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**The Spiritual Turn.**  
**On the Commitment to God and the Good in Epistemology**

**By**

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## ABSTRACT

It is commonly held that the search for truth is successful in proportion to the readiness of truth-searchers to put aside their original beliefs and to accept whatever belief will appear to be proven. This view is taken for granted by both philosophers and non-philosophers. I call it *mere epistemology*.

In this dissertation, I first argue that there are various problems with mere epistemology. First, it falls into a self-referential contradiction. Second, it does not explain the inconclusiveness that—especially in religious matters—besets debates in proportion to the commitment of debaters to their original beliefs.

I then focus on religious debates and show that Christian believers offer, more or less implicitly, significant suggestions regarding the problem of inconclusiveness. They seem expected to commit themselves to God and to related beliefs no matter how convincing the evidence contradicting such beliefs may appear to be. This, however, causes not only inconclusiveness but also various beneficial effects on the intellectual activity; furthermore, it determines in some measure unbelievers also. In short, believers and unbelievers can commit themselves to God and the good, respectively, which means that they assume good habits in any activity they take.

I call *spiritual turn* this assumption of good habits in the intellectual enterprise. It is a turn from mere epistemology, whose supporters first commit themselves to the search for truth—they maintain that every commitment must firstly be individuated epistemically. Unlike them, those who take the spiritual turn first *commit themselves to God and/or the good*, based on the conviction that this causes human flourishing and consequently perfects any human activity, the intellectual one included.

## LAY SUMMARY

It is commonly held that the search for truth is successful in proportion to the readiness of truth-searchers to put aside their original beliefs and to accept whatever belief will appear to be proven. I call this view *mere epistemology*. It may be described as follows: *one should always prefer beliefs supported by more evidence to beliefs supported by less evidence*. Needless to say, this view seems incorrigible, which is why it is usually taken for granted by practitioners in every field as well as philosophers of various orientation.

In this dissertation, I first argue that there are various problems with mere epistemology. First, it falls into a self-referential contradiction, because, although it should apply to any belief, it does not apply to itself. In fact, there is no more evidence for mere epistemology than for its negation. Saying that *one should always prefer beliefs supported by more evidence to beliefs supported by less evidence* is not supported by more evidence than the belief that *one should not always prefer beliefs supported by more evidence to beliefs supported by less evidence*. Second, mere epistemology does not explain the inconclusiveness that—especially in religious matters—besets debates in proportion to the commitment of debaters to their original beliefs. (By inconclusiveness I mean the property of those debates *whose protagonists are not ready to change their mind, however convincing the evidence in support of such a change may be.*)

I then focus on religious debates and show that Christian believers offer, more or less implicitly, significant suggestions regarding the problem of inconclusiveness. They seem expected to commit themselves to God and to related beliefs no matter how convincing the evidence contradicting such beliefs may appear to be. (It does not follow that aspects of those beliefs cannot be rethought and seen in a new light. It only means that there are beliefs such as ‘God exists’ and ‘Jesus is the son of God’ that cannot be given up.)

This causes not only inconclusiveness but also various beneficial effects on the intellectual activity; furthermore, it determines in some measure unbelievers also. Both believers and unbelievers are responsible for inconclusiveness, as shown by the fact that the number of believers who stick to their beliefs before contrary evidence is not significantly different from the number of unbelievers who do the same on the other side of the spectrum. Believers do so because they commit themselves to God, whereas unbelievers may do so because they commit themselves to the good. (Regarding unbelievers, I am only able to hypothesize such

commitments. Unlike believers, they are expected to commit themselves only to reason and arguments, which renders them mere epistemologists.) If so, both of them may commit themselves to human flourishing. This may enable them to generate the best possible condition to successfully conduct rational enquiries and discussions. Human flourishing, in fact, is expected to promote the assumption of good habits in any activity. By assuming good habits, one can cause mutual understanding and friendship as well as increasing opportunities to achieve conclusiveness, at least in some cases.

I call *spiritual turn* the assumption of good habits in the intellectual enterprise. It is a turn from mere epistemology, whose supporters first commit themselves to the search for truth—they maintain that every commitment must firstly be individuated epistemically, and this is the reason why I call this view *mere* epistemology. Unlike them, those who take the spiritual turn first *commit themselves to God and the good*, based on the conviction that human flourishing brings with it the ability to perfect any human activity, including the intellectual one.

## **DECLARATION**

I, the undersigned, declare that:

- (a) this dissertation has been composed by myself;
- (b) this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Roberto Di Ceglie

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I have employed here sections of eight essays of mine, which I have published in the course of last years.

Chapter 2 almost completely coincides with ‘Thomas Reid: Philosophy, Science and the Christian Revelation,’ *The Journal of Scottish Philosophy* 18 (2020), pp. 17-38.

In Chapter 3, I have used sections of ‘Faith, Reason, and Charity in Aquinas’s Thought,’ *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 79/2 (2016), pp. 133-46, and ‘Preambles of Faith and Modern Accounts of Aquinas’s Thought,’ *International Philosophical Quarterly* 58 (2019), pp. 437-51.

In Chapter 4, section 2, I have made use of sections of ‘Faith and Reason: A Response to Duncan Pritchard,’ *Philosophy* 92 (2017), pp. 231-247.

In Chapter 5, section 2, I have employed parts of ‘Divine Hiddenness and the Suffering Unbeliever Argument,’ *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, online first November 2019, pp. 1-25, and ‘No-Fault Unbelief,’ *Sophia*, doi: 10.1007/s11841-020-00761-0, pp. 1-13, whereas section 3 mostly coincides with ‘Religions and Conflicts,’ *The Heythrop Journal*, online first October 2019, pp. 1-13.

In Chapter 6, section 3, I have made use of parts of ‘On Aquinas’s Theological Reliabilism,’ *The Heythrop Journal* 59 (2018), pp. 653-652.

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS RELATED TO CONCEPTS EMPLOYED**

ST	Spiritual turn
FU	Fault-unbelief (see Chapter 5)
NFU	No fault-unbelief (see Chapter 5)
IP	Incompatibility problem (see Chapter 5)
NA	Naturalistic assumption (see Chapters 5-6)
SA	Super-naturalistic assumption (see Chapters 5-6)
DHA	Divine Hiddenness argument (see Chapter 5)
SW	Something wrong (see Chapter 5)

## INTRODUCTION

Bertrand Russell once said that an exemplary philosophical investigation uncovers problems with matters that are apparently beyond controversy, and from this gives rise to intellectually fruitful debates.<sup>1</sup>

Among the beliefs whose acceptance seems beyond controversy both in philosophy and common opinion is the one that the search for truth is successful in proportion to the readiness of truth-searchers to put aside their own beliefs and to accept whatever belief will appear to be proven.

Two quotations from classical thinkers exemplarily show this view. The first quotation is from Plato's *Gorgias*, where Socrates emphasizes the primacy of evidence over his own beliefs:

I am one of those who are very willing to be refuted if I say anything which is not true, and very willing to refute anyone else who says what is not true, and quite as ready to be refuted as to refute. For I hold that this is the greater gain of the two, just as the gain is greater of being cured of a very great evil than of curing another.<sup>2</sup>

Although Socrates does not mention the concept of evidence, this passage obviously means that, if the available evidence suggests that one's beliefs are to be refuted, then the truth-searcher must change her mind, a change which Socrates sees as a sort of recovery from 'a great evil' constituted by erroneous opinion.

The second quotation is from Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding*. According to Locke, assent to propositions comes in degrees and we should proportion our degree of assent to the available evidence. As he says, we should not entertain 'any proposition with greater assurance than the proofs it is built upon will warrant.'<sup>3</sup> No commitment to one's beliefs should therefore prevent one from changing one's mind if this is required by the available evidence.

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<sup>1</sup> To use Russell's words, philosophy 'keeps alive our sense of wonder by showing familiar things in an unfamiliar aspect' (Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998], p. 88).

<sup>2</sup> Plato, *Gorgias*, 458 a3—b3. For more on this, see below, Chapter 4, note 6.

<sup>3</sup> John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* (London: Printed for Awsham and John Churchil, at the Black-Swan in Pater-Noster-Row, and Samuel Manship, at the Ship in Cornhill, near the Royal Exchange, 1700, hereafter: *An Essay*), IV, xix, 1.

I call this view *mere epistemology*. I will later show my reasons for coining this expression. For now, let me describe it as follows: *one should always prefer beliefs supported by more evidence to beliefs supported by less evidence*. Needless to say, this view seems incorrigible, as shown by the fact that it is usually taken for granted by practitioners in every field as well as philosophers of various orientation, including epistemologists whose views are very different from the ones I have mentioned so far.

Mere epistemology is arguably aimed at achieving agreement among debaters. According to Thomas Aquinas, for example, evidence necessarily leads us to assent,<sup>4</sup> from which follows that, once evidence in support of certain beliefs is provided, everybody should hold those beliefs. In this connection, Locke exemplarily devotes his *Essay* to showing that, if assent is proportioned to the available evidence, agreement among debaters should follow. At the beginning of the work in question, Locke famously tells the reader that he formulated his new epistemological perspective as an attempt to help debaters ‘avoid the greatest part of the disputes and wrangling they have with others.’<sup>5</sup>

This aim, however, has not been achieved. Locke’s view has counterproductively fueled new controversies and disputes, a fact which has led J. Jenkins to affirm that ‘the very existence of the controversy attests the failure of Locke’s epistemological project.’<sup>6</sup>

This is a sign of a more general condition in which philosophers as well as practitioners in other fields and even common people find themselves. In proportion to the interest they pay to the subject of their debates, debaters seem to be not inclined to accept the available evidence that disproves their original belief.<sup>7</sup> More precisely, the more they care about certain views, the more do they try to re-propose such views either by arguing against the evidence in question or by starting to research anew from the beginning.

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<sup>4</sup> He says that ‘the assent of science is not subject to free will, because the scientist is obliged to assent by force of the demonstration’ (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, tr. by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, second and revised edition [London: Oates and Washbourne, 1920, hereafter: *Summa theologiae*], II-II q. 2 a. 9 ad 2. The Latin text of Aquinas’s works, when not otherwise indicated, is that of the Leonine Edition [Rome 1888-1948]). In some cases, I will propose a different translation. ‘Evidence,’ for example, does not render ‘evidentia,’ as Aquinas takes it in regard to faith. It should be replaced by ‘full evidence’ or ‘evidentness.’ For more on this, see below, Chapter 3, notes 46ff.

<sup>5</sup> Locke, *An Essay*, Epistle to the Reader.

<sup>6</sup> John Jenkins, ‘Faith and Revelation.’ In *Philosophy of religion. A guide to the subject*, ed. by Brian Davies (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2007), p. 214.

<sup>7</sup> See below, Chapter 4, note 54.

The attitude I have just described may be seen as a positive support for research and its advancement, as recent debates on disagreement have opportunely noticed.<sup>8</sup> This means that the attitude in question, unlike what I have said above, would turn out to be perfectly in line with mere epistemology. After all, there is more evidence than not that, at least in some circumstances, this is the best method to follow if one intends to take research a step further.

This, however, does not have anything to do with the state of affairs I'm describing here. I don't refer to those who, by way of hypothesis, try to further explore the outcome of their research by methodologically questioning the evidence they have at the moment. Once they find new evidence, they will accept it, however inconsistent with their original commitment this may be. By contrast, I refer to those people who, in proportion to their commitment to certain views, may endlessly continue rejecting the available evidence that disproves those views, and continue reflecting on the subject with the aim of re-affirming them. Needless to say, this is simply unacceptable from the viewpoint of mere epistemology.

Debates on religious subjects are probably the most persuasive example of this attitude. Given the deep commitment to some fundamental beliefs that the faithful are expected to take on and the fundamental role that these subjects can play in the experience of both believers and unbelievers, it does not surprise that endless disagreement and consequent inconclusiveness copiously characterize debates when such subjects are at stake. As a matter of fact, modern debates between believers and unbelievers seem to be almost always inconclusive, as both believers and unbelievers show by usually continuing to maintain their original position.

The inconclusiveness in question, therefore, can be defined as the property of those debates *whose protagonists are not ready to change their mind, however convincing the evidence in support of such a change may be*. In other words, those who conduct inconclusive debates, *qua* inconclusive debaters, *prefer beliefs supported by less evidence to beliefs supported by more evidence*. Needless to say, this openly contradicts mere epistemology, and yet debates conducted by supporters of mere epistemology frequently fall into inconclusiveness.

In this dissertation, I intend to explore why this is possible, and whether unexpected epistemological results may emerge from this exploration.

Before proceeding to show how I intend to develop this research, however, let me make two decisive points.

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<sup>8</sup> For more on this, see below, Chapter 4, section 2.3.

First, when I say that those who conduct inconclusive debates prefer beliefs supported by less evidence to beliefs supported by more evidence I don't for a moment mean that they *always* conduct research in this way. I only mean that they do so *as protagonists of inconclusiveness*, that is, to the extent that they reject the available evidence because of their own commitments. But when do they act so?

As I said above, inconclusiveness is proportioned to the commitment of debaters to their original beliefs. Scientific and mathematical truths, for example, may be of no interest to debaters, in the sense that no one seems to care whether or not a molecule of water is composed of two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom. It follows that inconclusiveness may not occur in scientific and mathematical debates, unless debaters care about something related to the truths in question—debater's professional success, for example.

If my argument is correct, all debaters put mere epistemology into practice. They do so in inverse proportion to their commitment to certain beliefs. This has a substantial consequence. I mean that this fact allows debaters to avoid the self-referential contradiction into which mere epistemology would inevitably fall. If mere epistemology were put always into practice, in fact, it should apply to any belief, including itself, which is not possible. In fact, there is no more evidence for mere epistemology than for its negation. Saying that *one should always prefer beliefs supported by more evidence to beliefs supported by less evidence* is not supported by more evidence than the belief that *one should not always prefer beliefs supported by more evidence to beliefs supported by less evidence*.

Taking into account inconclusiveness, therefore, leads us to argue that mere epistemology should be included in a more comprehensive epistemological view. Mere epistemology's fundamental tenet that *one should always prefer beliefs supported by more evidence to beliefs supported by less evidence* may turn into a more moderate view, namely, *one should with some exceptions prefer beliefs supported by more evidence to beliefs supported by less evidence*.

Second, one may object that I haven't yet provided evidence that inconclusiveness of debates is due to one's will to not change one's mind. After all, disagreement may simply be caused by different levels of competence among debaters, different levels of competence which may also be due to intellectual insanity and moral deficiency. It is known that debates on religion, which I have said above are probably the most inconclusive ones, have often been accompanied by mutual accusations of deficiency, both intellectual and moral, among believers as well as

between believers and unbelievers.<sup>9</sup> This may explain why inconclusiveness, as I take it, has usually been overlooked by scholars. Different competence among debaters as well as forms of deficiency that afflict them, in fact, are unworthy of epistemological consideration.

In reply to this objection, it seems that the amount of inconclusiveness that characterizes debates such as those on religious matters can unlikely be explained by recourse to different levels of competence. Persistent disagreement accompanies a long history of debates among apparently equally competent philosophers and theologians. Consequently, when equally competent scholars are involved, it is equally unlikely that accusations of intellectual insanity and/or moral deficiency can reasonably apply.

At any rate, my idea that inconclusiveness is due to a voluntary opposition to the possibility of changing one's mind is justified by substantial suggestions that emerge from religious debates, which I have already said are especially characterized by inconclusiveness. The suggestions at stake, which I find in Thomas Reid's and especially Thomas Aquinas's reflection, clearly show that inconclusiveness *is due to the will* of the faithful to stick to their religious commitments.

Let me make it explicit that by 'religious' I mainly mean Christian, though I cannot exclude that aspects of other doctrines that are similar to the Christian one, especially Jewish and Islamic theism, may be included in this discussion. In other words, I don't exclude that other religious beliefs may profitably expand and enrich this reflection. Focusing first on Christianity, however, can be an appropriate decision for at least two reasons. First, because of the role that this religion has played in shaping Western culture. Second, because my reflection is stimulated by suggestions that emerge from the thought of the abovementioned Christian thinkers.

Turning back to how I intend to proceed with this research, let me point out that, in the case of debates regarding the Christian religion, an additional reason seems to lead scholars to overlook inconclusiveness. (I say 'additional', because I have already mentioned above reasons that apply to any debate—different levels of competence among debaters, which may also be due to intellectual insanity and moral deficiency.) I am referring to a restricted understanding of the Christian faith and its relationship to reason. This restricted understanding excludes what I argue is the specific way in which the Christian faith requires to be related to reason. Typical of this way is an attitude that clearly causes inconclusiveness. I am referring to the fact that the love for God, which should inspire (paradigmatic) believers in any activity, rational investigations and

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<sup>9</sup> For more on this, see Chapter 5, section 2.

debates included, requires that they firmly commit themselves to God and the related beliefs—that God exists, loves us, sent Jesus Christ into the world for our salvation, and the like—no matter how convincing the evidence that contradicts such beliefs may appear to be. This does not mean that the believers in question are unable to review any aspect of their faith if other views may suggest so. It only means that fundamental beliefs such as the ones I have mentioned above cannot be given up.

The first three chapters of this dissertation aim, first, to reject the abovementioned restricted understanding of the relationship between the Christian faith and the intellectual activity; then they aim to support a more convincing, though unexpected, view of this subject. Especially Chapter 3, devoted to Aquinas's thought on faith, reason and charity, will allow me to advance a number of considerations that unequivocally support my thesis.

