The Dumb Ox Study Guide

The Dumb Ox by G. K. Chesterton

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Plot Summary

The Dumb Ox is a biographical sketch of the 13th century Dominican Friar St. Thomas Aquinas. The book is about evenly split between considering St. Thomas' life, and the writings that he produced; however, the author does attempt to combine the two. A large focus of the book is to interest modern readers in St. Thomas, and this is seen very clearly in the opening chapter, "On Two Friars". Chesterton is very aware that readers may be intimidated by, or just uninterested with, the figure of St. Thomas, who is well known as being a very thorough and systematic philosopher and theologian. Therefore, the first chapter is dedicated to associating him with the very vibrant and lovable character of St. Francis, with whom the author hopes the reader is familiar with and fond of.

The book discusses at some length what is known about St. Thomas' early life. St. Thomas was the youngest child of an influential Italian noble family. He was born at a time in which the Holy Roman Empire was waging active war against the Pope, and his family was found torn in their allegiances. St. Thomas had always been a very quiet and reserved individual, so his father arranged for him to enter the Benedictine monastery at Monte Casino. St. Thomas decided to join the Dominican Order instead. The Dominicans, also known as the Order of Preachers, was a new Catholic religious movement dedicated to preaching the Catholic faith. They lived entirely off of voluntary donations. They were a somewhat revolutionary movement in the 13th century, and many people did not have a great esteem for them, including St. Thomas' family. As a result, his decision to join them was met with much opposition, even culminating in his kidnapping and imprisonment. However, he endured all of his family's resistance and remained a member of the Dominicans his entire life.

As a member of the Dominican Order, St. Thomas' first major accomplishment was giving a theological defense of the Friars. Opposition to their movement was growing throughout the Church, and pressure was even being put on the Pope to abolish them. Therefore, St. Thomas dedicated himself to writing a reasoned defense, which was ultimately successful. This defense brought him a certain amount of prestige in the Church, though it would be only the first of many achievements.

His greatest accomplishment, which would consume his entire life, was the promotion of Aristotle's philosophy. By the 13th century, the dominant philosophy of Christianity, a Christianized version of Plato's philosophy, had grown stale, and the Church was having difficulty with a religious movement known as Manicheanism. This was the view that the natural world is evil and dangerous and that in order to live a good life one had to divorce oneself from the world as much as possible. The Church had continually condemned this view, but there was a tendency in Platonic thought that could easily lead to this. Therefore, St. Thomas and his teacher, St. Albert the Great, promoted Aristotelianism, which had a positive view of the natural world, in order to counteract the dangers of Platonism.

Chesterton attempts to give a brief sketch of St. Thomas' adult life. He was a very quiet and very brilliant Friar who, for all the time he spent studying, was deeply devoted to Christ and the Catholic Church. He witnessed and even participated in a number of miracles in the course of his life, many of which confirmed both his holiness and ability to defend the Catholic faith. In addition to being a rigorous thinker, he was also a very skilled poet, as evident in the hymns he composed for the office of Corpus Christi (Latin for "Body of Christ", referring to the Eucharist). At the age of forty-nine, after an unknown spiritual experience which caused him to judge that all of his writings in his life were "straw" compared to what he had seen, he died on the way to the Council of Lyons.

Chesterton gives a brief sketch of St. Thomas' philosophy, but does not treat his theology in any depth. The basic premises of Thomistic philosophy are the affirmation of goodness of Creation and the acceptance of reality as it is. According to St. Thomas' philosophy, everything is good because God has created it, and things are only bad if they are abused. In fact, the natural world is something that is absolutely necessary for man's existence, since all of his knowledge is received through the senses. His philosophy is, finally, something that is incredibly in touch with common sense.

The final chapter of *The Dumb Ox* attempts to place St. Thomas' work in an historical perspective. Compared with all of the philosophies that came after, Chesterton praises Thomism as the obviously superior and the only practical philosophy. He laments that after St. Thomas' time, Scholastic philosophy—the school of philosophy to which St. Thomas belonged—went largely downhill and very much against the spirit of St. Thomas' work. While St. Thomas had philosophically defeated the Platonic tendency in the Church, after several centuries had passed the Church revived it in the form of the Protestant Reformation which, according to Chesterton, marked the end of the age of Reason and the beginning of the modern era. However, Chesterton is hopeful that the philosophy of St. Thomas will make a return in the modern world.

Introductory Note and Chapter 1 - On Two Friars

Introductory Note and Chapter 1 - On Two Friars Summary and Analysis

This short introductory note's purpose is to give a few general disclaimers about the content of the book and explain what it is and what it is not. The two most important things that Chesterton states is that this is primarily a book for people who do not share St. Thomas' religion, namely, Roman Catholicism. Secondly, he makes it clear that, though St. Thomas is known primarily for being a philosopher and theologian, the book is not a work of philosophy or theology.

Chesterton states that the purpose of this book is to make St. Thomas Aquinas more popular than he is. The audience of this book is mainly non-Catholics and, as such, it is necessary to include explanations that are obvious to Catholics and leave out details only Catholics would want to know. Furthermore, in sketching a biography of St. Thomas, it is necessary to include the fact that he debated people he considered heretics, even if that fact might offend non-Catholics. It is especially important to include this detail since the Reformation is seen occurring because of the controversies happening during the time of St. Thomas. The acknowledgment of this fact is necessary for a true understanding of the subject of this book.

Further, the author states that it is not his intention to give a thorough explanation of St. Thomas' philosophy, but rather only to give a sampling of it. He makes no attempt to discuss theology, which he sees as something which comes after an understanding of the philosophy. His reason for avoiding a technical discussion of these fields is so that his book remains accessible and does not intimidate the average reader. Furthermore, he does not intend to bring up those beliefs of St. Thomas that people might think are superstitious today, such as a belief in demons. He chooses not to discuss these not because he wants to hide them, but rather because St. Thomas was not unique in holding these beliefs. Everyone held these beliefs, even most people who were not Catholic, and so it would not say anything particularly interesting about St. Thomas to discuss them at length.

This chapter uses the figure of St. Francis, about whom Chesterton had already written another book, as a way of introducing and showing the relevance of St. Thomas. St. Francis of Assisi is generally understood to be a figure that is very disconnected from systematic philosophy and theology and is best known as a "free spirit" who loved nature and loved God. St. Thomas, on the other hand, is primarily known as a quiet, reserved teacher who spent long hours reading and writing. In order to show why St. Thomas is important not only to philosophers and theologians, Chesterton tries to show throughout this chapter how what St. Thomas did, even though superficially different, was essentially the same as what St. Francis did. By doing this, Chesterton is clearly

trying to win over the reader who might think that St. Thomas is a figure who is in no way relevant to them.

The chapter begins by noting how writing a biography of St. Thomas is a much different task from writing a biography of St. Francis. In the case of St. Francis, it is very easy to give a general sketch of his life, since there still exist many stories about his life in the form of legends and stories. Very little, on the other hand, is known about the personal life of St. Thomas. He is known primarily through his very complicated writings, which would be difficult to summarize for the sake of a biography.

The content of the lives of these two men is also very different. St. Francis was a man who traveled impulsively from place to place, while St. Thomas was a man who spent hours in his room quietly studying. St. Francis was a poetic man who, for the most part, despised books. St. Thomas was a man who spent his life buried in books. St. Francis was loud and dramatic, while St. Thomas was quiet and reserved. Chesterton concludes the contrast by saying that while at first he was emotionally drawn to St. Francis, whose personality is so flamboyant and attractive, as he learned more about St. Thomas, he found himself having a great deal of affection for him, in some ways even more than he does for St. Francis. The intention of this observation is a way of drawing the reader in and make them interested in St. Thomas, who might, at first, seem like a boring character to them.

Next, there is a discussion of St. Thomas' role in the world today. Chesterton notes that there has been a resurgence of interest in St. Thomas' writings. He remarks that the resurgence is because the world needed to know what the writings conveyed. He remarks that it is true of all saints that they always have an effect upon the world because they somehow contradict it and challenge it. The fact that saints are often killed and made martyrs is evidence of this general rule; that they form an opposition to the general way the world works. This can be seen also in St. Francis, who not only had a big effect on the world in his time, but also was very popular to the English during the Victorian period, even though his way of life was utterly different from their very reserved culture. In fact, the English loved him precisely because he was the opposite of them. In a similar way, St. Thomas, who heavily emphasized the role of reason, was becoming popular because the twentieth century so greatly neglected reason. People returned to St. Thomas in hope that it might bring order to a world that had become very chaotic. Once again, it can be very clearly seen that Chesterton is making a great effort to engage his readers and make them interested in St. Thomas by showing how relevant he is to modern times.

Chesterton then goes on to explain why he chose to pair up St. Francis with St. Thomas, rather than with St. Dominic. St. Dominic is the obvious counterpart to St. Francis, since both men founded religious orders (the Order of Preachers and the Order of Friars Minor, respectively). However, it is more interesting to pair up St. Francis and St. Thomas since the two were doing essentially the same work, even though the way each did it was radically different. The work that these two men did was to bring more light and more liberty to the world of the Middle Ages. St. Francis accomplished this by

going out into the world itself and bringing about change, while St. Thomas brought about this renewal of the world through ideas.

The changes that these men brought about, however, were not a compromise or abandonment of Christianity, but rather a natural growth of the religion. It is necessary for Chesterton to point this out to quell the concerns of some readers, who might think that St. Francis and St. Thomas somehow diluted the religion in favor of a kind of worship of nature or pagan philosophy, respectively. Even though St. Thomas borrowed philosophy from pagans like Aristotle, he did not, in the process, somehow meld together Christianity with Paganism. Rather, he brought new light to Christianity, which made it stronger and more mature than it had been before. In the same way that St. Francis took the natural world and used it to do demonstrate the beauty of God, so did St. Thomas take the philosophy of the ancient Greeks and use it to show the truth of Catholicism.

Chesterton also points out that it is incorrect to see St. Francis and St. Thomas as figures that lead to the Renaissance, which was in many ways a distancing from religion. Rather, both men, by placing a great value on the material world, reaffirmed the central doctrine to Christianity; that God, by becoming man, came into the material world. Previous Christians, like St. Anselm, had emphasized too strongly the spiritual aspect of Christianity and had neglected the fact that man is a material being. Both St. Francis and St. Thomas corrected this attitude, and, in so doing, brought Christianity back to its proper roots. This can be especially seen in St. Thomas' treatment of humans. Whereas previous thinkers had thought of man primarily as a soul, St. Thomas saw man as an intimate union of both a soul and a body. In this way, St. Thomas is in many ways very similar to modern thinkers, who want to praise the body.

Chesterton then shows that St. Thomas' thought also has some parallels with modern political thinking. For example, when St. Thomas discusses God's purpose for revealing truths to man, St. Thomas is very concerned to include the uneducated, common man in the picture. For, while it might be possible for a scholar who can spend all of his time thinking and reading to know many of the truths about God; the common man who must spend most of his time working does not have that luxury. Therefore, God chose to directly reveal many of those things to mankind. In his discussion of free will, St. Thomas also showed his concern for the dignity and liberty of the individual person. He saw individuals as having a true freedom and autonomy, even to the point of being able to separate who they are from God.

St. Thomas also was a champion of common sense, and this can be seen in his treatment of the so-called problem of "the Many and the One". The basic question here is about what reality basically is. Some people, on the one hand, see reality as composed of separate individuals that are so distinct that they cannot in any way be classified or compared. Others, on the other hand, see everything in the world as so closely connected with everything else that it is impossible to make distinctions. St. Thomas finds himself coming down mainly on the side of those who would say that there really are different things in the world, but they are not so different that we cannot group them together. For example, while pigs are different from pigs, pigs are not so

different from each other that we cannot say they are, in a way, the same as each other. While this idea might be considered simply common sense, it is important to remember that it is deeply connected with the Christian idea of creation; the notion that it was God who created pigs the way they were. This is the opposite of the idea that pigs just came about through some impersonal process of the universe.

