cat’s overall motion comes from its mom. Each cat was once in its mother’s womb developing from a single cell. Mom and pop cat move each baby cat into motion. Details fit into place. Each cat’s essential motion comes from its parents. Within that motion, cats enjoy relative rest, but complete rest means death. Relative rest enables a cat to remain in place by stopping relative motion. But essential motion continues in the cat throughout its life. Essential motion starts with mom and pop cat uniting cells, and ceases when that cat dies. Thus organisms do not move themselves from non-act into act. They are not ultimate self-movers, but secondary shifters of some activities. They can shut down local motion, but keep moving in living ways.

Even as they move from place to place, cats don’t displace their entire bodies all at once. You see a cat lift its right foreleg, then lean forward. All that while, its other 3 legs remain where they are. Clearly, only one part of the cat moves at a time. While galloping, the cat raises both its front legs, and extends them. This extension is possible only because its two rear legs remain in place. From that place, the cat pushes and stretches its other parts forward. High-speed photographs reveal what we can’t see with naked eyes. Details support our original, general understanding quite well. Once we delve into puzzles, we clarify them. Secondary shifting shows that the cat can’t move itself in the ultimate sense. In a confined, relative, sense, the cat can move or rest. Details support our demonstration well. The proper distinctions clear difficulties away. The cat is not the exclusive cause of its motion. 79 Nor is the cat moving essentially when it glides away. Its essential motion is its entire life. Other motion modifies its essential motion. It lives while sleeping, as well as it lives while walking. The difference between sleeping and walking does not change its essence. Accidental changes are irrelevant to the causes of moving. Mom and pop cat are relevant to those causes. They and their ancestors lead back to the Necessary Cause.

Thomas drives directly to the heart of the question by reminding us that motion is the act of a body which is not-yet finished that act. All motion is a mixture of act and not-yet. So self-motion supposes a body both acting and not acting. At the same moment, and in the same meaning, a self-moving body must be both acting and not acting. This contradiction destroys the supposition. Thomas is the model of clarity, but also the model of generosity. He overlooks the foolishness of his opponents. It’s enough to show their error. 79

Some idealistic thinkers claim that motion is merely apparent, mere illusion. That assumption reduces the cat’s motion to something like the cat you throw down the stairs. Its motion is accidental. There is violent accidental motion, but it’s not the natural motion we see is real. So motion must be activated by another. 80

**Infinite Series of Movers**

Infinity is more difficult to comprehend. Infinity comes from the Latin *in* meaning without, and *finis* meaning limit. If something is without limit, it has no edges, no perimeter, no surface, no body. Without these limits it reflects no light, so is invisible. It can’t vibrate, so it’s inaudible. Without surface, we can’t touch it. Having no particles to give off, we can’t smell it, nor taste it. Infinity is detached from all sensory identification. Logic and math know infinity by its relationships. Metaphysics knows infinity as Pure Act in reality. Infinity negates limits. We know limits directly by sensing them. Therefore, we can negate all limits as a logical decision. When we consider amounts, we can affirm unlimited units to count, and unlimited figures, like lines, in space. These mathematical relationships fascinate some people, urging some of them to seek actual infinity. Most people don’t bother with infinity at all, but everyone can consider it.

Because we easily consider contradictions, like square circles or self-moving bodies, we can also examine an infinite series. Our challenge is to determine whether it’s a contradiction or a possibility. Thomas shows what is necessary about an infinite series of movers. The point of positing an infinite series of moved movers is to avoid the Unmoved Mover. So all these moved movers are bodies. Now an unlimited set of bodies would crowd upon each other, jam right against each other. Can such an infinity of movers move? Not at all! So supposing an infinite series of moved movers contradicts itself quickly. Moreover, an infinite set of movers, even is each took a mere instant to move, would take forever to move. As we observe motion right now, contradiction! Basically, if there is no first mover, there will be no second, so motion will not occur from infinite movers. 81

It’s obvious that the mover is superior to the moved, if only because it moves the moved. Previous movers are more active than subsequent ones. In everyday terms, friction retards the original impetus, so we never get all the energy from the kick-start that it gave the moved body. If there is no increased motion back toward the Original Mover, there is no motion at all. If we imagine an infinite set, with each equal, we have no more than an image of a possibility. But the details tell a different story. Real motion requires a Real 1st Mover.82

**Necessity Itself**

Many people deny necessity, calling everything relative. As Bertrand Russell says in *The ABC’s of Relativity*. “Some people say that Relativity Theory makes everything relative. Nonsense! Whatever is relative is relative to something. That something is absolute.” The absolute is necessary. It’s the basic requirement for the relative, the changing, the moving... If the mover moves the moved only accidentally, it merely modifies the moved, as in painting it a different color. The moved does not move from accidental changes. Actual movement requires actual moving. Actual moving is real, or necessary. This necessity allows for many different kinds of movement. If movement were merely accidental, each movement would be the same as every other. Obviously, movements differ. Could they differ infinitely? Then we would never observe them all, and could not identify differences among them. What’s true is true all around, as these details show there is no infinite set of movers, nor mere accidental movers. Instead, everything fits together, necessarily. 82

**What About A Circle of Causes?**

Suppose that the infinite set of moved movers is in a circle. Couldn’t it move everything in this circle? Each equal part would chug along equally. That means that each mover is both moved and moving. To move the next one, it relies upon motion from the previous one, and all do the same. Obviously, this equality requires each one to have the motion it passes along before it has the passed-along motion. The detail of time shows that this supposition contradicts itself. The equality of reception and passing along requires the body to be both acting and not acting at the same time, in the same way. Impossible. Suppose that there’s a delay, to avid acting at the same time. Time-difference makes the mover wait for passed-on motion while it moves. Impossible. 83

**St. Thomas Aquinas Class Summary #21: 2/9/13**

**Why did Powerful Authorities of His Time Oppose Thomas? (from p 83)**

Church leaders fought pagans for 1200 years. So they dreaded pagan ideas. Aristotle was a pagan, *ergo*. He affirmed the eternity of the universe. Yes, the Unmoved Mover moved it, but not a finite time ago. This contradiction of Creation is a serious objection to his thought. Thomas used Aristotle’s truths to correct his errors. Because God revealed Creation, and God is Truth Himself, Creation must be true. Still, the Archbishop of Paris condemned Thomas’ works after he died. Dominicans rushed to defend Thomas, and eventually cleared him of heresy-charges. This process took many years, but was a resounding success. Thomas emerged as our thinker.

**Ch 7 Revelation: Inclusivity**

The philosopher wants it all. He seeks to see the whole wholely. Therefore, he studies revelation. He knows that it differs from speculation. Theology is not philosophy. But if I claim to be a philosopher, and want it all, I accept revelation. Because what God reveals is so vast, I quail at the task of learning it. But to dismiss it without cause is prejudice. If I accept it, I expand beyond reason’s natural limits. As we experienced in proving the necessity of God, a supernatural Being exists. We strain to prove that God exists. Then we gape at God’s simplicity in awe and wonder. As Thomas shows, we can’t philosophize into God’s essence, or Being. The main reason is that He’s infinite, and we are finite. He is forever beyond our ability. But He reveals Himself.

So the truly inclusive thinker thinks about everything, especially big things. Revelation is the biggest. No theologian has mastered all of revelation. Thomas did not explore every nook and cranny. But he surveyed its main dimensions. His methods never finish uncovering God’s gift of beyond-nature knowledge. Modern developments in all theological fields use Thomas’ methods to advance. It’s clear that we will not exhaust all God tells us, or even touch on everything. But Thomas launches us into theologizing. Natural theology limps along, while revealed theology soars. Each helps us to include the entirety of what man can know.

A glance around shows that the majority of people marinate in their misery. They know nothing, and won’t learn. Actually, they know millions of things. But they claim to know nothing, and want to steep in that ignorance. A few people use revelation to live well. Fewer still integrate philosophy with theology to synthesize all knowledge. We strive to join this minority. So we trace Thomas’ main teaching. 84

**Where is Revelation?**

Revelation is in the Bible. This good answer is not good enough. Did Abraham get revelation from the Bible? Obviously not. Neither did Jesus. The Bible came after revelation. So revelation is bigger than the Bible. Revelation is in the flesh of the people who receive it from God. Abraham experienced revelation directly. Perhaps the most striking example of revelation in the flesh is Abe’s son Isaac. Isaac revealed the covenant by **being** the flesh and blood born of Abraham and Sarah. They kept the covenant in their flesh. They received the child of promise by their repeated decisions to believe. The Bible shows that Abe and Sary were not always faithful. There was Hagar’s child. All told Abe had 6 children. But only one was born outside biological capability. Only one was God’s promise fulfilled in the flesh. Revelation to us spirited-flesh beings is in our flesh.

After experiencing revelation, Abe reflected upon it. God is a patient teacher, taking about a century to get His point across to Abe. Eventually, Abe understood some of what God revealed. By daily meditation, Abe developed a summary. This he passed on to Isaac. Isaac then added his own experience to Abe’s revelation. So Isaac passed on a richer, longer, more varied summary of revelation to Jacob. Jacob lived similar experiences, and the process continued into a communal pool. Verbal summaries can’t capture the experiences they summarize. But these words were extraordinarily powerful. Too powerful to be men’ work. Instead, that power shines from God. So we say that God inspired, or breathed into, those men who received revelation. First reception is in the flesh. God loves Isaac into existence. Less obviously, God guides Abraham to wonder about revelation until Abe could speak words to Isaac. Hundreds of years later, God inspired someone to write a summary. *Scripto* is Latin for “I write”, so Scripture is a fine name for written revelation. Our personal experience of reading Scripture, in our own flesh, astounds us. Revelation differs from all other writing. Somehow, we recognize God’s inspiration shining there. From Scripture’s start, men revered its divine Source.

So Scripture is sacred: from God, about God, in God, through God, it reveals God. But it’s not revelation itself. Revelation is more intimate, infused in human flesh. That’s why Scripture gets under your skin. A non-believing literary analyst may know lots of Scripture, but he misses the main message. Revelation is God’s love-letter from God. It reminds us of thousands of experiences in the flesh. We love Him in return when we read it in Love. Thomas summarizes all this by saying that Scripture is inspired. Everyone knew the meaning.

They knew it because experts hadn’t yet limited knowledge to words. Thomas reminds us that knowing is being. The Scripturing of Scripture Scriptured the people. Moses authored the first 5 books of the Bible. Perhaps he even wrote them down, a thousand years after Abe died. God first inspires people as a whole, then inspires them to speak words, and finally to write words. Thomas didn’t need to express that very clear knowledge. Here are his opening words of the Summa to clarify **why** God revealed.

“OBJ 1: It seems, besides philosophical science, we need no further knowledge. For man shouldn’t seek to know what is above reason: "Seek not the things that are too high for thee" (Sirach 3:23). But whatever is not above reason is fully treated in philosophical science. So any further knowledge is superfluous.

“OBJ 2: Further, knowledge concerns being only, for nothing can be known, save what is true, and all that is, is true. But everything that is, is covered in philosophy, even God Himself. There is a part of philosophy called theology, or the divine science, as Aristotle proved (De Metaphysica VI). So philosophy suffices.

“On the contrary, it is written (2 Timothy 3:16): "All Scripture inspired of God is profitable to teach, to reprove, to correct, to instruct in justice." Now Scripture, inspired of God, is no part of philosophical science, which has been built up by human reason. Therefore it is useful that besides philosophical science, there should be other knowledge, i.e. inspired of God.

“I answer that, it was necessary for man's salvation that there should be a knowledge revealed by God besides philosophical science built up by human reason. First, indeed, because man is directed to God, as to an end that surpasses the grasp of his reason: "The eye hath not seen, O God, besides Thee, what things Thou hast prepared for them that wait for Thee" (Isaiah 64:4). But the end must first be known by men who are to direct their thoughts and actions to the end. Hence it was necessary for the salvation of man that certain truths which exceed human reason should be made known to him by divine revelation. Even for truths about God which human reason could discover, it’s necessary that man be taught by a divine revelation. because the truth about God that reason could discover, would only be known by a few, and that after a long time, and mixed with many errors. But man's whole salvation, which is in God, depends upon the knowledge of this truth. Therefore, in order that the salvation of men might be brought about more fitly and more surely, it was necessary that they should be taught divine truths by divine revelation. It was therefore necessary that besides philosophical science built up by reason, there should be a sacred science learned through revelation.

“Reply OBJ 1: Although those things which are beyond man's knowledge may not be sought for by man through his reason, nevertheless, once they are revealed by God, they must be accepted by faith. Hence the sacred text continues, "For many things are shown to thee above the understanding of man" (Ecclesiasticus 3:23). And in this, the sacred science consists. [Note faith-acceptance. This decision opens Scripture to us.]

“Reply OBJ 2: Sciences differ by various ways to obtain knowledge [methods]. The astronomer and the physicist both prove the same conclusion: that the earth is round [a sphere]. The astronomer uses mathematics (i.e. abstracting from matter). The physicist uses matter itself. Hence there is no reason why those things which may be learned from philosophy, so far as they can be known by natural reason, can’t be taught us by another science: revelation. Hence theology from sacred doctrine differs in kind from theology as part of philosophy.”

Note that Thomas knew the world was a sphere. Some people claim that people thought the world was flat. Uneducated people did so imagine the world. They worried about falling off the edge of the world, if they could approach it. But the Greeks proved the spherecity of the earth a thousand years before Thomas. Mathematicians used trigonometry to compare the lengths of shadows (of equal-length poles) in Athens and Alexandria. Physicists used the shape of the shadow during the eclipse of the moon. Another lie bites the dust.

Thomas knew that tradition was the source of Scripture. It’s more inclusive than Scripture, which records only a part of in-the-flesh-experience. See the end of St. John’s gospel for a lovely expression of this truth. This helps us catch up with truths common to Thomas and his audience. Socrates gives another common demonstration of God’s uniqueness. He noted that God means greatest being. But many Gods must be different from one another. If different, they can’t **be** equal. The greatest of them might be God, but the others are imposters. 86 Abe could have used a similar argument to realize that God is One. Abe surely figured out that God speaks to us. As Creator, He is the Source of everything. Because we communicate, God must give us communication. He, therefore, must communicate. He gets His point across directly, if we listen, by prayer. So Abe accepted revelation. Though we talk a lot in prayer, we eventually learn to listen to God. He speaks to us in our hearts. There we dialog with God, learning as we go, and join great friends like Abe, Moses, Jesus, His mom, the Apostles, and a long list of saints. May St. Thomas help us open up to all synthesized truth.

**St. Thomas Aquinas Class Summary #22: 2/16/13**

**Shining Examples of Synthesizing Speculation & Revelation (from p 86)**

At the apex of human thought, we learn God’s necessity. Next, necessarily, God is One. Abraham thought through to the same conclusion, from reason alone. This achievement was magnificent, and countercultural, given Abe’s neighbors’ commitment to many gods. Similar commitments confused Aristotle’s neighbors. How astounding it is, that each found the same unique God, necessary Source of the world, given millions of people who missed it. This accord of Abe and Ari attracts our attention. But it’s merely a first step into coordinating philosophy and theology. Thomas takes us through many more steps on the way to a grand synthesis.

God made man to think and to love, intelligent and free. When man unites thinking & loving, he integrates his acts. Abe exemplified that integrity when he thought from God’s necessity to His oneness, then to His fullness, and loved all this Good. If God necessarily exists, He is Existence. Creatures, existing in partial, passing, ways, come from God, so reflect Him partially. He is the perfection of these imperfect creatures, the Source from which they flow. So: if humans communicate fitfully, then God communicates fully. Abe tuned into God’s communication, thus opening himself to revelation. God made Abe free, and would not impose revelation upon him. By free choice, Abe experienced revelation in his flesh. Abe loved this experience, learning to love God.

Now and then, we must remind ourselves that we’re not spiting words at the wind. Instead, we express experiences so real that they enter our fleshy eyes, and change our meaty brains, to unite spiritually with us. Once known, we can love the sunning of the sun, which reflects the Godding of God, Who is more loveable still. Thus we unite with God Himself. First, we’re one by knowledge, then, we’re one by love. Each act unites us with what we know/love. Our acts merge into one. God first loves us into being. Loving our ability to think, He lets us figure out how he is the Source. Loving our love, He lets us return Love by free choice. United, we are most completely. United with Pure Act, there is no more activation around. No wonder this union is ecstasy.