In the following chapters, even more unexpected views will emerge.

Firstly, the love and the commitments that I have mentioned above may be only one of the causes of the inconclusiveness here under consideration. Non-religious commitments to the good and related beliefs may equally inspire debaters, from which follows that unbelievers and not only believers, although this is not equally documented in the existing literature, may be responsible for inconclusiveness.

Secondly, stimulating perspectives able to reorient and make more effective any dialogues, both on religious and non-religious topics, may emerge. On the one hand, believers are expected to increase their love for God and match it with the love for the neighbour and the search for the good. On the other hand, the search for the good may inspire not only believers but also unbelievers. This may enable them to generate the best possible condition to successfully conduct rational enquiries and discussions. If they assume good habits, in fact, they can cause mutual understanding and friendship as well as increasing opportunities to achieve conclusiveness, at least in some cases.

I call *spiritual turn in epistemology* this assumption of good habits and its beneficial effects on the intellectual activity. Similarly to the *linguistic turn*, according to which the problems of philosophy are problems of language and of relationship between language and the world,<sup>10</sup> the

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<sup>10</sup> As is known, this intuition was popularized by Richard Rorty in *The Linguistic Turn: Recent Essays in Philosophical Method*, ed. by Richard Rorty (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1967). For more on the genesis of this view, see Neil Gross, *Richard Rorty: The Making of an American Philosopher* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), pp. 177ff. Let me also

spiritual turn is based on the conviction that epistemological matters can fruitfully be treated by recourse to factors that are not strictly epistemological. The spiritual turn emphasizes the primary importance of human flourishing, taken as commitment to God and the good. ('Spiritual,' therefore, is not opposed either to 'non-religious' or 'physical.' It rather designates the overall perfection of humanity.<sup>11</sup>) It is a turn from mere epistemology, whose supporters first commit themselves to the mere search for truth—they maintain that every commitment must firstly be individuated epistemically, and this is the reason why I call this view *mere* epistemology. Unlike them, those who take the spiritual turn first *commit themselves to God and the good*, based on the conviction that human flourishing brings with it the ability to perfect any human activity, including the intellectual one.

This conviction emerges from a theological reflection on the subject. My intention is to develop our understanding of the epistemological consequences of the virtue of faith by drawing upon resources in philosophical discussion. This is in line with a traditional synergy between theology and philosophy, a synergy that started at least with Augustine's understanding of creatures, which he promoted and deepened on the conviction that they show traces of the Trinity. This explains why this dissertation focuses on epistemological matters and nonetheless was written in the School of Divinity at Edinburgh.

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mention an edited book whose topic is whether good reasons for belief are *facts* and whose title strongly resembles that of the present dissertation: *The Factive Turn in Epistemology*, ed. by Veli Mitova (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

<sup>11</sup> This employment of the word 'spirit' can be traced back to Georg F. W. Hegel. As is known, he was the first to use this word in philosophy to mean the totality of what exists, especially if taken *at its highest level of perfection*, which Hegel called 'absolute spirit.'

## PART 1

### Towards the Overcoming of the Lockean View of Faith and Reason

I have already said that the first three chapters of this dissertation are devoted to supporting my view of the relationship that the Christian faith requires with intellectual activity. This relationship—so I intend to argue—leads believers to render debates on religion inconclusive. I will fully show this in the third chapter, which explores Aquinas’s theological approach to faith and reason. Only a theological perspective, in fact, seems to offer an adequate understanding of the Christian faith and the way it can be employed in rational debates.

This view, however, has usually been overlooked in the course of modern age, when debates on religion have been conducted from a merely philosophical viewpoint. I intend to argue that this viewpoint, which J. Locke exemplarily adopted, has inevitably restricted the understanding of the Christian faith and its employment in the abovementioned debates.

Before moving on with Aquinas’s approach to the relationship between faith and religion, which I believe guarantees a satisfactory understanding of it, I intend to focus on relatively satisfactory approaches. They have been taken by prominent modern and contemporary thinkers such as J. H. Newman and A. Plantinga—to whom I will devote the first chapter—and T. Reid—to whom I will devote the second chapter—to oppose the restricted view here under consideration.

In this connection, an objection needs to be responded to. The thesis of this dissertation is that a spiritual turn in epistemology is required, which implies a theological approach to faith and religion like the one I will argue can be found in Aquinas’s thought. Why, therefore, devote a whole part (Chapters 1-2) of the three that constitute this dissertation to the relatively satisfactory attempts in question? Doesn’t this choice put exaggerated emphasis on them? My response is that treating the attempts made by thinkers such as Reid, Newman and Plantinga provides an opportunity to show that, though rarely, modern restricted understandings of faith like Locke’s have been individuated and opposed. Furthermore, devoting a whole part of the dissertation to the attempts mentioned above is equally opportune, because this emphasizes the distinction with the subjects of the other parts. At the same time, if compared with those parts, the first is of limited length. The later parts of the thesis are more extensive as they comprise the constructive elements of the discussion.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **Reformed Epistemologists and J. H. Newman as Critics of Locke's View**

In this chapter, I first explore Locke's thought, which can be seen as an exemplar of the restricted view of faith and reason mentioned above. This view is often seen as the one that has widely shaped the way in which philosophers and even common people have become accustomed to considering the relationship between faith and reason in modern and contemporary times. I then devote the second and third section, respectively, to seeing how Reformed epistemologists and J. H. Newman have criticized Locke's perspective. I will argue that their original and intellectually penetrating criticisms are only relatively satisfactory once considered from the viewpoint of the spiritual turn here under consideration.

#### **1.1 Locke's Thought as an Exemplar of a restricted Understanding of Faith and Reason**

Locke's view of faith and reason has exerted an impressive influence on the philosophy of religion until recent times. As J. Jenkins has pointed out,

perhaps more importantly, it shaped the way non-philosophers spoke about, thought about and practised debate and enquiry regarding religious matters. There were important dissenters from Locke's approach in subsequent centuries, but it became embedded in training and practice so that both philosophers and non-philosophers came to have difficulty imagining an alternative.<sup>1</sup>

To do justice to this phenomenon, Jenkins adopts C. Taylor's conviction that philosophy is 'inherently historical,'<sup>2</sup> namely, our philosophical views are implicitly conditioned by historically

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<sup>1</sup> Jenkins, 'Faith and Revelation,' p. 213.

<sup>2</sup> See Charles Taylor, 'Philosophy and its history.' In *Philosophy in History: Essays on the Historiography of Philosophy*, ed. by Richard Rorty, Jerome B. Schneewind and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge-London-New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 17, cited in Jenkins, 'Faith and Revelation,' p. 205.

dominant models. Their influence is due ‘to what Taylor calls “philosophical forgetting;” we have forgotten that the dominant model was one alternative among others.’<sup>3</sup>

The model in question, however, should not be attributed only to Locke. According to N. Wolterstorff, ‘Locke was not a *solitary* genius.’ However, he ‘articulated better than anyone else’<sup>4</sup> that model, whose understanding, therefore, can satisfactorily be achieved by focusing on his reflection.

Locke’s reflection on religion was heavily influenced by the social and cultural problems of his time, especially the disagreements, conflicts and wars which had accompanied the Reformation process. Wolterstorff rightly defines Locke as ‘an engaged philosopher,’<sup>5</sup> whose main interest was to solve the problems of his time though it was no longer possible to do so on the basis of a unified tradition.<sup>6</sup> Locke, therefore, found a different way, which consisted in appealing to the deliverances of reason. He promoted a new method, which Jenkins calls ‘epistemological project:’

It begins with the attempt to find universal norms and principles of correct human reasoning...if we let these norms and principles guide our enquiries and debates we can make progress toward the rational resolution of some disagreements...Subsequent thinkers would differ sharply with Locke on aspects of his epistemology or metaphysics, but the philosophical mainstream embraced the strategy of beginning by formulating the principles of a universalist epistemology, and then considering, in accord with these epistemological principles, arguments and evidence for and against the beliefs of faith.<sup>7</sup>

The beliefs of faith can therefore be accepted only to the extent that they can somehow be supported by reason. For Locke, the faithful should believe the divine revelation to the extent that they have arguments to demonstrate that it is really God who is the author of such a revelation:

What I see I know to be so by the evidence of the thing itself: what I believe I take to be so upon the testimony of another: But this testimony I must know to be given, or else what ground have I of believing? I must see that it is God that reveals this to me, or else I see nothing. The question then here is, how do I know that God is the revealer of this to me; that this impression is made upon my mind by his Holy Spirit, and that therefore I ought to obey it?<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Jenkins, ‘Faith and Revelation,’ p. 207.

<sup>4</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, ‘Locke’s philosophy of religion.’ In *The Cambridge Companion to Locke*, ed. by Vere Chappell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 172.

<sup>5</sup> Wolterstorff, ‘Locke’s philosophy of religion,’ p. 173.

<sup>6</sup> See Wolterstorff, ‘Locke’s philosophy of religion,’ p. 198.

<sup>7</sup> Jenkins, ‘Faith and Revelation,’ pp. 208f.

<sup>8</sup> Locke, *An Essay*, IV, xix, 10-11. As Wolterstorff rightly notices, Locke offers a slightly different view in *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, which is not intended ‘to show that it is probable on satisfactory evidence that the New Testament records revelation from God, but to show that a great deal of the *content* of the revelation there recorded can be arrived at by reason—that is, can either be demonstrated

As is known, Locke reproaches those whom he calls ‘enthusiasts:’

If they believe it to be true, *because it is a revelation*, and have *no other reason* for its being a revelation, but because they are *fully persuaded without any other reason* that it is true, they believe it to be a revelation *only because they strongly believe* it to be a revelation, which is a very unsafe ground to proceed on.<sup>9</sup>

The safe ground to proceed on is instead *evidence* in support of belief: ‘The believing, or not believing that proposition, or book, to be of divine authority, can never be matter of faith, but matter of reason.’<sup>10</sup> As is known, for Locke assent to divine revelation comes in degrees and we should proportion our degree of assent to the available evidence.<sup>11</sup>

Note that, among the Christian beliefs, God’s existence is the fundamental one, without which no other belief can reasonably be held. Furthermore, as Locke claims, that God exists is also the belief that is backed by such satisfactory evidence that we can claim that we have *knowledge* of the existence of God.<sup>12</sup>

As a consequence, Locke can conclude that God’s existence can firmly be held because it constitutes *knowledge*, more precisely *demonstrative* knowledge. Once this demonstration has been provided, other religious beliefs can be held with different degrees of firmness. Such beliefs constitute that which Locke names *judgment*, i.e., *probable* knowledge. Thus, once believers *know* that God exists, they will reasonably *believe*, at various levels of probability, religious statements such as ‘Jesus is the Son of God.’

Incidentally, let me mention that this view of faith does not apply to the experience of all believers. Locke distinguishes ‘original revelation’ from ‘traditional revelation.’ The former occurs when an impression ‘is made immediately by God’ on the mind of the prospective believer.<sup>13</sup> (While paraphrasing the Pauline epistles, Locke explicitly mentions St. Paul as a recipient of this kind of revelation.<sup>14</sup>) The latter occurs instead when someone believes on the ground that what he believes

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or shown to be probably true.’ (Wolterstorff, ‘Locke’s philosophy of religion,’ p. 192). In this case, therefore, reason plays an even more decisive role in the understanding of religious belief. Not surprisingly, the publication of the work in question raised controversies, including accusations according to which this book ‘would ultimately lead to atheism.’ (John C. Higgins-Biddle, *The Reasonableness of Christianity and Its Vindications*.’ In *The Bloomsbury Companion to Locke*, ed. by S. J. Savonius-Wroth, Paul Schuurman and Jonathan Walmsley [London—New York: Bloomsbury, 2010], p. 270).

<sup>9</sup> Locke, *An Essay*, emphasis added.

<sup>10</sup> Locke, *An Essay*, IV, xviii, 6.

<sup>11</sup> See above, Introduction, note 3.

<sup>12</sup> See Locke, *An Essay*, IV, x, 6.

<sup>13</sup> See Locke, *An Essay*, *ibid.*, IV, xviii, 3.

<sup>14</sup> See Locke, *Works*, vii, 30—1,34,432, cit. in Wolterstorff, *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 126, note 110.

has been revealed by God. Obviously enough, Locke's view of faith only applies to the latter case. Consequently, as Wolterstorff points out, 'it appears that Locke's definition of "faith," when combined with his account of original revelation, yields the result that the believer's *response* to original revelation is not a case of faith.'<sup>15</sup> Let me also add that the distinction Locke proposes between the two kinds of revelation does not seem convincing. Thomas Aquinas's view of the object and signs of faith provides a more intellectually satisfactory view, according to which the distinction at stake disappears.<sup>16</sup>

At any rate, Locke certainly saw his approach to religion as supportive of religious belief's credibility. Against the view that reason and faith are opposites, which he believed was common in his time,<sup>17</sup> he attempted to reconcile them with one another.

The way in which Locke proposed this reconciliation, however, was based on a restricted understanding of faith, i.e., the view of faith as just intellectual assent or propositional belief. (I take here 'faith' as commitment to God, which includes trust in him [belief-in] and propositional belief [belief-that]. I will extensively deal with this in Chapter 3, where I will focus on Aquinas's thesis, which traces back to Augustine, that faith is 'believing in a God,' 'believing God,' and 'believing in God.'<sup>18</sup> Newman's view, as I will show in the third section, is consistent with this tradition, as emerges when he says that 'I mean by belief, not precisely faith, because faith, in its theological sense, includes a belief, not only in the thing believed, but also in the ground of believing; that is, not only belief in certain doctrines, but belief in them expressly because God has revealed them.'<sup>19</sup>) In fact, looking at faith as a propositional belief inevitably excludes what is typical of religious faith. I am referring to what distinguishes religious experience from any other, that is, the full reliance that believers—at the least the paradigmatic ones—are expected to place on the revealed doctrines. They should see such a reliance as caused by their communion with God, which God

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<sup>15</sup> Wolterstorff, *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief*, p. 126, note 110.

<sup>16</sup> I will focus on this in Chapter 3. See notes 56ff.

<sup>17</sup> Locke claims that 'though it be in itself a very improper way of speaking, yet common use has so authorized it, that it would be folly either to oppose or hope to remedy it' (*An Essay*, IV, xvii, 24). G. Forster appropriately finds this view 'exaggerated', although he recognizes that 'during the seventeenth-Century the influence of the Enlightenment, especially from the Continent in places like France, was issuing a major challenge to the view of faith and reason as natural allies.' (Greg Forster, *Starting with Locke* [London—New York: Continuum, 2011], pp. 63f.).

<sup>18</sup> See below, Chapter 3, note 84.

<sup>19</sup> John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, edited with introduction and notes by Ian T. Ker (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985, hereafter: GA), V, Introduction. Among Reformed epistemologists, let me mention Dewey J. Hoitenga, according to whom, 'faith, although it includes belief, is more than just belief; it is belief that arises from trust' (Dewey J. Hoitenga, *Faith and Reason from Plato to Plantinga: An Introduction to Reformed Epistemology* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991], p. 35).

himself grants to them. As a result, they should stick to their religious beliefs, no matter how convincing contrary evidence may be.<sup>20</sup> By contrast, Locke's approach to religion can be seen as methodologically 'naturalistic.' By methodological naturalism I mean the view according to which religious belief can only be taken as *the outcome* of a rational exploration of our experience. This view straightforwardly excludes any possibility that believing in God may somehow be due to a relationship with him, which God himself may grant to some of us. Locke's reflection clearly implies the assumption that *every subject*, including religion, should be treated without taking into account that a super-natural being may exist and reveal to us an unexpected way to deal with our experience.<sup>21</sup> By contrast, religious believers, whether they are right or wrong, are expected to ground their belief precisely in the conviction that God exists and may play a role in their believing. While referring to Locke's severe rejection of the enthusiast's position, N. Wolterstorff points out that 'it's regrettable that, beyond this highly tendentious attack on the enthusiasts, Locke *never explores the possibility* that religious experience, of one sort or another, can provide evidence for theistic belief.'<sup>22</sup> In other words, Locke chooses to exclude the possibility that, unlike any other belief, the religious one may be characterized by a high level of certainty that is divinely granted and is not due to rational justification.

Locke's choice may arguably be seen as caused by the abovementioned 'attempt to find universal norms and principles of correct human reasoning,' which he tried to apply to every subject in order to achieve agreement among interlocutors. However, this objective, which was the ultimate one of his epistemological project, has not been achieved. It is actually true that such a project has given rise to further disagreement and disputes, which testify to its overall failure.<sup>23</sup>

My thesis is that the widespread disagreement in question is due to the fact that, in proportion to their commitment to a certain view, debaters simply want to stick to that view, regardless of the available evidence that may convince them of the contrary. Religious doctrines explicitly include the abovementioned will to stick to one's beliefs. At least religious debates, therefore, manifestly call for an approach to epistemology that is alternative to Locke's.

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<sup>20</sup> I will deal with this subject in detail while treating the way faith can be seen from Aquinas's viewpoint. See Chapter 3, Section 3.