Chesterton then reminds the reader that in accepting Aristotle and in accepting common sense, St. Thomas was not somehow diluting Christianity, but actually bringing it back to its real meaning and bringing fresh air into it. The work of St. Thomas was something altogether different from the work the Renaissance. During the Renaissance, people were trying to resurrect ideas from the past and replace new things with old things. On other hand, the work of St. Thomas was to use old things to make new things more new. During the Renaissance, people were abandoning Christianity in favor of a complete return to the ancient writers, but St. Thomas saw the ancient writers as a way of bring back the basic meaning of Christianity.

Chesterton draws another link between St. Francis and St. Thomas by showing how they were both revolutionary figures for their time, and it should be noted here that this is another way of interesting the reader, who might be under the impression that revolution would be something very foreign to the serious character of St. Thomas. The nature of this revolution can be seen in the Order of Preachers, the order to which St. Thomas belonged. The Order of Preachers was founded to try to convert the Albigensians, a religious sect that condemned the material world and only recognized the value of what was spiritual. Because the goal of the order, initially, was to use debate and reason as a way to convert the Albigensians, the Order was filled mainly with philosophers. As a result, St. Dominic and his followers had a kind of intellectual independence that was a shock to the world. Though the Order of Preachers were orthodox Catholics, they were dedicated to the truth and were unwilling to accept the ideas of society at face value.

In order to combat the prejudice some people might have against St. Dominic and the Order of Preachers (and also St. Thomas, since he belonged to the Order of Preachers) as being a group that was primarily interested in using physical force to bring about conversions, Chesterton points out that St. Dominic was primarily interested in bringing about conversions peacefully through calm, rational debate. The fact that he thought that the government could punish people for religious crimes is not something that should be held against him, since that was the belief of everyone at the time. Chesterton remarks that it is especially strange to try to separate St. Francis from St. Dominic in this way, since the two men held the same beliefs. St. Dominic's life did involve times in which heretics were punished for their beliefs, but this was the exception in his life and not the rule. The greatest accomplishments of St. Dominic were through peaceful preaching and not through the use of force.

The religious orders of St. Dominic and St. Francis were also revolutionary because they were movements that were primarily concerned with the common people. The rich reacted against these religious orders out of fear that it would upset the social order of the time. It is easy to forget the revolutionary nature of these orders, however, since no

revolution can continue forever. In time, the religious orders became institutions and people got used to them. Therefore, it is necessary to remember how much opposition these groups faced at the time in order to understand the kind of world of St. Thomas, who joined the Order of Preachers at its very beginning.

Chapter 2 - The Runaway Abbot

Chapter 2 - The Runaway Abbot Summary and Analysis

This chapter begins the actual biography of Thomas Aquinas. Its basic purpose is to depict the political and social background into which Thomas Aquinas was born, and to show, given his circumstances, the significance of his decision to join the Order of Preachers. The chapter begins with a lengthy description of Frederick II, the Holy Roman Emperor, who is used as a symbol for Europe as a whole. The discussion is then narrowed down to the Aquino family, which Chesterton also uses to represent the social situation of the time. The third and final part of this chapter is the story of Thomas' decision to enter into the Order of Preachers and the difficulties he faced in pursuing this vocation.

The chapter begins by explaining the family into which St. Thomas was born. He was born into a very wealthy and important family and was related to many of the most influential figures of Europe, including Frederick II, the Holy Roman Emperor, who was his cousin. Having Italian, French, and German blood, St. Thomas is deeply connected to the very heart of Europe. Nonetheless, despite his diverse ancestry, he identified himself primarily as an Italian. Furthermore, despite his blood relationship with the Emperor, he was more devoted to the Pope. Looking beyond, for the moment, the early years of St. Thomas' life, Chesterton explains that while St. Thomas was by birth a very cosmopolitan man, he would add greatly to this by the various travels he would make over the course of his life, traveling all across Italy, through Germany, spending many years in Paris, and even probably at one point traveling to England. His intellectual formation was equally diverse, as shown by the attention he paid to people he completely disagreed with, such as Muslim philosophers like Avicenna and Averroes, and by his nuanced opinions about the treatment of Jews.

Chesterton then contrasts the way in which St. Thomas could be considered an "international man" with the way the word was used in his day to describe a famous and well-respected political named Cobden. Cobden, he points out, was actually a very specifically national man, concerned first and foremost with the welfare of England and only with the welfare of other nations insofar as it benefited his country. Cobden's life is indicative particularly of the nineteenth century in which one was always particularly beholden to a particular nation. In contrast, in the thirteenth century, nationhood was not such an important characteristic of either people or areas; for that reason, a person could truly be an "international man". One could travel about Europe without concern for what country one was in and truly be a person who belonged, in a way, to all nations. This international character of the thirteenth century can be seen in the biography of St. Thomas who, though he was an Italian by birth, was a long-time teacher at French universities. The French hailed him as one of their greatest. Likewise, St. Thomas' mentor, St. Albert, a German, was also highly respected in French universities.

It follows from this that wars that occurred during this period were not necessarily wars between different nations, but rather between forces which existed across all nations, like between the Catholic Church and Holy Roman Empire. It was, in fact, the ongoing conflict between these two powers that formed the background of St. Thomas' life. In particular, the life of Frederick II heavily influenced the political order of the time. Chesterton notes that while Frederick was sometimes called the "Wonder of the World" the original Latin form of this would be "Stupor Mundi". From this, Chesterton suggests that perhaps we might understand Frederick's real influence as one that stupefied the world, particularly in the way in which he did great harm to religion. Frederick is a man whose reputation has been much distorted by later generations who want to make him into a very noble and exceptional figure. However, in truth, he is not so wonderful as he is portrayed. The Victorian English, for example, who were very much admirers of Frederick, coined a saying that Frederick was a "statesmen in an age of Crusaders; a philosopher in an age of monks". However, the implication of this saying-that one could not be both a statesman and a Crusader or a philosopher and a monk-is shown false by the examples of St. Louis, King of France, and by St. Thomas himself, who was both philosopher and monk. In fact, Frederick, for the most part, failed in both of these roles. While St. Louis was able to greatly build up the French nation, Frederick's idealism prevented him from truly creating a better Germany. Likewise, while Frederick might have been interested in philosophy, certainly it was only a side interest, as is evident from the fact that no one cares to study what Frederick had to say about any given philosophical topic.

Chesterton sees this idealizing of Frederick as symptomatic of a general bias against the Middle Ages, and goes off onto a short tangent on this subject. He says that it is impossible for people of his age to think that a person who lived according to the spirit of the Middle Ages could actually accomplish anything that the modern world would judge to be good. Thus, men who, in the Middle Ages, were concerned not only with their own particular nation's interests, but with the interests of all of Europe, are looked down upon as not being real statesmen. This attitude towards the medieval politics is, Chesterton claims, indicative of the narrow-mindedness and selfishness of modern thinkers. Nevertheless, despite the common view that Frederick was a statesman in the modern sense—that he was a man concerned primarily with his own country's welfare—he was, in fact, a true international man, though only in the sense that he thought the Holy Roman Empire ought to govern the whole world.

Another peculiar feature of the political composition of Europe at that time was that large-scale war was made impossible because it required that there be large groups of men with a common cause to fight behind. However, during the Middle Ages, since the idea of modern nationhood—the idea that one person being French and another person being German somehow made them fundamentally different—had not yet taken root, it was impossible to get widespread support for any war. Moreover, even when a war did break out, so unorganized were people that "peace might break out at anytime"-that is, the people might just decide that the war is not worth fighting anymore, and there was not much that could be done about it. Chesterton uses the Aquino family as a representation for this phenomenon. At one time, they are waging a war against the Pope's land; at another, they are asking the Pope for permission to send one of their

sons to a monastery; and, finally, one of the Aquino sons (not Thomas) joins the Pope's army and winds up being executed by the Emperor. Still later, two of the brothers kidnap the youngest for joining a religious movement approved by the Pope. In short, the medieval family had a great deal of independence from particular political bodies.

This story shows both the political character of the times as well as the particular situation the Aquino self found itself in, and the background out of which St. Thomas was to arise. The Count of Aquino, St. Thomas' father, had decided to send St. Thomas to the monastery of Monte Cassino, a monastery that the Count had, ironically, helped destroy in Frederick's military campaigns. The decision to send his son there may have been motivated by uncertainty about what St. Thomas was good for, since he had never shown in any interest in war or any other "gentlemanly pursuits". He was a quiet and reserved young man, but also one who was intellectually curious, and so it seemed fitting for him to be somehow in the service of the Church. Therefore, the Count arranged for his son to become abbot of Monte Cassino. However, St. Thomas was not willing to go along with this and, without his father's knowledge or consent, arranged to become a part of the Dominican Order, the Order of Preachers, who were greatly looked down upon during that time as being a kind of radical new movement. The fallout from St. Thomas' decision was very dramatic: not only was his family in an uproar, his extended family and even unrelated nobles were furious about this decision and had appealed to the Pope himself. St. Thomas refused any compromise—including one in which he would still be a monk at Monte Cassino, but would wear the Dominican habit.

Chesterton remarks at how significant a decision this was, not only for his time, but also for all times. St. Thomas gave up a life in which he would have a certain amount of prestige as the head of an established monastery, and instead insisted on being an equal with other friars in an order that survived only off what they could get from begging. In order to avoid negative repercussions from this decision, the head of the Dominicans had St. Thomas move away from his family to study in Paris. This journey-which Chesterton notes is significant since Paris is where St. Thomas would eventually wind up doing his greatest work—was interrupted by a plot by his family. While he was walking down the road with other Friars he was accosted by two of his brothers and was taken away and locked in a tower. The image of the brothers kidnapping St. Thomas is, as Chesterton notes, something very striking: even though the men were supposedly trying to uphold the esteem of the nobility against the crudeness of their brother who wished to be a beggar, it was *they* who were acting like the roughest bandits. In addition, while these men were seeking to uphold the notion of a family in the narrowest sense, St. Thomas was working towards realizing an ideal of family that included the entire world and not just those who are related to it by blood. This contrast shows something of the confused nature of the Middle Ages—it consisted both of the best and the worst elements of humanity.

St. Thomas appears to have taken the imprisonment without much physical resistance and probably was not very disturbed, since he could do philosophy from a monastic cell or in a prison. However, imprisonment was not all his brothers had in mind. They hired a very attractive prostitute with the hopes of causing some kind of scandal or moral fault. While St. Thomas had, for the most part, been passive and accepted what his brothers

were doing, this event caused in him a hitherto unknown anger. According to the stories, he picked up a flaming brand from the fireplace and used it to chase the woman out of his room. He slammed the door shut and used the stick to trace a black sign of the cross on the door. This event would ultimate settle the question, and from this point on, he would live a life of contemplation.

Chapter 3 - The Aristotelian Revolution

Chapter 3 - The Aristotelian Revolution Summary and Analysis

This chapter details St. Thomas' role in bringing the philosophy of Aristotle into the mainstream of Catholic thought and in resisting the challenges brought against it. It begins with an account of St. Albert the Great, St. Thomas' teacher, who was the first to start seriously studying Aristotle. Chesterton then gives the story about how St. Albert recognized the talent in the young St. Thomas who continued to progress in his education and understanding. St. Thomas' first "breakthrough" was his defense of the "mendicant orders"-orders like the Dominicans and Franciscans who lived only off the alms given to them voluntarily. However, that was only the beginning of his work. His main life's work was reconciling Aristotle with Catholicism against the objections of the Augustinians—that is, those who followed the philosophy of St. Augustine—who were wedded to the philosophy of Plato. Chesterton gives a brief overview of Aristotelian, which he describes as a philosophy fundamentally connected with the material world and observation; Platonism, on the other hand, is a philosophy that emphasizes the spiritual to the neglect of the physical. One of St. Thomas' last battles was to draw the limits of theological investigation and scientific investigation. Since truth was ultimately one, science could not contradict faith; therefore, St. Thomas argued, the interpretation of Scripture could sometimes be influenced by scientific discoveries. Likewise, science should be guided by the truths given by faith. However, after this final point was made, St. Thomas had to deal with Siger of Berbant, who, acting as if he agreed with St. Thomas, said that there were in fact two different truths, scientific truths, and religious truths. This last episode was St. Thomas' final philosophical battle and is notable since it is one of the few times when St. Thomas appears to get angry.