God shows Himself to be One in His creation. He affirms Himself to be One in His revelation. When we synthesize speculation with revelation, we experience **both** more fully. This realization exalts us above life’s struggles. The very blending of our efforts with God’s divinizes us. At first, this blend stretches us painfully. It is so different from ordinary life, that its strangeness scares us. Adjusting to this painful extension, we discover that God made us just for this expansion into Him. Our destiny is to see the whole so wholely that we synthesize speculation & revelation. This union is exactly what we need, and why we exist. Finally, we fit the fragments into their intrinsic order. Comprehending order in change so satisfies us that we’re outside ourselves in joy. Ultimately one with Pure Act, no further act can be. Each small act contributes to larger acts, which come from, and go to, Ultimate Act. Uniting knowing and loving, we contemplate Ultimate Order in Ecstasy.

Instead of fighting change, we harmonize with it. That step toward God satisfies us for a while. Then we progress further into the dynamics around us, confident because we just enjoyed harmony. We became what we knew & loved. Step by step, we integrate more & more. Uniting ever more, we are ever more satisfied, and ever more into Infinity. Small successes spur us on larger syntheses. All his abstraction helps us advance. But we notice that Abe used a different process. He remained firmly in fleshy experiences. Rather than abstract to act, Abe acted along with God in life’s details. Abe so loved God that he did what He wanted. Hence the Jewish emphasis on Torah (law). Abe loved God by doing His will, uniting his will with His, becoming One. 87 In contract, Aristotle loved abstraction. 86 Each of us should live the blend of fleshy and abstract act that’s best for us. Each is uniquely tuned toward God individually. Each is an independent person, like The Persons in Trinity.

Each of us adapt to the events around us. Abe & Sarah experienced the miraculous birth of Isaac from their flesh. We will not. But we reflect upon this glorious revealed miracle, seeing many ways that it fits with God’s other revelations. Then we plumb its endless benefits, and love God revealing His Love. In Love, we take the next step: to fulfill His covenant with us. As we consider the infinite mystery of God’s revelation, He draws us toward Him, reiterating our destiny to freely attain our Source. Reflecting on the unending meaning and value of Isaac’s birth, **is** dwelling in God’s fullness. He is so full that we can’t encompass Him. That’s why He eternally fascinates us. Creatures’ limitations frustrate us. They may sparkle for a moment, but soon they bore us. In the Thomistic Synthesis boredom is impossible because we see each finite creature in its infinite context. Each creature reflects its Source, fascinating God. Because God is infinite, we can’t grasp Him. Instead, we ask God to surpass our natural limits. God gives us supernatural virtues to extend us beyond our abilities. Relying on these beyond-nature powers, we let God take us past our natural boundaries. Faith is our first breakthrough into supernatural acts. By God’s gift of faith, we allow God to extend our experience into His divinity. 87

Revelation in the flesh of Abe is not ours. So God inspires secondary authors to write His word into stories we can follow in faith. In addition. That’s why Scripture tells us so much that we can read the same story thousands of time with new insights each time. Everything God does synthesizes. The more we see His work in creation & revelation, the more we grasp His unity. As infinite, His unity is forever new, eternally surprising, & has been that way forever. Most amazing is His love for us. He wants us to be one with Him. Scripture provides our most comprehensive, coherent, and clear account of these happenings. By Faith, we see Scripture expressing its Primary Author beyond all boundaries. That’s why reading the Bible often transports us to Him.

Other people claim the same for other scriptures. We respect the people who believe in them. But we compare other scriptures to what’s happening. Thomas makes that comparison in *Summa Contra Gentiles*. One quick example is that Abe’s religion keeps going, while all idolatries died out. The Judaeo-Christian way of life goes and grows, while we don’t even remember competing scriptures. 88 In quick sketch: during 2000 years, while kingdoms fell to dust, Abe’s descendants became as numerous as the stars. They developed revelation, through prophets, to expect the Messiah. He would save his people from their greatest miseries. Most people interpreted salvation to mean: this Messiah would be greater than Moses at saving Israel from material oppression. They were in for a surprise! Jesus **is** revelation in the flesh. He saved all people from sin. What does this mean? It’s too much for us. But we can follow after Christ as He reveals more than we can comprehend.

Start with the flesh. Descendent from Abraham, through David, by Mary, the Messiah came in the flesh. “The Word of God (Logos) became flesh”, Jn 1:14. Jesus Christ **is** revelation. He is the entire package: God Himself become human flesh. Greater revelation can’t be. Since what’s true is true all around, all prophecies come true in Jesus. Christ lived out everything foretold for Him. Faithful followers of Abraham identified Jesus to be Messiah. Thomas specifies why these faithful knew in his *Commentary on the Gospel According to Matthew*. 89 In the slice of that account that follows, Thomas uses shorthand. He gives the name of the commentator first. By gloss he means explanation. Here it is: “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham. JEROME; 'The face of a man' (in Ezekiel's vision) signifies Matthew, who accordingly opens his Gospel with the human genealogy of Christ. RABANUS; By this introduction, he shows that it is the birth of Christ according to the flesh that he has undertaken to narrate. PSEUDO-CHRYSOSTOM; Matthew wrote for the Jews, and in Hebrew. To them it was unnecessary to explain the divinity which they recognized. But is necessary to unfold the mystery of the Incarnation. John wrote in Greek for the Gentiles who knew nothing of a Son of God. They required therefore to be told: first, that the Son of God was God, then, that this Deity was incarnate. RABANUS; Though the genealogy occupies only a small part of the volume, Matthew yet begins thus: The book of the generation. For it is the manner of the Hebrews to name the books from that with which they open; as Genesis. GLOSS. The full expression would be: This is the book of the generation. But this is a usual (common, ordinary) ellipse. For example: The vision of Isaiah, for, 'This is the vision.' Generation, he says in the singular number, though there be many here given in succession, as it is for the sake of the one generation of Christ that the rest are here introduced.

“CHRYSOSTOM; Or he therefore entitles it: ‘The book of the generation’ because this is the sum of the whole dispensation, the root of all its blessings: viz. (namely) that God became man. From this, once effected, all other things followed, of course. RABANUS. He says: ‘The book of the generation of Jesus Christ’ because he knew Genesis was written: 'The book of the generation of Adam'. He begins this then, that he may compare book to book, the new Adam, to the old Adam, for by the one were all things restored which had been corrupted by the other. JEROME: We read in Isaiah: ‘Who shall declare His generation?’ But it does not follow that the Evangelist contradicts the Prophet, or undertakes what he declares impossible, for Isaiah is speaking of the generation of the Divine nature, while Matthew speaks of the incarnation of the human. CHRYS. And do not consider this genealogy a small thing to hear. For truly, it is a marvelous thing that God should descend to be born of a woman, and to have as His ancestors David and Abraham.”

We see that Thomas comments for professionals. He uses a “gloss” to clear up missing parts in the discussion. They help us understand what Matthew was doing. Above all, we see that Thomas gives reasons for what’s said. Thus he relates for us what the community understood, and the secondary author did not mention. Eg, he reminds us that Jews kept accurate accounts of their ancestors. This connects Abe to David, to Mary, to Jesus, so that Jews would accept this genealogy. How clear this is when Thomas says “because this is the sum of the whole dispensation, the root of all its blessings”. It fulfills the covenants with Abe, Moses. It fulfills all the prophets. But this connection explodes beyond humanity: “God became man”. It’s worth all our attention!

**St. Thomas Aquinas Class Summary #23: 2/2/13**

**Ongoing Revelation in the Flesh (from p 90)**

God respects our spirited flesh. After all, He made us that way, to show His creative virtuosity. So He reveals Himself to us in the flesh. For Abraham, it was the flesh of Isaac, the miracle baby. To prefect His revelation, the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, saves us. This merciful revelation flows through the flesh of a dozen apostles, their converts, and down to our parents and teachers. The Word worked through them to us. God asks us to keep this message alive. He relies on us to en-flesh His Word continuously among us. You may object that we are unworthy. Certainly. You may say we are untrustworthy. Correct again. But God loves us so much that He wants us to share His message. He won’t do it without us. So the Word advances from flesh to flesh. The Holy Spirit guides this effort through all our distortions, deflections, derelictions, and even defections. God chooses this continuity, & the Spirit protects His revelation. It continues both because of us and in spite of us.

We call this continued presence in the flesh: the Mystical Body of Christ. Jesus lives in us as in individual cells. 90 The Church is Christ’s life growing through time and space. God so loved the world that He did not send a committee. Instead, He Himself came. He incarnated (in *carne*=flesh) to be God with us, Immanuel. Please look past the words, to the **act**. Then we see revelation as it is: alive in the flesh. Then we harmonize with God’s in-flesh-ment. Words help, but do not contain the meaning and value of the act. Nor do they convert. Jesus, acting in us, converts. So “religion is caught, not taught”. Written revelation is precious. Therefore we cherish Scripture. But words are faint reflections of living revelation. Christ reaches mankind by acting in us.

Back when Thomas taught, his students lived this reality. The Church constructed culture for Christ and His beloved. Almost all of that culture (Christendom) is gone. Only a few cultures are Christian: Poland, the Philippines, some African areas, and the underground churches of China and Vietnam. The West, once blazing in Christ, is all but extinguished. Faint echoes of Jesus remain. But Christ-resurrected shows in His perfect flesh what He can do with our sinful flesh. We are a resurrection people. Jesus will unite us with God in glory, if we agree. Living saints shine with God’s glory, as you remember in John Paul II and Mother Teresa. We’re all cells of Christ’s Risen Body. Some shine brighter than others, because they joyfuly serve God’s people. All Christians show glimmers of Jesus, glimpses of Christ. Jesus lives in and through us, to bring others the Good News.

**What is Revelation?**

Jesus is the Eternal Word, the infinite Son of God, in the flesh. No wonder that St. John said: “If all the things which Jesus said and did were written down, the world could not contain them”, Jn 20:30. Though we can’t describe all of it, we can define it. Revelation is what God shows us **beyond** creation. 91 Our usual way to learn is to observe creation. So revelation is unusual. God’s excess of love surpasses creation, giving us knowledge beyond nature. From Abe through Christ, revelation lives in the faithful. God offers His life to us. Baptism initiates this divine life. It is life, not concept. It is act, nor idea. The Trinity vitalizes us to live the same life that divine Persons live. Therefore, revelation is remarkable different from speculation (philosophy).

Aristotle followed creation, step by step, to Creator. Activated by Pure Act, creatures enact hints of their Source. They echo a limited version of Unlimited Act. Aristotle thereby learned something of God’s activity. But Love does not leap out from creation. After all, creation is fallen with Adam into sinful rebellion. Fallen creation is mroe violent than loving. Jesus loves away this violence. His Love shines clearly in His life, and even more brilliantly in His death. But Aristotle lived three centuries befoe Christ. Aristotle lacked revelation. So he did not see love among creatures. That’s why he asserted that God is too perfect to notice measly critters. 91 Jesus lives Love. “God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten son” Jn 3:16. His Son died for love of us. Death is the price of sin. Jesus paid every last cent of our debt. Christ died to redeem us. “Greater love than this no one has than to give his life for his beloved”, Jn 15:30. Jesus **did** that. His act expresses His Love. 92 His act enacts Love among us. Trace the act to learn what’s happening. Then you too can correct Aristotle.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta traced it, and learned: “If it doesn’t hurt, it isn’t love”. Living out His Love, Christ endured massive pain. Because He was free of Original Sin, Jesus was not dulled, as we are, to every experience. Once Adam revolted against God’s order, God allowed him to have his way. Disorder erupted in Adam, Even, all their children, and the entire universe. Sin disrupts all our experiences. So even our suffering is clouded, and can’t compare to Jesus’ suffering. Consider that. A splinter in Christ’s finger was more painful than all our pains combined. In His flesh, Jesus suffered more than the entire human race. As Love is, so does Love act. Love loved His beloved so much that He suffered to save us. Christ teaches us to replace propaganda (seek comfort) with truth (love hurts). Jesus **did** all this. That’s why the center of the Thomistic synthesis is action. The entire process is dynamic, from creation all the way to Glory. It’s al act. Words point to actions.

Thomas lied in Jesus acting. Thomas saw Christ unify God with man in His very Self. The second Person of the Blessed Trinity made God & man one. This unity dispels all opposition of speculation to revelation. Yes, the two are different. Yes, speculation is what we do on our own. Yes revelation is accepting information we can’t find ourselves. But we also accept speculation. We must accept creation before we examine it. Then we must accept the reliable act behind swirling changes, when we abstract. So we rely no more on God for revelation than for creation. Natural knowledge is the act acting in nature. Supernatural knowledge is the act acting in revelation. To there’s no significant difference between the two. Creation does not exhaust God’s infinity. Infinity exceeds all limits. Who are we to limit Infinite God to just creation? It’s silly to try. Moreover, if I try to impose that limit, I restrict myself, eliminating the better part of available knowledge. Better to accept it all.

Thomas used revelation to overcome intolerable defects in Aristotle’s natural theology. From nature, we know lots about nature’s creator. But from revelation, we know lots more. Together they give us our best view of God. [On page 93, line 7 “He” is missing. It goes after “that’ and before “is”] An example is that nature shows the necessity of some Being beyond nature, to spark the Big Bang. Beyond nature means quite unlike nature. The cat’s limits, such as size, color, and shape, both hide and reveal its catting. We abstract from those limits, to see the reliable act of catting. Catting “cats” this cat. As Plato noticed, the restrictions on catting in this cat bother us. They get in the way of our progress to God. In a sense, Platowise, all these limits are illusory. But Plato used them to reason through contingent beings to Necessity. So they’re not illusions, but merely incomplete beings, dependent upon Complete Being. Aristotle cleared up Plato’s mistakes. So he demonstrated God’s necessity by tracing motion to its Source. He also showed that man’s soul can’t be destroyed. As simple spirit, it has no parts, so it can’t come apart. Both Plate and Aristotle affirmed that man is immortal. They gave excellent reasons for man’s eternal existence, once created. Man is eternal only in the forward direction.

Both philosophers experienced man’s infinite desire for Infinity. But neither of them could imagine that God would desire man. They believed that man was insignificant to God. Instead, Thomas accepts what Jesus **did**. Therefore, he sees God loving us so much that He joins us to His Perfect Love. As we contemplate this reality, lived in Christ’s flesh, we clarify how creation connects to God. 93 But divine connections are infinite, so we need eternity to investigate them. No wonder we are immortal. Among the many facets of this diamond, Thomas notes two essentials. In *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia Dei* (Disputed Questions about God’s Power), he stretches speculation to its limit, then completes the picture with revelation. Obviously, God is incorporeal. That alerts s. To attain our goal of union with Him, we **must** be incorporeal. We must be totally spiritual to unite with Total Spirit. Plato insisted that we are really pure spirits, with illusory bodies. But Aristotle showed that we’re spirited flesh, incarnate spirits. Plato was wrong. Aristotle was incomplete. Thomas sees revelation completing this picture. Jesus affirms that we will be one with Him by resurrection. We will be like Him: spiritualized flesh. Those reasons enable us to conclude that we will be one with the One, in our flesh. Thomas even gives a natural reason why we must unite with God in the flesh. “The soul united with the body is more like God than the soul separated from the body, because the soul possesses its nature more completely.” God made spirited flesh. The soul “spirits” flesh. So a totally incorporeal spirit united with God could not be a human spirit, because human spirit activates flesh. This example shows Thomas synthesizing speculation and revelation. It’s so different that we must dwell upon it a while, to let nature function. Then we see its brilliance.

Act delights us. It shines in various brilliant degrees. All acts, even a mosquito bite, reflect Pure Act, or Love Himself. I don’t know how a mosquito bite accomplishes this. But I have seen enough other magnificent transformations to know it does. Thomas’ *Shorter Summa* compacts his *Summa Theologica*, eliminating objections. There, article 143 shows why we see God’s love in His care. “Since God’s love is the cause of goodness in things, and is not called forth by any preexisting goodness (as our love is), a special intensity of divine love must be discerned in those whom He showers with such extraordinary effects of His goodness. Therefore God is said chiefly and simply to love those whom He endows with these effects of His love by which they are enabled to reach their last end, which is He Himself, the fountainhead of all goodness.” Here we see Love in creatures.

The same book, article 201: “By willing to become man, God clearly displayed the immensity of His love for men, so that henceforth men might serve God, no longer out of fear of death, which the first man had scorned, but out of the love of charity. ... The Incarnation [exemplifies] that blessed union whereby the created intellect is joined, in an act of understanding, to the uncreated Spirit.” Jesus lived the Way for us, by being One.