<sup>21</sup> Let me point out that naturalism can be taken in a more comprehensive way, as the view that no agent or force that stands outside the natural world exists. In this sense, Plantinga argues that naturalists don't accept the existence of God as well as that of 'the Stoic's Mind, or Fichte's Absolute I, or Plato's Idea of the Good, or Aristotle's Unmoved Mover, or Hegel's Absolute.' In other words, 'naturalism is stronger than atheism, in the sense that it is possible to be an atheist but not a naturalist, but not possible to be a naturalist but not an atheist.' (Alvin Plantinga, 'Against Naturalism.' In *Knowledge of God*, ed. by Alvin Plantinga and Michael Tooley [Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2008], p. 19).

<sup>22</sup> Wolterstorff, 'Locke's philosophy of religion,' p. 195, emphasis added.

<sup>23</sup> See above, Introduction, note 6.

I will argue that an alternative approach can emerge from the examination of how religious experience requires believers to engage in debates. The approach in question is what I call a *spiritual turn* from mere epistemology, mere epistemology which Locke's project exemplarily shows.

Before moving on to this argument, however, I need to consider some reactions to Locke's thought, which, from the viewpoint of my argument, are only partly satisfactory.

## 1.2 Reformed Epistemologists as Critics of Locke's View of Faith and Reason

'Reformed epistemology' is a view developed by various thinkers, among which stand out W. Alston, N. Wolterstorff and A. Plantinga, in the last decades of the Twentieth-Century.<sup>24</sup> Calvin College, situated in Grand Rapids (Michigan), is the academic institution where many of them have studied and taught, and it is to the thought of prominent Reformers like Calvin that their epistemology is especially associated. Calvin's thought, as I will say below, has influenced especially A. Plantinga's research with the conviction that God implanted in all humans a *sensus divinitatis*, which, given appropriate circumstances, makes everyone able to believe even in the absence of evidence. Reformed epistemologists, however, have also been influenced by epistemologists like Reid, and have especially reflected on Reid's argument that we are all born with belief dispositions, which form beliefs once triggered in a certain way. From this follows that, contrary to Locke's views, Reformed epistemologists have maintained that theistic belief, and other religious beliefs as well, can be reasonably held in the absence of arguments, and that to understand whether these beliefs are rational we should focus on our dispositions, and not evidence in their support.

A. Plantinga is often seen as 'the chief defender of Reformed Epistemology.'<sup>25</sup> Due to space constraints, therefore, I will focus on their proposal as it is shown by his reflection. As I said above, this reflection can be seen as being inspired by Calvin's view that 'there is within the human mind, and indeed by natural instinct, an awareness of divinity,' which Calvin calls *sensus divinitatis*. It is 'a tacit confession of a sense of deity inscribed in the hearts of all,' which is testified by the fact that

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<sup>24</sup> The first expression of this perspective is often considered *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, ed. by Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame—London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983).

<sup>25</sup> Michael Bergmann, 'Religious belief, epistemology of, recent developments.' In *A Companion to Epistemology*, ed. by Jonathan Dancy, Ernest Sosa and Matthias Steup, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Malden—Oxford: Wiley—Blackwell, 2010), p. 697.

‘from the beginning of the world there has been no region, no city, in short, no household, that could do without religion.’<sup>26</sup> As P. Helm has emphasized, by using the concept of *sensus divinitatis*, Calvin ‘implies that belief in God is natural in the sense of being part of man’s original condition, part of what it means to be really or fully human.’<sup>27</sup>

Plantinga argues that Calvin’s view traces back to Aquinas. As he says, ‘we can usefully see Calvin’s suggestion as a kind of meditation on and development of a theme suggested by Aquinas.’<sup>28</sup>

However convincing this harmony between them may be,<sup>29</sup> it is of interest to my argument that, while emphasizing what he thinks is common to outstanding representatives of different Christian denominations, Plantinga seems to be determined to find out if there is a *Christian* way to reflect philosophically on religious experience as well as on experience in general. This clearly emerges from his famous article entitled *Advice to Christian Philosophers*.<sup>30</sup> In it, Plantinga explicitly states that the Christian community has its own interests, and Christian philosophers should exhibit autonomy—both in choosing their own topics and in their treatment of topics chosen and dealt with by non-Christian philosophers.

As a matter of fact, it is on the basis of his religious experience that Plantinga seems to reject the typically Lockean view, according to which we should not entertain ‘any proposition with greater

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<sup>26</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), Bk. 1, Chapter 3, pp. 43f.

<sup>27</sup> Paul Helm, ‘John Calvin, the *sensus divinitatis*, and the noetic effects of sin,’ *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 43 (1998), p. 88. Let me point out that the reference to the ‘original condition’ may lead to think that Calvin and Plantinga have in mind the unfallen condition of man. In reality, at least according to Plantinga’s interpretation of the *Institutes*, ‘Calvin is pretty clearly teaching that all people, fallen as well as unfallen, have this knowledge’ (Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2000], p. 173).

<sup>28</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 17.

<sup>29</sup> Let me point out that, if on the one hand both Calvin and Aquinas claim that the existence of God can be affirmed without philosophical demonstrations, on the other hand Aquinas’s view is that all men by nature understand ‘in a general and confused way’ (*Summa theologiae*, I, q. 2, a. 1, ad 1) that God exists. The idea of God that can be achieved in such a way by no means matches Plantinga’s idea of God as the creator of all things who ‘is to be thanked and praised.’ In addition, where Aquinas deals with the existence of God as the omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good creator of all things, he openly says that there are only two ways to acquire such a knowledge, philosophical demonstration and faith (see below, Chapter 6, note 85).

<sup>30</sup> Alvin Plantinga, ‘Advice to Christian Philosophers,’ *Faith and Philosophy* 1 (1984), pp. 253-271. This essay was written for the inaugural lecture delivered by the Reformed philosopher at the Catholic University of Notre Dame in 1983. In addition, in 1999 Plantinga commented on John Paul II’s encyclical *Fides et ratio* released in 1998. He referred to Catholics in this way: ‘We must make common cause with these fellow Christians, and perhaps especially common cause in the world of philosophy and the intellectual life in general’ (Plantinga, ‘Philosophers Respond to Pope John Paul II’s encyclical letter *Fides et ratio*,’ *Books & Culture* 5 (1999), p. 35).

assurance than the proofs it is built upon will warrant.’<sup>31</sup> His own experience as a Christian believer, combined with the abovementioned Calvinian conviction that the faithful believe because of a *sensus divinitatis*, that is, without any need of argument, must have led him to propose an alternative to Locke’s approach to religion. Plantinga finds this approach, which has been called ‘evidentialism’ because of the crucial role it ascribes to evidence, incompatible with the experience of the vast majority of the faithful. These—so he observes—do not usually believe on the basis of evidence, that is, do not believe religious statements by way of inference from other statements.

Incidentally, let me say that, in my opinion, this view can be improved once combined with Aquinas’s thought on faith. According to Aquinas, the faithful believe mainly because of God’s grace and only secondarily because of arguments.<sup>32</sup> This means that they tend to support their religious belief by way of inference—which is not part of Plantinga’s view. (From this, however, it does not follow that, for Aquinas, faith is due to such inference. As Aquinas says, before the same evidence, some believe whereas some do not—and this is compatible with Plantinga’s view.)

At any rate, what is of interest to my argument is that Plantinga seems to oppose the view that I call mere epistemology, at least in the sense that he rejects a substantial aspect of this view. The aspect in question consists in the fact that, for mere epistemologists, every commitment must firstly be individuated and supported epistemically. No commitment to God and religion, therefore, is acceptable if not previously grounded in the available evidence.

As I have already said, Plantinga rejects this view precisely on the ground of religious experience. Due to this choice, he gives rise to an intellectual itinerary that may briefly be presented in three steps.

First, he argues that the epistemic standard applied to religious belief is more severe than the one applied to any other belief. Against this attitude, he employed an argument, which T. Penelhum would later call the ‘parity argument.’<sup>33</sup> In *God and Other Minds*,<sup>34</sup> Plantinga shows that, if believing in other minds is rational though unsupported by argument—we cannot observe the

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<sup>31</sup> See above, Introduction, note 3.

<sup>32</sup> See Chapter 3, notes 75ff. and 89f.

<sup>33</sup> See Terence Penelhum, *God and Skepticism* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1983), Chapters 2, 5, and 6. After having been first used by Plantinga in *God and Other Minds* (1967, see next footnote), this argument has widely been used and also modified.

<sup>34</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds: A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1967).

thoughts and feelings of other people<sup>35</sup>—then there is no reason to deny that believing in God is rational even if evidentially unsupported. Just as we sometimes ‘see’ that someone is thinking, depressed or in pain, so can a theist impressed by the harmony and beauty of the universe or the profundity of the Scriptures claim to ‘see’ that God exists.

Second, Plantinga shows that there are problems with evidentialism as well as foundationalism once applied to religious belief. Let me focus on foundationalism, which in *Reason and Belief in God* he rightly says is ‘the dominant way of thinking’ in the epistemology of Western philosophical tradition.<sup>36</sup> According to foundationalism, knowledge consists of two types of statements: basic statements, which are immediately recognized as true, and other types of statements, which are inferred through reasoning from the basic statements. In Plantinga’s discussion of foundationalism, ‘any statement must be proved through demonstration or, alternatively, must be accepted basically if it is self-evident, evident to the senses or incorrigible.’ The author of *Reason and Belief in God* concludes that this statement (‘any statement must be proved through demonstration or alternatively must be accepted basically if it is self-evident, evident to the senses or incorrigible’) does not apply to itself, because it doesn’t meet the criteria in question—that is, it has never been proved, nor is it self-evident, evident to the senses or incorrigible. This shows that foundationalism, as Plantinga takes it, is self-referentially contradictory. It also shows that, since it has never been proved, its supporters must have held it basically, in a way that is necessarily different from the ones I have mentioned above. The parity argument, therefore, can be employed again. If foundationalists act inconsistently with foundationalism, there is no reason to expect believers to act consistently with it. In other words, if there is no reason to maintain that a basic belief can only be self-evident, or evident to the senses or incorrigible, then it is possible to take into consideration other perspectives.

Third, Plantinga takes into consideration other perspectives, which may probably do justice to the way in which Christians maintain their belief. He takes into account affirmations that Calvin and, as he believes, Aquinas have advanced jointly. He uses them as a model—which he calls ‘A/C model’—of both theistic and Christian belief. His goal is to show that, although held basically, such beliefs can reasonably be taken as ‘warranted’—where ‘warrant’ is the quality ‘enough of which is what makes the difference between knowledge and mere true belief.’<sup>37</sup> While taking part in the

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<sup>35</sup> Thomas Reid had argued similarly two centuries earlier: ‘The thoughts and passions of the mind are invisible’ (*The Works of Thomas Reid*, ed. by William Hamilton [Edinburgh—London: Maclachlan and Stewart—Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts and Green, 1863], p. 450).

<sup>36</sup> Plantinga, ‘Reason and Belief in God.’ In *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, p. 48. See also Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason Within the Bounds of Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 2nd ed., p. 30.

<sup>37</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. xi.

development of virtue epistemology,<sup>38</sup> Plantinga focuses on the intellectual faculties which yield theistic and Christian belief, and also considers the environment in which such faculties work. His objective is to show that, if the beliefs in question are true, then very likely the A/C model is also true. This means that Plantinga intends only to show how it *could* be that the belief in question is true or actual. The aim of his treatment of the A/C model ‘is not that it is *true* but, rather, that it is *epistemically possible*.’<sup>39</sup> To show that the model in question is true would be—in Plantinga’s own words—‘to show that theism and Christianity are true; and I don’t know how to do something one can sensibly call “showing” that either of these *is* true.’<sup>40</sup>

Obviously enough, such conclusion can easily lead to criticism, which R. Swinburne has summarized as follows: ‘There is...a monumental issue which Plantinga does not discuss, and which a lot of people will consider needs discussing. This is whether Christian beliefs do have warrant (in Plantinga’s sense). He has shown that they do, if they are true; so we might hope for discussion of whether they are true.’<sup>41</sup> As Deane-Peter Baker has pointed out, however, ‘Plantinga’s model achieves what he intends it to show, namely that provided Christian belief is true Christians are not irrational—or, more accurately, unwarranted—in holding the beliefs that they do hold.’<sup>42</sup>

At any rate, this brief outline of Reformed epistemology as developed by Plantinga serves an important purpose in criticizing the approach to religion which I have called ‘methodologically naturalistic.’ Unlike Locke, in fact, Plantinga explores the possibility that religious experience, even if unsupported by arguments, can make a contribution to rational reflection. In this sense, he seems to oppose a fundamental aspect of what I call mere epistemology, that is, the conviction that commitments can be made only if they are previously supported by way of rational investigation.

If my argument is correct, Plantinga rejects mere epistemology, according to which one should always prefer beliefs supported by more evidence to beliefs supported by less evidence. He rejects philosophical arguments proposed by thinkers such as Locke, and continues believing, including when he is not yet in possession of adequate counterarguments. (Of course, ‘not yet’ means that, being a philosopher, Plantinga is expected to continue searching for such counterarguments.)

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<sup>38</sup> See Chapter 6, notes 13f.

<sup>39</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. xii.

<sup>40</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 170.

<sup>41</sup> Richard Swinburne, ‘Plantinga on Warrant,’ *Religious Studies* 37 (2001), p. 206.

<sup>42</sup> Deane-Peter Baker, *Tayloring Reformed Epistemology. Charles Taylor, Alvin Plantinga and the de iure challenge to Christian belief* (London: SCM Press, 2007), p. 95.

Plantinga, however, does *not explicitly* claim that he continues committing himself to his religious belief, nor does he note that this commitment, even in the absence of argument, is required by religious doctrine. Accordingly, he does not explore the inconclusiveness here under consideration. He does not take into account the possibility, which I will explore in this dissertation, that, when related to religious debates, this inconclusiveness is demanded by the specific way in which faith requires to be related to reason. Consequently, Plantinga cannot wonder whether or not, beyond mere inconclusiveness, other effects such as the spiritual turn here in question may follow from the Christian faith for both believers and unbelievers.

### 1.3 The Role of Newman's Notion of Inconclusiveness in his Criticism of Locke's View

J.H. Newman seems to have taken this debate a step further—which is why, though he lived a century before the Reformed epistemologists, I deal with his reflection after having focused on them.<sup>43</sup>

Born in London in 1801, he experienced a spiritual conversion during the adolescent years. This would determine his lifelong search for spiritual perfection. He became soon an influential priest in the Church of England and the leader of the so-called Oxford Movement, started in 1833 with the aim of reforming the abovementioned Church by emphasizing the Catholic elements of the English religious tradition. He then left his Church as well as his teaching post at Oxford and converted to Catholicism in 1845. Facing no little opposition, misunderstanding and resentment, he continued working as an engaged theologian, whose importance in the life of England and devotion to the Church was recognized to the point that he was created a Cardinal in 1879 and canonized in 2019.

This religious background may explain why Newman opposed Locke's view that assent to divine revelation must be proportioned to the available evidence.<sup>44</sup> Such a devout believer

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<sup>43</sup> Closeness to my argument, therefore, is the criterion I have employed to decide on which thinkers to focus first. The same criterion will lead me to decide which affinities and differences between Newman, on the one hand, and Reformed epistemology, on the other, I will mention here. For a more general treatment of such affinities and differences, see Stephen R. Grimm, 'Cardinal Newman, Reformed Epistemologist?' *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 75 (2001), pp. 497-522. The author responds to those Catholic thinkers who had only emphasized the differences—he explicitly refers to *Rational Faith: Catholic Responses to Reformed Epistemology*, ed. by Linda Zagzebski (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1993). He also recognizes that similarities had already been detected by Basil Mitchell and Anthony Kenny (see Grimm, p. 498, footnote 4).

<sup>44</sup> See above, Introduction, note 3. According to Gerald McCarthy, Newman was actually the 'more articulate and forceful' among Locke's opponents. See McCarthy, 'Newman, Foundationalism, and the Ethics of Belief,' *Horizons* 8/1 (1981), p. 63.

must have considered unacceptable ideas such as that ‘no religious tenet is important, unless reason shows it to be so’ and ‘it is dishonest in a man to make an act of faith in what he has not had brought home to him by actual proof,’<sup>45</sup> ideas which are typical of mere epistemology. On the contrary, Newman’s religious experience must have suggested, as J. Lamont has pointed out, that ‘the belief in divine revelation that faith involves requires the strongest possible degree of assent,’<sup>46</sup> which is obviously more than the available evidence mostly allows.

In reply to Locke’s view that assent must be proportioned to the available evidence, Newman devoted his *Grammar of Assent* to reflecting on ‘what it is to believe.’<sup>47</sup> Reflecting on the nature of our intellectual activity led him to argue that assent can be certain in the absence of equally certain arguments. For Newman, ‘assent is in its nature absolute and unconditional.’<sup>48</sup> This, however, does not mean that no preliminary reasons accompany assent. Newman only means that assent is independent of our acts of inference, as he points out in this passage:

Indeed, I doubt whether assent is ever given without some preliminary, which stands for a reason; but it does not follow from this, that it may not be withheld in cases when there are good reasons for giving it to a proposition, or may not be withdrawn after it has been given, the reasons remaining, or may not remain when the reasons are forgotten, or must always vary in strength, as the reasons vary; and this substantiveness, as I may call it, of the act of assent is the very point which I have wished to establish.<sup>49</sup>

For Newman, Locke’s view is grounded in an attitude to start from philosophical reflection alone and not from the exploration of human experience. In other words, Locke ‘consults his own idea of how the mind ought to act, instead of interrogating human nature, as an existing thing, as it is found in the world.’<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua: being a History of his Religious Opinions*, edited, with an Introduction and Notes, by Martin J. Svaglic (London: Oxford University Press 1967), p. 260.