St. Albert is called the founder of modern science, Chesterton claims, because he was one of the first people to distance himself from the kind of "science" which was really superstition, like alchemy or astrology. While it is certainly true that scientists—even real scientists—were often persecuted by the world, they found a friend in the Catholic Church, who took them for what they were. Even many centuries after St. Albert's times, there is still an admiration for magicians, or for people who can interpret dreams or give horoscopes, which shows that the suspicion of scientists was not something peculiar to the Middle Ages. However, certainly St. Albert and his colleagues were limited in their science since they did not access to very good or very much data—they, for example, believed there were unicorns. The important point, though, is that, even if they had bad data (for which they could not be faulted), they approached the data logically and scientifically.

The city where St. Albert did his first work was Cologne. The academic situation of Cologne clearly showed the difference in how nations were understood in those times compared to how they were understood in later periods. Even though there were people

from many different regions, and certainly there may be tensions between them, they were unified in the search for a single philosophy and a single truth, which brought about a kind of peace among them. The sort of philosophy St. Albert was interested in was certainly one heavily influenced by Aristotle, but his interests were not in the deeper conceptual issues about morality or metaphysics, but were instead in the biological and scientific works of Aristotle.

St. Thomas was one of his students known by his classmates as the "dumb ox" because of his large physical stature as well as his shyness and silence ("dumb" here should be understood as "quiet" rather than stupid"). His quietness even caused many students to think that he was not very smart, though this impression was falsified whenever he would talk, though his speech would not be frequent. His silence was in large part caused by his humility. However, this humility was overcome by his love of truth. If he felt he was being taught something wrong, he would not be hesitant to point it out. St. Albert, who had dealt with many students, was one of the first to recognize the real brilliance of St. Thomas, and he gradually tested his intelligence by giving him various tasks. St. Thomas, of course, would eventually blossom into his own, and his work would even be a progression over the work of St. Albert.

Chesterton notes that the Aquino family had obviously, at some point, abandoned their attempt to dissuade St. Thomas from his chosen path. Though nothing directly is known about how they came to give up, it is quite possible that his sisters, who were more sympathetic to him, were involved. However, even though his family had relented, the world in general did not cease to view the Friars negatively. It was St. Thomas' good fortune that he had managed to become friends with St. Albert, who would take him to Paris.

In Paris, St. Thomas would meet St. Bonaventure, a Franciscan friar. This meeting would be the start of a great friendship. St. Bonaventure, like St. Thomas, was among the early generations of his order and in addition was an outstanding intellectual. The difference between the intellectual approaches of these two men, however, is noteworthy. The Franciscans were always more interested in the mystical aspect of the spiritual life, and less interested in trying to ground religion in rigorous philosophy. The Dominicans, and especially St. Thomas, would take the opposite route. However, the difference between these two worldviews should not be understood as a contradiction. Rather, the difference was one of emphasis. St. Thomas emphasized the aspect of Truth in religion, whereas St. Bonaventure emphasized the aspect of Love. Both are truly aspects of religion and do not in any way compete with each other. These two friars were encouraged that they were both right by the fact that the rest of the world thought everything these men were doing was completely wrong. They were both Friars, and Friars were still very much hated by the world. The defense of the Friars was a project that St. Thomas and St. Bonaventure took up together and they both went to Rome.

The defense of the Friars was St. Thomas' first great accomplishment, and that accomplishment won him some amount of fame and prestige. His defense is also, perhaps, what protected the Friars from eventually being destroyed and abolished. This

was not terribly difficult, since the movement of the Friars was one that was very popular among the people. However, saving the Friars was only a preface to the greater work that lay ahead of him in defending Aristotle. Churchmen at the time thought that the two greatest dangers to religion at the time were the Friars and Aristotle: St. Thomas had defended the one, and now it became his task to defend the other. People were suspicious of Aristotle largely because he had come to Europe from the Muslims. Aristotle was Greek; however, his manuscripts had been lost to Europe for many centuries. Muslim philosophers were the first to rediscover them and they had used to manuscripts to develop certain ideas about God and religion that were foreign to Catholicism: for example, pantheism, the view that God is everything and everything is God.

Chesterton remarks that revolutions are really only counter-revolutions, movements against some previous revolution. Men always react against the new things that their predecessors had brought about. It would be wrong, he argues, to think that in all of this there is some great progress since there is no movement forward, but simply a reversal back and forth. It is only in the case of a particularly strong and fresh revolution that it can come, with time, to seem like it had always existed. This is the case, particularly, of Aristotelianism, which eventually did become institutional and stale. Therefore, to understand the Renaissance simply as a period in which the old Aristotle was discarded in favor of a new Platonism is simply wrong. Platonism was the philosophy that St. Thomas and St. Albert were reacting against; *it* was the old way of thinking. The Church had begun with Platonism, since Platonism was the dominant philosophy among the Greeks, where Catholicism spread very rapidly in its early years. The danger of Platonism, though, was that it could often lead to Manicheanism, the view that the material world was essentially evil and that the spiritual realm alone was good.

However, Chesterton explains, philosophy prior to St. Thomas was not without merit. The Aristotelian movement in philosophy during St. Thomas' is best seen as a development of the existing tradition, rather than a break from it, like what would happen in philosophy centuries later. This is evident in the fact that St. Thomas constantly refers back to previous thinkers. However, what St. Thomas did was certainly something new and sudden; his contribution was not a small change in philosophy. It was, according to Chesterton, the fulfillment of philosophy in a certain sense. However, even though it was a sudden change, it did not happen without certain signs predicting it. The philosophical tradition had developed quite a bit prior to St. Thomas' time and many of the ideas as expressed by Aristotle were more hints than an elaborated system.

The change, moreover, was one that was religious in its core. Even though the Aristotelians were using a pagan philosopher, their primary concern was with the Catholic faith. It was precisely because the hold on the Christian faith had been slipping that St. Thomas wanted to introduce Aristotle. Platonism, with its overemphasis on the spiritual aspect of man, had made the faith too inaccessible and ethereal. The influence from Eastern Christianity was also having a stifling effect on Christianity in the West. The East, Chesterton claims, tends to "flatten" things and deprive them of their real significance, reducing them to mere pictures and symbols, rather than allowing them to

be living things. In addition, asceticism—the practice of denying oneself of bodily goods out of penance—had contributed to the idea that material goods were something to be spurned altogether, as if they were evil. However, the neglect of philosophers in reiterating the goodness of material objects was much more at fault than the penance of nuns and monks.

The fear many people had for Aristotle was that incorporating his philosophy into Catholic theology would somehow bring in foreign, Muslim elements. However, Chesterton points out, Islam is less accommodating of the doctrines they feared than Catholicism. For example, even though neither Muslims nor Catholics believed in the notion of God as some mystical stream of being—as some Muslim Aristotelians had interpreted Aristotle—the Catholic religion was, in some ways, easier to reconcile with that notion than the Muslim religion. The fear might have been that just as Muslims became bad Muslims when they became interested in Aristotle, so too might Catholics become bad Catholics. In the face of all of this, the only two men standing against all the cries for the silencing of Aristotle were St. Albert and St. Thomas.

It is unclear when things began to turn decisively in favor of Aristotle; however, one culminating point was a meeting with the Bishop of Paris, a firm opponent of Aristotle as well as of the Friars. St. Thomas and St. Albert went before the Bishop (who, despite his philosophical tendencies, was an honest man), to make their case, in front of an eclectic gathering of philosophers and theologians of all stripes. While they were never able to completely convince the bishop, he was at least partially swayed, and in such a climate as they were in, this was a major victory. It proved that one could be both a Catholic and an Aristotelian. The final victory stroke was the production of a new translation of Aristotle that removed many of the mistranslations that had caused so much difficulty for the opponents of Aristotle.

One of the great contributions in St. Thomas' Aristotelianism was his attitude towards science, what Chesterton calls the "humility of the man of science". While St. Thomas himself did nothing that might be called scientific work, he worked hard to show the role of experimental science. Since he granted that Scripture was not something that was easily interpreted, he argued that the interpretation should be guided by other truths that are known to man, even scientific truths. While such a standard is a prudent one to take, it can be subject to misuse in certain circumstances. Thus, in the 19th century, men were too ready to accept any scientific hypothesis as grounds for overturning an interpretation of Scripture that had become established. The humility of this consists in the willingness to accept even the most basic and brute facts as the way of learning about the highest and most sublime truths.

St. Thomas, in a certain sense, represents one of the greatest successes of Christianity. Christianity does not measure success in the same way that other ideological or political movements do, that is, in terms of mere domination. Rather, the great success represented by St. Thomas was that, despite his great learning and his great intellectual ability, he was able to remain humble and understand his place in the world. His writing style expresses this, too. He does not write in a manner that shows off or flaunts his

accomplishments. Rather, he writes plainly and openly, his personality undetectable in the text.

After he had at last succeeded in gaining support for Aristotle's philosophy within the Church, St. Thomas would face one of the greatest challenges face during his life. While the rise of Aristotle had been welcomed not only by orthodox Catholics, but also by atheists and heretics of all stripes, St. Thomas was truly disturbed by the philosophical movement of a man named Siger of Brabant. Siger had acted as if he had taken St. Thomas' doctrine and accepted it, but in reality, had only made a false counterfeit of it. Noting that sometimes the biggest lies are those that appear most like the truth, Chesterton notes that nothing else in St. Thomas' life, except for possibly the encounter with the prostitute, had provoked such a strong reaction from him. Siger's doctrine was that there were two truths, scientific truth and revealed truth, which were completely independent from one another. When a man was pursuing science, he could act like religion was false. When a man was studying religion, he would act as if it were true. This came so close to St. Thomas' doctrine about the independence and value of science that it might have fooled St. Thomas' followers had he not protested.

While the doctrine might seem like it resembles St. Thomas', it actually would completely undermine it. St. Thomas had encouraged the use of science as well as the study of religion, not because he thought each would find different truths, but precisely because he was convinced there was one single truth, which was the same no matter how it was arrived at. In contrast to his straightforward and impersonal writings throughout the rest of his career as a theologian and philosopher, the controversy with Siger angered him and caused him to write a very impassioned and direct rebuke.

However, in his rebuke, St. Thomas shows how mild he was. He went out of his way to make clear that he thought Siger and his followers were wrong on philosophical grounds, not that the Faith contradicted them. The distinction is important, because it shows that one must always argue with an opponent on *his* terms, rather than on one's own terms. St. Thomas could easily have tried to refute him using Scripture or the Church's tradition, and perhaps a great number of people would have believed him, but, out of honesty and humility, he did not.

The controversy with Siger was to be the last battle of St. Thomas' life. Afterwards, he receded into a kind of silence and contemplation and did little more than his typical monastic duties. The Pope summoned him to help at an ecumenical council when he was forty-nine and, after he had set out to fulfill this request, he died.

Chapter 4 - A Meditation on the Manichees

Chapter 4 - A Meditation on the Manichees Summary and Analysis

This chapter documents St. Thomas' struggle with the heresy of Manicheanism, the view that the material world is somehow intrinsically evil and that only the spiritual realm is of any value. The chapter opens with a long anecdote about St. Thomas visiting St. Louis, the King of France, and his preoccupation with settling the debate with the Manicheans. The Manichean form of bodily penance is contrasted with Catholic penance. The Manicheans undergo severe bodily sufferings because they think the body and the world are fundamentally bad. The Catholic, on the other hand, practices penance, not because he thinks the world is bad, but because it corrects man's attitude towards the world. However, the philosophy of Plato, which had been the primary philosophy of the Church, was tending the Church towards a Manichean worldview and the only thing that kept people in line was the Church's own dogmas. St. Thomas, then, was concerned with having a theology and a philosophy which did not lead towards Manicheanism, but which embraced the world as something that was fundamentally good.