**St. Thomas Aquinas Class Summary #24: 3/2/13**

**Certitude: Being Sure (from p 93)**

None of us knows very much. So we’re tempted to say we know nothing. The Know-Nothing Party was very popular in 1850’s America. History repeats itself today because of science. It revises its claims so often that scientists have no lasting truth. They brag that science self-corrects, because correcting errors is its main job. It is so busy self-correcting, that scientists can’t use “truth”. Instead, they think hypothetically, measurement to test hypotheses. After testing, scientists construct a model that accounts for more measurements than the previous model. So most scientists think science is shifting models. Truth disappeared long ago. Perhaps the last scientists to use the word truth defended Newton’s model against Einstein’s. They lost that battle, & physics, our most developed science, became a maelstrom of changing models

Most university professors ridicule truth. But Thomas is all about truth. First, he finds it by viewing (speculating) creation. Then, he revels in revealed Truth. God’ major revelation is Jesus. He shows us stunning views of God. Recovering, we see why He’s God in the flesh. So nothing He says could be false. He’s all truth, so much that eternity isn’t long enough to learn all of it. 93 For example, Christ’s resurrection launches a torrent of truth. It never ends, so our sketch is inadequate. Rising from the dead confirms all that Jesus taught. It’s a shining beacon, illuminating His life. Most emphatically, it corrects our natural impression that Christ died in vain. Moreover, Jesus affirms that we too shall rise from death. Christ defeats death, opening heaven to us. His faithful followers shall be as He is. The **act** of rising reveals all this, and much more. Book upon book is already in print, reviewing the resurrection’s lessons for us. Eternity is not long enough to exhaust the meaning of resurrection. We call it a mystery because it fascinates us forever, urging us on to unpack its infinite riches. The more we let the act activate us, the more its reality enlivens us. Then we revel in revelation.

God’s gift of Christ-life, Faith, enables us to live divinely. The more we accept Faith, the more God’s Act enlivens us to live Trinitarian Life. From Truth Himself we learn surpassing truths. From Good Himself we learn unending goods. Awash with truth and good, we live God’s Pure Act. Truth awaits us at every turn. Why don’t we dwell in these blessings? Primarily, we mistake agreement for truth. Notoriously, people disagree. Americans encourage disagreement by lauding all who disagree. But this habit doesn’t flow from truth. Instead, it’s our imitation of Adam’s rebellion. Look again at disagreement. You see that it is decision rather than vision, choice rather than truth. Truth acts right there in front of us. It’s so enduring that it’s serene. But we must upset ourselves to tell lies Such aggitation is seldom about truth. Rather, it’s our effort to dominate others. This willful imposition is the opposite of seeking truth. This disgraceful power struggle screams “truth”, but means imposition. Disagreement is hardly ever about truth. Truth-seeking is peaceful advance from obvious evidence, to less obvious evidence, to fully supported truth. All the way to truth, we live in the serenity of Love. Thomas exemplifies that peaceful activity. Fury, shouting, insulting, ridiculing, and such falderal, oppose truth.

Instead, Thomas realized that all truths unite. This union stabilizes us. So he concentrated upon three main truths: 1) God loves us; 2) He created, then saved us, for union with Him; 3) this union is entire: spirit and flesh. The light and warmth of those truths encourage us. Then we’re secure in Love. This difference is always unusual, but particularly striking today. Consider how many certainties you attain from philosophy, then count those from theology. You see that theology provides more. Experiencing Love acting, you relax into certitude. The more sure you are of individual truths, the more unity they reveal. They enlighten each other. Most mistakes evaporate in their light. Thus the synthesis expands. Each truth mutually reinforces every truth. Each lie (heresy) clashes with every truth. Liars exhaust themselves forcing lies upon people. 94 Truth fits so well with every other truth that we relax in serenity. Every truth lightens the load of knowledge by enlivening all we know.

**How to Do Theology**

Philosophy and theology strive toward the same goal: truth, and the same ultimate objective: unite with God. But their methods differ. Philosophical method starts by sensing bodily beings. Then we abstract the reliable unifying **act** behind sensory data. This learning is accurate. But expressing our knowing is often inaccurate. In act, we never mistake a cat for a dog. In expression, we may argue fiercely, one saying they’re different, the other insisting they’re the same. They are different kinds of animals, but each is an animal. We often confuse these different levels of being. The resulting altercation would be amusing, if it weren’t so harmful. Disagreement reigns. Most often, people contend against each other, each seeking to dominate the other. If you see this conflict coming, avoid it. Leave the field to dominators. They bash each other for nothing. Now and then, strife may be worth the effort. One example of worthwhile strife is preventing dominators from aborting babies.

Philosophy reasons from partial good in creatures to complete Good in God. Eg: God made each creature. He can’t give what He doesn’t have. God made creatures to communicate. If creatures communicate partially, then God communicates totally. This necessarily follows. Notice that universities are full of people who disagree. When you see people arguing to amass power, let them attack each other. The few people who want truth use an entirely different method. Their search is peaceful. Peaceful philosophy is so hard to do that hardly anyone does it. After all that peaceful work, our stark conclusion sits there in cold isolation. So philosophy is a lonely activity, with little results and less audience appreciation.

Similarly, theology is hard work, done by few, and appreciated by fewer. The best prep for theology is to master philosophy, as St. Thomas recommended. But then, the method changes diametrically. Instead of watching change in nature, theologians watch revelation. Starting with Jesus, Who is Revelation in the flesh, theologians live along with Christ. Faith is the gift of God-life. So the real theologian is on his knees. As St. Thomas affirmed: “I’ve learned more from contemplating the crucifix than from all books”. The theological method is contemplating God’s revelation. To contemplate is to unify knowing and loving, synthesizing them on the most knowable/lovable Being. This Being, God, surpasses our comprehension. 94 God expands us ever onward unto His infinity. Speculating about Him whets our appetite for Him. But this philosophical process takes too long, and leaves us outside Him. Delightful as it is, it’s frustrating, and full of errors.

But His revelation is much less difficult, and leads us directly to Him. As Thomas says: “philosophers treat divine things only insofar as they are principles (sources, causes) of all things ... in that science where what is common to all beings is studied, whose subject is being as being, a science philosophers call divine science”, *Commentary on Metaphysics*, Bk 4, lec 1, q 5, a4. He continues: “There is, however, another way of knowing such things, not as they are manifested through their effects, but as they have manifested themselves. This way is mentioned by the Apostle in 1 Cor 2:11: ‘What is of God no one knows save the spirit of God. We however do not accept the spirit of this world, but the spirit which is from God, in order that we might know’. And in the same place: 2:10: ‘God has revealed it to us through His spirit’. In this way divine things are treated as they subsist in themselves, and not merely insofar as they are principles of things.” 95

So philosophers abstract from sensory impressions to acting sources, causes, or principles of nature. But theologians tune into divine activity as God acts. Philosophy examines God as ultimate cause of the universe. Theology examines God as the Person Who lovingly reveals Himself. God invites us to **be** family. If we accept Christ’s invitation, the Father adopts us. He gives us Faith. Then we shift from externals to internal Love, to living in the Spirit. This Spirit of Christ expresses God’s inner life in us. He teaches us God in Christ’s flesh. Faith **is** who we **are**. If we freely accept Faith, we **become** Christ. He divinizes us, and advances us towards One.

We decide. We select among these options: 1) ignore speculation and revelation; 2) speculate about nature; 3) revel in revelation; 4) speculate & revel (philosophize & theologize together). This synthesis is our destiny. Ultimately, in heaven, we live God’s unity. Here below, we dabble in each option. Obviously, we’re best served by synthesizing. Thomas recommends it. It is our heart’s desire. It is the unity we seek. God’s simplicity requires unification. There’s no separation in God. You may object that this unity is hard to achieve. That’s why Thomas develops the preambles to Faith. They are natural steps which go (*ambo*) before (*pre*) our decision to request Faith. We accepted Faith already, but these preambles may assist others toward Faith. Our first baby steps toward God exert us to the max. Thereafter, we walk, then run. The Spirit waits until we commit ourselves. Then He advances us still more rapidly. Many of us don’t notice our progress. But all of us get along toward God, each in his unique way.

Formal & informal learning provides explicit and implicit knowledge. Most of our knowledge is implicit. We know it, & accurately negotiate reality by it. But we don’t name it. We don’t reflect upon it, formalize it, or discuss it. Thomas calls reflective, explicit, knowing *scire* (to know), and its accomplishment *scientia* (knowledge). It’s formal, like philosophy. Thomas calls implicit knowing *intellegere* (to read between the lines), and its completion *intellectus* (informal knowledge). Intellectus is abstraction that we take for granted, and do not review or name. If we re-consider these natural abstractions, we complete our knowing by naming, relating, and organizing it as a concept. 96 We use both kinds of knowledge both to philosophize and to theologize. But theologizing vaults beyond nature to accept God’s secrets. Abstractions from changing creatures are good. But God’s revelation is much better. From those ineffable mysteries we derive much more certitude than philosophy provides. Most theological starting points are revealed. Eg: God reveals resurrection in Christ’s flesh. Then we’re off & reveling in an unending set of expressible acts. Contrast & compare them to enjoy ultimate truth.

**St. Thomas Aquinas Class Summary #25: 3/9/13**

**Sources of our Knowledge of God (from p 96)**

Once we comprehend what St. Thomas did, we realize that it’s very simple. Thomas coordinates common sense, advancing from surface to profound understanding. The Synthesis is so true, and so natural, that we ask: “Why didn’t I think of that?” Frequently we say: “How simple it is.” You really know something if you can explain it to your grandmother. Thomas really knows. As we do what he does, we see clearly. Your teachers called tricky expressions “brilliant”. Thomas doesn’t do tricky expressions. He is straightforward. For example, He shows two ways to know about God. Looking at His creatures, we learn indirectly. Listening to His Word, we learn directly. But God’s Word is Infinite. So we always find more revelation than we can understand.

Thomas recommends: believe in order to understand (*credo ut intelligere*). 96 If we believe what Jesus teaches about the Triune God, we do not understand the Trinity. But believing enables further understanding. At first sight, the Trinitarian mystery seems impossible. We never heard of three Persons being One. With time, we realize that Triune One makes more sense. By believing/thinking, we realize that God **must** be Three-in-One. Wherever we are in this process, believing advances our understanding. We analyze creatures to find related parts. Then, we see how this relation would work if it were perfect. Because God is so different from His creatures, His relationship is analogical. In Greek, *ana* means above or beyond, while *logos* means word, exact word, knowledge, logic, perfect knowledge, or science. So we know analogies intuitively (*intellectus*), rather than logically (*scientia*). An example is: March comes in like a lion, and goes out like a lamb. March is a month, not an animal. But that analogical statement is more true than most scientific things we say abut March. All statements are intrinsically analogical because every word is analogical. Perhaps you remember from our linguistic analysis, that analogies relate **different** things that are **similar**.

God is **entirely different** from His creatures, but is **intrinsically similar**. Our zinger statement, is: God’s fingerprints are all over creatures. God’s creation is the most real thing about creatures. They depend upon Him for their existence necessarily. But they are contingent. They are not necessary. If we penetrate down to any creature’s core, we find Him creating. Creating is the most definite act about each creature. It’s required. God’s act enables all the other acts of every creature. As soon as you read that, you zing in to this basic activity. [Zing = say something emphatically. It’s not in the dictionary.] Thomas zings in first, and shows us the way.

**The Triune God** *Sum. Theol. Trinity; Question 31: The Plurality of Persons in God:*

Thomas treats this famously baffling mystery so well that hardly any improvements occurred during the following 750 years. His explanations, in *de Trinitate* are clearest, most penetrating, and most extensive. Before reading the shorter *Summa* text, we should identify strange words. “Plurality” means more than one. “Substance” means an independent being, either created or uncreated. “Trine” means 3 each, as in 3 lobes on each maple leaf. “Triplicity” means 3-ness. Now on to Thomas himself:

“The name Trinity in God signifies the determinate number of persons. And so the plurality of persons in God requires that we should use the word trinity, because what is indeterminately signified by plurality, is signified by trinity in a determinate manner.

“Article 1: Whether there is trinity in God?

“OBJ 1: It would seem there is not trinity in God. For every name in God signifies substance or relation. But this name Trinity does not signify the substance, otherwise it would be predicated of each one of the persons. Nor does it signify relation, for it does not express a name that refers to another. Therefore the word Trinity is not to be applied to God.

“OBJ 2: Further, this word trinity is a collective term, since it signifies multitude. But such a word does not apply to God, because the unity of a collective name is the least of unities, whereas God is the greatest possible unity. Therefore this word trinity does not apply to God.

“OBJ 3: Further, every trine is threefold. But in God there is not triplicity, since triplicity is a kind of inequality. Therefore neither is there trinity in God.

“OBJ 4: Further, all that exists in God exists in the unity of the divine essence, because God is His own essence. Therefore, if Trinity exists in God, it exists in the unity of the divine essence, and thus in God there would be three essential unities, which is heresy.

“OBJ 5: Further, in all that is said of God, the concrete is predicated of the abstract, for Deity is God and paternity is the Father. But the Trinity cannot be called trine, otherwise there would be nine realities in God, which, of course, is erroneous. Therefore the word trinity is not to be applied to God.

“**On the contrary**, Athanasius says: "Unity in Trinity; and Trinity in Unity is to be revered."

“I answer that: The name Trinity in God signifies the determinate number of persons. And so the plurality of persons in God requires that we should use the word trinity, because what is indeterminately signified by plurality, is signified by trinity in a determinate manner.

“Reply OBJ 1: In its etymological sense, this word Trinity seems to signify the one essence of the three persons, according as trinity may mean trine-unity. But in the strict meaning of the term, it rather signifies the number of persons of one essence. On this account we cannot say that the Father is the Trinity, as He is not three persons. Yet it does not mean the relations themselves of the Persons, but rather the number of persons related to each other. Hence it is that the word in itself does not express regard to another.

“Reply OBJ 2: Two things are implied in a collective term, plurality of the supposita (2 or more persons), and a unity of some kind of order. For people is a multitude of men, comprehended under a certain order. In the first sense, this word trinity is like other collective words; but in the second sense it differs from them, because, in the divine Trinity, not only is there unity of order, but also with this, there is unity of essence.

“Reply OBJ 3: Trinity is taken in an absolute sense, for it signifies the threefold number of persons. Triplicity signifies a proportion of inequality, for it is a species of unequal proportion, according to Boethius (Arithmetica i,23). Therefore in God there is not triplicity, but Trinity.

“Reply OBJ 4: In the divine Trinity is to be understood both number and the persons numbered. So when we say, Trinity in Unity, we do not place number in the unity of the essence, as if we meant three times one. Instead, we place the Persons numbered in the unity of nature, as the supposita of a nature are said to exist in that nature. On the other hand, we say Unity in Trinity, meaning that the nature is in its supposita.

“Reply OBJ 5: When we say, Trinity is trine, by reason of the number implied, we signify the multiplication of that number by itself, since the word trine imports a distinction in the supposita of which it is spoken. Therefore it cannot be said that the Trinity is trine. If the Trinity be trine, there would be three supposita of the Trinity, as when we say, God is trine, it follows that there are three supposita of the Godhead.”

Comment: unaccustomed as we are to serious statements, these may stagger us. But they show the process of all theology. By this revelation, Christ teaches that God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are One Being. That opens the Infinity of Trinitarian Life. We’ll never exhaust Trinitarian Truth and Goodness. That very inexhaustibility fascinates us. God made us for it. We never get enough of Infinity. Jesus reveals these family secrets to encourage us to join the Family. Then we dive into believing, so that we can understand. Notice the difference between learning from creation, and learning from revelation. We act on creatures to analyze, synthesize, find parts & put them together. It’s active. We act on revelation to receive. It’s more like loving gazing at Love teaching. After basking in Love-Light, we crash back to earth. Then we organize an account of our contemplation. Knowledge of creation helps, but always falls short. Thomas uses philosophy to order parts in simple, common sense, ways. He refutes objections to Christ’s revelation of Trinity. Each objection overemphasizes some part of Jesus’ teaching. Thomas balances the emphasis in his replies, clearing errors away.

We conclude that God’s way of being Three is not the way creatures are three. Creature’s limits individuate them. E.g., matter restricts each cat to its own space. God has no matter, or limit, or not-yet. So His way of being is very **different**. It’s infinite. His Being is the Primary Anaolgate, causing all **similar** creatures to be. This analogy enables us to think from creatures to God. They encourage us to study Trinity by gazing lovingly. Then Ultimate Truth shines upon us. Like sunlight, we can’t absorb it all. But we love to get what we can. Similarly, Ultimate Good warms us, satisfies our longing, and attracts us onward to Union.