<sup>46</sup> John R. T. Lamont, ‘Newman on Faith and Rationality,’ *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 40 (1996), p. 63.

<sup>47</sup> Newman, GA, V, Introduction. The fact that this work is devoted to exploring ‘what it is to believe... what the mind does, what it contemplates, when it makes an act of faith’ allows us to understand why Newman gave the work in question such an unusual title.

<sup>48</sup> Newman, GA, VI, Introduction, p. 105.

<sup>49</sup> Newman, GA, VI, § 1, n. 3, pp. 113f. An aspect of this relationship between inference and assent is the fact that, as Newman notices, different people may hold different assent though the inference they possess is the same, which explains why philosophers have cultivated logics (see Newman, GA, VIII, § 1).

<sup>50</sup> Newman, GA, VI, § 1.

Newman does interrogate our experience, and notices that our thought is in most cases complicated, due to personal factors, and hard to understand from the viewpoint of logics.<sup>51</sup> This is not surprising if we consider that we often have to do with *concrete facts* and *real things*, not *abstract notions*.<sup>52</sup>

Assent to real things is a *real assent*, which Newman typically calls ‘belief.’ This allows him to reject the accusation that religious belief is untenable because it has a-rational commitments at its core, and not evidence. For him, in fact, all beliefs, including the ones that we usually see as properly held, presuppose a-rational commitments. To use Newman’s words, ‘none of us can think or act without the acceptance of truths, not intuitive, not demonstrated, yet sovereign.’<sup>53</sup> In this way, like Reformed epistemologists, Newman seems to develop a parity argument, as D. Pritchard has convincingly argued.<sup>54</sup>

At the same time, while focusing on religious belief, Newman develops this reflection by saying that ‘to the devout and spiritual, the Divine Word speaks of things, not merely of notions.’<sup>55</sup> Consequently, the faithful give a *real assent*, which I have already said is what Newman calls ‘belief,’ to an equally present reality, which is God. They do not simply give a notional assent that regards instead the mere *idea* of God.

God, however, cannot be seen and perceived like other things in the world. An inference from the experience of such things to the transcendent God is, therefore, necessary. At the same time, this inference should not lead us to give a notional assent. Newman, therefore, argues that believers make an *informal* inference by way of a specific faculty, which he calls *illative sense*. Informal inference is the argument from concrete facts, e.g. miracles performed by Jesus and the apostles, to concrete facts, e.g. the divinity of Jesus. Unlike formal inference, informal inference is not a causal conclusion from given premises. In other words, concrete

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<sup>51</sup> See Newman, GA, VI, § 1.

<sup>52</sup> To be clearer, in some propositions, terms ‘stand for things external to us, unit and individual,’ whereas, in others, terms are ‘common nouns, as standing for what is abstract.’ This is the distinction formulated by Newman between, respectively, propositions that only admit of *real apprehension and assent*, on the one hand, and propositions that only admit of *notional apprehension and assent* (Newman, GA, I, § 2).

<sup>53</sup> Newman, GA, VI, § 1.

<sup>54</sup> See especially his recent article entitled ‘Skepticism.’ In *A Companion to Atheism and Philosophy*, ed. by Graham Oppy (Hoboken: Wiley, 2019), pp. 277-290. I will also take into consideration other publications devoted by Pritchard to this subject in Chapter 4, Section 2.4. I refer the reader to that section for more on two related theses advanced by Pritchard: (1) Newman’s parity argument is partly different from the one developed by Reformed epistemologists; (2) Newman’s reflection exerted an influence on Wittgenstein’s remarks contained in *On Certainty*.

<sup>55</sup> See Newman, GA, IV, § 2, p. 57.

facts, singularly taken, do not lead to any assent, whereas this is possible if the facts in question are taken collectively. In this connection, Newman speaks of ‘cumulation’ and ‘converging’ of such facts.<sup>56</sup>

A crucial role in this inferential process is played by the level of experience, culture, and maturity of the knowing subject. Note that, as I said above, the illative sense is the faculty that performs such an inference. Newman sees this sense as similar to the Aristotelian *phronesis* to the extent that it ‘is developed and matured by practice and experience.’<sup>57</sup> In other words, this faculty varies among people. Its working depends on a complex of personal characteristics.<sup>58</sup>

A similarly relevant role is played by moral responsibility, whose importance for Newman’s reflection we can easily understand while considering Newman’s notion of conscience. For him, conscience is the fundamental premise of religious belief. It is the sense of moral obligation that spontaneously predisposes one to believe. It, in fact, leads one to think of and to revere God as the Supreme Governor, the Judge which is ‘holy, just, powerful, all-seeing, retributive.’<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, Newman is aware that not everybody infers God’s existence from the voice of conscience.<sup>60</sup> True, he is also aware of the force of conscience and its injunctions, as emerges when he asks himself: ‘Who can deny the existence of Conscience? Who does not feel the force of its injunctions?’<sup>61</sup> And nonetheless he argues that conscience is fleet and consequently insufficient to make one adhere to religious belief. (When he focuses on the experience of ‘an ordinary child,’ he takes into consideration the one ‘who is safe from influences destructive of his religious instincts.’<sup>62</sup>) Moral responsibility, therefore, plays a

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<sup>56</sup> See Newman, GA, VIII, § 2.

<sup>57</sup> Gérard Verbeke, ‘Aristotelian Roots of Newman’s Illative Sense.’ In *Newman and Gladstone Centennial Essays*, ed. by James D. Bastable (Dublin: Veritas Publications, 1978), p. 179.

<sup>58</sup> See Newman, GA, IX, § 3.

<sup>59</sup> Newman, GA, V, § 1, p. 110.

<sup>60</sup> In this connection, Mark Wynn rightly notices that Newman ‘treats the data of conscience not so much as evidence for the existence of God ... but rather as presupposed in any religiously sensitive explication of what we mean by the term “God.”’ (Mark Wynn, ‘The Relationship of Religion and Ethics: A Comparison of Newman and Contemporary Philosophy of Religion,’ *The Heythrop Journal* 46/4 (2005), p. 440).

<sup>61</sup> Newman, *The Idea of a University* (London: Basil Montagu Pickering, 1873), p. 514.

<sup>62</sup> See Newman, GA, V, § 1. For more on conscience described as the ‘voice’ of God, see Terrence Merrigan, ‘Revelation,’ In *The Cambridge Companion to John Henry Newman*, ed. by Ian Ker and Terrence Merrigan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 51.

fundamental role in the process that leads to religious assent. The illative sense, as V.F. Blehl says, ‘requires a moral preparation for the perception of truth and for proper reasoning.’<sup>63</sup>

All of the elements of Newman’s thought that I have mentioned so far—the persuasion that assent is unconditional, the difference between real and notional assent, the informal inference, the illative sense, the role of conscience and moral responsibility—emphasize Newman’s conviction that real assent is due to an amazingly high quantity of factors, only a few of which can be clearly determined. Even the ‘most elaborate exhibitions’ of logic—so Newman says—‘fail to represent adequately the sum-total of considerations by which an individual mind is determined in its judgment of things.’<sup>64</sup> From this it follows that the more distant the views adopted by debaters are, the more inconclusive their debates are destined to be. As Newman openly claims, ‘I do not talk to those who are too far from me on a number of questions.’<sup>65</sup>

When all is said and done, let me notice that this approach to inconclusiveness is far different from the one on which I focus in this dissertation. Newman endorses the idea that inconclusiveness of debates is simply due to the exceedingly complicated nature of human knowledge. This leads to the conclusion that, had we the opportunity to reduce the complicatedness at stake, clarity and conclusiveness would inversely proportionally increase—which is confirmed by the fact that, for Newman, no inconclusiveness can be found in debates that are so simple and short that it is impossible to get confused.<sup>66</sup>

I instead hypothesize that believers are expected not to give up on their commitment to God even if the arguments that oppose their faith appeared to be rationally sound and convincing. The inconclusiveness at stake needs therefore to be taken into consideration with a reference to the specific way faith relates to reason--which Newman, like Plantinga and other Reformers, does not take into account. Unlike Locke, they convincingly reject the idea that religious belief should be

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<sup>63</sup> V. F. Blehl, ‘The Role of Education in the Formation of Conscience and the Illative Sense.’ In *Internationale Cardinal Newman Studien Elfte Folge: Achter Newman-Congress Freiburg*, ed. by H. Fries, W. Becker and G. Biemer (Nuernberg: Glock und Lutz, 1980), p. 146.

<sup>64</sup> See Newman, GA, VIII, § 1, n. 2.

<sup>65</sup> Newman, GA, X, § 2, n.1.

<sup>66</sup> ‘When an argument is in itself and by itself conclusive of a truth, it has by a law of our nature the same command over our assent, or rather the truth which it has reached has the same command, as our senses have. Certainly our intellectual nature is under laws, and the correlative of ascertained truth is unreserved assent. But I am not speaking of short and lucid demonstrations; but of long and intricate mathematical investigations; and in that case, though every step may be indisputable, it still requires a specially sustained attention and an effort of memory to have in the mind all at once all the steps of the proof, with their bearings on each other, and the antecedents which they severally involve; and these conditions of the inference may interfere with the promptness of our assent.’ (Newman, GA, VI, § 1).

held by way of argument. However, they do not seem to focus on the proper tenacity of faith in the face of counter-evidence, which I intend to argue depends on the specific relationship that faith requires with reason.

In the next chapter, I will focus on Thomas Reid's thought on religious belief. Unlike the thinkers considered so far, Reid makes a reference to the relationship between faith and reason. Like them, he does not develop a systematic reflection on the subject. Therefore, he is unable to see what effects the relationship between faith and reason could have with respect to the theme here under consideration of the spiritual turn.

## CHAPTER 2

### **Thomas Reid: Philosophy, Science, and the Christian Revelation**

In this chapter I focus on Reid's reference to the specific way the Christian faith seems to require to be related to rational arguments. I start showing that two aspects of his thought seem to be irreconcilable with one another. On the one hand, Reid constantly refers to the substantive benefits which mankind has received from the Christian revelation. On the other hand, the investigations—both philosophical and scientific—which Reid conducts are not supported by any appeal to religious beliefs. I argue that a closer inspection of these investigations shows, on the contrary, that the two aspects just mentioned are compatible with one another, and that this compatibility is what Reid believes the Christian faith requires once related to reason.

#### **2.1 On the supposed Incompatibility, in Reid's Thought, between divine Revelation's Influence on Reason and autonomous rational Investigations**

For Reid, human beings are provided with knowing faculties —both sensory and intellectual— whose reliability has wrongly been put into doubt by the sceptic outcomes of the theory of ideas. Though Reid admires Hume's genius<sup>1</sup>, he famously rejects Humean scepticism, whose conclusions appear 'so shocking to the common sense of mankind, and so contrary to the decisions of all our intellectual powers.'<sup>2</sup> Against such scepticism, Reid praises not only the natural ability to make appropriate use of evidence,<sup>3</sup> which only some possess, but also the instinctive belief in the

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<sup>1</sup> In a letter addressed to the author of the *Treatise of Human Nature*, Reid writes: 'I shall always avow myself your disciple in metaphysics. I have learned more from your writings in this kind, than from all others put together' ('Letter to David Hume,' *The Correspondence of Thomas Reid*, ed. by Paul Wood [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002], hereafter *Correspondence*, p. 31).

<sup>2</sup> Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (1785), ed. by Derek R. Brookes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), hereafter EIP, II, xiv, p. 187.

<sup>3</sup> See EIP, II, xxi, p. 238: 'It is, no doubt, the perfection of a rational being to have no belief but what is grounded on intuitive evidence, or on just reasoning.'

deliverances of our senses, with which all of human beings have been provided.<sup>4</sup> The author of everything must be thanked for this:

I consider this instinctive belief as one of the best gifts of Nature. I thank the Author of my being, who bestowed it upon me before the eyes of my reason were opened, and still bestows it upon me, to be my guide where reason leaves me in the dark. And now I yield to the direction of my senses, not from instinct only, but from confidence and trust in a faithful and beneficent Monitor, grounded upon the experience of his paternal care and goodness.<sup>5</sup>

The reliability of our senses cannot reasonably be denied if we consider that ‘we come into the world without the exercise of reason; we are merely animal before we are rational creatures; and it is necessary for our preservation, that we should believe many things before we can reason.’<sup>6</sup>

These few references to Reid’s epistemology highlight the role played by the author of everything—whom Reid calls indifferently God, the Author of nature, and Nature; they also emphasize a line of reasoning which is developed autonomously from religious beliefs—the reliability of our instinctive beliefs emerges in fact as rationally undeniable.

It is unclear, however, how these two aspects of Reid’s reflection relate to one another. Attempts to explain whether or not a logical priority is ascribed by Reid to his religious convictions over his philosophical and scientific reasoning have unsurprisingly given rise to mutually contrasting interpretations of his epistemology. On the one hand, there is the idea that Reid’s reliabilism is justified by the belief that God would not let us be deceived by our natural faculties. He explicitly says that even ‘highly civilized’ nations, ‘greatly enlightened in many arts and sciences’ held ‘the grossest absurdities’ with regard to various subjects. Human beings—so Reid claims—may be ignorant of even self-evident truths, and the ‘corruptions’ which follow from such mistakes require ‘a light from heaven’ so as to be corrected.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, there is the conviction that the reliabilism in question was developed without any appeal to religion. As a matter of fact, Reid never justifies rational beliefs by having recourse to religious ones, and, not surprisingly, considers

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<sup>4</sup> Common sense knowledge and its principles, which is especially grounded in senses’ operation, possess ‘the consent of ages and nations, of the learned and unlearned, [which] ought to have great authority with regard to first principles, where every man is a competent judge’ (EIP, VI, iv, p. 464). According to Reid, common sense is that ‘degree of understanding which makes a man capable of acting with common prudence in the conduct of life’ and at the same time ‘makes him capable of discovering what is true and what is false in matters that are self-evident, and which he distinctly apprehends’ (EIP, VI, ii, p. 426).

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* (1764), ed. by Derek R. Brookes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), hereafter IHM, VI, xx, p. 170.

<sup>6</sup> EIP, II, xxi, pp. 238f.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Active Powers of Man* (1788), in *The Works of Thomas Reid*, ed. by William Hamilton, hereafter EAP, V, ii, p. 641.

sciences such as mathematics exemplary because they make ‘no room for authority, nor for prejudice of any kind.’<sup>8</sup>

For Norman Daniels, it is in a sort of providential order that Reid grounds the idea that, by natural constitution, we are not led to false beliefs: ‘Reid justifies natively given “common sense” beliefs through a dogmatic appeal to God as a non-deceiver.’<sup>9</sup> Derek Brookes has argued that such appeal to both God’s existence and his providence has been made by Reid to justify natural laws and the reliability of our cognitive faculties.<sup>10</sup> In other words, that there are laws of nature and that we are not deceived by our cognitive faculties is ultimately due to the providential order established by God. Finally, for a scholar of Hume such as D. F. Norton, Reid and other Scottish thinkers (especially George Turnbull, whose classes seem to have deeply shaped the adolescent Reid’s thought) cultivated a ‘providential naturalism’ or ‘curious supernatural naturalism.’<sup>11</sup> According to Norton’s reading of Reid’s epistemology, our natural faculties ‘are God-given, are a part of the overall design of a providential nature, and can be trusted implicitly... What we naturally believe is in fact supernaturally guaranteed.’<sup>12</sup>

Referring to Daniels’s thesis mentioned above, Keith DeRose says instead that ‘Reid would be absolutely scandalized by the claim that he justifies common sense by an appeal to God as a non-deceiver.’<sup>13</sup> This would in fact imply for Reid to make the same mistake of circularity he rightly accused Descartes of. In line with this view, Philip De Bary argues that Reid’s response to scepticism ‘does not depend on his religious belief in any essential respect.’<sup>14</sup> Reid, in other words, by no means needs a recourse to supernatural reality so as to rationally support the reliabilism he

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas Reid, *A Brief Account of Aristotle’s Logic, with Remarks* (1774), hereafter *Brief Account*, in *Thomas Reid on Logic, Rhetoric, and the Fine Arts: Papers on the Culture of Mind*, ed. by Alexander Broadie (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 142 (see below, note 27).

<sup>9</sup> Norman Daniels, *Thomas Reid’s ‘Inquiry’: the Geometry of Visibles and the Case for Realism* (New York: B. Franklin, 1974), 1<sup>st</sup> ed., p. 120. Daniels modified such a view in the second edition of the work mentioned, as shown in Patrick Rysiew, ‘Reid and Epistemic Naturalism,’ *The Philosophical Quarterly* 52 (2002), p. 438.

<sup>10</sup> See his edition of Reid’s *Inquiry* (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1997), especially pp. xivff.

<sup>11</sup> See David F. Norton, *David Hume: Common-Sense Moralist, Sceptical Metaphysician* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), especially pp. 202ff. The term ‘providential naturalism’ was coined in his PhD dissertation dated 1966.

<sup>12</sup> Norton, ‘Hume’s Scottish Critics.’ In *McGill Hume Studies*, ed. by David F. Norton, Nicholas Capaldi and Wade Robison (San Diego, CA: Austin Hill Press, 1979), p. 318.