On one occasion in St. Thomas' life, he was invited to a banquet held at the court of St. Louis IX, the King of France, which he accepted to go only because the Dominicans obliged him to do so. The difference between St. Thomas, a humble, quiet friar, and St. Louis, the glorious and active king, shows the great difference between saints. St. Louis was a man who was simple and humble despite his worldly position and accepted his office as King as he would accept any other role in life. He had also greatly built up the city of Paris, which stood out in Europe as one of the few places of obvious civilization, especially by the introduction of the Gothic style of architecture. Nonetheless, despite all the glories of Paris, St. Thomas was reluctant to go, always more concerned with intellectual pursuits than worldly ones.

St. Thomas arrived at the banquet and, as he usually did, remained quiet and spoke only out of courtesy to those who talked to him. He receded into thought and was in every way a contrast to the rest of the gathering. He sat in his black and white Dominican habit, completely silent, amid the colorfully garbed and loud guests of the King. Suddenly, during a lull in the conversation, St. Thomas, still immersed in thought, brought his fist down on the table and exclaimed, "And *that* will settle the Manichees!" Obviously, despite being in a very social setting, St. Thomas' thoughts were still only the most philosophical and abstract level. The room went silent, and people even became fearful, because such an action could easily be taken as an indignity committed against the King. However, St. Louis responded only by asking his servants to take a tablet to write down what St. Thomas had come up with, lest he forget it.

The reason why St. Thomas was so concerned with the Manichees might not be obvious. A large of part of his life's work was done to refute them, but in actual point of fact, organized groups of Manichees no longer existed. Their latest manifestation in Northern France had been altogether destroyed by the work of St. Dominic and Simon de Montfort. Before explaining St. Thomas' motives, Chesterton notes that in certain external practices, the Church and even St. Thomas in particular, might be mistaken for Manichees because of their bodily penances. It would be easy to infer from the many fasts and acts of self-denial that an average monk or friar would go through that they did because they hated the body and the material world. It would be easy to think that the cause of this, also, was the authority of the Church, since it would not seem that a person would undertake these things willingly. However, such an assumption shows a lack of understanding of non-Western religions. In many cultures, particularly in the East, far more extreme forms of bodily mortifications are undergone than anything that happens in a convent or a monastery, and all of this happens without the influence of authoritative religion. There is, in certain people at least, an appetite to do these things, and the Church's teachings, rather than forcing these penances upon people, restrains them from the excesses of the East.

The restraining force in Catholicism is the undeniable belief that the world is, fundamentally, good. Therefore, if a monk is going to deny his body of food or live a life of solitude, it cannot be because he thinks that the body or the world is something evil. Rather, because of original sin—the universal disposition to prefer evil instead of good—the monk denies himself of material things, which really *are* good, in order to correct his sinful nature. The monk, therefore, is limited in the kind of self-denial he can engage in, and he certainly could not ever go to the length of hanging himself on hooks or lighting himself on fire. What permits this to happen in the religions of the East is ultimately a kind of pessimism, that the world has to be escaped because it is something intrinsically evil.

One form of this pessimism is Manicheanism, which has taken many forms, but is always basically the idea that evil is something that, in some way, is on equal ground with good. This can take the form of believing that there are two gods: one who creates good things, and the other who creates evil things, or it might claim that the devil is the author of the material world. In every form, though, it posits that the creator of the world is also the creator of evil. In contrast to this is the Catholic doctrine, which says that there are no things in the world that are intrinsically evil, but only abuses of things are intrinsically good. Thus, the human being is essentially a good thing, but through a misuse of his will and a misuse of his material goods, can do evil things.

All errors that have afflicted the Church historically have done so both from the inside and from the outside. Thus, the movement of social Darwinism in the 19th century—the view that economics would enrich the most fit humans and impoverish the weakest—was something that was fundamentally and obviously opposed to the Catholic Church. However, within the Church, there was a more subtle movement to try defending Capitalism in a similar way, which was not obviously opposed to the Church's teaching, though it did ultimately turn out to be. In the same way, while Manicheanism was something that was obviously outside of the Church, there was lingering in the Church's

own thinkers a certain inclination towards Manicheanism, and this came mainly from the Church's past love for Plato. As time was progressing, it was become clearer that Plato's emphasis on the spiritual was bringing the Church itself close to Manicheanism. This tendency in Platonism can even be seen in the popular phrase "Platonic love", which is always used to refer to a love that has no physical dimension. Insofar as "Platonic love" is a superior love to love mixed with a physical relationship, this implies a certain intrinsic crudeness to the physical. While Catholics could never say this explicitly, Platonism had certainly disposed them, at least emotionally, to something very much like this view. In fact, the Church's very dogmas prevented men from falling into the very error they were inclined to accept by disposition.

Thus, the work of St. Thomas can be clearly seen as an affirmation of the Church's own doctrines about the goodness of Creation. It is because St. Thomas' philosophy was both entirely orthodox and Catholic and also because it allowed men to escape the pessimism and melancholy of Platonism that his thinking came to dominate the minds of Catholics. His philosophy was, at its root, something very optimistic, if one were to try to describe St. Thomas in modern terms. St. Thomas' teaching was one that affirmed that living is essentially something good and joyful, and therefore the modern prejudice that the Middle Ages were a time in which people despised life and joy is refuted. Certainly, during the Middle Ages, there were certain restrictions placed upon the desire to live life to its fullest, but it was only after the Middle Ages that there were men who really began to think that life was not something worth living.

This aspect of St. Thomas' thought is seen especially in contrast with the great figures of pessimistic philosophies and religion, like Buddha and Nietzsche. Even though Buddhism might appear externally similar to Catholicism, in self-denial and the longing to escape the world, the two theologies are completely different. Catholics wants to escape the world in order to get to the Creator of the world. Buddhists, on the other hand, want to escape the world and the creator, because they think it is all bad. Nietzsche, likewise, the great atheist philosopher, was never able to find joy or goodness in the world. St. Thomas, then, alone among all the thinkers of the world, stood alone as the champion of the goodness of the world and the joy of life.

It must be noted that the optimism of St. Thomas' philosophy is something that only could have come from Christianity. It was not something present in Aristotle originally, and it was necessary for St. Thomas to import this optimism into Aristotelianism. This can be seen in three aspects of St. Thomas' philosophy. This is first seen by the fact that it was only because St. Thomas had a reputation for being so solidly orthodox that Aristotle could be accepted. Aristotle's writings contained a number of things which seemed heretical to many people in the 13th century, and it was only on the promise of St. Thomas that people were willing to accept that they might not actually be heresies. Second, the Aristotelean scientific method, which begins with the lowest of things, received a new justification in St. Thomas' system. While the Greeks might have wanted to start with low things because they were cynical and skeptical about having knowledge about the greater things, St. Thomas wanted to start with the lowest things because he thought they might express something about the greatest things. Finally, even though Aristotle had more esteem for the body than Plato did, only with the explicit

belief in a good Creator could St. Thomas exalt material Creation to the level his theology did.

While these three specific points may say something about the Christianity that St. Thomas brought to Aristotle, the difference may just be summarized by St. Thomas' very positive attitude towards the world, which was based upon his love of its Creator. In fact, more than any other theologian or philosopher, St. Thomas was able to express the greatness and beauty of the Creator.

Chapter 5 - The Real Life of St. Thomas

Chapter 5 - The Real Life of St. Thomas Summary and Analysis

This chapter gives a rough biographical overview of St. Thomas' life as a Dominican friar. After remarking that sanctity is something which is, by its very nature, something hard to examine, Chesterton says that one must begin by first considering the most external characteristics of the saint. Thus, the chapter begins by remarking on St. Thomas' physical stature, which was quite large and even fat. His personality was largely characterized by a kind of absent-mindedness and reflectiveness. In his work, St. Thomas always refrained from personally attacking his opponents and, even though he was often the intellectually superior, always maintained a humble demeanor. He was very careful to not give an impression to others that he was a holy man and was even anxious to avoid certain supernatural occurrences in his life from becoming well known. His entire life was marked by an unshakable confidence in the Catholic faith, even from a very young age, and with a constant concern for the poor. In addition, by nature, he was a man very much disposed to living chastely and did not appear to suffer many sexual temptations. There is good evidence that he witnessed many miracles in his lifetime. As the miracles attested, St. Thomas' primary interest was not in philosophy, but in God. This came out most clearly in the last years of St. Thomas' life, when, after some mysterious experience, he no longer could write. Shortly after, he was summoned to the Council of Lyons, but died suddenly on the way there.

In attempting to sketch the life of St. Thomas, it is necessary to understand his sanctity, which is a quality that, by its very nature, tries to hide itself from observation. This is because a saintly person, by the very fact that he is holy, is humble enough to not want to show off that fact. Therefore, in trying to understand St. Thomas' sanctity, it is necessary to begin the investigation with the most external and obvious details.

St. Thomas has been characterized physically as a man who did not look Italian; however, Chesterton suggests that this may be misleading and that, though his appearance may not have been usual, it was probably not altogether foreign to Italy. He was a very large man, probably not as fat as legend describes him, but rather a very tall and bulky man. His head, however, was certainly very large. Chesterton compares him with the figure of Count Fosco, a character well known in Victorian England, who was a very large and calm figure. His appearance also must have made evident his quality of absent-mindedness. However, he was not absent-minded in the sense that he was always thinking of nothing, but rather, that his mind was always contemplating higher truths, even when engaged in very worldly business. His stare betrayed a kind of inner excitement with the interior, intellectual life.

His habits also showed this disconnection with the world. When he was not engaged in study or in writing, he would walk around the monastery silently, pondering some deep philosophical or theological question. Though he was never offended when he was

interrupted, it was obvious that he preferred to be left alone. It must be remembered, however, that St. Thomas' disconnection with the world was not something akin to the Buddhist desire to contemplate nothingness. Rather, St. Thomas' thoughts were always turned to something very real, whether it be some abstract argument, or the very concrete debate he would be having with his opponents. This last point emphasizes that St. Thomas was not only concerned with abstract argumentation, but also with the reality that there were actual people in the world who needed to be convinced of his ideas.

St. Thomas' intellectual life and dedication to argumentation also necessitated that he spent a large amount of time writing, since the process of argumentation is one that is necessarily very long. This is especially true in his case, since he felt compelled to always answer any objection that came his way. However, in argumentation, he was always sure not to act disrespectfully towards his opponents and certainly never to act as if he were above them. Even though he was perhaps the greatest intellectual of his time, he did not discriminate with whom he would discuss his ideas. He was interested in the salvation of the souls of everyone, not just his intellectual peers. Thus, during his lifetime, he accumulated a large amount of correspondence, which shows his patience in answering even the most trivial questions without the slightest hint of pride or contempt.

His life was also characterized by a great silence and secrecy. Chesterton illustrates this with the example of a piece of art in which on St. Thomas' chest there is drawn a sun which is dark in the center with the golden rays only showing at the margins. Just like the sun, St. Thomas' true glory was seen only in his efforts to help others, and he never showed it for its own sake. In fact, he was very careful to hide it and, even though his followers and friends were very anxious to document his holiness, he was more successful than other saints who were as equally modest. St. Thomas was, in general, a very quiet and reserved man. He did not have the kind of personality that would attract a massive following, even though he certainly did have the admiration of many men of his age. However, his life was not one of excessive privation. He strove to live, above all, a balanced life, in which time for study was measured alongside time for attending to physical needs and even to having fun. Nonetheless, his shyness and silence still somewhat dominates his personality. If one were to compare his tomb with the tombs of other saints, this difference is especially notable. Some saints, like St. Thomas of England, are buried in tombs that almost become scenes for revelry and festivity. St. Thomas' tomb, however, is much quieter and uneventful.

One of the defining qualities of St. Thomas' life was his deep and ingrained confidence in the truth of the Catholic faith. This confidence was evidently in him long before the truth of the Catholic faith would become something that he would rationally discuss and debate about; it was apparently present even in his early childhood. This conviction can be seen especially in his lifelong love for the poor, which seemed to be almost instinctual. Long before he could give a theological basis for the love of one's neighbor, he would give away whatever money his parents would give him. This love for the poor as a young child, in a way prefigures his decision to become a Dominican friar, which was really a decision to become like the poorest of all the poor.