No wonder that Thomas wrote an entire book, *de Trinitate*, elaborating on this slight introduction from his *Summa Theologica*. In his longer book, Thomas analyzes “person”. He shows that “person” is a spiritual center from which the “doer” does. The person observes, figures out, and decides 98. In Latin *ago* means I do. So the agent is the decider of every choice. The agent is a way to express the person, or inner doer. The person is the basic good of the being. So lovers love the person. The person is responsible. Therefore the person deserves praise of blame. In Latin the person is the *sub posita* or the one who knows, and decides, or posits, or places the act. 98 In our minor way, we’re like God. His Persons create angelic & human persons. That’s why they are Prime Analogates, or Models for lesser persons. Angels are simple, all-at-once persons. Humans are step-by-step supposits, or rational persons. We develop ur persons. All the way to death, we step through development to our moment of full awareness and complete choice. At death, we make our one-&-only total decision. May it be for union with Trinity, oneness with One. If we so decide, Jesus takes us the rest of the way to God.

That describes how Thomas proceeded. He took logic as far as it went, becoming a complete logical theologian. Then he dissolved into God’s contemplation, becoming a complete mystical theologian. 102 This is the double approach that opens into full appreciation of revelation. As he put it: “It’s better to fail in this most excellent activity than to succeed in lesser endeavors.” In his *Shorter Summa*, he condenses his larger work: “Since our intellect does not adequately grasp the divine essence in any of the conceptions which the names applied to God signify, the definitions of these terms cannot define what is in God. That is, any definition that we might formulate of the divine wisdom would not be a definition of the divine power, and so on regarding other attributes. The same is clear for another reason. A definition is made up of genus and specific difference, to properly define the species. But earlier we have shown that the divine essence is not included under any genus or species. Therefore it cannot be defined.” # 26

Comment: Thomas rambles through knowledge familiar to his students, but strange to us. If we attribute power to God, we can define what power means. But that definition applies to creatures, not to God. Creaturely power has a definition because it has two major limits. It has a genus, or general limit, and a specific difference, or detailed limit, which sets it apart from other parts in the genus. Natural parts belong together in a genus, which is distinct from other geni. Eg. power belongs to the genus “ability”, signifying that a being is capable. Since beings are capable of many things, power’s specific difference is [capable of] “overcoming resistance”. How satisfying it is to finally define power. Now it’s clear that this definition applies to power and nothing else. Naturally, this application is to its meaning, not to its usage. Usage varies too much to matter. At once, you see that this definition of power applies to creatures directly. To God, it applies only analogically. We do two things when we speak properly of God. We affirm that God must have some attribute, like power, but we deny that he has it in any limited way. Creatures have limited power. God’s power is infinite. So the two methods of theology are: 1) positive affirmation of attributes; 2) negation of any creaturely limits in God. Ultimately, God is utterly simple. So He does not have power; He **is** Power. Though this process stresses us, it’s the only adequate way to affirm attributes of God. We use it in all theological activity.

Consider Thomas’ expression, in *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1, 30. “The manner of super-eminence (super excellence) in which the aforesaid perfections are found in God cannot be signified by the names which we impose, unless qualified by a negation, as when we say that God is eternal or infinite, or by a relation, as when we say that God is first cause or supreme Good. For we cannot understand of God what He is, but rather what He is not, and how other things are related to Him.” 103

**St. Thomas Aquinas Class Summary #26: 3/16/13**

**Revelation Fosters Our Most Complete Understanding (from p 99)**

God stretches us to our very limits. He’s extreme. It could hardly be otherwise, because He is infinite. Infinity fascinates us. At times, the stretch towards Infinity hurts. But creatures disappoint us. Only God continues to interest us. He fascinates us so much that stretch-pain disappears. In fact, God comforts us. God dissipates our pain, and fosters our delight. You remember moments that stretch, pain, and comfort you into fascinating delight. But these moments are so compact, so unified, that they look like blurs. Thomas saw through them to clarity. To follow Thomas, we need to focus on the blurs until they clarify. Remember, we aren’t memorizing words! We’re identifying actions! Attend to your most active moments, and you find Infinity.

God creates and sustains us, making us His activity. His perfect Person makes us be imperfect persons. Creating us is perfectly clear in itself. But not at all clear to us. Instead, confusion is common. Thomas identifies our many difficulties relating to God. In *Summa Theologica*, Ia, 2, 1, Thomas shows that God’s being is self-evident in itself. But if we saw Him clearly, we could not avoid choosing Him. His Goodness would overwhelm our freedom. Instead, God mercifully hides Himself, allowing us freedom to choose Him or not. He loves our freedom so much that He allows us to decide against Him.

We can’t decide against a self-evident truth like: the whole is greater than any of its parts. No one bothers to contradict that truth. Only university professors, theoretically, dispute it. No one actually opposes it. By contrast, some people actually deny God. The major reason they deny Him, is to soothe their consciences when they disobey Him. One famous way to express this intent is: If God doesn’t exist, then I can do what I want. Today’s atheists echo Jean-Paul Sartre’s preference of his own freedom over obeying God. I want to impose my imperial will. But it’s vain, useless, pointless, because forcing my will down people’s throats fails to satisfy me, and upsets them. Every time I try it, I increase everyone’s misery. I suffer first and foremost. Instead, I should harmonize with reality. This free choice to pursue truth brings everyone some satisfaction. Then we realize that God is the only being that makes sense. He is Full Being. He is Necessary. His essence is to exist. He is Pure Act. All other beings don’t have to be. They show how inadequate they are by ceasing to be. They come and go. They are unreliable. No wonder that we’ve never satisfied until we unite with God.

At first, creatures fascinated us. Their changes captivated us. When we discovered their limitations, disappointment flooded us. Parts do not satisfy us. But our complete view of all things, in light of God, satisfies. 100 That complete view includes revelation. Open now to all dimensions of knowledge, we learn the full view. Learning refreshes us, though it stretches us, sometimes painfully. By observing human fathers, we realize that God is Ultimate Father. From human sons, we note that God is Ultimate Son. These necessary connections between contingent creatures and Necessary God, satisfy us. But it’s very hard to make these connections by thinking creatures all the way through. So it’s easier, and clearer, to accept revelation that God is Father and Son. Thinking from creatures to the Holy Spirit is well-nigh impossible. But if we accept Jesus’ teaching, we see more and more reasons why the Trinity is how God is. Thomas gives an extensive account in *de Trinitate*.

A quick sketch of his demonstration begins with obvious activity: spirits know and love. God is Perfect Spirit, so He knows and loves most perfectly. Humans identify the known’s act with the knower’s act (soul). All knowledge is identity of knower and known. So the Father’s knowledge is identical with Him. Since He is a Person, so is his knowledge. This personal identity is the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. Considering the second spiritual act, human love identifies lover with beloved. All love is identity. God’s love is more perfect than outs. So The Father’s love of the Son is an identity, another Person: the Holy Spirit. 101 Because knowing and loving constitute spiritual act, the Trinity is complete with a Person generated by Knowing, and a Person generated by Loving. Divinity is complete when these Three are One by mutual Knowledge and Love.

It’s true that we do not comprehend this Three-way contemplation. But it’s more true that Trinitarian Act is the best way to exist. It’s an exemplary expansion of Aristotle’s realization that God is Pure Act. Trinity is what Pure Act does. If we allow God to activate us His way, we harmonize with Trinity mutually contemplating each of the Three. Thomas calls their mutual interaction “circumincession” because our best approximation of their activity is: the Persons go round and round together. In Latin, *circum* = around, and *incessere* = to go together. Truly, we don’t see circumincession in humans. But a family resembles the Trinity. Consider loving wife, husband and baby. They do their best to circumincess. They strive to whirl about their three persons, knowing and loving each more and more. Yes, God’s Persons are not limited in space, so whirling is not the best approximation. But it’s analogical to what God does. Most important, God invites us to join His Trinitarian contemplation. Our word for this act is “prayer”. When we pray profoundly, we circumincess with God.

Thomas vaults from nature toward God by God’s activation of creatures. Creatures resemble God, in a minor key. So we reason by analogy from minor to major key, from creatures to God. When we harmonize with a creature’s act, we simultaneously harmonize with Pure Act. It’s unavoidable. But we can confuse this harmony. Thomas reduces confusion in the best ways we have ever seen. His clear and precise accounts guide us to increased harmony with God. In *Summa Theologica*, Thomas identifies our major difficulties on the way to God. For example, we can’t analyze God because he is Perfect Simplicity. At first, this failure frustrates us. But, reflecting, we realize that nothing less than Simplicity could be One. Pure Act has no not-yet. To be one part is to not-yet be another. Parts are defects, so Perfection, or God, has no parts. 102

**God’s Attributes**

God is beyond description. His simplicity escapes our comprehension. But He shares His Infinity with us. This sharing stretches us beyond our comfort level. But it stretches us where we’re made to go, into Infinity. This stretch overwhelms us. God’s overwhelming us is usually the first thing we notice. So we attribute to Him almighty power. God’s Power is clear from creatures, by speculation, but clearer from God, by revelation. If we coordinate both sources, we maximize certitude. As Thomas demonstrated in *Summa Theologica* 1a, 13, 3, it’s better to fail to know God than to succeed to know lesser beings, 102 Our partial knowledge of God is better than complete knowledge of the entire universe. Imperfect knowledge of God is better than perfect knowledge of creatures. Thomas shows that our knowledge of God is more negative than positive. In his words, from *Summa Contra Gentiles* 1, 30: “The manner of super-eminence (super excellence) in which perfections are found in God cannot be signified by the names which we impose, unless [qualified] by a negation, as when we say that God is eternal or infinite, or by a relation, as when we say that God is first cause, or supreme good. For we cannot understand of God what He is, but rather what He is not, and how other things are related to Him.”

Comment: We invent names for creatures, which are vastly inferior to God. So when we apply a name to God, it doesn’t fit. When we name power, it applies to creaturely power. It’s limited to mean the capability to overcome opposition. But God has no capabilities, nor is there opposition to God. Therefore, what we mean by God’s Power is different, much greater than any creaturely power. It’s super-eminent Power. We can understand that a creature’s power is much less than God’s Power. What we can’t understand is **how much less**, because God is Infinite. Infinity is a negation: in Latin, *in* = without, and *finis* = limit. Similarly: eternal: *e = ex* = beyond, *tempus* = time. These negations insist that God surpasses the limits we know in creatures. Similarly, relations, like First Cause, refer to the cause infinitely beyond created causes. Though we know created causes first-hand, we know God second-hand, because passing causes necessitate a super-eminent cause that needs no other cause. It is first, but quite different from the second, third, all the way down to the several billionth that types this paper. First Cause and subsequent causes are **different**, but **similar**. So we must relate them analogically. While all this is relatively clear, it’s definitely different from our usual occupations. It’s a stretch.

But it’s a delightful stretch because it approaches God. It approaches so effectively that we can continue this process for eternity. That’s full satisfaction. Let Mick Jaeger know! By this analogical method, we identify God’s attributes of Truth, Goodness, Beauty, Oneness, and so on. Each is **super** compared to any creature. This superiority is satisfactory precisely because it transcends the limitations of creatures. These limitations frustrate us. But transcendence satisfies us. Ongoing transcendence is the right direction. Once we embark on this direction, our job is to continue. Thomas guides us on this continual path. It’s hard to do positive theology, by identifying God’s attributes expressed in creatures. It’s hard to do negative theology, by negating all limitations in God’s attributes. It’s hard to balance both. As Thomas says: “The First Cause surpasses human understanding and speech. He knows God best who acknowledges that whatever he thinks and says falls short of what God really is”, *In Librum de Causis*, lect 6. 103 We can’t escape hard work. If we do this hard work, we convince ourselves that we really want God. Then He takes us to Himself.

When God took Thomas, by infused contemplation, no words sufficed to say what happened. Stunned, Thomas fell silent. Instead of telling us about God, Thomas experienced God. He tried to express this experience, but it was too great. By comparison to God infusing Himself in Thomas, all previous expressions seemed to be useless, like straw. All his writing was too far from the simplicity of God. 104 What then about us? Perhaps, some day, we shall accept God’s infused contemplation. Then it will surpass everything we can say or do. Until then, we profit from what Thomas said and did, and we advance toward the goal that he attained.

**St. Thomas Aquinas Class Summary #27: 4/6/13**

**Rational Basis For Living Well (Ethics), & God’s Revealed Way to Live (addition to text)**

**Rational, or Speculative, Start**

Speculation is systematic questions and answers. For example: “Why are you here?” A good answer is: “To learn something. Why learn something? To gain something. Why gain something? To improve my life. Why improve life? To be happy. All questions lead to the ultimate answer that man does everything to be happy. Aristotle expresses this reasoning in *Nicomachean Ethics*. Ultimate happiness is every man’s purpose, his goal in life. Aristotle then asks: what is happiness? A few systematic steps show that happiness is total activity. To be totally active is to be completely engaged, and utterly happy about it. The trouble, here below, is that this totality ends. During our total involvement, we’re totally happy. Therefore, complete commitment is a good way to say happiness. Unlimited engagement is another aspect of total happiness. While we’re totally committed, we’re undistracted from what we’re doing. Happiness is total focus. Walking is not our total activity, so walking is only partial happiness. Complete happiness is higher activity, like knowing and loving. Total commitment to truth and good make us utterly happy. The happiest acts of our lives are complete engagement in knowing and loving higher beings. Then we harmonize our highest acts, identifying with highest truth and goodness.

Our most striking example of happiness is friendship. Coordinating with another human challenges us most completely. Friends stretch us beyond our expectations. Friendship is our most enjoyable activity. We can’t wait to meet again! Being with our friend is the highlight of our lives. What we **do** together matters not. It’s doing **together** that counts. Being together delights us beyond expression. If a friend becomes a spouse, and the two become one, friendship attains its earthly peak. Consider your happiest activities. Summarize them. Recall that we’re not spouting words. We’re experiencing acts. Then you identify with happiness completely.

By this experience, we see the outside criterion for happiness. In happy moments, we’re too committed to be distracted. Commitment satisfies us. To what should we commit to be happy? Definitely, we’ve been distracted from everything we’ve done so far. So we look for those activities which are least distractible. What do we do that so absorbs us that we can’t be distracted? Some people can find that act immediately, while others dither. Therefore, Aristotle scanned our entire range of acts. He ordered them logically, so he covered them all, leaving out nothing significant out. He simplified them enough to conveniently list them all. This organization surpasses science, and requires wisdom. Now we ramble through Aristotle’s analysis.

Our acts are either outside our skin or inside. Outside, we act on either material or spiritual things. A hotdog exemplifies a material thing. Food exemplifies a spiritual thing (idea, concept, universal). Gaining material things satisfies us, momentarily. But all the material things we hoped would sustain our commitment failed to capture our interest. Grave disappointments with material things teach us that they can’t make us ultimately happy. One snappy way to say this is: happiness is being rather than having. So we advance to spiritual external things like fame, honor, and power. Our pulse quickens when we consider these externals, because they seem closer to happiness. Personal experience is best, but if we’re not famous, we observe famous people to see if fame satisfies them. Most of them abuse alcohol, drug, and sex. So we see their failure. Good famous people affirm that fame is not important to them. So fame fails our test. Fame flames away like the proverbial balls of flax that the advisor burned in front of the new Emperor of Rome. The same thousands who cheered him today would try to assassinate him tomorrow. At best fame is fickle, so not worth our effort.

What then of honor? It’s a way to be, so more basic, so more likely to satisfy. It’s close, because we can’t be happy without being honorable. But we can be honorable without being honored. The most honorable of us all, Jesus, was without honor among opinion-makers. Honor is ours if people honor us. So it is fickle, unreliable, unsustainable. Therefore, it’s far from ultimate happiness. You see that the most dishonorable of men sell out to seek honor. They wallow in “honor”, giving it a bad name. Truly honorable people attest that honor is superficial, not worth pursuing. Honor is not happiness.

Power incites us so much that it may suffice. See what happens to powerful people. They are famous for their misery. So power won’t make anyone happy. In fact, many powerless people are quite happy. As we watch power, we see that, like honor, others must give it. What others give, they can take away. In our democracy, the people give power by voting. Each elected official is regularly replaced. Power over people is unreliable. Physical power, like electricity, is more reliable, but nuclear power is notoriously unsatisfying. So power will not satisfy us. At best power, may help us attain happiness. It isn’t happiness.