<sup>13</sup> Keith DeRose, ‘Reid’s Anti-Sensationalism and His Realism,’ *The Philosophical Review* 98 (1989), p. 327.

<sup>14</sup> Philip De Bary, *Thomas Reid and Scepticism: His Reliabilist Response* (London and New York: Routledge 2002), p. 5.

adopts. In the same vein, Lehrer and Warner<sup>15</sup> show that, from the fact that Reid believed that our natural faculties are a divine gift and are trustworthy and not fallacious, it does not follow that the trustworthiness and non-fallaciousness in question depend on the assumption that God exists. These authors focus on what Lehrer in his 1989 book devoted to *Thomas Reid*<sup>16</sup> had called ‘the first first principle.’ This principle is one of the first principles of contingent truths, which Reid lists in EIP. Lehrer also calls it ‘metaprinciple,’ because it provides the general reliability of our intellectual powers: *the natural faculties, by which we distinguish truth from error, are not fallacious.*<sup>17</sup> Although this principle may seem to rely on the providential order mentioned above, it ‘does not require any other principle or assumption, not even that of the existence of God.’<sup>18</sup> (In fact, any attempt to establish the trustworthiness of our faculties will presuppose such trustworthiness.) Lehrer’s and Warner’s conclusion is that the first first principle’s truth is self-evident to both theists and atheists ‘as soon as they understand it: all reasoning, whether of science, religion or philosophy, rests upon the assumption of the cogency of the first first principle and all are powerless to refute it.’<sup>19</sup>

Partly in line with the two views I have just mentioned, I am persuaded that in Reid’s thought religion exerts an influence on intellectual investigation but no religious statements are employed to justify rational beliefs. To appropriately argue this view, I will make reference to some arguments that can be found in Reid’s works.

According to Reid, believers should not be tempted to overlook the strength and the autonomy of our intellectual faculties as ‘some good men’ did ‘by zeal for religion.’ They were ‘led to depreciate the human understanding, and to put out the light of nature and reason, in order to exalt that of revelation.’<sup>20</sup> Although Reid claims that there are things and phenomena ‘whose existence is certain though their cause be occult,’ this does not imply any form of religiously motivated agnosticism. On the contrary, ‘to acknowledge this, is only a candid confession of human ignorance, than which

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<sup>15</sup> Keith Lehrer and Bradley Warner, ‘Reid, God and Epistemology,’ *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 74 (2000), pp. 357ff.

<sup>16</sup> Lehrer, *Thomas Reid* (London: Routledge, 1989).

<sup>17</sup> See EIP, VI, v, p. 480.

<sup>18</sup> Lehrer and Warner, p. 361

<sup>19</sup> Lehrer and Warner, p. 372. For Reid, however, ‘there are certain ways of reasoning even about them [the first principles], by which those that are just and solid may be confirmed, and those that are false may be detected.’ (EIP, VI, iv, p. 463). According to William P. Alston, ‘not only is there no significant reason to doubt them [our native belief-tendencies]; in addition, they confirm their own claim’ (‘Thomas Reid on Epistemic Principles,’ *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 2 (1985), pp. 448f.).

<sup>20</sup> EAP, IV, xi, p. 636. I share Dale Tuggy’s persuasion that, for Reid, by defaming reason and exalting revelation, ‘Calvinism and Bayle... paved the way for Hume and other critics of religion’ (‘Reid’s Philosophy of Religion,’ *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Reid*, ed. by Terence Cuneo and René van Woudenberg [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004], p. 289).

there is nothing more becoming a philosopher.’<sup>21</sup> In regard to the widespread tendency to believe that qualities cannot exist without a related substance, for example, Reid confesses that he is not able to explain ‘how we know that they cannot exist without a subject, any more than ... how we know that they exist.’<sup>22</sup>

Equally philosophically acceptable, and not in need of any appeal to God as a non-deceiver, is the criticism that Reid addresses against the ideal system, which in his eyes is simply not philosophically sustainable. While reflecting on those who ask us why we believe that the material objects we perceive really exist, and claim that we should reject this belief since we are not able to rationally argue in its support, Reid rhetorically asks: ‘Why, sir, should I believe the faculty of reason more than that of perception? They came both out of the same shop, and were made by the same artist.’<sup>23</sup> (This passage might be read as an appeal to God who is the creator of both the faculties at stake. What I intend to highlight, however, is the line of reasoning adopted by Reid: given the fact that both faculties have the same origin, which Reid’s interlocutor apparently accepts, it would not make sense to accept one and reject the other.) Therefore, it is merely from a philosophical viewpoint that Reid offers arguments aimed at showing the limits which lie at the basis of the intellectual proposals advanced by great and influential thinkers such as Descartes and Hume.<sup>24</sup> Their system ‘admits only one of the principles of common sense as a first principle; and pretends, by strict argumentation, to deduce all the rest from it.’<sup>25</sup> All of our natural faculties, and not only some of them, are instead trustworthy and non-fallacious.<sup>26</sup> That which the order of the world provides is entirely reliable, and must be used in accordance with its own nature. If so, our intellectual faculties do not fail, as it is confirmed by mathematics, which Reid praises as paradigmatic science:

I agree with Mr Locke, that there is no study better fitted to exercise and strengthen the reasoning powers, than that of the mathematical sciences—for two reasons: first, because there is no other branch of science which gives such scope to long and accurate trains of reasoning; and, secondly, because, in mathematics there is no room for authority, nor for prejudice of any kind, which may give a false bias to the judgment.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> EIP, II, viii, p. 120.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., II, xix, p. 218.

<sup>23</sup> IHM, VI, xx, p. 169.

<sup>24</sup> Reid convincingly shows significant inconsistency in the thought of both thinkers. Like Descartes, whose intention to accept only what is ‘clear and distinct’ is not based on equally clear and distinct criterion (see EIP, II, xx, pp. 229f.), Hume aimed at rejecting the existence of both material and spiritual things without being aware that the belief that impressions and ideas exist is ‘as little supported by reason as that of the existence of minds and bodies’ (see IHM, V, vii, p.71).

<sup>25</sup> IHM, VII, p. 210.

<sup>26</sup> For a convincing argument in support of this thesis, see DeRose, p. 330.

<sup>27</sup> *Brief Account*, p. 142.

After having shown Reid's support for the idea that philosophy and sciences should be developed without recourse to external authority, I intend now to deal with Reid's passages which may lend themselves to the belief that for him the process of knowledge relies on the presupposition of religious belief.

While focusing on the natural principles from which such a process develops, Reid claims that they have been granted us by God:

The first of these principles is, a propensity to speak the truth ... Another original principle implanted in us by the Supreme Being, is a disposition to confide in the veracity of others, and to believe what they tell us. This is the counterpart to the former; and, as that may be called *the principle of veracity*, we shall, for want of a more proper name, call this *the principle of credulity*.<sup>28</sup>

Reid also concentrates upon self-evident truths:

Men may, to the end of life, be ignorant of self-evident truths. They may, to the end of life, entertain gross absurdities. Experience shews that this happens often in matters that are indifferent. Much more may it happen in matters where interest, passion, prejudice, and fashion, are so apt to pervert the judgement.<sup>29</sup>

Inappropriate moral orientation, passions, and prejudices negatively affect any activity, including the understanding of self-evident truths. By contrast, good habits, good examples, and precepts of wisdom and virtue support such understanding. For Reid, they can openly be related to Christianity:

The history of past ages shews that nations, highly civilized and greatly enlightened in many arts and sciences, may, for ages, not only hold the grossest absurdities with regard to the Deity and his worship, but with regard to the duty we owe to our fellow-men ... Such corruptions in religion and in morals had spread so wide among mankind, and were so confirmed by custom, as to require a light from heaven to correct them.<sup>30</sup>

## 2.2 Reid's Appeal to the Christian Revelation: Adherence to God and his Message

I intend now to argue that no contradiction between reason and revelation arises out of the view that I have described so far. I mean that it is precisely on the basis of his religious beliefs that Reid values the intellectual activity and its autonomy from external authority. He claims that 'Reason as

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<sup>28</sup> IHM, VI, xxiv, pp. 193f.

<sup>29</sup> EAP, V, ii, p. 641.

<sup>30</sup> Ibidem.

well as Revelation comes from God. Both are lights afforded us by the Father of Light.<sup>31</sup>

Consequently, no contradiction can arise between such lights, to which it can apply what Reid says about reason and perception, namely, that ‘they came both out of the same shop, and were made by the same artist.’<sup>32</sup> As a consequence,

We ought to make the best use of both [reason and revelation], and not to put out one that we may use the other. ... As one Man may enlighten another in things that can be discovered by Reason, it is easy to conceive how a Revelation from Heaven may give men new Light in things which Reason can discover. ... But this is no Reason why we should not make the best Use we can of our Reason ... Revelation is given to us as reasonable Creatures, not to hinder the Use of Reason, but to aid and encourage it.<sup>33</sup>

For Reid, not only does divine revelation exert an influence on human reason; God’s revelation also ‘encourages’ our reason, of which we should make ‘the best Use we can’. Elsewhere he emphasizes this persuasion by saying that ‘Revelation was not intended to supersede, but to aid the use of our natural faculties.’<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, this use greatly helps to preserve a correct interpretation of divine revelation:

Revelation was given (to) us not to hinder the exercise of our reasoning powers, but to aid and assist them. It is by reason that we must judge whether that revelation be really so; it is by reason that we must judge of the meaning of what is revealed; and it is by reason that we must guard against any impious, inconsistent, or absurd interpretations of that revelation.<sup>35</sup>

It is now clear that in Reid’s thought there is no room for Cartesian appeal to the providential order of the world and to God as a non-deceiver. Such an appeal would clearly ‘supersede the use of our natural faculties,’ which is something Reid openly rejects. At the same time, a recourse to God and his revelation is undeniable. Not only can revelation offer us ‘new Light in things which Reason can discover;’ even the encouragement to its best use is supported and promoted by divine revelation.

Let me now proceed to offer some passages which clearly document Reid’s optimism about the potentialities of reason. Reid’s optimism emerges especially from some passages concerning the mistakes that have been made by the representatives of the ideal system. As I have already said, Reid considers their conclusions clearly unacceptable. Even if geniuses like Hume had made remarkable mistakes, however, we should not lose the trust in our intellectual abilities: ‘Is this to be

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<sup>31</sup> *Thomas Reid on Practical Ethics. Lectures and Papers on Natural Religion, Self-Government, Natural Jurisprudence and the Law of Nations*, ed. by Knud Haakonssen (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), hereafter *Practical Ethics*, p. 9.

<sup>32</sup> See above, note 23.

<sup>33</sup> *Practical Ethics*, p. 9.

<sup>34</sup> EAP, V, ii, p. 641.

<sup>35</sup> *Thomas Reid on Religion*, ed. by James Foster (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2017); this quote is from the Natural Theology Lecture 73<sup>rd</sup>, p. 1.

despaired of, because Des Cartes and his followers have failed? By no means. This pusillanimity would be injurious to ourselves and injurious to truth.<sup>36</sup> We should instead trust in our cognitive faculties and their philosophical deployment:

If philosophy contradicts itself, befools her votaries, and deprives them of every object worthy to be pursued or enjoyed ... Is it not possible she may have been misrepresented? Have not men of genius in former ages often made their own dreams to pass for her oracles? ... I have found her in all other matters an agreeable companion, a faithful counsellor, a friend to common sense, a top the happiness of mankind.<sup>37</sup>

Reid's optimism about reason leads him to claim that we should value even the efforts made by those who have misrepresented philosophy and have made substantive mistakes:

Instead of blaming the philosophers I have mentioned for the defects and blemishes of their system, we ought rather to honour their memories, as the first discoverers of a region in philosophy formerly unknown...however lame and imperfect the system may be, they have opened the way to future discoveries...have removed an infinite deal of dust and rubbish...have put us in the right road.<sup>38</sup>

This view, however, seems to be contradictory. As I have said above, it claims the coexistence of the influence of revelation on reason with the autonomy of reason from revelation. To assess the meaning and the reasonableness, if any, of this view, we need to have recourse to Reid's religious point of view. This may allow us to consider his appeal to the providential order of the world as based on a specifically theological conception of the Christian revelation and of the way it requires to be related to any human activity, including the rational one.

Unfortunately, no scholarly theological treatments of these topics can be found in Reid's works, mainly devoted to philosophy and sciences.<sup>39</sup> It is reasonable to believe, however, that, being not only a Christian but also a minister of his Church, the 'Kirk,' Reid was naturally influenced by some theological views. As A. Broadie has pointed out, 'the Kirk's belief system and its institutions informed his soul, and therefore informed his philosophy also.'<sup>40</sup> Not surprisingly, Reid's reflection resonates with the typically Reformed stress placed not only on the limitations of philosophical knowledge but also on the gratitude and trust seen as appropriate characteristics of the human

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<sup>36</sup> IHM, I, viii, p. 23.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., I, viii, p. 24.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., I, iv, p. 18.

<sup>39</sup> As Tuggy has appropriately said, while Reid had 'a life-long interest in what we now call philosophy of religion issues', he 'wasn't given to theological and ecclesiastical controversies' (Tuggy, p. 289).

<sup>40</sup> Alexander Broadie, 'Reid in Context.' In *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Reid*, p. 32.

relationship with God.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, the belief that the divine revelation exerts an influence on human reason, and that this may improve the employment of our intellectual abilities, is a widespread one among various branches of Christianity, not only within the Reformed tradition; one may go so far as to claim that it characterizes the whole history of the relation between the Christian revelation and the development of the Western civilization.

At any rate, Reid's conviction that the divine revelation can influence reason and at the same time promote its autonomy is precisely the one Thomas Aquinas extensively supports in his theological reflection, which is one of the most influential in the history of Christianity.<sup>42</sup> In the next chapter I will treat Aquinas's thoughts on this subject in detail. I will argue that Thomas Aquinas's theological reflection on faith and reason offers the opportunity to reconstruct a viable view of how Reid combines the influence of divine revelation with the autonomy of the rational activity. Like Reid, Aquinas was firmly persuaded not only that human reason, if appropriately used, cannot be wrong, but also that there cannot be contradiction between well conducted rational investigations and religious beliefs. Unlike Reid, however, Aquinas was a theologian, and explicitly theorized about a view of how divine revelation can influence our knowing processes without replacing the autonomous employment of our rational faculties. According to Aquinas, the believers are expected to reject any rational argument which opposes their religious view—however convincing the argument in question may at first glance appear to be—and to confirm also from the merely rational point of view what they already accept as true by faith.

In this chapter, I limit myself to showing the effects that, in Reid's thought, *adherence* to God and his revelation seem to have on the intellectual activity. Because of such adherence, the faithful seem to firmly hold various beliefs, among which: (1) religious beliefs, at least the fundamental ones such as the existence of God and his revelation through Christ, are true; (2) human reason, if appropriately employed, cannot contradict them. These convictions seem to take part in Reid's rational inquiries. (Not only (1) and (2) but also the consequences that I am about to mention in regard to Reid's thought, are extensively treated and argued by Aquinas, as I will show in Chapter

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<sup>41</sup> Wolterstorff argues that these three elements--humility, active gratitude and trust—characterize what he names 'Reid's epistemological piety' (See Wolterstorff, *Thomas Reid and the Story of Epistemology* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001], Chapter X, especially pp. 260f.; a longer version of this chapter is in *Thomas Reid: Context, Influence and Significance*, ed. by Joseph Houston [Edinburgh: Dunedin academic Press 2004], pp. 77-101). According to David Fergusson, in this view of Reid's epistemology Wolterstorff 'encapsulates' a host of Reformed tenets among which are 'a stress on the limits of human knowledge' and 'a sense of an overarching divine providence' (David Fergusson, 'Reformed Theology in the British Isles.' In *The Cambridge Companion to Reformed Theology*, ed. by Paul Nimmo and David Fergusson [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016], p. 256).

<sup>42</sup> See below, Chapter 3, note 1.

3.<sup>43</sup>) On the one hand, Reid adheres to God and his revelation, from which it follows that he holds (1)-(2). On the other hand, this does not limit the rational autonomy of his investigations. On the contrary, he believes that such investigations must be conducted autonomously from any authority, including the religious one. For Reid,

*in all matters belonging to our cognizance, every man must be determined by his own final judgement, otherwise he does not act the part of a rational being. Authority may add weight to one scale; but the man holds the balance, and judges what weight he ought to allow to authority.*<sup>44</sup>

Because of the adherence mentioned above, Reid employs (1)-(2) not only in the course of his epistemological investigations but also, and perhaps more significantly, in the context of his scientific research. While treating scientific topics, in fact, Reid clearly sticks to his religious views and rejects any scientific thesis which may be incompatible with them; he also uses reason to the best of his abilities, and effectively replies with the same methods employed by his opponents. In this way, he acts consistently with his rejection of Cartesian circularity. Unlike Descartes, he does not appeal to God as a non-deceiver. Instead, he limits himself to employing the abovementioned methods, which all scientists, not only those who believe in God, are expected to consider plausible. At the same time, given the adherence mentioned above, he endeavours to defeat any view which may appear to oppose his religious convictions; furthermore, he seems to be sure that the abovementioned methods will not lead us astray if they are consistent with the right employment of our cognitive faculties.