Purity is also a very clear quality of St. Thomas. According to tradition, after his battle with the prostitute, his brothers had unleashed on him when he had a vision in which an angel wrapped a girdle around his loins and bound it very tightly, even painfully. After that experience, it is said that he never seriously struggled with any real sexual temptation. Even though a man who is troubled with these temptations can be as pure as one who is not, so long as that man does not give into and act upon those temptations, it is probable that St. Thomas was never forced to struggle very much in that regard. This fact can perhaps be explained by the theory that in spending so much time in intellectual exercises, the lower energies are, so to speak, lifted up to a higher level.

St. Thomas also had a very intensely spiritual aspect to his life, which even included the witness and experience of some miracles. However, by the very nature of sanctity, these are experiences which can only be reported by a kind of violation of the saint's own desire to remain hidden. The miracles include the report of a case in which a friar apparently saw St. Thomas levitating while in prayer, an event which, as Chesterton remarks, is unlikely to be a mistake, since the saint's great size would preclude anyone being deceived about what was really happening.

However, the most significant miraculous story in St. Thomas' life was the occasion on which the figure of Christ spoke to him from the Cross, and after telling St. Thomas that He was pleased with his writings, offered him whatever he wanted. Chesterton notes that there are many stories that are reported, or at least could be imagined, of some great sage or mystic being offered anything he wants in the world, but instead insists that he wants nothing at all. The Greek philosopher might have wanted nothing because he thought himself so self-sufficient that he did not need anything. The Eastern mystic might want nothing because he thought nothingness was something to be desired itself. However, St. Thomas was unlike either of them, because he was certainly a man who wanted something. His entire philosophy affirmed the goodness and reality of things and so it would be inconceivable to think that he would want nothing. While no one would suppose that St. Thomas would have asked for riches or worldly power, it is remarkable that he did not ask for what might benefit him in his intellectual pursuits: some solution to a philosophical puzzle or some insight into this or that science. However, regardless of St. Thomas' fascination and love for the natural world, which was being offered to him in its totality, it is recorded that he replied humbly, but at the same time also boldly, "I will have Thyself".

As was already noted, the number of miracles recorded in St. Thomas' life is relatively small compared to some other saints of similar reputation. There was apparently a case in which a woman was healed by touching his cloak, and there appear to be a few stories that may just be different accounts of the miracle of the Crucifix. One of these stories is particularly significant. While he was teaching at the Sorbonne, his colleagues had given him some difficult question regarding the Catholic doctrine of the Eucharist and he proceeded to labor over a response. When he was finally done with this difficult work, he went into the chapel and threw the paper he had written on the altar, as if waiting for a judgment from Christ himself. At this point, the figure of Christ on the Crucifix descended from the Cross and told St. Thomas that he had written well of Him.

It was in connection with this miracle that the miraculous levitation was supposed to have happened.

While St. Thomas' life is known today primarily by his work in philosophy and theology, it is interesting to note, as these miracles show, that his primary focus was not in abstract matters, but in his love of God. It is inevitable, though, that history regard St. Thomas in this way, since that is his most obvious achievement, just like Columbus is most well-known for discovering America, even if his Catholic faith was thing most important about his life to *him*. However, in treating the life of an individual, one cannot focus simply on theology, since that theology is, in a certain sense, common to all saints, since they hold the same essential beliefs. Certainly, his philosophy did, in some ways, shape his theology and in that way differentiate him from other saints. However, once truly examined, the differences are minor ones and consist mainly in how each saint chose to emphasize certain doctrines. For example, St. Thomas saw happiness as consisting primarily as a satisfaction of the desire to have truth, while St. Bonaventure emphasized the component of love and emotion in happiness. Neither saint believed anything the other would deny, they simply approached the same question from different perspectives. The differences are also probably indicative of each saint's disposition. While St. Bonaventure was comfortably writing at great lengths about love, one gets the sense that St. Thomas would have been embarrassed to do so.

However, St. Thomas did violate this general rule when he wrote poetry, even though very little of his poetry exists today. The only poetry attributed to St. Thomas that still exists—and it is not known whether he wrote more—is the Office for the feast of the Body of Christ, which celebrates Christ's presence in the Eucharist. This feast day was instituted in St. Thomas' lifetime, partially because of the writings he had created on the subject of the Eucharist, and the Pope had commissioned him to write the hymns and prayers that were to be recited on that day. While his theoretical writings were often dry and very plain, his poetry expresses a very deep spirituality and even allows a certain amount of his personality to shine through. His poetic ability in these hymns is similar to the artistic ability of the so-called Renaissance Men who could design buildings and equally carve sculptures. The hymns themselves are very craftily put together, drawing on a variety of artistic sources.

The depth of St. Thomas' holiness is also evident in the affection that he had for his friends. While he might have differed in many ways from St. Bonaventure, it was obvious to anyone that he had a great love for him. He also showed a great love for his Religious order, even towards those people within the Order who had not treated him fairly or with the respect that he showed them. Towards the end of his life, he drew very close to Friar Reginald, one of his brothers in the Order.

It was to Friar Reginald that St. Thomas made a revelation that is both mysterious and very telling about the life of St. Thomas. After St. Thomas had finished his lengthy debate with Siger of Brabant, a debate that affected him both as a philosopher and as a person, he found himself exhausted. For the greater part of his life, his struggle had been to get his fellow Catholics to see that they need not fear that Aristotle might say something that contradicted the teachings of the Church. What he had never imagined

was that someone might take Aristotle and use it as a way of denying the Church's own teachings, which is precisely what Siger wound up doing. Though he had won this battle, he returned from it with a kind of disillusionment with the world. The next several months were spent simply doing the exercises proper to his life as a Friar and spent very much time in silence. At some point, perhaps during Mass, St. Thomas received some mystical experience, the contents of which are unknown. After this point, he refused to write anymore, saying that compared to this experience, everything he had done written was "straw".

Shortly thereafter, the Pope requested his help at the Council of Lyons, a request St. Thomas assented to out of obedience. However, while he was on the way to the Council, he fell suddenly sick and was put up at a monastery. It is significant to note that, while he was dying, this highly intellectual man requested that the Song of Songs, the most passionate and emotional book in all of Scripture, be read to him. Chesterton remarks that the men who were in the room as he died must have felt as if some massive, powerful machine was coming to a very loud and dramatic end before their eyes. It is reported that the priest who heard his confession before he died told his brothers that the saint's confession was so short and innocent that it might have been the confession of a five-year-old child.

Chapter 6 - The Approach to Thomism

Chapter 6 - The Approach to Thomism Summary and Analysis

Chapter six is an attempt to give a very basic overview of St. Thomas' philosophy, also known as Thomism. Thomism is essentially a philosophy of common sense, in contrast to the philosophies of the modern period, which very often claim things that are quite contrary to common sense. Thomism holds onto the basic idea that things really are what they are and that we can know what things are through our senses. It is opposed to any skeptical form of philosophy that denies that we can know anything at all. However, despite how sensible St. Thomas' philosophy is, there are still many difficulties for readers, especially if the reader is untrained. First, St. Thomas uses a philosophical language that will be foreign to most readers. Second, he uses the logical form of deduction—proving a claim on the basis of premises and a conclusion—which is foreign to many forms of modern philosophy. Finally, much of the terminology that St. Thomas uses will have meanings that are not familiar to the average reader today.

Chesterton takes it for granted that Thomism truly earns its reputation as being a philosophy of common sense. However, such a way of thinking is in a way foreign to the modern world, which has been built upon paradoxes since the Reformation in the sixteenth century. Paradoxes can be useful, Chesterton points out, to make a point by jolting someone awake by saying something that sounds contradictory. However, this purpose is frustrated when paradoxes cease to be the exception and begin to be the norm. When paradox is accepted as the normal way of thinking, it is inevitable that the society will begin to think unclearly or even incoherently. This has become true not only in the case of politics, but even in the realm of theoretical philosophy. Thus, most modern philosophers begin their theories by urging the reader to assume something that is completely counterintuitive and even absurd. Thus, for example, Berkeley bases his philosophy on the notion that there is no reality, but only ideas. Once that idea is accepted everything else follows, however, it is not an insignificant point to accept.

Chesterton reminds the reader that he is no philosopher, and as such, is approaching the subject very much from the point of view of the "man on the street". Therefore, given his lack of training, he cites a priest named Father D'Arcy who points out that although the philosopher Hegel and St. Thomas both have some basic agreements, they do differ somewhat in that St. Thomas does not believe that two contradictory things can both be true and that in order for something to be understood it must first exist. However, as Chesterton notes, these are not insignificant differences, and only a well-versed philosopher and a very patient priest like Father D'Arcy could so calmly glance over these differences. To the average man, saying that two things that contradict each other could both be true is simply insanity. It is exactly this kind of senselessness that Chesterton takes to be characteristic of modern philosophy in general.

Thus, in contrast to this, Thomism simply takes things for what they are. While various philosophies might think an egg is all sorts of things other than an egg—for example, Hegel might think that an egg is really a chicken—St. Thomas is happy to accept simply that it is an egg. Furthermore, we can *know* that it is an egg on the authority of the senses. It is common, however, in modern philosophy, to question even whether the senses are of any value, and some criticize St. Thomas for never directly addressing this issue. However, if a person were to really deny that the senses are valid, in order to be consistent, they must not accept anything else. If the senses are rejected, philosophy must come to a halt. Therefore, most people who claim to be skeptics are really people who are inconsistently skeptics, because they allow themselves to believe certain things, whether for convenience's sake or for some other reason. St. Thomas, again, definitively affirms that the senses are valid, and if that admission is made, then it follows from there that there really is a connection between the human mind and an external world and, for St. Thomas, understanding the external world is primarily one of accepting what he calls *ens* or "being".

However, just because the works of St. Thomas are deeply in tune with common sense, it does not follow that they are easy to read. In fact, even to the most scholarly of philosophers, some passages in his works are very difficult to understand. This is not because of his philosophy being nonsense, but, rather, because the terminology and language in which the philosophy is bound up as well as on the logical form that his arguments take. Thus, for example, St. Thomas might give a complex argument for why the mind is really capable of grasping external objects as they are and not merely an impression of them, but, ultimately, he is giving a very obvious and sensible conclusion: the mind really is capable of knowing what things are. Modern philosophers, by contrast, use very complex and obscure arguments to come to conclusions that are no clearer or more obvious than the arguments employed to prove them.

The language of Thomistic philosophy is difficult not only because of it being one foreign to most readers—that is, Latin—but also to the difficulty of the terms themselves. In the translation of any text, something is inevitably lost. This can be seen clearly in the translation of the Thomistic word *ens*, which is usually rendered as "being." Even the sound of the word is significant-*ens* is a short, to-the-point term, whereas, in English, "being" is wrapped up with various, vague connotations which rob the term of its succinctness. *Ens*, on the other hand, is a word free from these foreign associations. The straightforwardness of this term is representative of St. Thomas' writing in general. Though the Scholastic philosophers had no issue with the use of rhetoric, St. Thomas was always sure to write things as clearly and as directly as possible, without throwing in words with uncertain meanings.

Another difficulty many readers find with St. Thomas' approach is his use of the logical syllogism. A logical syllogism is a type of argument in which two or more true premises are used to deduce a true conclusion. "All cats are animals. Garfield is a cat. Therefore, Garfield is an animal", is an example of a logical syllogism in which two true premises are used to deduce a true conclusion. However, in modern times, the use of induction, it is thought, has come to replace deduction. Induction is the process by which we observe the world and gather facts. However, as Chesterton points out, induction

cannot, on its own, prove anything. Rather, all it can do is supply premises for deduction out of which to bring true conclusions. The process of deduction, regardless of time or place, always remains the same. All that changes are the true premises, and it is certainly true that in the Middle Ages, the number of true premises was much smaller than the number of true premises scientists have today.

For this reason, it is not a fair criticism of the Middle Ages to point out their use of the syllogism. Modern science relies on it just as much as medieval science did. However, there is always a danger in the misuse of it. It is certainly a proper use of the syllogism to argue that since all matter is composed of tiny particles, and human bodies are made of matter, that human bodies are composed of tiny particles. However, it is an abuse of logic to say that since one would like to think that the human *mind* is made of matter that it, too, must be composed of particles.