This review shows that everything created out there on the other side of our skin is inadequate. They are objects we could commit to, but none of them satisfy us. If you say that you’re satisfied after a big meal, you still move on to something else, like sleeping it off. The ultimate satisfier satisfies us forever, completely activating us. Finding none outside our skin, we look inside. Since happiness is a way of being, and we **be** most intensely inside, we’re more likely to find satisfaction there. Within us we find body and soul. Our body itself might make us happy. So we consider it as it is, and as it acts. Our body is good in and of itself if it’s healthy. So health may make us happy. Millions of people are so convinced that health happy-fies them that they spend millions establishing health. Observe to see if they are satisfied. They keep trying new things, so the old didn’t satisfy them. Assume the best, that they are perfectly healthy for years. Then they die. It dawns on us that ultimate happiness is not bodily health. At best, health contributes to happiness.

So we must look elsewhere for happiness itself. Elsewhere, includes bodily acts. Many of these acts, like taking a hot shower, refresh us, pleasure us, and may be our favorite things. But none satisfies us enough. Even the most pleasurable bodily activity tires us, distracting us from ultimate happiness. Even those who worship sex wear themselves out, suffer more loss than gain, and finally quit acting out their fantasies. Sex thrills adolescents. But sex-pleasure does not last. Attempts to pump more pleasure from it fail to deliver what people desire. Even the most exciting act fades away. Sex-acts are so pleasurable that people keep trying, in spite of disastrous failures. But the body itself, by health, and its pleasurable activity fail to satisfy. Mick Jaeger made millions by deploring this fact loudly.

So we advance to consider our souls. Our soul itself, its health, might suffice. Mental health is a goal famous since the 1960’s. Psychologists extracted millions of dollars from people eager to achieve healthy souls. Their failure tells us that soul-health itself won’t satisfy. Our own experience confirms this verdict. Basically, soul-health means a soul organized to act. So we must move on to consider soul-acts. We do two kinds of acts: knowing and loving. Recall that knowing is our act of being what we know. We are it as it is true. Loving is our act of being what we love. We are it as it is good. Each act thrills us. Already we find more satisfaction.

Knowing is so satisfactory that some people devote themselves entirely to learning. Others find loving so satisfactory that they commit themselves totally to serving their beloved. Fortunately, knowing harmonizes with loving into a synthesis. This union is much more satisfactory than knowing or loving alone. We call this syntheses contemplation. As parents love to contemplate their child, so everyone loves to contemplate something. The more active the being we contemplate, the longer we commit to it, and the less distracted we are. Contemplating creatures, like sunrises, satisfies us for a moment. So sunrises are not enough. From sunrises, we vault to God. He created the sun, the sky, and all constitutes sunrises. Aristotle figured all this out 2,400 years ago. Thomas reconstituted Aristotle’s Ethics 700 years ago. What’s true is true all around, forever. As we catch up with Aristotle and Thomas, we come home to acts as they act. We live this synthesis of our highest acts united with the Highest Act, Pure Act. His Act activates us entirely, finally satisfying us.

When we act at our peak by contemplating God, we finally unite our inner activity with the most active of all Beings. God is Pure Act. He is within us, but can’t be confined to us. He is outside us, but can’t be kept out. Finally, we find the truly satisfactory being. He is the greatest knowable, and the greatest lovable Being. When we know Him, we identify with Him as Truth. When we love Him, we identify with Him as Good. In His image and likeness, we unite our knowing and loving to identify with Him as One.

This synthesis thrills us. In teenage talk, it drives us crazy. More maturely, it so unifies us that we observe ourselves enjoying contemplation as if we were looking upon ourselves from above. That’s why the Greeks and Romans called it standing = *stasis* outside = *ex*, which we mispronounce as ecstasy. Ecstasy satisfies us. As kids, we achieved mini-ecstasies. They resemble being out of our minds. Driven mad, we squealed, hopped up and down, ran around, and finally fell exhausted. Even if we were ecstatic all day long, we were not satisfied. We fell asleep planning more ecstasies tomorrow. Without realizing it, we prepared for heaven, which is on-going ecstasy, forever. We live well if we graduate from childish ecstasies into adult ecstasies, or contemplation. Another name for contemplation is prayer. The more advanced our prayer, the more spiritual it becomes. Gradually, we attain heaven. United with God, we achieve ultimate satisfaction by undistracted contemplation. This is as far as speculation goes. But it’s a great distance, as it reaches complete satisfaction in total commitment to complete activity, activated by Pure Act. It’s a good preparation for Thomas’ systematic development in *Summa Contra Gentiles*. We’ll take those systematic steps, then look at revelation, to see how God improves our understanding, so painstakingly attained by strenuous thought.

**St. Thomas Aquinas Class Summary #28: 4/13/13**

**Thomas’ Speculative Development in *Summa Contra Gentiles* (from p 105)**

**Philosophical Development of Ethics**

Thomas reminds us that God **is** Pure Act. Following nature’s acts to their Source, we find the Ultimate Happening, God, Creating. Without Him, nothing exists. Because He is our Source, He is our intrinsic Purpose. We exist of, by, and through Him. We **are** because of Him. That’s why we say that God is Alpha and Omega, beginning and end. It’s obvious that God is Source, or Alpha. Why is He end, or Omega? In utter simplicity, He is end because there’s no alternative. Just as God is Source because He is the only being who **is**, so is he End because He alone **is**. There is no other **Being**. Beside Him there are only creatures. They resemble Him. How much they are His image and likeness varies from one kind of being to another. But God is **Necessity**, while other beings are **contingent**. All beings rely entirely upon Him. Notice how Aquinas acts. He observes created activities, identifies with them, then traces them to their source. So he expresses the acts that cause creatures.

When we do the same, clarity abounds. The reason for what happens has got to be that way. Each clarification, initiates others. For example, because God is Source, He has no helpers. Nor does He need raw materials. God is Complete Agent (Doer, from Latin *agere*=to do). He makes all creatures that exist. Perfect Being that He is, God is Perfect Knowing. We, who are lesser knowers, in His image and likeness, see that knowing is being the known. Its substantial being **is** our intentional being. To know the being is to know its activity. Then we can use its activity. How simple it is to identifying with the cat catting. Its complete act immediately identifies that it catches rats. Maybe we don’t know that cats catch rats. But that beginning knowledge falls short of catting itself. Instead, it’s a collection of “properties” accepted in society. Social learning enables us to play the money game, but is light-years away from natural learning. Notice how often people prefer economic competition to full life. How many people insist there’s nothing else besides the rat race! We did it for years. But now we learn beings as they **be**, not as we buy and sell them. Either way acts aim at goals. Thomas says: aim high!

God is Perfect Willing (Deciding, Choosing, Electing). We lesser willers know that to decide is to put a being to a use. All doing starts with use, purpose, goal. Whether familiar human, or transcendent Divine, acts aim at a goal. Humans start with a purpose, find an acting being whose act achieves it, and apply it appropriately. What we do in slow motion, imperfectly, God does instantly, perfectly. If we imperfect knowers-willers do something to achieve something, then God’s perfection accomplishes uses, purposes, and goals much more efficiently. Thomas says it succinctly: “Each of the things produced by an agent’s decision aims at that agent’s end.” As we adjust our thinking to Thomistic dynamics, we understand that sentence. It’s in *Summa Contra Gentiles*, book 3 of the Vernon J. Bourke translation, chapter 1, prologue. The proper object of the will is the good achieved at the end. Whether human or divine, willing is all about achieving the good goal. This is how willing works, for intelligent beings: God, angels, and humans. It’s the “willing” of willing.

When we catch up with Thomas, we see how natural this understanding is. He’s the Angelic Doctor because he leads us to Truth like a guardian angel. Rejecting social learning, we adopt natural learning, to see clearly. God shares creation with every being that selects a goal and works toward it. God creates mosquitoes to maintain their population. To do so, they must feed their eggs blood. So they home in on warm-blooded animals, to suck a drop. Notice, only female mosquitoes nurture eggs. Thomas summarizes this example with millions of others in a wonderfully clear expression of meaning and value. “Each thing achieves its ultimate end through its own action, which must be directed to the end by Him Who gives things the principles through which they act.” *SCG*; bk 3, ch 1, # 2. Ultimate Act creates contingent beings, which act contingently, sometimes achieving their aims, and sometimes missing. But each being acts to succeed. Success attains the good goal.

Thomas develops this principle (source) in #3: “So it must be that God, Who is in all ways perfect in Himself, and Who endows all things with being from His own power, exists as the Ruler of all beings, and is ruled by none other. Nor is there anything that escapes His rule, just as there is nothing that does not receive its being from Him. As He is perfect in being and causing, so also is He perfect in ruling.” Notice that Thomas gives the reasons why God acts as He does. As Pure Act (perfect in Himself), He must “endow all things with being from His own power”. So another way to say his existence is “the Ruler of all beings”. Because He rules the others, no being rules him. Nor can anything escape His rule. Thomas uses “just as” to express the “reason why”. The reason nothing escapes His rule is that nothing escapes His creation. All things “receive being from Him”. Thomas closes by giving the reason: “As he is perfect in being and causing” for the conclusion: “He is perfect in ruling”. If you review His statement several times, you will see the light.

Notice that I said “Rejecting” social learning. It’s dear to us, purchased at a great price. We sweated to learn the politically correct interpretation of everything. Teachers swatted us when we gave natural interpretations instead. That social learning is unnecessarily stressful because it is so wrong. The several examples given in class do not exhaust the damage done by teachers who manipulate students into social learning. Instead of this manipulation, Thomas teaches nature naturally. Welcome home! Next, he examines consequent human acts.

“Of course, the result of this rule is manifested differently in different beings, depending on the diversity of their natures. For some beings so exist as God’s products that, possessing understanding, they bear His likeness and reflect His image. Consequently, they are not only ruled, but are also rulers of themselves, inasmuch as their own actions are directed to a fitting end. If these beings submit to the divine rule in their own ruling, then by virtue of the divine rule they are admitted to the achievement of their ultimate end. But if they proceed otherwise in their own ruling, they are rejected.”

Thomas gives the reason why humans have ethics: they possess understanding. Thus they resemble God more than mosquitoes, who understand nothing. Understanding is a purely spiritual act. Though we usually separate understanding from willing, they are mutually required. We could not understand unless we were free to seek understanding. Nor would we understand if we were not free to use what we know. Knowing-willing unite in our spiritual act. We will to know, and know how to will. They occur instantaneously, especially when the being known is great. One way to capture that instantaneous experience is: “to know him is to love him”. This act is truest of God. Knowing-loving God is our most integral act: contemplation.

Then Thomas notes the clock-like accuracy of celestial motions. Aristotle was so impressed by celestial accuracy, compared to earthly defects, that he insisted celestial matter was not earthly matter. Thomas follows Aristotle to this overemphasis, but is correct to insist that such accuracy is beyond the hit-or-miss unfolding of earthly events. We’ll skip the details of Galileo’s telescope showing craters on the moon, and leave many demonstrations behind, as we trace man’s moral behavior. Man struggles to overcome his inherited tendency to choose himself over God. Adam succumbed to pride. He had nothing but his wrecked humanity to pass on to us.

Ethics is deciding. 106 If you decide to lie, you become a liar. No one can make you a liar. Your decision is totally private. It’s also totally effective. Once you lie, you are a liar. Adam’s children that we are, we confuse ourselves about most things. So we must distinguish a decision from violence. You are not a murderer is someone murders a child by throwing you down upon the kid. At best, that is an act of man, inasmuch as your weight broke the kid’s neck. But it’s not a human act, because you did not consider it thoroughly, and decide to do it yourself. 106 Every agent intends an end, or acts for a purpose. Thomas expresses common ordinary acts. Whether animate or inanimate, knowing or not, all beings act to achieve a goal. 107-108 Observation shows that the doer ceases his activity when he attains his goal. This is a powerful intrinsic reason to know that every act is for a goal. Infinity fascinates organized thinkers. What about continuing the doing rather than achieving? We can imagine that. But an actual infinity is impossible, as we reviewed when we demonstrated the necessity of God. The process of getting there is **not** more important than arriving. Most folks agree that intelligent beings act for ends, but question how non-intelligent beings could. The regularity of achieving goals shows that mosquitoes act out a script, called instinct. But play and contemplation seem to avoid achieving goals. Thomas notes that play relaxes the person. When relaxed, he quits playing. This illustrates its goal. Contemplation may extend beyond creation. That seems to eliminate determinate goals. Definitely, it does eliminate created goals. But God is definite, though unlimited, unique though beyond definition. He is the Ultimate Goal.

You see that Thomas is thorough. He addresses professional philosophers, covering their intense questions with intense clarity. As he advances, he introduces revelation, bit by bit, until his synthesis shines brightly.

With the same brilliant precision, Thomas shows that every agent acts for a good. Good transcends definition, as it is too simple to fit in genera and species. But clearly good is desirable. Desiring it, we act to attain it. That’s how simple it is to show that every agent acts for a good. Good is the proper object of willing. Thomas distinguishes between chance, which is unknown cause, and uncaused events. Without cause, nothing happens. Regular happenings indicate unknown causes that work regularly. 109-110

If everything acts for good, how is there evil? Evil is not something. So it strictly can’t **be**. But some good can be missing. Evil is the absence of the good that belongs there. 110-111 Because evil is a specific act, we can’t find it. It’s shadowy. If you turn your ignition, without starting the car, some good is missing. Perhaps the battery is dead. Machines have several breakable parts. It’s worth our effort to clarify shadowy evil. Then we reduce our mistakes about it, and increase the good which all beings desire with all their intensity. **St.**

**Thomas Aquinas Class Summary #29: 4/20/13**

**Philosophical Development of Ethics in *Summa Contra Gentiles* (from p 110)**

Ordinarily, we insist that evil is something. The Axis of Evil stood for a very definite set of people, armed and dangerous, who almost took over the world between 1938 and 1945. To fight evil, we need positive targets. Then why does Thomas insist that evil is the absence of good that ought to be there? It’s too complicated to analyze Hitler’s National Socialist Party. Leftists hide the truth so completely that they oppose their own leftist Nazis, calling them fascists, instead of socialists. So let’s consider a simple example: a kid pulls off a pigeon’s wing so his friends can guffaw as the bird hops in pain until it dies. What’s evil about that?

Among various evils we see the kid’s evil intent to harm the bird for fun. Where respect and care for the pigeon should be, the kid chooses disrespect and harm. This moral evil is absence of respect for the bird, followed by absence of proper care for it. True, but abstract. The missing wing is more concrete. This physical evil is more visible. Peer deeply into the be-ing of the bird. The pigeon-ing of the pigeon can’t continue. If a vet repaired the wing-stub, so that the bird survived, its pigeoning is still incomplete. It never flies again. This experience illustrates that every evil is an absence of some good which ought to be there. When you see the evil-ing of evil, you see two necessary components: 1) absence of a good; which 2) should be there.

What about cancer? Is it not a definite growth that doctors remove? Indeed it is. A brain tumor challenges us. We must look past proliferating brain cells, into a deeper absence of orderly growth. Cancerous brain cells reject their proper growth-rules. They disorder themselves. They cease to function by design. Instead, they go wild. They disrupt proper growth patterns, arrogating inflated importance to themselves. They multiply as if they were the only cells worth growing. They change from ordered to disordered cells. Unless removed, they consume more and more nourishment, killing other cells to self-proliferate. Disorder spreads, becomes rampant, and kills the organism the cells were supposed to serve. Disorder increases. This absence of order increases until it gobbles up so much good that the body dies. So cancer is the absence of order where it belongs. It’s a fine analogy for invisible sin. Thomas helps us properly understand evil of every type, from least to greatest.

In our synthetic terms, an evil-doer advances from not-yet decided to decided. His deciding is like motion, because it advances by steps. As we follow these steps toward a goal, we imagine what will come next. Given our defective inheritance from Adam, we fail to actualize some of these next steps. For example, O’Henry wrote a marvelous short story with double step-failures. The husband decides to please his wife by buying her a hair-comb she admired. Poor as they are, he must pawn his watch to buy the comb. She decides to please him by purchasing a watch-fob he admired. She must sell her hair to buy that fob. In the love of Christ poured forth during Christmas, they give each other these gifts. Each moral decision gives self for beloved. But each physical gift fails to achieve its goal, which each beloved sold, to buy the gift for each beloved.

O’Henry’s story touches us, because the love was so pure. It startles us, because the gifts missed their marks. Analogously, evil acts miss their goals. Consider stealing. The thief aims to attain a good with the money he takes. He does get money. But it does not belong to him. So he imposes evil upon the victim, by taking if from its owner, to whom it belongs. Much worse, he imposes greater evil upon himself, by making himself a thief. Thomas develops this absence of being. The physical absence of the cash is easy to see. The moral absence of honesty is invisible. With effort, we can know it. Perhaps we know it in the moral pain that necessarily accompanies sin. Some loss is more evident than others. But all loss is negative. Therefore, we can’t directly identify it. That’s why evil confuses us. Evil so upsets us that we often attempt to destroy it.