### **2.3 Reid as Critic of religiously unacceptable scientific Views**

In Reid's view, common sense, philosophy, and sciences are all intimately related to one another. For him, 'philosophy has no other root but the principles of Common Sense,'<sup>45</sup> and Newton's *regulae philosophandi* 'are maxims of common sense, and are practised every day in common life.'<sup>46</sup> In other words, 'he who philosophizes by other rules, either concerning the material system or concerning the mind, mistakes his aim.'<sup>47</sup> Consequently, the study of both matter and the mind

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<sup>43</sup> Aquinas and Reid have already been compared to each other, although this has been done on another topic. In the book I have already cited in note 38, Wolterstorff focuses on affinities and differences between their understanding of the concept of wisdom (See Wolterstorff, pp. 250-5).

<sup>44</sup> EIP, V, viii, p. 528, emphasis added.

<sup>45</sup> IHM, I, iv, p. 19. For Reid's definition of common sense, see above note 6.

<sup>46</sup> IHM, I, i, p. 12.

<sup>47</sup> IHM, I, i, p. 12.

is based on common sense, which Reid considers a trustworthy and non-fallacious mean to the end of knowledge, gratuitously and providentially conceded by God to all human beings.

As a result, the optimism with which Reid looks at common sense as a reliable ground for knowledge can also apply to natural sciences. These disciplines occupy a significant portion of Reid's thought because, as has been said, the study of nature is for him an appropriate way 'by which we come to apprehend the wisdom and design of the Almighty.'<sup>48</sup> (Not surprisingly, it has also been said that 'among all the great eighteenth-century philosophers, Reid is arguably the most learned and expert concerning scientific issues.'<sup>49</sup>)

In the study of nature, Reid is guided by the conviction that observation and experiment must be adopted,<sup>50</sup> while any inclination to build science on abstract convictions which lack reference to common experience must be avoided:

Conjectures and theories are the creatures of men, and will always be found very much unlike the creatures of God. If we would know the works of God, we must consult themselves with attention and humility, without daring to add anything of ours to what they declare.<sup>51</sup>

I intend now to focus on some disputes Reid had with those who seemed to lack the abovementioned alliance and balance between, on the one hand, common sense—and its consistency with religion, which Reid considered simply indispensable—and, on the other hand, scientific disciplines. One repercussion of this must have been for him the contemporary widespread tendency to reduce all beings to matter and consequently consider everything measurable (probably in an attempt 'to replicate in moral philosophy the success of natural philosophy'<sup>52</sup>). Though highly competent in many scientific fields,<sup>53</sup> Reid resisted such a

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<sup>48</sup> Robert Callergard, 'Thomas Reid's Newtonian Theism: his differences with the classical arguments of Richard Bentley and William Whiston,' *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 41 (2010), p. 110.

<sup>49</sup> Cuneo and van Woundenbergh, 'Introduction.' In *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Reid*, p. 3

<sup>50</sup> See IHM, I, i, p. 11: 'Wise men now agree, or ought to agree, on this, that there is but one way to the knowledge of nature's works—the way of observation and experiment.'

<sup>51</sup> IHM, I, I, p. 12. For Reid, as has been said, 'the "votaries of the ideal system" display *hubris* not simply because they do not patiently observe nature ... but also because they prefer *their own* imaginings and thoughts ... to nature's laws' (Michael Pakaluk, 'A defence of Scottish Common Sense,' *The Philosophical Quarterly* 52 (2002), p. 578).

<sup>52</sup> Haankonssen, 'Introduction.' In *Practical Ethics*, p. xxxvi.

<sup>53</sup> Among them, Reid successfully cultivated mathematics, and was convinced of its valuable role in stating and testing theories (see EIP, 6.4, pp. 456f.). For him, mathematics is especially liable to be rigorously conducted without indulging into personal 'imaginings and thoughts,' and this is why it can successfully apply to the study of natural phenomena.

widespread tendency, which was accompanied by a ‘totally misleading analogy between body and mind.’<sup>54</sup>

I shall argue in two steps that Reid opposed such a misleading analogy as well as the confusion between mind and body with a stance that avoids the opposite extremes of materialism and idealism and consequently supports the traditional conception of human beings as both immaterial and material creatures of God.

### 2.3.1 Against both Materialism and Idealism

In a short paper entitled *An Essay on Quantity*,<sup>55</sup> Reid argues against the possibility for the human mind to be measured. He criticizes the view promoted by Francis Hutcheson’s *Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, according to which the morality of our actions can be measured. At the very beginning of his essay, Reid provides the readers with a clear understanding of the issue at stake and the reason for him to deal with it:

Since it is thought that mathematical demonstration carries a peculiar evidence along with it, which leaves no room for further dispute, it may be of some use, or entertainment at least, to inquire to what subjects this kind of proof may be applied. Mathematics contain properly the *doctrine of measure*; and the object of this science is commonly said to be *quantity*; therefore quantity ought to be defined, *what may be measured*. Those who have defined quantity to be *whatever is capable of more or less*, have given too wide a notion of it, which, it is apprehend, has led some persons to apply mathematical reasoning to subjects that do not admit of it.<sup>56</sup>

As I have already pointed out, Reid, like many of his contemporaries, values mathematics and its incomparable perspicuity, accuracy, and certainty. From this, however, it does not follow that, for him, its method can apply to any possible subject. Reid disagrees with Hutcheson, according to whom things like tastes, smells, wisdom, virtue, merit, and so on, can be mathematically approached and measured. From the fact—which Reid acknowledges—that they are ‘capable of more or less,’ it does not follow that they can be subjected to *measurement*. The reason why is that

whatever has quantity, or is measurable, must be made up of parts, which bear proportion to one another and to the whole; so that it may be increased by *addition* of like parts, and diminished by *subtraction*, may be *multiplied* and *divided*, and, in a word, may bear

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<sup>54</sup> Haankonssen, p. xxxvi.

<sup>55</sup> This essay was his first published paper: *An Essay on Quantity* (1748), in *The Works of Thomas Reid*, pp. 715-720, hereafter *On Quantity*.

<sup>56</sup> *On Quantity*, p. 715

any proportion to another quantity of the same kind, that one line or number can bear to another.<sup>57</sup>

This empirical evidence is obviously incompatible with things like virtue and merit, and effectively supports Reid's conviction that operations of the mind cannot be measured. Reid therefore employs against the supporters of the universal application of mathematics the empirical method they themselves adopt. (He also explains why they may be misled into error. First, they understandably look for something which will enable them 'to conceive more easily and more distinctly to express and demonstrate the properties and relations of those things that have real quantity.'<sup>58</sup> Second, describing mental operations is a difficult and easily puzzling enterprise because it is easy to confuse mental states and external objects.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, for this confusion, as Callergard has pointed out, Reid recognizes two reasons. One is the fact that 'our mental capacities are suited to be used in dealing with everyday issues, such as external objects. The science of the mind is not a very natural pursuit for the mind.'<sup>60</sup> The other reason is the fact that 'almost all the words, by which we express the operations of the mind, are borrowed from material objects. To understand, to conceive, to imagine, to comprehend, to deliberate, to infer, and many others, are words of this kind.'<sup>61</sup>)

A reflection against the inclination to consider all beings material is offered by Reid while discussing the view presented by Buffon (1707-1788) in his *Histoire Naturelle*. Natural history, comprising many sub-disciplines such as the classification, anatomy and physiology of plants and animals as well as the study of geology and human nature, was of interest to Reid for much of his life. A few years after the publication of Buffon's voluminous work had started (1748), Reid engaged in its reading and—as Paul Wood points out—'was soon caught up in a critical confrontation with Buffon's controversial ideas about classification, the history of the earth, the theory of generation and the nature of humankind.'<sup>62</sup>

Of particular interest for our purposes is the fact that Reid rejected Buffon's idea that matter was self-organized. As Reid saw it, for Buffon

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<sup>57</sup> *On Quantity*, p. 715.

<sup>58</sup> *On Quantity*, p. 716

<sup>59</sup> See also IHM I, whose section ii is entitled 'The Impediments to our Knowledge of the mind.'

<sup>60</sup> Callergard, 'Remarks on Thomas Reid's allegedly Newtonian Science of the Human Mind,' *Filosofiska Notiser* 3 (2016), p. 37

<sup>61</sup> EIP, I, iv, p. 54.

<sup>62</sup> Wood, 'Introduction.' In *Thomas Reid on the Animate Creation*, ed. by Wood (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), hereafter AC, p. 4.

the Molecules proper for making the several Parts of the Animal ... by a natural Power or Virtue make various Conjunctions which seem to have life and Motion and perhaps really have so.<sup>63</sup>

Such a view should appear simply unacceptable to a thinker like Reid who engaged in ‘the physiology of plants, animals, and humankind, with the over aim of demonstrating that their vital functions were the result of the actions of immaterial causes.’<sup>64</sup> As I will show in the next section, Reid argued that efficient causes must be immaterial and equipped with active power. Consequently, Reid could not agree with Buffon’s view, which he involved in the criticism that he addressed, with no little irony, against the overt materialism of Helvetius, namely, the

Extravagant Opinion advanced by Helvetius sur l’Esprit and countenanced by Buffon in some parts of his natural Historie. That the chief Difference between Men and Brutes lies in this that Nature has given to Men finer Organs of Touch particularly in the hands and fingers. That Men having by this means a more accurate knowledge of the tangible qualities of Bodies, all their other improvements are owing to this. According to this System it might be said that a man’s Wit lies in his finger ends.<sup>65</sup>

Reid opposed not only materialism<sup>66</sup> but also idealism, taken as the conviction that only ideas exist, and material objects do not. Reid perceived these opposite extremes as (ironically) related to one another. The theory of ideas conceived in fact the mental world on the basis of a strict analogy between mind and matter. This analogy consisted in looking at both mental and material world as composed of parts, which in the case of the former are the simple ideas of which complex ideas are in turn composed. Reid, however, noticed that there was simply no empirical evidence to support the analogy mentioned, as I have shown above while treating Reid’s conviction that no parts and consequently no *ratio* among them has ever been found in the realm of mental operations.<sup>67</sup>

### 2.3.2 In Support of the traditional Coexistence of Matter and the immaterial Mind

Reid’s opposition to both materialism and idealism coheres with his idea that reality shows coexistence and some (although tenuous) commonality between matter and the immaterial mind.

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<sup>63</sup> AC, p. 87

<sup>64</sup> Wood, p. 4.

<sup>65</sup> Thomas Reid, MS 2131/4/i/29, 16, cited in Wood, p. 8.

<sup>66</sup> Let me remind the reader that in Reid’s criticism of materialism, an outstanding role was played by his dispute with Joseph Priestly, a theologian, clergyman and natural philosopher who argued in support of a materialistic interpretation of Newton. Reid rejected this interpretation, which denied what he firmly believed, namely, that Newton’s philosophy was simply antithetical to materialism. (A detailed documentation of the chronological development of such a dispute is offered by Wood, especially pp. 32ff.)

<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, Reid goes so far as to argue that, on closer inspection, there is no evidence in support of even the existence of ideas, as they are conceived by the theory in question. See above note 24, and see also EIP, II, xiv, pp. 171ff.; John Greco, ‘Reid’s Reply to the Skeptic.’ In *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Reid*, pp. 138ff.

Evidence that for Reid matter and the human mind can sometimes be treated analogously is the conviction, which he shares with many of his contemporaries, that both matter and the mind belong to the natural world:

The constitution of the human mind ... may justly be considered as part of the great volume of Nature ... its [of the human mind] powers and faculties, their extent and limits, their growth and decline, and their connection with the state of the body, may, not improperly, be called phaenomena of Nature.<sup>68</sup>

In this view, both matter and the mind can be empirically investigated in an attempt to find *natural laws* and not *causes*, as Rebecca Copenhaver points out.<sup>69</sup> Natural laws are general laws under which we can subsume less general ones, which ultimately are observable facts. Consequently, we can find natural laws by induction, which Reid considers ‘the only way to attain any knowledge of Nature’s work.’<sup>70</sup> A cause is instead ‘that which has power to produce the effect:’ ‘by a cause I mean only an efficient cause which by its active power produces the effect.’<sup>71</sup> Only substances with will, that is, agents provided with the active power to produce an effect, can be considered efficient causes: ‘a being which has no will can have no power...Power in the proper sense is under the command of him who has the power.’<sup>72</sup> As Copenhaver says, this leads Reid ‘to a radically non-necessitarian account of causation.’<sup>73</sup> Only minds can—properly speaking—be called causes,<sup>74</sup> and ‘the voluntary actions of men can in no case be called natural phenomena, or be considered as regulated by the physical laws of Nature.’<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> AC, p.185

<sup>69</sup> See Rebecca Copenhaver, ‘Is Reid a Mysterian?’ *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 44 (2006), pp. 449-66. From this it follows that Reid’s view of the human mind is not ‘mysterian’, namely, as if the mind were in principle inexplicable. Such a ‘mysterian’ view can be found in Wolterstorff, *Thomas Reid and the Story of Epistemology*, p. 261.

<sup>70</sup> EIP, VI, viii, p. 535. Reid seems to have so insightfully understood limits and opportunities of induction that, according to P. Anstey, contemporary inductive fallibilism as well as its denial trace back to Reid’s work (See Peter Anstey, ‘Thomas Reid and the Justification of Induction,’ *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 12 [1995], p. 78).

<sup>71</sup> Reid, ‘Of Power’ (1792), ed. by John Haldane, *The Philosophical Quarterly* 51 (2001), pp. 6 and 9. Reid only accepts the notion of *active* power, while considers ‘a misapplication of the word’ (EAP, I, iii, p. 519) the idea that there also are *passive* powers. On this rigorous employment of the word, which leads Reid to criticize Locke’s account of power, see William L. Rode, ‘Thomas Reid’s Theory of Freedom and Responsibility,’ *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Reid*, p. 224.

<sup>72</sup> ‘Of Power’, pp. 10f.

<sup>73</sup> Copenhaver, p. 454.

<sup>74</sup> Pakaluk concurs with Copenhaver. For him, ‘although Reid accepts Newtonian principles of induction for pneumatology, he does not make the crude mistake of thinking that the characteristics of spiritual beings must be understood on the model of material beings because Reid regards only minds as having active power.’ (Pakaluk, p. 567):

<sup>75</sup> AC, p. 185

The fact that the word ‘cause’ is often applied to natural substances lacking will and freedom is a misunderstanding, due to the ambiguity which is typical of the employment of the word ‘cause:’

It is proper here to explain what is meant by the Cause of a Phenomenon when that word is used in Natural Philosophy. The word Cause is so ambiguous...By the Cause of a Phenomenon nothing is meant but the law of Nature, of which that Phenomenon is an instance or a necessary consequence. The Cause of a body’s falling to the ground is its gravity. But gravity is not an efficient Cause, but a general Law that obtains in Nature of which Law the fall of this body is a particular instance.<sup>76</sup>

Natural philosophy can only search for laws, which are nothing but the rules according to which the efficient causes operate: ‘natural Philosophy has no more to do.’<sup>77</sup> Focusing on efficient causes is instead the task of another branch of philosophy, natural theology or metaphysics. Thus, from the empirical point of view, both matter and the mind can be investigated only if the investigator searches for laws and not for causes. In this connection, Reid notices that, since practitioners of physical sciences have finally abandoned the search for causes, these sciences have significantly improved: they ‘are really sciences.’<sup>78</sup> The same has occurred only partly with the science of mind, which is why this discipline ‘is but in a very low state.’<sup>79</sup>

From what I have said so far it emerges that Reid makes convincing use of empirical evidence and is consequently able to show that matter is inert, namely, lacks the active power that characterizes instead the mind. Reid argues in defence of the traditionally religious persuasion that the core of reality, which is the cause of everything, is immaterial: ‘all causation in nature, then, is ultimately the result of the exercise of God’s agent power or the power of agents subordinate to God.’<sup>80</sup> Reid also supports one more traditional persuasion, namely, the idea that there is some commonality between matter and the mind. As I have shown, they can both be investigated by way of induction to the extent that such an investigation is aimed at finding natural laws.

Once having made clear that the active power and the cause which possesses it cannot be investigated and known from the point of view of natural philosophy, it should be made clear whether or not this somehow limits Reid’s research. Let us consider his treatment of muscular motion, which regards the relation between the nervous power and the will—and ultimately matter

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<sup>76</sup> *Correspondence*, p.142

<sup>77</sup> *Correspondence*, p.143. As Copenhaver says, ‘science cannot know the ultimate causes of things and must rest content with discovering laws of nature’ (p. 452). She also points out that for Reid both natural science and the science of mind are *natural* sciences. In fact, ‘both body and mind are governed by metaphysically contingent laws of nature that describe how the natural world must work, as a matter of contingent necessity’ (p. 466).

<sup>78</sup> IHM, I, iii, p. 16.

<sup>79</sup> IHM, I, iii, p. 16.