The real criticism of Thomistic philosophy is that the syllogism is always made explicit, even when it does not need to be. One can argue syllogistically without necessarily spelling out each explicit step of the argument. However, it always has to be remembered that, even if the syllogism is not made plain, there really must be a syllogism beneath the words, or one is just talking nonsense. However, this criticism does not easily apply to St. Thomas, since he did *not* always make explicit the syllogisms he was working with. The perception that the medieval scholastics wrote works which were completely unintelligible to the initiated just for the sake of preserving their overly complicated system, is largely a myth of the Renaissance. But, nonetheless, the Scholastics, and St. Thomas with them, did engage in a certain amount of logical abstraction to justify their theories; but, it is worth remembering that what they were trying to justify was, ultimately, what everyone already believes by common sense. The method of some modern philosophers, conversely, is to start with ordinary terms and use them to prove something that is in plain contradiction with the world.

Finally, Thomistic language is difficult for the uninitiated because, to the modern reader, the terms often mean the opposite of what they would have meant to the medieval writer. Thus, the word "formal" in modern parlance denotes something that is only superficial and without substance, as in the case of "merely a formal apology". However, in Thomistic vocabulary, to say something is formal is to emphasize the reality of that thing. The form of a substance is what makes it what it really is, and therefore to say that an apology was formal would be to imply that it really was an apology in the most emphatic way. St. Thomas understood physical objects to be a combination of form and matter. Form is what gave the object its qualities, and the matter is what had those qualities. Thus, matter, which has no qualities of its own, is the more mysterious of the two. Form, on the other hand, is what makes a thing what it is, and is the truest reality of any object. If a modern person is unwilling to accept the Scholastics on their own terms and speak in their language, he has no grounds on which to criticize them.

Chapter 7 - The Permanent Philosophy

Chapter 7 - The Permanent Philosophy Summary and Analysis

In this chapter, Chesterton illustrates how St. Thomas' philosophy was one that was based on a fundamental acceptance of reality as being real and as being what it is. The realism of St. Thomas is contrasted with the superficial realism of so-called anthropologists, who do not want to understand man in his entirety, but just as a brute animal. St. Thomas, on the other hand, treats of man in his entirety, not just insofar as he is an animal. In fact, these contrasts are seen more completely in contrast with modern philosophy, which often denies the very existence of reality at all. Even those philosophers who will admit that there is a reality will often stop short of accepting it for what it is, and are unwilling to admit either that things in the world have anything in common or that things in the world have any difference between them. However, St. Thomas simply accepts reality as it is; both the similarities between things, and their distinctions. This reality of things as they are is, furthermore, the basis for affirming the existence of God, since by their incomplete natures they point towards the complete nature of God.

Chesterton begins the chapter by lamenting that anthropology, the study of man, has in modern times been reduced simply to the study of prehistory. While certainly there is a value in studying prehistory, it is a valid criticism that anthropologists are only studying one small part of humanity. The distinguishing feature of humans is that, unlike other animals, they are intelligent, and therefore the study of humans ought to focus particularly on the study of human intelligence. This is precisely how St. Thomas proceeds to study human beings.

St. Thomas' method is not altogether unlike the method of many great agnostics. Many agnostics believe that one ought to follow reason "as far as it will go" and accept whatever it finds. St. Thomas believes this whole-heartedly, and this is the basis of his philosophical work. In fact, he even accepted what would sound like a very materialist doctrine by saying that the only way man knows anything is through his senses. However, he thought the senses could be used not only to talk about this or that particular sensible object, but also to shed light on the less sensible nature of the human being.

Proceeding in this way, St. Thomas develops a complete theory of humanity. Anthropologists wind up with an incomplete theory of man because they are unwilling to ask, or at least to answer, the most important questions about mankind, such as questions about whether men have souls, whether men are perfect or in need of perfection, what the nature of death is, and so on. They shy away from these questions because they think that they are, ultimately, unknowable. However, Thomistic philosophy sees these as essential questions to understanding humanity and, furthermore, questions which really can be answered by the use of reason.

Chesterton then reflects on one of St. Thomas' titles, "the Angelic doctor". While there may, perhaps, be some good and innocent reason for giving this title to St. Thomas, it does seem to minimize his accomplishment by restricting it (seemingly) only to angels, as if he had not treated other matters with an equal amount of mastery. For St. Thomas, his interest in the angel was actually less pronounced than his interest in man. In the study of any creature, whether an angel or man, his first interest was in trying to understand the thing as it is, and not trying to impose something upon it which it is not. Thus, man is not a disembodied intellect, like the angel, nor is he a brute creature like a mere animal.

Modern thought—so-called "free thought"—is incapable of producing an understanding of the world that does not ultimately end in chaos. Thus, in the example of free will, modern philosophy says that men do not act freely, but then tells them that they should act, nonetheless, as if they were free. The philosophy of St. Thomas, on the other hand, appears as a way out from this chaotic thinking.

Modern philosophy leads to a variety of false conclusion. Some philosophies say, for example, that when a person sees something, they really are only seeing a representation of the thing, and not the thing itself. Others say that when a person sees something, they cannot be sure that there really *is* anything that they are seeing, but only that they are experiencing something. However, amid all these answers, St. Thomas responds that man really can know things by looking at them, and that things really do exist. The fundamental principle of Thomistic philosophy is that there really is something that exists. It is on the basis of this single principle that St. Thomas builds his entire philosophical structure.

It immediately follows from the acceptance of being that it is impossible for there not to be "being". That is, it is impossible for something to be both true and false, or for two contradictory things to both be true. Thus, it follows that there really is truth and falsity. Skeptical philosophers have muddied the waters of thought by denying this principle and believing that things can, in some way, both exist and not exist at the same time. After accepting the truth that there is truth and falsity, St. Thomas then also notes that in reality there is also change. By excessively emphasizing the role of change, many modern philosophers also go wrong, and wind up denying the fundamental principle of being. They argue that since things really are changing all the time, there must not be anything at all, but only change. However, St. Thomas takes the argument in the opposite direction. He argues that since there is a kind of incompleteness in the nature of things, as shown by the fact they are constantly changing, that this points to a kind of being which is complete in its nature, and this is God. He accepts that things are constantly changing, but he also accepts that, at any given moment, there really are things that are changing, and not just the change itself. The ordinary object that we observe changes because it is not everything it might be, and this shows that they are, somehow, a part of something that is everything that it might be; that is, God.

St. Thomas believed that the universe had a beginning and that it will have an end, but he believed this only on the basis of the Church's teaching. Indeed, modern science, Chesterton says, appears to be verifying this. Nonetheless, none of St. Thomas' proofs

of God's existence were based upon the assumption that the world did have a beginning, or that it would have an end. Rather, he saw no particular reason why the world *must* have a beginning or an end. Nonetheless, even if it has no beginning, it still must have a creator, for the very reason that all beings show a kind of dependency in their nature. Ordinary beings are, in a certain sense, imperfect. They are not the kind of beings that are self-sufficient, which do not require some cause for their existence. This imperfection is not changed if it turns out the being has always existed and always will exist. The imperfection implies that there is some more perfect being; or, in other words, the fact that it is not everything that it might be implies that there really is something it might be.

The difficulty in modern thought on this topic is that people are unlikely to even see the problem that St. Thomas is trying to solve. Evolutionists try to argue that everything came chaotically out of nothing (the reader should be aware that the term "evolutionist" does not narrowly apply to those who believe in biological evolution. Chesterton is describing a general trend in thought that thinks of all of reality as a process of change). They do not see the difficulty in supposing that something can just come out of nothing without reason. The fundamental thesis of St. Thomas is that the world cannot explain itself, and that it does not matter how long it has existed or how individual beings came to exist. Evolutionists, however, think that it is more tolerable to believe that nothing simply came to exist out of nothing, rather than thinking that a God (whose nature is admittedly incomprehensible) caused the existence of everything out of nothing.

Nominalism was another philosophy that St. Thomas fought to refute. Nominalism is the view that individual objects are so unique and different from one another that they can in no way be said to be the same kinds of things. Rather, it is only by purely human convention that individual people are collectively called "men"; there is nothing inherent in their nature that is shared between them. Chesterton notes, with irony, that Nominalism is a common belief among people who, despite seeing the world as fundamentally unordered, want a massive amount of social ordering by the government.

Evolutionists are committed to a deeply incoherent view by supposing that, as things develop and change over time, they are becoming *better*. By supposing this, evolutionists hope to solve the theoretical problems in their view. However, Chesterton points out, this assumption in no way solves the difficulty, since the difficulty is something which is much more fundamental. However, this is, in a sense, the doctrine of St. Thomas. As already shown, St. Thomas believed that change was the process of things becoming more of what they might be. However, this also assumes that there is some being in which those potentials were, in some way, a design. Put another way, the assumption that things will get better as time progresses, also assumes that there is some *best* towards which these things move.

In fact, the assumption that there exist purposes in nature presupposes a Person that is intending them. It is conceivable to think that there might be an intention without someone to intend it. This is something that is immediately obvious to common sense, and it is not even necessary to consult St. Thomas to see that it is true. To believe that

the universe is purposefully evolving over time, without accepting that there is a Person with that purpose in mind, is simply irrational.

The most basic premise in Thomistic philosophy is the acceptance of reality as it is, and this is the theme that underlies Thomistic philosophy throughout. This attitude shows a special kind of Christian humility. St. Thomas does not assume the role that many modern philosophers assume, philosophers who want to remake reality according to their own ideas. Rather, he passively submits and accepts things just as they are, and then builds his philosophy on that affirmation. A great number of the errors in philosophy can be reduced to a denial of what St. Thomas affirms. Thus, St. Thomas accepts that there really are things in the world, even if they are in a constant state of change, contrary to the claims of the evolutionists. Furthermore, he will accept that there really are classes of things in the world that have common properties, contrary to the claims of the Nominalists. He will also accept that there really are different things in the world, contrary to the claims of the Monists, who believe that the whole universe is just one thing.

Chesterton notes that it is not possible for him to give the complex and lengthy philosophical arguments necessary to defend St. Thomas' claim, but he notes that, whether or not St. Thomas is right, it is at least obvious that St. Thomas is a realist. He accepts things as they are and never denies the essential claim that there really are things. Even the sometimes deceptive nature of existence is, in a way, a proof to St. Thomas of its reality. Thus, when an object is considered in isolation, it may seem devoid of meaning, or trivial. However, once that same object is considered as something tending towards some greater end, it becomes clear that there is more to the object than once thought. Likewise, as has already been noted, the fact that an object might lack some perfection implies that it really does contain, at least potentially, that very perfection. It is by proceeding in this very realistic way that St. Thomas developed his mastery of philosophy and was able to accumulate such a great understanding of the cosmos. However, Chesterton laments, the scope of his book is not able to encompass the most important part of St. Thomas' thought: his theology.

Chapter 8 - The Sequel to St. Thomas

Chapter 8 - The Sequel to St. Thomas Summary and Analysis

This final chapter considers the works of St. Thomas Aquinas from an historical perspective. It begins by once again asserting that Thomism is a fundamentally realistic philosophy in contrast to unrealistic modern philosophy. Chesterton then considers the way in which St. Thomas might be considered a liberal in promoting the use of debate and dialectic as the means for coming to conclusions (the term "liberal" here should not be understood in the modern American political sense, but rather in the broader sense as one who advocates freedom). Economically, Chesterton sees St. Thomas as a beneficial corrective to the early 20th century. St. Thomas was an opponent of an overly materialistic society and Chesterton sees the embrace of that kind of society as the root of many modern evils. Scholasticism, the school of philosophy which St. Thomas was a part of and changed greatly, Chesterton laments, fell into great decadence after St. Thomas' time and took a great deal of the common sense out philosophy and the mystery out of religion. Finally, Chesterton notes that the Reformation was in large part due to the rejection of St. Thomas' worldview, and a triumph of the Platonic and Augustinian philosophy and theology he had devoted his life to refuting. The book ends on a note of optimism about the growing awareness of St. Thomas.