But trying to destroy evil increases it. Thomas analyzes evil formally. Here’s an informal rendition. Every act aims at a good. Eg: a thief steals money to buy food. His goal is good. Evil is incidental to this good end. The money belongs to the victim who misses it. This incidental absence deforms the act. Thomas emphasizes the difference between the decider’s intention and action. “When the result of an action differs from the intention of the agent, it is clear that such a result occurs unintentionally. Evil differs from good, which every agent intends. Therefore evil happens without intention. Defect in effect and action results from defect in the principles (sources) of action. [Eg] Thus a monstrosity [like a hunchback] results from a defect in the seed [biological function]. A curvature of the leg causes limping [due to an improperly set broken bone].”

Perhaps it helps to say that the thief intends food when he steals money. The absence of that money from its owner is incidental to the thief’s intent. In fact, no one can will an absence. It’s not willable because it’s not there. It does not exist. In the example of stealing money, every moral step is about attaining something good. All absence is incidental. But it necessarily occurs during the act. Stealing necessarily requires a minimum of two absences. First, the money is gone from its owner. Second, honesty is gone from the thief. Perhaps those incidental, but necessary, absences will help you follow Thomas on p 110. We can’t see absence. We can’t positively attain negation. It’s incidental. If the thief could get the food without stealing, he would.

The clarifying example that Thomas gives on 111 made excellent sense 700 years ago. It was a sterling example, clear to his students. It’s fair to say that it’s not clear to us. So consider paper burning away. The papering ceases to paper, as what was paper becomes smoke and ash. Smoke smoking, and ash ashing are quite different from paper papering. Paper ceases papering as it burns, and begins smoking and ashing. This is a substantial change. The paper-substance burns away into smoke-substance and ash-substance. The paper-act, or form of paper, burns into smoke-act, or form of smoke, and ash-act, or form of ash. Burning transforms a substance into other substance(s). Never does the burning strive to deprive the paper of its papering. But this deprivation is nonetheless necessary. Each act’s intention is always toward a new act, never toward the absence of an old act. Deprivation is necessary, but incidental. To fix this process in mind, ramble through several examples of change. Each follows the same pattern. Good is the goal. Evil is incidental.

If it’s incidental, unintentional, how can we commit sin? Thomas examines objections to his conclusion. 112 If an act is incidental, it seldom occurs. But evil occurs often. It seems to be everywhere. Why say it’s incidental? Moreover, Aristotle shows that vice is voluntary. If voluntary, it’s not incidental. Sin seems to be the sinner’s definite intent. Volcanoes erupt. So natural corruption occurs. If natural, it’s not incidental. These are great objections to the conclusion that evil is incidental. How can Thomas dispose of them?

Aristotle gave excellent advice: never deny, seldom affirm, always distinguish. Thomas noticed that these objections suffer from confusing substance with that substance’s action. If we clarify the difference, we resolve the objections. If evil is an absence in a substance, then some good natural to that substance is missing. Thomas gives good examples. Man does not have wings. This is an absence, but not an evil, because wings are not standard issue for men. A man does not have blond hair. This is an absence, but not an evil because blond hair is not standard issue. If a man lacks all hair, then he suffers an evil. A worse evil is to lack hands. 112

More generally, all matter has some form. There is no formless matter. There is no matterless form. They go together. It’s the nature of matter-form substances to change often, in many ways. Since change is natural, and change requires loss of what belonged, change requires evil. Where is that evil? Matter and form are virtual beings, not substances. In virtue of them, we understand substances. So neither suffers evil during change. The substance loses its form, when paper ceased to be paper. The substance suffers evil. To be is good. Whatever was, but ceases to be, loses the good of its being. If it ceases to be entirely, it suffers entire evil. If only a part of a substance ceases to be, it suffers partial evil. When a person’s hair-producing cells die, and his hair falls out, his bodily integrity remains. However, loss of integrity is an absolute evil. So a man who loses his hand suffers absolute evil. But a man who limps, suffers relative to his walking. This is merely an evil of action.

Apply this distinction to stealing. The decision to take the money for food includes realizing that this act deprives the owner of his money. Therefore the thief intends to deprive the owner, by gaining the money. In this case, there are two intentions. One of them, depriving the owner, is sinful. The other, mere absence of money because the thief took it, is incidental. This is evil of action in the thief. 113 It is not by chance, but by choice. Thus it is voluntary, rather than incidental. When we fully trace choice, we distinguish and clarify. Then we realize that the absence is physically incidental, but morally voluntary. The thief is guilty by his own decision. A thief knows that taking the money ultimately for food requires, incidentally, that the owner lose it. Seeing that loss, and willing it, constitute willful stealing. A thief does not will this loss absolutely, but relatively to gaining the owner’s money. Thomas does not mention it here, but this evil also makes the decider a thief, so it changes the person’s moral life. This changes the moral substance of the person.

Why do people sin? Usually because they prefer sensory pleasure to moral integrity. Moral integrity is a fine way to say rational good. It’s the good of orderly living. Though no one can sense it, everyone can intellect it. Each person knows that he can prefer pleasant sensations to ordered life. When people choose sensation instead of order, they sin. 113 Nature can’t sin, as it is not a person with intellect and will. Complete observation shows that nature balances generation with corruption. They inextricably interact. So nature does not intend the end of corruption apart from the end of generation, but both at the same time. Therefore, nature does not intend privations directly, but only accidentally. Nature intends goods, like plants and animals, directly. So absolute evil is not part of nature, though accidental evil abounds. Proper distinctions enable us to resolve these objections. These resolutions require work, but are well worth our effort. We can clarify even evil. Thank God.

**St. Thomas Aquinas Class Summary #30: 4/27/13**

**Ultimate Understanding of Evil: *Summa Contra Gentiles* (from p 114)**

Evil confuses us. St. Augustine agonized over it. The problem is that we can’t track evil, because there’s nothing there to track. Evil is an absence of good that should be there. If we repeat that reality frequently, we finally comprehend it. At our basic core, everyone knows evil is an absence, a lack, a deprivation, a missing piece of an otherwise whole being. But this knowledge is way down at our basic level. Hardly anyone expresses basic-level knowledge. But everyone uses it, daily, to survive. Because we don’t have words for such a basic reality, we lose track of it. We take it for granted. Philosophy is easy precisely because it digs into basic functions which we always use. But philosophy is hard to express, for the same reason. Thomas digs into our base systematically. If we apply his distinctions, then we dig accurately, find what’s actually happening, and express it. Thinking that way, we see many connections to other basic acts. Real thought is identifying with acts, by acting them as they actually act. Knowledge isn’t limited to just manipulating words, imagining pictures, or elaborating concepts. Instead, we become what we know, as it is, as it acts. To know it is to be it, intentionally, rather than substantially. As we see how true this activity is, we follow Thomas into more complete understanding.

To follow, read your text, in Anton Pegis’ translation. Then compare it to this handout: Vernon Burke’s translation. First, a summary of last class. Because evil is an absence, it does not act. The lack of action is not action. As a thing is so does it act. Ripping off a pigeon’s wing interrupts its action, its pigeon-ing. Therefore, it “pigeons” less than it did before the rip. What used to pigeon (its wing) stopped pigeoning. We observe that the bird no longer flaps both wings. The absence of one wing prevents many pigeon-acts. Full pigeoning no longer happens in this damaged pigeon. So something is obviously missing. So the pigeon endures some evil. Evil is the very absence of the act which should be acting. Act **is** what a thing is. Act determines what **is**. “What is” is the being’s “to be”. In Latin, “to be” is *essere*. In English, it’s essence. The absence of act is the opposite of essence. So evil is not an essence. As the very lack of the act which makes a being be, evil is the opposite of being.

Here’s Bourke’s translation: “In fact, evil is simply a privation of something which a subject is entitled, by its origin, to possess, and which it ought to have. Such is the meaning of the word ‘evil’. Now privation is not an essence. It is, rather, a negation in a substance. Therefore, evil is not an essence in things.

“Again, each thing has actual being in accord with its essence. To the extent that it possesses being, it has something good. If good is that which all desire, then being itself must be called a good, because all desire to be. As a consequence, each thing is good because it possesses actual being. Now, good and evil are contraries. So, nothing is evil by virtue of the fact that it has essence. Therefore, no essence is evil.

“Everything is either an maker, or a thing that is made. Now, evil cannot be a maker, because whatever acts does so inasmuch as it is actually existent and perfect. Similarly, it cannot be a thing that is made, for the termination of every process of generation is a form, and a good thing. Therefore nothing is evil by virtue of its essence. Moreover, nothing tends toward its contrary, for each thing inclines to what is like and suitable to itself. Now, every being intends a good, when it is acting, as has been proved. Therefore, no being, as being, is evil.

“Furthermore, every essence belongs to some definite thing in nature. Indeed, if it is a substance, it is the very nature of the thing. However, if it is an accident, it must be caused by the principles of some substance, and thus it will be natural to this substance, but maybe not to another substance. Eg: heat is natural to fire, but not to water. Now, what is evil in itself cannot be natural to anything. For it is of the very definition of evil that it be a privation of that which is to be in a subject by virtue of its natural origin, and which should be in it. So evil cannot be natural to any subject, since it is a privation of what is natural. Consequently, whatever is present naturally in something is a good for it, and it is evil if the thing lacks it. Therefore, no essence is evil in itself.

“Again, whatever possesses an essence is either a form itself, or has a form. In fact, every being is [made to be] in a genus or species by a form. [Recall: genus and species are groups beings belong to; large or small.] Now a form, as such, has the essential character of goodness, because a form is a principle of action. So, to, does the end to which every agent looks. So also does the action whereby each thing having a form is perfected. Hence, everything that has an essence is, by virtue of that fact, a good thing. Therefore evil has no essence.

“Besides, being is either act or “not-yet” (potency). Act, as such, is good, for something is perfect to the extent that it is in act. “Not-yet” also is a good thing for “not-yet” tends to act. [All change is this tendency to good.] Moreover, “not-yet” is also proportionate to act, and not contrary to it. It belongs in the same genus with act. Privation does not belong to it, except accidentally. So, everything that exists, whatever the mode of its existence, is a good thing to the extent that it is a being. Therefore, evil does not possess any essence.

“Moreover, we proved in Book Two of this work that every act of being, whatever its type may be, comes from God. And we have shown in Book One that God is perfect goodness. Now, since evil could not be the product of a good thing, it is impossible for any being, as a being, to be evil. This is why Genesis 1:31 states: ‘God saw all the things that He has made, and they were very good’, Eccleastes 3:11: ‘He hath made all things good in their time’, and 1Tim 4:4: ‘Every creature of God is good’. [Note Scripture integrated here.]

“Dionysius, in ch 4 of *On the Divine Names*: ‘evil is not an existing thing’. i.e. in itself. ‘Nor is it something among things that have existence’. It is a sort of accident, like color [of an apple]. Through this consideration, the error of the Manicheans is refuted, for they claimed that some things are evil in their very natures.” 115

We see Thomas using his fundamental distinctions, especially act and “not-yet”. In this synthetic way he demonstrates that evil is like a hole in your shoe. It’s not a thing. In fact, it needs the thing (shoe) to be a hole in. You can’t have a hole in nothing. There most be some good thing, which suffers some lack, like a hole. Thomas next considers arguments against the positions he just expressed. Again, read the text (115-118), and compare it to Burke’s translation, given here: “Now it appears that the preceding view may be opposed by certain arguments. Each thing is specified by its own specific difference. But evil is a specific difference in some genera: eg in habits and moral acts. Just as virtue is specifically a good habit, so the contrary vice specifically is a bad habit. The same may be said of virtuous and vicious acts. Therefore, evil is that which gives specificity to some things, and thus it is an essence, and is natural to certain things.

“Again, of two contraries, each is a definite nature. If one contrary were supposed to be nothing, then it would be either a privation or a pure negation. But good and evil are said to be contraries. Therefore, evil is a nature of some sort. Besides, good and evil are spoken of by Aristotle in the Categories as “genera of contraries”. Now, there is an essence and a definite nature for each kind of genus. There are no species or differences for non-being. So that which does not exist cannot be a genus. Therefore, evil is a definite essence and nature.

“Moreover, everything that acts is a real thing. Now, evil does act precisely as evil, for it attacks the good & corrupts it. So, evil precisely as evil is a real thing. Furthermore, wherever the distinction of more or less is found, there must be certain things arranged in hierarchic order, since neither negations nor privations admit of more or less. But among evils, one is worse than another. So evil must be a real thing. Thing and being are convertible [terms; one means the other]. There is evil in the world. Therefore, it is a real thing, and a nature.

[Aquinas answers, and I edit.] “It’s easy to answer these arguments. Evil and good are called specific differences in morals because morals depend on the will. [They are decisions.] So anything voluntary is moral. Now, the object of the will is the end & its good. Hence, the end specifies morals, just as [fire heats]. Hence, because good & evil are ordered, or deprived of order, to the end, it’s necessary in morals to distinguish between good & evil. Now there must is only one primary standard in any one genus. The standard in moral matters is reason. Therefore it must be by their rational end that moral things are good or evil. So, in morals, that which is specified by an end that is in accord with reason is called good specifically. That which is specified by an end contrary to the rational end is termed evil specifically. Yet that contrary end, though it opposes a rational end, is nevertheless some sort of good. E.g. something that delights our senses. These are goods for certain animals, & even for man, when they’re moderated by reason. It also happens that what’s evil for one being is good for another. So, evil, as a specific difference in the morals, doesn’t imply something that’s evil in its own essence, but something that is good in itself, though evil for man, inasmuch as it reduces the order of reason which is the good for man. Therefore, evil and good are contraries only in morality, not elsewhere. Therefore, argument 2 is mistaken [to make evil and good physical contraries. Instead, evil is contrary to good only in the effects of man’s decisions. There evil effects are contrary to good effects.] Elsewhere, evil is the privation of the good. [Moral contrary does not mean physical contrary.] Indeed, in all moral contraries, either both contraries are evil (prodigality & stinginess), or one is good and the other evil (generosity & stinginess). Therefore, moral evil is both a genus & a difference, not by its being a privation of rational good, but by the nature of the act ordered to the wrong end. [I shorten the text. Argument 3 mistakes Aristotle’s comment on Pythagoras’s supposition that good & evil are categories. Aristotle did not think so. Argument 4 assumes that evil counters good, opposes it, or corrupts it. We speak this way loosely. But for evil to do that, it must act. Evil is precisely the lack of act. So it’s a mistake to assume that evil acts against good. The 5th argument is accurate because death is worse than disease. But it’s a short way to say that more good is missing in death than in disease. More evil means more missing good. Similarly, the 6th argument mistakes a loose expression: “evil exits” for a thoughtful statement, which would be: “good is missing”. Understanding evil is very good for us. Thank God!

**St. Thomas Aquinas Class Summary #31: 5/4/13**

**Evil Requires Good: *Summa Contra Gentiles* (from p 118)**

What’s happening is starkly different from standard teaching. Thomas eases us into the acting of act, to overcome the errors we learned. The more we act along with created act, the closer we get to Pure Act. So read our text, translated by Pegis, and compare it to this handout, by Bourke. Together, they deliver a better picture of Thomas’ stark simplicity, expressed in Latin.

*Summa Contra Gentiles*, Chapter 10: “That Good is the Cause of Evil. The foregoing arguments enable us to conclude that evil is caused only by the good. [Since nothing else exists.] For if an evil thing were the cause of a certain evil, then the evil thing would not act, except by virtue of the good, as has been proved. So this good must be the primary cause of the evil. Again, what does not exist is not the cause of anything. So, every cause must be a definite thing. But evil is not a definite being, as has been proved. Therefore, evil cannot be the cause of anything. If, then, evil is caused by anything, this cause must be the good.

“Besides, whatever is properly, and of itself, the cause of something, tends toward a proper effect. So, if evil were of itself the cause of anything, it would tend toward an effect proper to it, namely, evil. But this is false, for it’s been shown that every agent tends toward the good. Therefore, evil is not the cause of anything through evil itself, but only accidentally. Now every accidental cause [must] work through itself. Only the good can be a cause through itself, for evil cannot be a cause through itself. Therefore, evil is caused by the good.

“Moreover, every cause is either matter or form, or agent, or end. [These are the 4 causes: material, formal, efficient, and final.] Now evil can’t be either matter or form. It has been shown that both being in act and being in potency are good. Similarly, evil cannot be the agent, since anything that acts does so according as it is an act, and has form. Nor, indeed, can it be an end, for it is apart from intention, as we have proved. So evil can’t be the cause of anything. Therefore, if anything is the cause of evil, it must be caused by the good.