<sup>80</sup> Cuneo and van Woudenberg, p. 11.

and the mind—and was widely investigated at Reid’s time. While dealing with this subject matter, Reid may seem to indulge in a position of nescience, because for him ‘all we know is, that in the sound state of the Body the Exertion of the nervous Power immediately follows our Volition.’<sup>81</sup> On the other hand, however, this sort of nescience does not limit—on the contrary, seems to improve—the exploration Reid conducts of the subject in question:

We have a natural Conviction of our being the Cause of our voluntary actions, and therefore accountable for them. ... he that believes a certain Effect to be in his Power and exerts his Power to effect it, is undoubtedly in moral Estimation the Cause of that Effect and accountable for it, whether in Physical Consideration he be really the Efficient, or onely what the Cartesians call the occasional Cause.<sup>82</sup>

Although Reid agrees to the view that, from the standpoint of natural philosophy, it is not possible to deal with whether or not we are really the efficient cause of our voluntary actions, he cannot accept the conclusion some draw from this, which consists in *denying* our freedom and responsibility. If, therefore, the empirical method cannot be employed to show that we are free and responsible agents, Reid develops a straightforward argument which aims at defeating the inference from the limitations of natural philosophy to the negation of human freedom and responsibility. The argument advanced by Reid applies to the realm of ethics, and unfolds as follows: if we naturally believe that we cause our actions, it is not possible for us not to consider ourselves responsible for them. As I said, this is a straightforward as well as effective argument, which allows Reid to support his conviction that we are free and responsible moral agents. Against occasionalism and mechanistic necessitarianism which could both be taken as supporters of the idea that we are not responsible for our actions, Reid must have felt the urgency to support what he certainly considered extremely important in human life: that we can exercise freedom and responsibility in our relationship with God, ourselves, and others.<sup>83</sup>

According to Wood, ‘Reid’s speculations on human physiology were thus conditioned by moral considerations,’ and Reid ‘emphasized our nescience concerning the physical connections between

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<sup>81</sup> AC, p. 119f.

<sup>82</sup> AC, p. 120.

<sup>83</sup> Some may opportunely object that Reid’s insistence on libertarian free will is not based on religious convictions. As James Foster suggests, given ‘the strict Calvinism of the Evangelicals, God’s favour is granted to the elect before any reformation of character... From this perspective, an emphasis on the meritoriousness of a virtuous person smacks of heresy... According to the Moderates, on the other hand, virtue acquisition and righteousness before God go hand in hand. They cannot be easily separated’ (‘Introduction.’ In *Thomas Reid on Religion*, p. 9). However, some form of free will (and responsibility) is undoubtedly part of at least some branches of the Christian tradition, regardless of the exact way they relate it (free will) to God’s favour. In this vein, Reid’s debates against those who tended to *deny the existence of free will* (and responsibility) may plausibly be seen as due to his religious convictions.

mind and body, in order to protect his beliefs in man's free will.'<sup>84</sup> Elsewhere, while discussing Reid's treatment of Buffon's theories on natural history which I have mentioned above, Wood similarly claims that 'his [Reid's] work on generation reveals that Reid was all too willing to withdraw into a posture of nescience about the processes involved in reproduction in order to protect his religious beliefs, and his anxieties about materialism led him to ignore questions which he should perhaps have addressed.'<sup>85</sup>

All I have argued so far leads me to agree with Wood that moral and religious beliefs must have played a fundamental role in Reid's scientific investigations. At the same time, if what I have argued in the course of this essay is right, I have to disagree with Wood that Reid assumed a 'posture of nescience' as a strategy aimed at protecting religious beliefs and avoiding further research. It is true that Reid seems to have conducted his research with the aim of rationally supporting his religious beliefs. From this, however, does not follow that he limited the freedom to conduct research in any possible direction. As I have shown above, he himself openly declared that no philosophical or scientific investigation, *if appropriately conducted*, would be proved harmful to religion,<sup>86</sup> and that his religious view could promote and encourage rational investigation without the fear of being contradicted. In this essay I have argued precisely that, in line with this view, Reid seems to have carried out both his philosophical and scientific research. If the arguments I have developed here are correct, it must be said that Reid must by no means have considered his religious belief in need of being 'protected' by recourse to a posture of nescience.

In conclusion, unlike Newman and the Reformed epistemologists, to whose reflection I devoted Chapter 1, Reid refers to the specific way the Christian faith relates to rational arguments. He clearly points to such a specificity when he affirms that, on the one hand, revelation exerts an influence on reason, whereas, on the other hand, reason cannot be replaced by revelation. According to Reid, it is precisely because of the influence of revelation that believers should employ reason to the best of their ability. As believers, they are expected to rely on the persuasion that, if used appropriately and in accord with its own nature, reason cannot contradict religious belief. In other words, Reid seems to claim that the more religious experience influences reason, the better reason works. In line with this—at least apparently—paradoxical view, Reid seems to be reluctant to accept philosophical and especially scientific views—such as materialism or the negation of human free-will and responsibility—which must obviously appear to him incompatible with his religious

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<sup>84</sup> Wood, p. 30.

<sup>85</sup> Wood, p. 19.

<sup>86</sup> As it has rightly been said, 'in Reid's eyes, the real danger to theism is from bad epistemology' (Tuggy, p. 290).

belief. At the same time, Reid rejects those views by employing against them the same philosophical and scientific strategies that are usually employed in their support. In this way, he seems to reveal the conviction that reason, if used appropriately, cannot but confirm religious beliefs.

However, Reid only mentions such a specific relation between faith and reason, a viable reconstruction of which clearly requires a theological exploration of the nature of faith. Reid never performed such a scholarly theological work. He was a Christian and a minister deeply involved in the life of his Church, and, for this reason, he might not surprisingly have been influenced by theological views, especially if authoritatively conveyed through the Christian tradition. That which in Reid's work may constitute an implicit application of solidly established theological views, needs therefore to be made explicit by referring to Aquinas's theological works. As I have already shown, these works reveal an impressive closeness to Reid's idea of how the Christian faith requires to be related to the intellectual activity.

## PART 2

### The Christian Faith as Part of both the Problem and its Overcoming

In this part, I first focus on Aquinas's theological approach to faith and reason, an approach that could not characterize Reid's philosophical and scientific investigations. Aquinas's view is that, if the Christian beliefs are taken by the faithful as true and revealed to them by God, the believers may feel led to rely more on faith than on reason. Accordingly, they may reject in principle all of those propositions which, even if seemingly convincing, contradict their faith. Obviously enough, this theological view of how the Christian faith needs relating to the intellectual investigation encourages the tenacity of religious belief in the face of counter-evidence. This is why this theological view can be seen as part of the problem of inconclusiveness here under consideration.

I then argue that the abovementioned theological view is incompatible with mere epistemology, and I show why various attempts to minimize the gap between them should be rejected. At the same time, I argue that this theological view offers an opportunity to rethink mere epistemology and to turn it into a wider view, according to which it is the search for good, and not that for truth, that ultimately directs research and debates. This shows that the Christian faith is not only part of the problem of inconclusiveness; it may also be part of its overcoming.

## CHAPTER 3

### **Thomas Aquinas: Primacy of Faith and Autonomy of Reason**

In this chapter, I focus on Aquinas's conviction that contradiction between faith and reason is due to inappropriate employment of reason, since, unlike faith, reason may be mistaken. From this follows that, once confronted with this contradiction, the believer should engage in new investigations aimed at finding rational views that are compatible with religious faith.

Predictably enough, many objections can be raised to this view. I intend to demonstrate that they can plausibly be raised only from the viewpoint which I have so far defined as ‘Lockean,’ namely, as if the relationship between faith and reason were looked at without taking into consideration what seems to be specific of faith, i.e., the divine grace because of which the faithful believe. I first examine and reject various Lockean interpretations of Aquinas. Then, I concentrate upon the theological standpoint from which Aquinas looks at the matter. Finally, I consider the consequences of his view as to the inconclusiveness problem here under consideration.

### 3.1 ‘Lockean’ Approaches to Aquinas’s View of Faith and Reason

It is known that one of the most extensive and historically influential treatments of the relationship between faith and reason is the one provided by Aquinas.<sup>1</sup> It is equally known that Aquinas’s texts can easily be misunderstood and are consequently susceptible to various and sometimes mutually contrasting interpretations. This is probably due to the fact that, as Rudi te Velde has noted, ‘only superficially is he [Aquinas] clear, but on analysis one discovers that he does not at all offer us a decently confined “Anglo-Saxon” lucidity.’<sup>2</sup> John Milbank, while referring to this consideration, claims that in Aquinas’s works it is possible to find passages which seem to incontrovertibly support contrasting positions.<sup>3</sup> A well-known scholar of Aquinas such as Fergus Kerr has even devoted an entire book to ‘the very many ways of contemplating Aquinas,’ which are ‘rival, conflicting, even incommensurable’ with each other.<sup>4</sup>

The variety I have just mentioned applies to readings of Aquinas’s view of faith and reason also. Although scholars of Thomas usually agree with each other that the view in question seems to be an exemplary balance between Christian faith and natural reason, they equally disagree when it comes to the exact meaning of such a balance. Some maintain that Aquinas elaborated his rational views

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<sup>1</sup> His reflection can appropriately be seen as ‘the dominant Western tradition of thought on the subject,’ susceptible of being ‘accepted today by many both Catholic and Protestant Christians, as well as by the agnostic and atheist critics of Christianity’ (John Hick, *Faith and Knowledge. A Modern Introduction to the Problem of Religious Knowledge* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009) 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., p. 12). More recently, Gregory Dawes claimed that ‘few Christians will have read Aquinas, but since his view is widely shared by theologians they may have absorbed it “by osmosis”’ (Gregory Dawes, ‘The Act of Faith: Aquinas and the Moderns.’ In *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion*, ed. by Jonathan Kvanvig, vol. 6 [New York: Oxford University Press, 2015], p. 80).

<sup>2</sup> Rudi te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas* (London: E.J. Brill, 1995), pp. ix-xiv, cited in John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Milbank and Pickstock, p. 18.

<sup>4</sup> Fergus Kerr, ‘The Varieties of Interpreting Aquinas.’ In *Contemplating Aquinas. On the Varieties of Interpretation*, ed. by Kerr (London: SCM Press, 2003), p. 40.

without being under the influence of faith, while others claim that the Christian faith constitutes an indispensable component of Aquinas's rational enterprise.

These conflicting interpretations were discussed on the occasion of the well-known *querelle* on the concept of 'Christian philosophy' which took place in France in the 1930s.<sup>5</sup> Among the readings of the relationship between faith and philosophical reflection in Aquinas's works there presented, I will mention the ones formulated and argued by Étienne Gilson, Pierre Mandonnet, and Jacques Maritain.

Before proceeding, however, I need to register three *caveats*. First, the *querelle* regarded the concept of 'Christian philosophy,' which involved discussions on several pairs of concepts such as faith and reason, faith and philosophy, theology and philosophy, and so on, which do not perfectly coincide with one another. All of them, however, can easily be seen as based on the one in which I am interested here, i.e., the relationship between faith and reason.<sup>6</sup> (Following Thomas, I broadly take here *reason* as a cognitive faculty that searches for evidence,<sup>7</sup> and *faith* as the virtue which leads one to firmly believe the divine revelation though it lacks full evidence.) Second, and more importantly, the fundamental problem with the concept of Christian philosophy coincides with the subject here under consideration. Christian philosophy is perceived to be a sort of oxymoron because it is hard to see how philosophy can be helped and perfected by religious experiences (this is what the title of the book edited by Sadler, *Reason fulfilled by Revelation*, effectively marks) without losing its ability to work on the basis of its own principles. The *querelle* therefore regarded precisely our subject, namely, how to explain the coexistence between the superiority of faith, which claims to perfect any activity, including the rational one, and the autonomy of reason. Third, the *querelle* may sometimes appear to be devoted not only to Aquinas but also to any believer who happens to deal with philosophical matters. In reality, the debates in question were mainly referred to Aquinas, whom all of the thinkers I will mention would certainly have described as follows: 'one who had clarified the faith-reason relationship as perhaps no one else before his time.'<sup>8</sup> Not surprisingly, the *querelle* started with speeches devoted to the more general idea of 'Christian philosophy,' but moved soon to more specific discussions of that idea in the context of Aquinas's

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<sup>5</sup> See *Reason Fulfilled by Revelation. The 1930s Christian Philosophy Debates in France*, ed. by G. B. Sadler (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> 'Faith' can exist without theology, whereas the contrary cannot be; the same can be said of 'reason' if compared to 'philosophy' as well as of 'faith' and 'reason' if compared to 'theology.'

<sup>7</sup> For what exactly 'evidence' and 'evidentness' mean in Aquinas's thought, see below, notes 46ff.

<sup>8</sup> John Wippel, 'Thomas Aquinas and the Problem of Christian Philosophy.' In *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas*, ed. by J. Wippel (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1984), p. 1.

thought. (In this connection, let me notice that secular rationalists such as Brunsvicg and Brehier took part in the first phase of the *querelle*, which was later conducted mainly by Roman Catholics.) Furthermore, the thinkers whose views of faith and reason I am about to take into consideration mostly devoted their investigations to Thomas. What they affirmed regarding the relationship between faith and reason should therefore be taken as mainly offered in light of Aquinas's reflection.

It may be said that the *querelle*—for which meetings were held between 1931 and 1935—was devoted entirely to the concept of 'Christian philosophy' that had been proposed by Etienne Gilson in the early 1920s.<sup>9</sup> Gilson explored the thinking of several representatives about the history of Christianity—especially that of Augustine, Bonaventure, and Aquinas. His conclusion was that their thinking had given rise to authentic philosophies, and not merely theologies, as was usually maintained in those years.<sup>10</sup> The prevailing view, in fact, was that the philosophical reflection should be seen as separate from faith. As Gilson pointed out two decades after the *querelle*, this view involved 'a great many Catholic professors of philosophy,'<sup>11</sup> who had become convinced, in the wake of Descartes's thought, that 'where theology begins, philosophy comes to an end. If we philosophize, we cannot be theologizing at the same time.'<sup>12</sup> Apparently for apologetic reasons, such Christian thinkers had become convinced that, as philosophers, they could deal only with rational evidence. (In this way, they attempted from the outset to reject any charge of confusion between philosophy and their personal views in matters of faith.) In Gilson's eyes, divine revelation had, instead, been a source of philosophical inspiration, which throughout Christianity's history had strongly characterized the reflections of such authors as Justin, Lactantius, Augustine, Anselm, Bonaventure, and Aquinas. Gilson argued that being Christian had offered to them 'a view of the world' which was 'perfectly satisfying to the mind' and 'incomparably more rational than the conclusions of reason.'<sup>13</sup> Studying how such thinkers had developed their reflection led Gilson to conclude that a Christian believer becomes a Christian philosopher 'when amongst his [Christian] beliefs he finds some that are capable of becoming objects of science.'<sup>14</sup> If this prepares the believer

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<sup>9</sup> See for example Étienne Gilson, *La philosophie de saint Bonaventure* (Paris: Vrin, 1924).

<sup>10</sup> Especially Emile Bréhier, well-known historian of philosophy, who took part in the 1931 meeting with which the *querelle* began, opposed Gilson's view that philosophy had achieved new heights because it had been exercised under Christian influences.

<sup>11</sup> Among them, Gilson must have included not only Pierre Mandonnet, to whom I will refer shortly, but also scholars such as Amato Masnovo and Fernand van Steenberghe.

<sup>12</sup> Etienne Gilson, 'What is Christian Philosophy?' In *A Gilson Reader*, ed. by Anton Pegis (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and C., 1957), p. 184.

<sup>13</sup> Gilson, 'What is Christian Philosophy?' p. 178.

<sup>14</sup> Gilson, *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1936), p. 36.

to achieve new philosophical heights, the outcome can be rightly named a ‘Christian philosophy’.

As a matter of fact, such heights had been achieved:

A single God, creator of heaven and earth, Ruler of the world and its Providence, a God Who made man in His own image and revealed to him, along with his last end, the way to attain it—where, in the splendid achievements of Greek philosophy, could one find a view of the world as clear and as perfectly satisfactory to the mind as the one revealed to men by Holy Scripture?<sup>15</sup>

From his philosophico-historical approach to the subject, Gilson concluded that a Christian philosophy had existed, namely, ‘every philosophy which, although keeping the two orders [reason and faith] formally distinct, nevertheless considers Christian revelation as an indispensable auxiliary to reason.’<sup>16</sup> According to Gilson, the philosophies, which he believed to have prevailed especially during the Middle Ages, had clearly emerged under the influence of the Christian faith.

This view was firmly opposed by Pierre Mandonnet, the famous Dominican Thomist and medievalist, as well as others. For Mandonnet, although Christianity had promoted and supported the general progress of humanity, it had not been a factor of philosophical progress. In other words, philosophy must be developed autonomously from divine revelation. Philosophical progress ‘does not take place by Scripture but by reason.’<sup>17</sup> In this view, if philosophers who happen to be Christian are influenced by their religious convictions while developing rational arguments, the product of such an activity should be considered to be theology and not philosophy. On the other hand, if their activity includes no reference to faith (i.e., both believers and non-believers might have undertaken it), such an activity is simply philosophy, and not *Christian* philosophy.

Mandonnet also argued that, although ‘Christian philosophy’ cannot appropriately mean the *reflection* that philosophers who happen to be Christian developed, it must be acknowledged that those *philosophers* do exist. (More precisely, Mandonnet believed that there was only one scholar, among medieval thinkers, who could properly be considered to be a philosopher, namely, Aquinas.<sup>18</sup>) It is with such philosophers that a *de facto* union occurs between Christian truths and philosophical procedure. However, such a union cannot exist *de iure* because of the distinction between Christianity and philosophy. This is a distinction that, as I have shown above, was held by Mandonnet.

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<sup>15</sup> Gilson, ‘What is Christian Philosophy?’, p. 178.