The chapter begins by remarking that, while St. Thomas was not a poet, his writings do possess a quality that is very similar to poetry or painting. His works showed which was very basic about objects. This was accomplished in large part by his objectivity. The way he wrote, for example, avoided all consciousness of words or writing. He did not allow rhetoric to unduly influence the meaning of his sentences. The works of St. Thomas, like a good painting, show us a side of reality that is not commonly seen, not because it is something that is made up by the author, but because it is some fact about the object itself. In all of his thought there is a continual focus on what is outside of the human mind, a focus on the reality that is real regardless of human attitude towards it. For, according to St. Thomas, the mind in a certain way becomes enriched by the very fact that it receives things through the senses that it does not already possess; but in order to do this, it must be humble enough to accept them.

His view avoids two common problems in philosophy. There is, on the one hand, the danger of determinism, the philosophical doctrine that man has no free will and is completely subject to exterior, physical forces. The human mind is certainly passive towards the world, but the will is free to follow or not follow what the mind presents to it. On the other hand, Thomism also avoids the error of excessively emphasizing the role of the human mind to the deficit of external reality. On this view, reality is almost, or even actually, a product of the imagination. The basic principle of Thomism is that God has joined reality with the human mind, but that it is up to the individual to either accept or reject that reality.

Compared with all other philosophies, Chesterton claims, Thomism is the only one that one can both believe and practice. Skepticism, the view that we cannot have knowledge, is something one might think is true, but skeptics inevitably *act* as if they have knowledge in their daily lives. Likewise, a person who denies free will does not *act* like he has no control. St. Thomas' philosophy is distinguished by the fact that it is able to make real progress. Other philosophies are constantly stuck at the level of having to examine basic, and even obvious, beliefs, like whether the senses are valid or whether there is an external reality. However, since Thomism emphatically affirms the senses and the reality that they reveal, he is able to take reality as it is and truly understand it. No philosopher since St. Thomas was ever able to take as confidently the world as he was.

For this reason, St. Thomas' philosophy is one that is comprehensive of nearly every topic, since it is able to take in the entirety of reality. Thus, his works show an immense interest in even what many would consider very trivial matters. His works cover a thousand topics that, Chesterton notes, would be impossible to cover in his book.

In many ways, St. Thomas could be described as a liberal. The term "liberal" here is not meant to describe a political orientation. Rather, St. Thomas was a liberal insofar as he preferred the use of reason and debate over the use of violence and political means. While St. Thomas may not be a liberal politically, according to current standards, he is certainly more truly a liberal in comparison to the men of Chesterton's generation who were falling sway to the political philosophies of men like Hitler and the Fascists. He understood political authority as something that was primarily directed towards bringing order and justice into society, not as an authority that could be wielded arbitrarily or unjustly.

In economics, St. Thomas was very skeptical about a society that was based purely on trade and exchange. It should be noted in these passages that Chesterton is writing in 1933, during the Great Depression, and so that is what he has in mind when he criticizes the economic order of his day. Thus, he sees St. Thomas' skepticism about unlimited exchange as being vindicated by the economic collapse of the 1930s. Usury—the charging of interest on loans—is another aspect of modern economic systems that St. Thomas was highly critical of in his own time and which Chesterton sees as a great flaw of 20th century economies. Likewise, St. Thomas argues that an economic system in which man sells all of his labor is certainly going to produce goods of lower quality, since one cares more about quality when he is going to consume a good than when he is going to sell it. This is part of what St. Thomas sees as the ugly side of trade, since it inevitably involves a kind of inequity. In any trade, in order for a profit to be made, a good must be sold for some amount greater than it's worth. Everyone agrees that this happens, Chesterton says, but capitalism's advocates simply say that it is necessary.

However, despite St. Thomas' mistrust of trade and free markets, his philosophy is one that is filled with hope; there are even in Chesterton's time a number of people who are very hopeful Thomists. However, he notes, it is curious that there were not a great number of hopeful Thomists following St. Thomas' life. This is primarily because of the decline of Scholastic philosophy. While St. Thomas was always focused on creating a

philosophy that supported the common sense of the average man, many Scholastics who followed him, Chesterton claims, abandoned the common sense approach to philosophy and wound up defending what were, ultimately, nonsensical theses. Furthermore, they abandoned his approach to philosophy in which reason was free to accept the conclusions it discovered. Instead, the Scholastics became very dogmatic and tried to definitively solve every conceivable issue.

Ultimately, the Augustinians whom St. Thomas had so vigorously debated and refuted wound up winning, largely because of the problems of Scholasticism. This Augustinianism was a fundamentally pessimistic philosophy that viewed the world with contempt and suspicion. They had been defeated philosophically, but the general mood of their school lingered in the Church and gradually the natural world came to be seen as something very dangerous, a view at odds with St. Thomas and the Church's love of nature. Certain aspects of the Faith that, if not balanced, can become gloomy and overwhelming, were again growing out of control. For example, the fear of God was something that was always a part of Christian belief, but it was understood as something that belonged to the beginning of the Faith and which, in a certain sense, was surpassed by love and hope. However, centuries after St. Thomas had done his work, the fear of God began once again to dominate Catholic spirituality.

Thus, in the sixteenth century, when the Reformation broke out, the new religions spawned by the reformers had, in some sense, a precedent in the religious views of the Catholics who came after St. Thomas and nurtured the defeated Augustinianism. The difference between St. Thomas and St. Augustine was largely one of emphasis; but, Chesterton points out, there comes a point when emphasizing a particular doctrine so much can actually lead to a real difference in belief. This is what happened in the case of Martin Luther, who so strongly emphasized certain beliefs from St. Augustine that he wound up preaching an entirely new religion. Lutheranism was, in a certain sense, an unleashed form of Augustinianism. Luther was an outspoken opponent of all Greek philosophy and Scholastic philosophy. His religion was one in which man could basically do nothing before God, except meekly beg for mercy in a world that was hostile and dangerous. The natural world and reason were things that were both useless at best and evil at worst.

However, despite the differences in theology, the Reformation was not primarily about theology. This is obvious from the fact that Protestants today, regardless of how strange their doctrines might seem to Catholics, are not at all similar to Luther's doctrine. The Reformation was primarily a revolt of pessimism and hopelessness that was hoping, somehow, to avoid Hell. It is not fair to compare the mind of Luther with the mind of St. Thomas, for the latter was certainly an intellectual giant in comparison with the former. Nevertheless, it must not be forgotten that Luther did represent a very major and forceful movement in history. He also was one of the first men to use his personality as a weapon, and Chesterton sees this as something that clearly marks the beginning of the modern age. St. Thomas had a very powerful personality, but he never would have used his personality to try to persuade others. Rather, he employed reason and arguments. Luther, however, was a very charismatic and powerful person and it was largely due to this that he was able to gain such a large following. It is only natural that

this would happen, as he could not use reason to convince others since he had explicitly said that reason was something that was useless. This defeat of reason was symbolized by Luther's public burning of the works of St. Thomas Aquinas, who represented very much the good use of reason.

However, while it may have seemed for a long time that reason really had been defeated, Chesterton notes that there is hope. While many people still believe that philosophy and rational thought were absent from the Middle Ages, there is a growing awareness in the world of the work of St. Thomas Aquinas.

Characters

St. Thomas Aquinas

Aristotle

St. Francis of Assisi

St. Albert the Great

St. Louis of France

Frederick II

St. Dominic

Siger of Barbant

St. Augustine

Martin Luther

St. Bonaventure

Objects/Places

Holy Roman Empire

The Holy Roman Empire was the largest political force in Europe in St. Thomas' time and was comprised mainly of what are modern-day Germany and some neighboring territories. The Holy Roman Empire was waging war against the Papacy during when St. Thomas was growing up.

Scholasticism

Scholasticism is a general term to refer to the school of philosophy that developed in Catholic universities from roughly the 12th century. Prior to St. Thomas, Scholasticism was dominated by Platonism; however, due to his diligent work, Scholastics became primarily Aristotelians. Chesterton sees the Scholastics as sharply declining after St. Thomas' death.

Manicheanism

Manicheanism was a philosophy that came to Europe from the East, and which saw nature as intrinsically evil, or at least saw evil as existing naturally. Manicheanism took many forms, but in St. Thomas' time, the most recent forms were the Albigensians who had been converted by St. Dominic and conquered by Simon de Montfort. However, St. Thomas saw a lingering Manicheanism inside the Church in the Platonic and Augustinian philosophy.

Dominican Order

The Dominicans were a Religious order founded by St. Dominic to combat the Albigensian heresy in Northern France. They were dedicated to extreme poverty and lived off what they were given while begging.

Friar Movement

The Franciscans and Dominicans were two movements of Friars during the 13th century who were dedicated to living in extreme, voluntary poverty, and lived only off of alms. They were seen as a revolutionary movement during the 13th century and, as a result, were viewed with some suspicion by many Catholics. At one point, there was even pressure on the Pope to suppress them; however, due to the work of St. Thomas and St. Bonaventure, they were vindicated.

Realism

Realism is the philosophical doctrine that there really exists a world, and that human beings can have knowledge of that world. This was an important component of St. Thomas' philosophy.

Paris

Paris was the city in which St. Thomas spent most of his life and did a very large amount of his philosophical and theological work.

Skepticism

Skepticism is the philosophical view that the world is ultimately unknowable and inaccessible by humans.

Evolutionism

Evolutionism is the philosophical doctrine that things do not exist, but only a constant flux of change. This doctrine is associated especially with the philosopher Hegel.

Monism

Monism is a primarily Eastern philosophy that understands the world to essentially be a single thing without any distinction between various parts.

Nominalism

Nominalism is the philosophical position that individual objects are so unique and different from each other that there are no such things as kinds or classes in nature. Rather, it is only by humans making up labels that include a variety of different objects that things can be grouped together.

Liberalism

Liberalism is a general term that includes all beliefs that are concerned with the liberty of individuals. Chesterton understands St. Thomas to be a liberal because of his emphasis on the use of debate, rather than force, in convincing people of the truth, and because he saw the government as being naturally limited.

Themes

Realism in Thomistic Philosophy

Chesterton continually highlights that Thomistic philosophy is founded on the acceptance of reality as it is without any compromise or confusion. St. Thomas is firmly committed to the view that the physical senses give us real information about the external world, and that all philosophy has to begin with the affirmation that the world is, for the most part, as it seems. This realism comes mainly from the work of Aristotle, who believed that science and philosophy should begin with gathering data about the natural world.

St. Thomas' realism is also seen in his rejection of Nominalism and monism. Nominalism is the view that there are not actual "kinds" of things in nature, but rather that people just create words to class together what are fundamentally distinct and unique objects. On St. Thomas' view, it is an obvious fact of nature that there is a real similarity between two blades of grass that is simply not there between the blade of grass and, say, a rock.

Likewise, St. Thomas rejects monism, the view that the world is fundamentally one thing and that there are no real distinctions between different objects. This is doctrine is the opposite of Nominalism. Just as St. Thomas is willing to admit similarity between two blades of grass, he is also adamant on insisting that the two blades of grass are really two different blades of grass, and that the blade of grass is also really distinct from the rock.

Realism can also be seen in St. Thomas' understanding of the relationship between faith and reason. Since there truly is an independent and objective reality, St. Thomas has a great trust and love for reason, to the point that he is willing to believe whatever reason might discover. This is based on the firm confidence that the Catholic faith is true and that, therefore, nothing reason discovers could really contradict what Faith teaches. In addition, St. Thomas, admitting that Scripture can often be difficult to understand, is willing to use scientific facts to help understand difficult passages.

The Goodness of Nature in Thomism

Chesterton portrays St. Thomas' project of integrating Aristotle into Catholic thought as one that was primarily concerned with emphasizing the intrinsic goodness of nature and of Creation. That nature is fundamentally good is, as Chesterton points out, a definite Catholic doctrine; therefore, while previous thinkers under the influence of Augustinian doctrine never would explicitly say or believe that the natural world is a danger to man, they were nonetheless disposed to treat it with suspicion and distrust. In other words, their philosophy did not match their theology.