“In fact, since evil and good are contraries, one of these contraries cannot be the cause of the other, unless it be accidentally, as the cold heats (*Physics* 8). Consequently, the good could not be the active cause of evil, except accidentally. Now in the order of nature, this accidental aspect can be found either on the side of the agent or of the effect. It will be on the side of the agent when the agent suffers a defect in its power, the consequence of which is a defective action, and a defective effect. Thus, when the power of an organ of digestion is weak, imperfect digestive functioning, and undigested humor result. These are evils of nature. Now it is accidental to the agent, as agent, for it to suffer a defect in its power. It is not an agent by virtue of the fact that its power is deficient, but because it possesses some power. If it were completely lacking in power, it would not act at all. Thus, evil is caused accidentally on the part of the agent, in so far as the agent is defective in its power. This is why we say that ‘evil has no efficient, but only a deficient cause’ (St. Augustine, *De civiate Dei*, 7, 7). For evil does not result from an agent cause, unless because it is deficient in power. To that extent it is not efficient. [It’s the same thing] if the defect in the action and in the effect arise from a defect in the instrument, or of anything else required for the agent’s action. E.G. when the motor capacity produces lameness because of a curvature of the tibia. For the agent acts both by means of its power and of its instrument.

On the side of the effect, evil is accidentally caused by the good, either by virtue of the matter of the effect, or by virtue of its form. For, if the matter is not well disposed to the reception of the agent’s action on it, there must result a defect in the product. Thus the births of monsters are the result of lack of assimilation on the part of the matter. [The matter is not formed by the form.] Nor may this be attributed to some defect in the agent, if it fail to convert poorly disposed matter into perfect act. There is a determinate power for each natural agent, in accord with its type of nature, and failure to go beyond this power will not be a deficiency in power. Such deficiency is found only when it falls short of the measure of power naturally due it.

“From the point of view of the form of the effect, evil occurs accidentally because the privation of another form is the necessary concomitant of the presence of a given form. Simultaneously with the generation of one thing, the corruption of another thing results. But this evil is not an evil of the product intended by the agent, but of another thing, as was apparent in the preceding discussion.

“Thus it is clear that, in the natural order, evil is only accidentally caused by the good. Now, it works in the same way in the realm of artifacts [man-made objects]. ‘For art in its working imitates nature’ (Aristotle *Physics* 2, 2). Bad results occur in both, in the same way.

“However, in the moral order, the situation seems to be different. It does not appear that moral vice results from a defect of power, since weakness either completely removes moral fault, or at least diminishes it. Indeed, weakness does not merit moral punishment proper to guilt, but mercy and forgiveness instead. A moral fault must be voluntary, not necessary. Yet, if we consider the matter carefully, we find the 2 orders [moral and making artifacts] similar from one point of view and dissimilar from another. There is dissimilarity [because] moral fault is noticed in action only, and not in any effect produced. Moral virtues are not [about] making, but about doing. The arts are [about] making. So [for them] a bad result happens just as it does in nature. Therefore, moral evil is not [about] the matter or form of the effect, but only [about] the agent [efficient cause].

“Now in moral acts we find four principles arranged in definite order. One of these is the executive power, the moving force, by which the parts of the body are moved to carry out the [decision or] command of the will. Then this power is moved by the will, which is a second principle [or source]. Next, the will is moved by the judgment of the apprehensive power, which judges that this object is good or bad, because the objects of the will are such that one moves toward attainment, and another moves toward avoidance. This apprehensive power [for or against a good] is moved, in turn, by the thing apprehended. [Eg: we see a Big Mack. Our apprehensive power judges it good, and moves toward it. We call this movement a “desire” for Big Mack. This desire moves our will to make a decision, for or against the Big Mack. Finally, we move muscles to execute our will’s decision. If we decide to get the Big Mack, we order it. When it arrives, we eat it.] So the first active principle in moral acts is the thing that is cognitively apprehended [known], the second is the apprehensive power, the third is the will, and the fourth is the motive power, carrying out the command of reason.

Now, the act of the power that carries out the action already presupposes the distinction of moral good or evil. For this kind of external act [is not moral, unless it’s] voluntary. Hence, if the act of the will be good, then the external act is also deemed good. But if it be bad, the external act is bad. It would have nothing to do with the moral evil if the external act were defective [beyond] the will’s command. [If we decided to order a Big Mack, but couldn’t speak, the moral value of our decision remains, but we can’t get the hamburger, because of vocal failure.] Lameness, for instance, is not a fault in the moral order, but in the natural order. Therefore, a defect of this type in the executive power either completely excludes moral fault, or diminishes it. So, too, the act [of moving] the apprehensive power is free from moral fault, for the visible thing moves the power of sight in the natural order, and so, also, does any object move a passive potency. [A passive potency is a receptive “not yet”, like the eye, which receives light. Light activates the eye to see, letting the eye receive act it previously did not yet have.] Then, too, this act of the apprehensive power, considered in itself, is without moral fault, for a defect in it either removes or diminishes moral fault, as is the case in a defect of the executive power. Likewise, weakness & ignorance excuse or diminish wrongdoing. The conclusion follows, then, that moral fault is found primarily and principally in the act of the will only, and so it is quite reasonable to say, as a result, than an act is moral because it is voluntary. Therefore, the root and source of moral wrongdoing is in the act of the will.

However, a difficulty [follows] this investigation. Since a defective act stems from a defect in the active principle, we must understand that there is a defect in the will preceding the moral fault. Of course, if this defect be natural, then it is always attached to the will, so the will would always commit a morally bad act when it acts. But virtuous acts show that this conclusion is false. On the other hand, if the defect be voluntary, it is already a morally bad act, and we will have to look in turn for its cause. Thus, our rational investigation will never come to an end. [Infinite regression] Therefore, we must say that the defect pre-existing in the will is not natural, to avoid the conclusion that the will sins in [each] of its acts. Nor can we attribute the defect to chance or accident, for then there would be no moral fault in us, since chance events are not premeditated, and are beyond the control of reason. So, the defect is voluntary. Yet it is not a moral fault; otherwise, we should go on to infinity. How this is possible we must now explain. [See how Thomas connects bits of knowledge, or synthesizes.]

“As a matter of fact, the perfection of the power of every active principle depends on a higher active principle, since a secondary agent acts through the power of a primary agent. While, therefore, a secondary agent remains in a position of subordination to the first agent, it acts without any defect. But if becomes defective in its action if it happens to turn away from its subordination to the primary agent. E.g. an instrument falls short of the agent. [The pen you try to use runs out of ink.] Now, 2 principles precede the will in the order of moral acts: 1) apprehensive power, 2) object apprehended, which is the end [or purpose of the decision]. Since [each movable requires a mover, different desirables (Big Mack, lose weight) require different desires (appetites). So one is a sensory desire, another a meaning desire. E.g the Big Mack sets off sensory desire to eat it, but the person knows that he’s overweight, and should not indulge.]” Out of space, we must suspend this argument here. Remember: apprehensive powers include sensing appearances and intellecting meaning.

**St. Thomas Aquinas Class Summary #32: 5/11/13**

**The Act Which Deprives the Good, Spawning Evil : *Summa Contra Gentiles* (from p 121)**

Stopped as we were in the middle of Thomas’ argument, it helps to review the first part. As we study evil, we discover there is nothing to study. Evil is precisely what’s missing. So evil is a negation of something we could study: the good that ought to be there. Every evil negates some good which belongs where it’s missing. If we follow the good act, we find how the act becomes missing. It’s the evil-ing of the evil. It’s the missing of the good required for full being. Knowing it is the opposite of knowing. So it’s difficult, like driving in reverse.

This review emphasizes that all the stuff around evil is good. In fact, good is the cause of evil in 2 ways. 1) It is the material which evil negates. Evil is a hole in the good, the absence of good which ought to be there. 2) Because we can’t directly choose absence, we can’t directly intend evil. Instead, we intend some good, but miss the mark. Therefore the cause of evil is good, but accidentally off the intended goal. All this indirection towards what’s missing is too negative for us. But following positive act to its absence, teaches us that evil negates a good. We left off while Thomas was tracing good to its accidental absence in volition, or decision, or will acting well, to attain its goal. Reason, or intellecting, shows us what’s there to choose, and how good each choice is. Without that understanding, there’d be nothing to decide. So reason is the proper motivator of the will. From this realization, we continue with Bourke’s translation, complementing our text on p 121.

“Again, since reason is able to apprehend many goods, and a multiplicity of ends, and since for each thing there is a proper end, there will be, then, for the will, an end, and a first motivating object, which is not merely any good, but some determinate good. Hence, when the will inclines to act as moved by the apprehension of reason, presenting a proper good to it, the result is a fitting action.”

Comment: Those 2 sentences are loaded with truths. Unpacking, we see that we know many goods. These goods fit into networks of steps toward goals. Many of these ends, or objectives connect all the way to God, our ultimate end. Tracking these interacting goods wears us out. There are so many of them. There are so many ways we can connect them to advance toward improved goods, and finally to the Good. God is the ultimate end, but each decision has its own proper end. When hungry, our proper end is food. We abandon many more important ends, so that we can nourish ourselves, and survive to pursue those more important ends. Each decision has its proper end. Reason, or thinking, or intellecting, sees the ends available, & determines the most important at the moment. This is the “proper” good for us to choose. When we decide, we will that proper good, and will the acts to attain it. It’s amazing how effective we are at this process. Thank God, & return to Thomas:

“But when the will breaks forth into action, at the apprehension of sense cognition, or of reason itself presenting some other good, at variance with its proper good, the result in the action of the will is a moral fault.”

Comment: This is sin. When the will breaking forth into action is deciding. It is the person choosing. Instead of choosing the proper good, the person chooses an improper good. This misses the mark. Thomas says it can miss the mark by preferring sensory good to moral good. For example, we know that our proper good is to rise when the alarm goes off. If we prefer to stay in bed, then we choose an improper good. Feeling good trumps being good. When we prefer comfort to rising, we choose one good over another. The good we choose misses the mark of our proper good. Not every sin is choosing to feel good. We also sin by choosing a reasonable good, that’s not our proper good. Eg we could claim that health trumps rising, because we have a cold, and need extra rest. Whether we prefer to feel good or to choose a different reasonable good, we miss our mark: the good proper to this present decision. It’s hard to find a more accurate account of sin among the many thinkers who attempt to express it. How hard it is to trace negations. Thanks Thomas. Back to his text:

“Hence, a defect of ordering to reason, and to a proper end, precedes a fault of action in the will. In regard to reason, in the case of the will inclining, on the occasion of a sudden sense apprehension, toward a good that is on the level of sensory pleasure. In regard to a proper end, in the case when reason encounters, in its deliberation, some good which is not, at this time, or under these conditions, really good, [but still] inclines toward it, as if it were a proper good.”

Comment: Thomas clarifies how reason, or thinking, misses the proper end. Perhaps we could say that reason misrepresents an improper end as if it were proper. We know that our thinking goes astray here. If we didn’t know, we would not be responsible. Consider our experience. We know when our reasoning is muddled. If we follow muddled reasoning, we’re responsible for its misdirection. Sometimes, we misdirect our mental act by sensory desire. Other times, we misdirect our thinking to an intellectual goal which is proper at some other time, or under some other conditions. If we reason that it is the best option, when it is not, we misdirect ourselves. More specifically, we say that our reason misdirects our will. We insist that our proper good is to stay in bed, when, actually, our proper good is to rise from bed. Thomas continues to clarify details of our actions:

“Now, this defect in ordering is voluntary, for to will, and not to will, lie within the power of the will itself. And it is also within the power for reason to make an actual consideration, or to abstain from such a consideration, or further to consider this or that alternative. Yet, such a defect of ordering is not a moral evil. For, if reason considers nothing, or considers any good whatever, that is still not a sin, until the will inclines to an unsuitable end. At this point, the act of the will occurs. Thus, it is clear, both in the natural order, and in the moral order, that evil is only caused by good accidentally.”

Comment: Thomas excellently expresses difficult interactions. It’s even better in Latin. Pondering two English translations helps us identify with the very act which accidentally causes evil. By thinking all this through we improve our good actions, and eliminate more & more evil. Now on to the next chapter is.

“It can also be shown from the preceding considerations that every evil is based on some good. Indeed, evil cannot exist by itself, since it has no essence, as we have demonstrated. Therefore, evil must be in some subject. [A subject is an existing being: a substance.] Now, every subject because it is some sort of substance, is a good of some kind, as is clear from the foregoing. So, every evil is in a good thing.

“Evil is some privation, as is evident from the foregoing. Now, privation, and the form that is deprived, are in the same subject. But the subject of form is being in potency to form, and such being is good, because potency and act belong in the same genus. [Act & potency are principles (sources) of change: virtual entities that enable us to know change.] Therefore, the privation which is evil is present in a good thing, as in a subject.

“Besides, something is called evil due to the fact that it causes injury. But this is only so because it injures the good, for to injure the evil is a good thing, since the corruption of evil is good. Now, formally speaking, it would not injure the good unless it were in the good. Thus, blindness injures a man to the extent that it is in him. So, evil must be in the good.

“Moreover, evil is not caused, except by the good, and then only accidentally. But everything that occurs accidentally is reducible to that which is by itself. So, with a caused evil which is the accidental effect of the good, there must always be some good which is the direct effect of the good as such. Thus the good effect is the foundation of the evil. For what exists accidentally is based on that which exists by itself.

“However, since good and evil are contraries, one of those contraries cannot be the subject for the other. Rather, it excludes the other. It will seem to someone, at first glance, that it is improper to say that good is the subject of evil.” Comment: subject means evil’s container; a substance defected by evil. Thomas clarifies:

“Yet it is not improper, provided the truth be investigated to its limit. Good is spoken of in just as general a way as being, since every being as such, is good, as we have proved. Now, it is improper for non-being to be present in being, as in a subject. Indeed, any instance of privation is a non-being, yet its subject is a substance which is a being. However, non-being is not present in a being contrary to it, as in a subject. For blindness is not universal non-being, but, rather, this particular non-being whereby sight is taken away. So, it is not present in the power of sight as its subject, but rather, in the animal [the substance which is the subject]. Likewise, evil is not present in a good contrary to it, as in its subject. Rather, this contrary good is taken away by the evil. For instance, moral evil is present in a natural good, while a natural evil, which is a privation of form, is present in matter which is a good, in the sense of a being in potency (not yet).

Comment: at its limit good transcends all limits. Like being, good is beyond all groups. Four things that we know are so real that they escape any group of created beings. Ponder a bit to see that 1) truth, 2) goodness, 3) being, & 4) oneness are starting points of our knowledge. When we investigate to the limits, we find them sitting beyond. So they are ways to say God, the Unified Transcendent. He is simultaneous Truth, Good, Being, & One. Recall thinking this way before school, where teachers knocked most natural learning out of us. Let being be, and we see that good “goods” unlimitedly. So good is not proportional to evil. They can’t “contrary” each other, because good is so much more vast than evil. Good is caused. Evil is not. Good is the being of each substance. Evil is accidental to many substances. Reflection upon these realities lets good be, lets it act. Blindness is small compared to all the good left in the blind man. Its cause is an accident. It does not rise to the size of substance. So it’s not contrary to the good substance. Thomas teaches well. If we listen and learn, we surpass our past knowledge, and explode into God’s truth and goodness. Amazing as it may seem, God made us in His image/likeness to unite with Him, to be one with the One. Lacking that ultimate union is evil. As we see how negative evil is, we focus more clearly upon good. Try to be so busy doing good that there’s no time for evil.

**St. Thomas Aquinas Class Summary #33: 5/25/13**

**Evil Does Not Entirely Destroy Good : *Summa Contra Gentiles* (from p 123)**

Again, here’s Burke’s translation, to compare to Pegis’. “It is evident from the foregoing explanation that, no mater how much evil be multiplied, it can never destroy the good wholly. In fact, there must always continue to be a subject for evil, if evil is to endure. Of course, the subject of evil is the good, and so the good will always endure. Yet, because it is possible for evil to increase without limit, and because good is always decreased as evil increases, it appears that the good may be infinitely decreased by evil. Now, the good that can be decreased by evil must be finite, for the infinite good does not admit of evil, as we showed in Book One. So, it seems that eventually the good would be wholly destroyed by evil, for, if something be subtracted an infinite number of times from a finite thing, the latter must be destroyed eventually by the subtraction.