Thus, St. Thomas dedicated his work to developing a philosophy that not only acknowledged, but also celebrated the goodness of the natural world and, as part of the natural world, the human body. His philosophy focuses very much on the fact that God, who is all good, is the Creator of the world, and that, therefore, the world itself must be fundamentally good. It is true that men with bad intentions can misuse the things of the world, but there is no reason, on this account, to think that the world is intrinsically evil.

The goodness of nature is also seen in the emphasis Thomistic thought has on the natural sciences. While St. Thomas himself did not spend much time studying sciences like biology, his work sees these sciences as being vitally important to truly understanding the world. In fact, studying the world can even lead man to a greater knowledge of God, since the cause is always somehow seen in its effect. Thus, overall, Chesterton describes Thomism as a very optimistic philosophy.

The Relevance of and Need for Thomism in the Modern World

Chesterton continually emphasizes in *The Dumb Ox* the need for a large-scale return to the philosophy of St. Thomas to overcome many of the problems of modern society. In this regard, the author focuses primarily on philosophical issues. Thus, St. Thomas' realistic philosophy is continually contrasted with the skeptical and unrealistic philosophies that have come about during the 19th and 20th centuries. Philosophies like determinism, Skepticism, and Hegelianism are all seen as fundamentally unworkable systems of thought. All of these philosophies demand that something be believed which is completely foreign to common sense and obvious truth. Thus, determinism insists that man has no free will; Skepticism insists that there is no reality, at least not one knowable to us; Hegel insists that there are no objects, just processes of change. In contrast to all of these is the Thomistic system: the purpose of which is to support and justify what the ordinary person already believes. Thus, St. Thomas insists that the senses really are valid, that reality can be known, that there really are things in the world, even if those things are changing, and that man really does have free will.

Thomism is, furthermore, a philosophy that Chesterton sees as the only practical philosophy. While a Skeptic might believe in his heart that there is no reality, he necessarily must *act* in his daily life like there is a reality. Likewise, the determinist does not *act* as if he has no freedom in choosing between options. St. Thomas alone has developed a philosophical framework in which people can act as if they really believed what it thinks. It is an eminently practical worldview.

Finally, Thomism is praised and recommended for its optimism. Especially in the final chapter of the book, Chesterton emphasizes the dismal state of the world, or at least the beliefs of the world. He understands the Reformation as fundamentally being the revival of a pessimistic worldview that St. Thomas had fought hard to defeat in his own time. Chesterton finds this same kind of pessimism in the modern world's economic and political systems. Thus, Chesterton puts forth the optimistic philosophy of St. Thomas as the medicine the world needs.

Style

Perspective

G.K. Chesterton was an English author and journalist who lived from 1874 to 1936. He was neither a trained philosopher nor a trained theologian and, as a result, when treating St. Thomas' thought, he always approaches it with a kind of humility and restraint, careful not to speak beyond what he knows. Nevertheless, despite his lack of formal training, Chesterton is very familiar with Catholic doctrine and obviously familiar with the thought of St. Thomas. His approach to the subject is primarily as an admirer of St. Thomas, and thus he puts a great deal of emphasis on his life and circumstances.

Chesterton's reason for writing this book, as is made clear in the final chapter, is to promote a wider understanding and appreciation of St. Thomas Aquinas, who he sees as the cure for many problems in the modern world. While Chesterton talks at greatest length about the problems in modern philosophy, he also makes it clear that St. Thomas serves as a good corrective to many economic and political situations that were arising in his time. For example, the unbridled capitalism that Chesterton sees as creating the Great Depression is something that St. Thomas vehemently condemned.

Furthermore, Chesterton is trying to overcome a kind of intimidation that is present in the public conception of St. Thomas as a boring and complicated philosopher who is in no way relevant to their lives. In order to overcome this, he argues that St. Thomas was engaging in basically the same work as the much beloved St. Francis of Assisi. He also emphasizes the fact that Thomistic philosophy put a great emphasis on common sense and so, unlike many modern philosophies that propose bizarre theories, St. Thomas is arguing primarily for what even the most ordinary man already believes.

Tone

The Dumb Ox is clearly written by a very devout and unashamed Roman Catholic and, as a result, much of the book is written with the promotion of the Catholic faith in mind. This book is certainly not an apologetic work, in the sense of actively trying to convert the reader; however, it is a book that is written explicitly for non-Catholic arguments and the book clearly goes to great lengths to both show the beneficial effect of the Catholic faith on the world as well as the destructive effect of non-Catholic religions. Thus, for example, Manicheanism, which is a philosophy that comes from the East, is presented as a pessimistic belief system that is ultimately opposed to life itself. Protestantism, too, is seen as a Christianized form of Manicheanism and represents, according to Chesterton, an almost unrestrained pessimism about the world.

However, Chesterton does not at all assume that the reader agrees with him about the Catholic faith, and he writes in such a way that his assumptions are made to seem obvious. He makes a heavy use of rhetoric, especially the use of paradoxical sentence

constructions, in order to both entertain the reader and convince him of various points that might be controversial.

Nonetheless, the tone of the book is primarily objective. It is an attempt to give a real overview of the life of a saint that Chesterton greatly admired and also to treat with some level of detail the philosophical system of the book's subject. Chesterton certainly expresses his own opinions throughout the book, and the introductory note makes that explicit, but these comments are, for the most part, distinct from the general thrust of the book.

Structure

The Dumb Ox is divided into eight titled chapters with a brief introduction written by the author. The introductory note is a brief explanation of the intended scope of the work as well as some comments about the author's perspective. The chapters of the book can be roughly divided into four parts. The first chapter is written to engage the audience and make them interested in St. Thomas. Chapters two through five are focused heavily on St. Thomas' biography, emphasizing especially the historical context of many of his philosophical contributions, and talking about his personal sanctity. Chapters six and seven are devoted chiefly to explaining St. Thomas' philosophy. The final chapter provides an understanding of St. Thomas' philosophical contributions in the light of history. However, while these divisions can be made, Chesterton does not strictly confine himself in any individual chapter. Thus, in explaining St. Thomas' biography, there is inevitably a discussion of his philosophy, and in his discussion of St. Thomas' philosophy, there is inevitably a discussion of his life.

Quotes

"You can make a sketch of St. Francis: you could only make a plan of St. Thomas, like the plan of a labyrinthine city." Chapter 1, p. 1

"The saint is a medicine because he is an antidote. Indeed that is why the saint is often a martyr; he is mistaken for a poison because he is an antidote. He will generally be found restoring the world to sanity by exaggerating whatever the world neglects, which is by no means always the same element in every age." Chapter 1, p. 5

"It will not be possible to conceal much longer from anybody the fact that St. Thomas Aquinas was one of the great liberators of the human intellect." Chapter 1, p. 13

"For instance, it was a very special idea of St. Thomas that Man is to be studied in his whole manhood; that a man is not a man without his body, just as he is not a man without his soul. A corpse is not a man; but also a ghost is not a man. The earlier school of Augustine and even of Anselm had rather neglected this, treating the soul as the only necessary treasure, wrapped for a time in a negligible napkin." Chapter 1, p. 17

"He was born in the purple; almost literally on the hem of the imperial purple; for his own cousin was the Holy Roman Emperor. He could have quartered half the kingdoms of Europe on his shield—if he had not thrown away the shield." Chapter 2, p. 29

"We need not dwell on the causes of this Victorian prejudice [against the Middle Ages] which some still think so very advanced. It arose mainly from one narrow or insular notion; that no man could possibly be building up the best of the modern world, if he went with the main movement of the medieval world." Chapter 2, p. 34

"Serious historians are abandoning the absurd notion that the medieval Church persecuted all scientists as wizards. It is very nearly the opposite of the truth. The world sometimes persecuted them as wizards, and sometimes ran after them as wizards; the sort of pursuing that is the reverse of persecuting. The Church alone regarded them really and solely as scientists." Chapter 3, p. 45

"For Aquinas was still generally known only as one obscure and obstinately unresponsive pupil, among many more brilliant and promising pupils, when the great Albert broke silence with his famous cry and prophecy; 'You call him a Dumb Ox; I tell you this Dumb Ox shall bellow so loud that his bellowings will fill the world.'" Chapter 3, p. 50

"Broadly speaking, the danger was the danger of the orthodox, or those who too easily identify the old order with the orthodox, forcing a final and conclusive condemnation of Aristotle." Chapter 3, p. 54

"Perhaps there is really no such thing as a Revolution recorded in history. What happened was always a Counter-Revolution. Men were always rebelling against the last rebels; or even repenting of the last rebellion." Chapter 3, p. 55

"[St. Louis] never said the wrong thing; and he was orthodox by instinct. In the old pagan proverb about kings being philosophers or philosophers kings, there was a certain miscalculation, connected with a mystery that only Christianity could reveal. For while it is possible for a king to wish very much be a saint, it is not possible for a saint to wish very much to be a king. A good man will hardly be always dreaming of being a great monarch; but, such is the liberality of the Church, that she cannot forbid even a great monarch to dream of being a good man." Chapter 4, p. 75

"Alone upon the earth, and lifted and liberated from all the wheels and whirlpools of the earth, stands up the faith of St. Thomas; weighted and balanced indeed with more than Oriental metaphysics and more than Pagan pomp and pageantry; but vitally and vividly alone in declaring that life is a living story, with a great beginning and a great close; rooted in the primeval joy of God and finding its fruition in the final happiness of humanity; opening with the colossal chorus in which the sons of God shouted for joy, and ending in that mystical comradeship, shown in a shadowy fashion in those ancient words that move like an archaic dance; 'For His delight is with the sons of men.'" Chapter 4, p. 91

"His curiously simple character, his lucid but laborious intellect, could not be better summed up than by saying that he did not know how to sneer. He was in a double sense an intellectual aristocrat: but he was never an intellectual snob." Chapter 5, p. 102

"All sanctity is secrecy; and his sacred poetry was really a secretion; like the pearl in a very tightly closed oyster." Chapter 5, p. 113

"The most familiar example is the English boasting that they are practical *because* they are not logical. To an ancient Greek or a Chinaman this would seem exactly like saying that London clerks excel in adding up their ledgers, because they are not accurate in their arithmetic. But the point is not that it is a paradox; it is that paradoxy has become orthodoxy; that men response in a paradox as placidly as in a platitude. It is not the practical man stands on his head, which may sometimes be a stimulating if startling gymnastic; it is that he *rests* on his head; and even sleeps on his head." Chapter 6, p. 119

"In other words, he is an anthropologist, with a complete theory of Man, right or wrong. Now the modern Anthropologists, who called themselves Agnostics, completely failed to be Anthropologists at all. Under their limitations, they could not get a complete theory of Man, let alone a complete theory of nature." Chapter 7, p. 134

"He is one, so to speak, who is faithful to his first love; and it is love at first sight. I mean that he immediately recognised a real quality in things; and afterwards resisted all the disintegrating doubts arising from the nature of those things." Chapter 7, p. 148

"M. Maritain has used an admirable metaphor, in his book *Theonas*, when he says that the external fact *fertilises* the internal intelligence, as the bee fertilises the flower." Chapter 8, p. 155

"For there was one particular monk, in that Augustinian monastery in the German forests, who may be said to have had a single special talent for emphasis; for emphasis and nothing except emphasis; for emphasis with the quality of earthquake. He was the son of a slatecutter; a man with a great voice and a certain volume of personality; brooding, sincere, decidedly morbid; and his name was Martin Luther." Chapter 8, p. 163

Topics for Discussion

To what extent is Chesterton trying to give a straightforward life of St. Thomas and to what extent is he trying to convince the reader to become interested in St. Thomas?

If the difference between Augustinianism and Thomism was one of emphasis, what did St. Thomas emphasize that the Augustinians did not?

In what way was Martin Luther a revival of the Augustinianism that St. Thomas had defeated?

What is the basis for Chesterton's dislike for modern philosophies?

To what extent does Chesterton use St. Thomas' personal holiness as a way of convincing the reader of the truth of his philosophy?

According to Chesterton, what do modern philosophy and the old Augustinianism have in common?

Why was Aristotle initially so unpopular in Medieval Europe?

Why was the Friar movement so unpopular among Medieval Catholics?

In what way is St. Thomas, according to Chesterton, medicine for modern society?