“Now, it cannot be answered, as some people say, that if the subsequent subtraction be made in the same proportion as the preceding one, going on to infinity, it is not possible to destroy the good, as happens in the division of a continuum. For, if you subtract half of a line two cubits long, and then half of the remainder, and if you go on this way to infinity, something will always remain to be divided. [By definition, taking away half leaves half.] But in this process of division, that which is subtracted later must always be quantitatively diminished. In fact, the half of the whole is quantitatively greater than half of the half, though the same proportion continues. This however, cannot in any sense happen in the decreasing of good by evil, for the more the good would be decreased by evil, the weaker would it become. So [it would be] more open to diminution by subsequent evil. On the contrary, the later evil could be equal to, or greater than, the earlier evil. Hence, a proportionately smaller quantity of good would not always be subtracted by evil from the good in subsequent cases.”

Comment: Because evil is an absence of good, there must always be some good in which this absence is. If evil were something that could **be**, we could say it **was** in the good. But as a pure negation, evil is the opposite of something that **is**. Since most words refer to something, the word evil trips us up. We try to find some thing which **is** evil. But nothing’s there. Evil is mere negation. Evil negates good, so good is the stuff which evil negates. There is no being that negates. Instead, evil is the negation. So it can’t be a being. When we find a negation of good, we find evil. The more we give ourselves examples of evil, the more clear this negation is. As Thomas showed, Infinite Being is beyond any and all negation. So evil is possible only in finite (limited) beings. But we focus on creatures, using their limits to learn about them. So we imagine subtracting half a line, then another half, and continue without end. Our image of the line diminishes to zero. However, this is false, even proportionally, because taking half always leaves half, as Zeno observed when Achilles tried to overtake the tortoise. Actually, Achilles leaves the tortoise in the dust. Actually, subtracting good occurs without proportion. So proportional arguments miss the point. So they are evil, lacking the good that belongs. Thomas cures that.

“So another sort of answer must be given. It is evident from what has been said, that evil does take away completely the good which is its contrary. Eg: blindness. Yet there must remain the good which is the subject of evil. This, in fact, inasmuch as it is a subject, has the essential character of goodness, in the sense that it is in potency to the act of goodness which is lacking due to the evil. [Comment: The blind man is not-yet seeing, so is in potency to seeing. Blindness-evil-ing is the negating of seeing.] So the less it is in potency to this good, the less will it be a good. Now, a subject becomes less potential to a form, not simply by the subtraction of any of its parts, nor by the fact that any part of the potency is subtracted, but by the fact that the potency is impeded, by a contrary act, from being able to proceed to the actuality of the form. For example, a subject is less potential in regard to cold to the extent that heat is increased in it. Therefore, the good is diminished by evil more as a result of the addition of its contrary than by the subtraction of some of its goodness. This is also in agreement with the things that have been said about evil. Indeed, we said that evil occurs apart from the intention of the agent, and that he always intends a definite good, and that it consequently implies the exclusion of another good which is contrary to it. So the more this intended good (which, apart from the agent’s intention, results in evil) is multiplied, the more is the potency to the contrary good diminished. And this is rather the way in which the good is said to be diminished by evil.”

Comment: After seeing that mere subtraction of good does not account for evil, Thomas provides another, more adequate, answer. Thomas reminds us of our central principles, or sources of understanding. Potency, or not-yet, is the negation of actually, or already acting. This not-yet, the negative principle necessary for all change, applies to evil. In fact, it applies better than mere absence. Absence is so totally negative that it falls short of the lack-of-good we call evil. Not-yet, or potency, is more like evil-deprivation, because it tends towards the good that is not-yet. Eg: the young person is not-yet mature. But this not-yet condition includes a basic drive for maturity. So being young is a positive act, but incomplete. It tends toward maturity, rather than merely lacks maturity. Thomas offers this more complete understanding of what’s lacking. The accidental cause of lacking maturity is the positive act of being young. Youth is contrary to maturity. The young-ing of the young is good, but not good enough. Its youth is contrary to maturity, but still positive. So we understand evil more completely if we see its cause as a contrary positive act inhibiting its contrary, more positive, act. This account enlightens the accidental cause of evil. No being can seek evil. There is nothing there to seek. Every being seeks good. But getting one good, like youth, prevents getting a better good, like maturity. Another example: if you boil an egg for 2 minutes, it’s two-thirds of a 3-minute egg. It’s good to be a 2-minute egg, but not good enough for those who prefer 3-minute eggs. The act of partial cooking interferes with the act of complete cooking. The 2-minute egg is not-yet the 3-minute egg. This is not good enough for the gourmet, who desires that just-right boiled egg. Creatures are always part actuality, and part not-yet (potency). Even the 3-minute soft-boiled egg is not-yet hard-boiled. The principles that enable us to comprehend motion apply just as well to how evil deprives one act by doing another. As we understand, reality opens to us. Thomas expands on this:

“Now, in the natural order, this diminution of the good by evil cannot proceed to infinity. All natural forms and powers are limited, and they reach some limit beyond which they cannot extend. So, it is not possible for any contrary form, or any power of a contrary agent, to be increased to infinity, in such a way that the result would be an infinite diminution of good by evil. [Comment: perfect physical evil is impossible because perfect lack of the good is perfect nothingness. Remember that evil is the absence of the good **that should be there**.]

“However, in the moral order, this diminution can proceed to infinity. For the intellect and the will are not limited in act. The intellect can go to infinity by understanding. This is why the mathematical numbers and figures are called infinite. Likewise, the will proceeds to infinity in its act of willing. A man who wills to commit a theft can will again to commit it, and so on to infinity. Indeed, the more the will tends toward unworthy ends, the greater is its difficulty in returning to a proper and worthy end. People develop vicious habits because they grow accustomed to sinning. Therefore, the good of natural aptitude can be infinitely decreased by moral evil. Yet, it will never be wholly destroyed. Rather, it will always accompany the nature that endures[person].”

Comment: Thomas distinguishes moral from physical being. He means that human persons escape all limits by intellecting and willing. We all think beyond all limits. An example is our identity with the catting of the cat. It applies to all cats which ever were, are, and ever will be. By number, that’s a practical infinity. But it’s a potential infinity because cats can become without end. Every truth is in God’s image and likeness by its infinite application. We are Infinity’s image by our infinite thoughts. Our will is more like God, infinitely deciding. So we **will** God: we decide to unite with Infinity, to **be One**. In act, intellect and will illustrate our divine source, destiny, and likeness. It’s **in act** that we’re infinite. In being, we’re created finite. Sin cripples us further. So we can addict ourselves by turning our infinite desire for God to cocaine instead. But, with Jesus, we can rise to our infinite potential. From God, and destined for God, we can actually decide to unite with Him. Thomas:

“From what’s been said, [we see] that, though evil has no direct cause of itself, still there must be an accidental cause for every evil. Whatever exists in another thing, as in its subject, must have some cause, for it is caused either by the principles of the subject, or by some extrinsic cause. Now, evil is in the good as in a subject. So it is necessary for evil to have a cause. That which is in potency to either of 2 contraries is not advanced to actuality under one of them unless through some cause, for no potency makes itself be in act. Now, evil is a privation of something that’s natural to a man, which he ought to have. This is why anything whatever is called evil. Evil is present in a subject that’s in potency to evil, and to good. Therefore, evil necessarily has some cause.

“Besides, whatever’s in something, & isn’t due to it from its nature, comes to it from some other cause, for all things present in existing beings as natural components, remain there unless something else prevents them. Eg: a stone is not moved upward unless something else impels it, nor is water heated unless by a heating agent. Now, evil is always present as something foreign to the nature of that in which it is, since it is a privation of what a thing has by natural origin, & ought to have. Therefore, evil must always have some cause, either directly of itself, or accidentally. Moreover, every evil is the consequence of a good, as corruption is the result of an act of generation. But every good has a cause, other than the first good in which there is no evil... Therefore, every evil has a cause, by which it’s an accidental result. Moreover, every evil is a consequence of a good, as corruption is the result of an act of generation. But every good has a cause, other than the first good in which there is no evil... Therefore, every evil has a cause, in regard to which it is an accidental result.” Praise God!

**St. Thomas Aquinas Class Summary #34: 6/1/13**

**There is No Supreme Evil; All Beings Advance to Good: *Summa Contra Gentiles* (from p 126)**

Burke’s translation enlightens us. “As a consequence, it is evident that there cannot be any highest evil, which would be the first source of all evils. The highest evil ought to be quite dissociated from any good, just as the highest good is that which is completely separate from evil. Now, no evil can exist in complete separation from the good, for we have shown that evil is based upon the good. Therefore, the highest evil is nothing.

“If the highest evil be anything, it must be evil in its own essence, just as the highest good is what is good in its own essence. This is impossible, because evil has no essence... So it is impossible to posit a highest evil which would be the source of evils. Besides, that which is the first principle is not caused by anything. But every evil is caused by a good. Therefore, evil is not a first principle. “Moreover, evil acts only through the power of the good... But a first principle acts through its own power. Therefore, evil cannot be a first principle. Furthermore, since ‘that which is accidental is posterior to that which is per se’, it is impossible for that which is first to be accidental. Evil arises only accidentally, and apart from intention... So it is impossible for evil to be a first principle. Again, every evil has an accidental cause... Now, a first principle has no cause, whether direct or accidental. Therefore, evil cannot be a first principle in any genus. Besides, a per se cause is prior to one which is accidental. But evil is not a cause, except in the accidental sense... So evil cannot be a first principle. By means of this conclusion, the error of the Manicheans is refuted, for they claimed that there is a highest evil, which is the first principle of all evils.”

Comment: Thomas synthesizes well. All depends on defining evil. It is the absence of the good which ought to be present. As such, it is pure negation. It can be a negation only in a positive good. As deprivation of this good increases, we say that evil increases. If privation increases until all the good is gone, nothing remains. So complete evil is nothing. The meaning of evil precludes any highest evil. Evil-ing prevents being. Yet we imagine a highest evil to be something. This image is false. Real evil is nothing more than a gap in a good. Gaps of various sizes can occur. But a total gap is a total zero. So there’s no evil first principle. Mani seduced lots of people by firing up their imaginations with combating gods: Good and Evil. Often, it looks to us as though Evil were as powerful as Good, or even more powerful. Sometimes, we imagine that we should join the winning side: Evil. When we calm ourselves, and see daylight, we realize that Thomas told the truth. Perfect absence of good is perfect absence. Nothing is there. Only good exists. How is good the start and end of all created act?

“If every agent acts for the sake of a good, as we proved above, it follows further that the end of every being is a good. Every being is ordered to its end through its action. If must be, then, that the action itself is the end, or that the end of the action is also the end of the agent. And this is its good. Again, the end of anything is that in which its appetite terminates. Now, the appetite of anything terminates in a good. This is how the philosophers define the good: ‘that which all things desire’. Therefore the end of everything is a good.”

Comment: Thomas uses a natural term that our common training obscures. We commonly restrict the word appetite to a biological drive for food. This restriction steals a valuable word from us. Our drives extend way beyond food. We drive toward truth (which is good), good (obviously good), beauty (a great good), and unity (the One Good). These drives actually drive our minor appetite for food. They are more human, more important, more valuable than hunger. Once we recognize those more basic appetites, we realize that the fundamental drive is toward good. All acts aim to harmonize with Pure Act. The end of everything is Good. Return:

“Besides, that toward which a thing tends, while it is beyond the thing, and in which it rests, when it is possessed, is the end for the thing. Now, if anything lacks a proper perfection, it is moved toward it, insofar as lies within its capacity. But if it possesses it, the thing rests in it. Therefore, the end of each thing is its perfection. Now, the perfection of anything is its good. So each thing is ordered to a good as an end.

“Moreover, things that know their end are ordered to the end in the same way as things which do not know it. The ones that do know their end are moved toward it through themselves, while those that do not know it incline to their end as directed by another being. The example of the archer and the arrow shows this clearly. However, things that know their end are always ordered to the good as an end. The will, which is the appetite for a foreknown end, inclines toward something only if it has the rational character of a good which is its object. So the things which do not know their end are ordered to a good as an end. *Ergo*, the end of all things is a good.

Comment: Thomas recognizes that human freedom escapes mere commands. Instead, moral order attracts. Attraction preserves freedom. So the archer is free to pick up the bow, or not. Having picked it up, he’s free to fit an arrow to it, or not. Having fitted the arrow, he’s free to aim, or not. So on, down each decided step, the archer drives his decisions by freely yielding to the attraction of the next good step. If all goes well, he fires the arrow into the target of his choice. Decisions are more important than the function of bow & arrow, which aren’t free. Instead, the archer directs them. He is the being who orders the inanimate objects. In spite of temptations to despair because of evil, we remind ourselves of the truth. Evil is the non-existent hole in good beings. It can’t overwhelm us, because evil does not exist. Instead, we fill in what is missing. All that is, is good. Where good is missing, fill it in. Thomas sees the ultimate reason why: All Beings Are Ordered To God.

“It is, consequently, apparent that all things are ordered to one good, as to their ultimate end. If, in fact, nothing tends toward a thing as an end, unless this thing is a good, it is therefore necessary that the good, as good, be the end. Therefore, that which is the highest good is, from the highest point of view, the end of all things. But there is only one highest good: God. So, all things are ordered to one good, as their end: God.”

Comment: Here’s another great example of synthesis in act. The necessity of God grounds everything else. God, Necessary Being, Pure Act, is the center from which radiates all that is. God is Source of all. He is also the Main Attraction, the Good which pulls everything toward Him. He is the End. So the Greeks called Him the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and end of their alphabet. All our knowledge synthesizes in these acts. All our efforts to bust loose from our false training into the light of natural knowledge lead to this wonderful conclusion. All beings go ultimately to God, from Whom they came. Mystery is rich. Thomas gives other reasons:

“Again, that which is supreme in any genus is the cause of all the members that belong in that genus. Thus, fire, which is the hottest of corporeal things, is the cause of the heat of other things. Therefore, the highest good which is God is the cause of every end that is an end, since whatever is an end is such because it is a good. Now ‘the cause of an attribute’s inherence in a subject always itself inheres in the subject more firmly than does the attribute’. Therefore, God is obviously the end of all things. Besides, in any kind of causes, the first cause is more a cause than is the secondary cause, for a secondary cause is only a cause through the primary cause. Therefore, that which is the first cause in the order of final causes must be more the final cause of anything than is its proximate final cause. But God is the first cause in the order of final causes, since He is the highest in the order of goods. Therefore, He is more the end of everything than is any proximate end.

“Moreover, in every ordered series of ends the ultimate end must be the end of all preceding ends. For instance, if a potion is mixed to be given a sick man, and it is given in order to purge him, and he is purged in order to make him thinner, and he is thinned down so that he may become healthy, then health must be the end of the thinning process, and of the purging, and or the other actions which precede it. But all things are found, in their various degrees of goodness, to be subordinated to one highest good which is the cause of all goodness. Consequently, since the good has the essential character of an end, all things are subordinated to God, as preceding ends under an ultimate end. Therefore, God must be the end of all things.

“Furthermore, a particular good is ordered to the common good as to an end. Indeed, the being of a part depends on the being of the whole. So, also, the good of a nation is more godlike than the good of one man. Now, the highest good which is God is the common good, since the good of all things taken together depends on Him. The good whereby each thing is good is its own particular good, and also is the good of the other things that depend on this thing. Therefore, all things are ordered to one good as their end, and that is God.

Again, order among ends is a consequence of order among agents, for, just as the supreme agent moves all secondary agents, so must all the ends of secondary agents be ordered to the end of the supreme agent, since whatever the supreme agent does, He does for the sake of His end. Now, the supreme agent does the actions of all inferior agents by moving them all to their actions, and consequently to their ends. Hence, it follows that all of the ends of secondary agents are ordered by the first agent in His own proper end. Of course, the first agent of all things is God... There is no other end for His will than His goodness, which is Himself. Therefore, all things, whether made by Him immediately, or by means of secondary causes, are ordered to God as to their end. Now, all things are of this kind, for there can be nothing that does not take its being from Him. So all things are ordered to God as an end. Besides, the ultimate end of any maker, as a maker, is himself. We use things made by us for our own sakes, and if sometimes a man makes a thing for some other purpose, this has reference to his own good, either as useful, delectable, or as a good for his own sake. Now, God is the productive cause of all things, of some immediately, of others by means of other causes... Therefore, He Himself is the end of all things.

Closing comment: Nothing is more important to know than this: all things are from, in, by, and for God. All fits together in this synthesis. Nothing else comes close to tracing act from Source to Destiny. Thank God for Thomas, and his wonderful work, passed on to us, so we can glorify God. Thanks to God for all that is!