<sup>16</sup> Gilson, *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, p. 37.

<sup>17</sup> *La philosophie chrétienne. Journée d'études de la Société Thomiste* (Juvisy: Éditions du Cerf, 1933), pp. 67f., tr. by G. B. Sadler in *Reason Fulfilled by Revelation*, p. 81.

<sup>18</sup> Mandonnet decisively argued in support of this stance while reviewing Gilson’s *Le philosophie de saint Bonaventure* in *Bulletin Thomiste* 3 (1926), pp. 50-54.

Gilson agreed entirely with Mandonnet's idea that there is a union *de facto* in the person of a philosopher who is a Christian. However, he found Mandonnet's conviction that this union should be accepted *in fact* but not *in right* to be inconsistent. For Gilson, 'if there are relations of fact between faith and reason, between Revelation and philosophy in the concrete subject—if there are in fact relations, I say that it is impossible that there not be relations of right.'<sup>19</sup>

Regardless of how convincing Gilson's position might have appeared to be, many scholars criticized it in the past. Gilson's view that faith was 'an indispensable auxiliary to reason' (the *in right* union that is mentioned above) did not seem reconcilable with his conviction that the influence of faith on reason was a matter of historical fact. Ralph McInerny, for example, claimed that Gilson 'has persuaded everyone of the historical fact of the influence of the faith on philosophy.' However, as McInerny concluded, this is a 'far cry from holding that there is a continuing formal, objective dependence of philosophy on the faith.'<sup>20</sup>

Jacques Maritain's approach to Christian philosophy may be seen as an attempt to bridge the gap under consideration here between historical fact and formally objective dependence. According to Maritain, from Gilson's philosophico-historical approach to the matter, it did not follow that Gilson meant 'to suppress the theoretical question.' Instead, he intended 'to leave it open.'<sup>21</sup> Maritain addressed such a theoretical question by focusing on 'the classical distinction between the order of specification and the order of exercise.'<sup>22</sup> Specifically, he examined the distinction 'between the *nature* of philosophy, of what philosophy is in itself, and the *state* in which it is found factually, historically, in the human subject.'<sup>23</sup> According to Maritain, when 'considered in its pure *nature*, or essence,' philosophy 'depends only on the evidence and criteria of natural reason.' However, if 'taken concretely, in the sense of being a *habitus*,' philosophy 'is in a certain *state*.' This can be Christian or a-Christian and 'has a decisive influence on the way it exists and develops.'<sup>24</sup> (Maritain, however, applies this view only to theoretical philosophy. When it comes to moral

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<sup>19</sup> *La philosophie chrétienne*, pp. 63f., tr. by Ralph McInerny, *Praeambula fidei. Thomism and the God of the Philosophers* (Catholic University of America Press, 2006), p. 94. Looking at Aquinas's theology, for example, Gilson says that 'by its very nature (it) includes not only in fact but necessarily a strictly rational philosophy' (Gilson, *Thomism*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition 1965 [Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2002], p. xiii).

<sup>20</sup> McInerny, *Praeambula fidei*, p. 106.

<sup>21</sup> Jacques Maritain, 'La notion de philosophie chrétienne,' *Bulletin de la Société française de Philosophie* 31 (1931), p. 59.

<sup>22</sup> Maritain, *An Essay on Christian Philosophy* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1955), p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> Maritain, 'La notion de philosophie chrétienne,' p. 59. See also Maritain, *An Essay on Christian Philosophy*, pp. 11f.

<sup>24</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Science and Wisdom* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1938), p. 79.

philosophy, he argues that new distinctions are needed.<sup>25</sup> In this case, not only the state, but also the nature of philosophy, should be related to the Christian faith. A ‘moral philosophy adequately considered,’ as Maritain describes it, ‘must be guided by the knowledge of our ultimate end, which, as Christians we cannot pretend not to know is supernatural.’<sup>26</sup>)

Although not exempt from criticism,<sup>27</sup> the distinction between nature and state appears, at least initially, to offer an acceptable balance between reason and faith. John Wippel has similarly distinguished between the *moment of discovery* and the *moment of proof*.<sup>28</sup> According to Wippel, ‘in the moment of proof his [the Christian's] procedure cannot be described as Christian philosophy.’ In contrast, ‘since in the moment of discovery it was his religious belief that first suggested this particular issue to him as a possible subject for philosophical investigation, one might refer to such a procedure as Christian philosophy in the order of discovery.’<sup>29</sup> In short, beliefs of various origins can contribute to philosophical discourse as suggestions and possible answers for the philosophical process to verify. This process remains ‘philosophical’ only if strictly argumentative, whereas ‘Christian’ is what Wippel names the ‘moment of discovery.’ The latter is a pre-philosophical context from which hypotheses, suggestions and possible answers are drawn.

From the examination so far conducted a problem emerges that is crucial to these interpretations of Thomas’s thought. Though different if not mutually conflicting, all of them end up overlooking the nature of faith and what is specific of it, namely, being caused by God and consequently not in need of being demonstrated by way of argument. The scholars in question treat the relationship between philosophy and the Christian experience as if it regarded, on the one hand, reason, and, on the other, faith as well as any other subjective or cultural condition. The *state* mentioned by Maritain as well as the *de facto* union mentioned by Gilson and Mandonnet and the *moment of discovery* depicted by Wippel may coincide with any possible experience and not only the Christian or the religious one.

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<sup>25</sup> Maritain’s sophisticated differentiations have been seen by P. Redpath as ‘a marvellously orchestrated melange of fine distinctions that is as entertaining to attempt to unravel as is the dance of the dialectic of the Hegelian *wesen*.’ Among the problems Redpath claims such differentiations have raised, there is a questionable concept of philosophy as taken *in itself*. See below, note 27.

<sup>26</sup> See Maritain, *An Essay on Christian Philosophy*, pp. 38ff. Maritain says that moral philosophy is not theology, as many critics argue, but ‘a formally philosophic science subalternated to theology’ (Ibid., p. 86). ‘Theological truths are indispensable for the full constitution of ethics and the object of morals is only adequately known in light of these truths’ (*Science and Wisdom*, p. 109)

<sup>27</sup> Redpath points out that philosophy simply does not exist *in itself*, that is, apart from its state (Peter Redpath, ‘Romance of Wisdom: The Friendship between Jacques Maritain and Saint Thomas Aquinas.’ In *Understanding Maritain: Philosopher and Friend*, ed. by Deal W. Hudson and Matthew J. Mancini [Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987], p. 110)

<sup>28</sup> John Wippel, ‘The possibility of a Christian philosophy: a Thomistic perspective,’ *Faith and Philosophy* 1 (1984), pp. 272-290.

<sup>29</sup> Wippel, ‘The possibility of a Christian philosophy: a Thomistic perspective,’ p. 280.

From this, however, a contradiction follows. These thinkers assume that pre-philosophical experiences that are able to make philosophy move in the right direction may be of various kinds, and not only religious. However, the various cultural and subjective states in question are expected to be also criticized and even rejected by the philosophical reflection. In accordance with a classical view of philosophy, they should be rigorously examined so as to find which of them can be maintained and which of them needs instead to be discarded. But this, once referred to the Christian faith, may never be accepted by the thinkers here at stake. They are in fact all convinced that divine revelation is true and can only improve human enterprises, philosophy included.<sup>30</sup>

This problem is due to the fact that, unlike Aquinas, the thinkers mentioned so far do not focus on what specifically occurs once reason is related *to the Christian faith*, taken as *granted by God* and only partially responsive to rational criteria. They actually seem to start their reflection from the assumption that what may be proper to the faith in question, i.e., its supernatural origin, cannot be taken into account in the context of their philosophical reflection. As a consequence, they do not seem to be in a position to adequately evaluate the idea that faith may exert an influence on reason without compromising the autonomy of rational enterprise.

The above-mentioned assumption that the theological origin of faith should be kept outside of the philosophical investigation on faith and reason seems to perfectly coincide with Locke's approach to the subject. As I have already said in Chapter 1 while focusing on Locke's epistemological problem and its consequences in regard to faith and reason, such an approach lacks any consideration of what seems to be specific of faith, namely, characterized by a high level of certainty that is divinely granted and is not due to demonstration. Furthermore, this 'Lockean' approach to religious belief, based on which the firmness of belief comes in degrees and needs proportioning to the available evidence, has become the dominant model in the field until recent times. It can therefore have influenced many scholars of Aquinas and their way of interpreting Aquinas's view of faith and reason. For Jenkins, they have ascribed to Thomas the conviction that

the Christian believer is first convinced by metaphysical arguments of natural or philosophical theology that God exists. Subsequently he believes on the basis of testimony and other evidence that there were miracles and signs in biblical times and in the history of the Church. From these beliefs he is led to the conclusion that God has made revelations in

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<sup>30</sup> Of course, there are aspects of the experience lived by the believer that these thinkers as well as Aquinas may consider in need of being criticized and even rejected. In this case, it can be said that the believer mistakes his or her own conjectures for the Christian faith. As Aquinas openly claims, 'it is possible for a believer to have a false opinion *through a human conjecture*, but it is quite impossible for a false opinion to be *the outcome of faith*' (*Summa theologiae* II-II q. 1 a. 3 ad 3, emphasis added).

history, and the essence of these revelations is contained in the Christian Creed as this is defined by the Church.<sup>31</sup>

However, no matter how widespread this view is, Aquinas cannot reasonably be considered a ‘proto-Lockean’. While ‘Locke thought that in a normal case whether or not one assented to a proposition as divinely revealed is a matter of reason, ... Aquinas explicitly states that Christian faith requires something more than natural principles.’ Moreover—so Jenkins goes on—‘Locke recognized that on his account the assent of faith is much less certain than that of knowledge.’ In Aquinas’s view, on the contrary, ‘the faithful hold the articles of faith with even greater certainty than the principle of non-contradiction.’<sup>32</sup>

Unlike Locke, Aquinas considers the certainty of faith firmer than the one provided by reason. Thomas’s perspective is a theological one. For him, faith is caused by God and does not need to be grounded on evidence. From this theological view of faith, as I will show in the next section, Thomas draws conclusions on the relationship between faith and reason which are substantially different from not only the Lockean ones but also the readings of Aquinas’s thought which I have mentioned above.

Before moving on to the next section, in which I will examine Aquinas’s view of faith and reason as it emerges from his writings, I intend to further point out that the fact that Thomas’s views are often seen as if they had rather been elaborated by Locke can also be confirmed by a recent debate on faith and reason. This debate deals with the relationship between faith and propositional belief and has received significant attention especially since John Schellenberg questioned the idea that faith involves propositional belief.<sup>33</sup>

As I have said in Chapter 1,<sup>34</sup> that faith involves propositional belief is a traditional view. On the one hand, faith includes propositional beliefs such as that God exists; on the other hand, faith is

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<sup>31</sup> Jenkins, ‘Faith and Revelation,’ pp. 215f. Jenkins points out that this view of Aquinas’s thought is accepted by Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, pp. 20f.; Terence Penelhum, ‘The analysis of faith in St Thomas Aquinas,’ *Religious Studies* 3 (1977), p. 145; Plantinga, ‘Reason and Belief in God,’ pp. 40-47; Louis Pojman, *Religious Belief and the Will* (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), pp. 32-40.

<sup>32</sup> Jenkins, ‘Faith and Revelation,’ pp. 216f.

<sup>33</sup> See John Schellenberg, *Prolegomena to a Philosophy of Religion* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005), Chapters 2, 5, and 6.

<sup>34</sup> See above, Chapter 1, note 18. Let me add that the distinction, and sometimes the identity, between *belief in* and *belief that* was clearly explained by Henri Prince: ‘There are two senses of “believe in.” First there is a factual sense. Here belief-in is clearly reducible to belief-that.... Secondly, there is also the “evaluative sense of believe in.” Here believing-in amounts to something like esteeming or trusting; and in this second sense, believing-in seems to be quite a different attitude from believing-that’ (Price, ‘Belief

more than propositional belief. According to Daniel McKaughan, given the conception of faith as involving propositional belief, ‘faith in God is justified only if the belief that God exists is justified.’<sup>35</sup> This connection between belief in God and belief that God exists, which McKaughan rightly considers ‘a widely held principle,’<sup>36</sup> seems to resemble Locke’s conviction according to which, in order to believe in God, God’s existence must be demonstrated.<sup>37</sup> According to McKaughan, in fact, given this ‘widely held principle,’ those who are instead persuaded that no sufficient evidence in support of the belief that God exists can be provided, will consequently raise what the author in question names the ‘problem of faith and reason,’ namely, the conviction that believers believe in-authentically.<sup>38</sup>

The typically Lockean idea that belief in God cannot be held if the belief that God exists is not rationally justified has often been ascribed to Aquinas as well. Protestant thinkers in recent centuries have often argued that Thomas relied excessively on human reason. More precisely, as A. Vos has pointed out, they held ‘that Aquinas places too much confidence in natural theology and thereby compromises revealed theology.’<sup>39</sup> For them, ‘Aquinas is an evidentialist ... he relies on proof of God’s existence.’<sup>40</sup> Alvin Plantinga reiterates this reading while claiming that Aquinas seems to say that ‘to believe in the mysteries of the faith is not to be foolish or to believe with undue levity, because we have *evidence for* the conclusion that God has proposed them for our belief.’<sup>41</sup> Of course, since the thesis that God has proposed certain beliefs intuitively implies God’s existence, Plantinga’s claim is equivalent to saying that for Aquinas we believe in God since we have evidence for his existence. This is openly stated by Antony Kenny while concentrating on Aquinas’s five

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“in” and belief “that,”” *Religious Studies* 1 (1965) p. 17). For Aquinas’s distinction between *credere Deum* and *credere in Deum*, which correspond to belief-that and belief-in, respectively, see below, note 84.

<sup>35</sup> Daniel McKaughan, ‘Authentic faith and acknowledged risk: dissolving the problem of faith and reason,’ *Religious Studies* 49 (2013), p. 105.

<sup>36</sup> As a matter of fact, this principle, though with some variations, is held by many scholars. McKaughan mentions Plantinga, ‘Reason and belief in God,’ p. 18; Anthony Kenny, *What is Faith? essays in the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Richard Swinburne, ‘The Christian wager,’ *Religious Studies* 4 (1969), pp. 217-228 (all cited in McKaughan, ‘Authentic faith and acknowledged risk: dissolving the problem of faith and reason,’ p. 104).

<sup>37</sup> See above, Chapter 1, note 8.

<sup>38</sup> Although this is of no interest here, let me mention that, to ‘dissolve’ such a problem, as the title of his article reads, McKaughan proposes that the conception of faith as involving belief—which he calls ‘belief-plus model’—should be put aside in favor of other models—which he names ‘trusting acceptance’ and ‘hopeful affirmation.’ (See McKaughan, pp. 109ff.).

<sup>39</sup> Arvin Vos, *Aquinas, Calvin, and contemporary Protestant thought* (Washington, D.C.--Grand Rapids, MI: Christian University Press and Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), p. 125.

<sup>40</sup> Vos, p. 125.

<sup>41</sup> Plantinga, ‘Reason and Belief in God,’ p. 46.

ways. He claims that ‘if belief in the existence of God cannot be rationally justified, there can be no good reason for adopting any of the traditional monotheistic religion.’<sup>42</sup>

Nevertheless, the idea that to believe in God one has to previously demonstrate his existence would be unacceptable to Aquinas. (In reply to the Protestant’s views abovementioned, among which Plantinga’s may be numbered, Vos claims that ‘a thorough investigation of Aquinas’s thought clearly shows that he actually contends that faith far surpasses reason both in the content it can grasp and in the certitude it can provide.’<sup>43</sup>) As I will show in the next section, Aquinas believes that arguing for God’s existence is a useful support for the reasonableness of faith; at the same time, however, he also considers faith *theologically*, namely, as assent to revelation and trust in God which are ultimately caused by God. From this point of view, believers do not need evidence in support of faith, also because no arguments may sufficiently cause them to believe. As it has been pointed out, ‘the demonstration that God exists would not of itself be sufficient to establish the truth of revelation for the religious believer. For this an act of faith would also be required.’<sup>44</sup>

The readings according to which for Thomas *belief in* God cannot be held if the *belief that* God exists is not supported by evidence are therefore unconvincing. They apply to many circumstances (as Price has rightly points out: ‘I cannot trust my doctor unless I at least believe that there is a person to whom the description “being my doctor” applies’<sup>45</sup>), but not to the experience of the Christian faith. The readings in question simply overlook the fact that, for Aquinas, the act of believing in God is mainly due to divine grace.

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<sup>42</sup> Anthony Kenny, *The Five Ways* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 4. Both Plantinga and Kenny, therefore, ascribe to Aquinas the view that belief in God needs a previous rational justification of the belief that God exists. Of course, they do so with different degrees of firmness, which can easily be explained given the fact that Plantinga only attempts to compare his own view to Aquinas’s, of which Kenny is instead a distinguished interpreter. Furthermore, unlike Plantinga, Kenny shares in the alleged Thomistic view here under consideration.

<sup>43</sup> Vos, p. 162.

<sup>44</sup> John Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), p. 381. Elsewhere Wippel suggests that Aquinas ‘cannot mean that every Christian must first have demonstrated one or more of the preambles, such as the existence of God, before making an act of faith’ (‘Thomas Aquinas on Philosophy and the Preambles of Faith.’ In *The science of being as being. Metaphysical investigations*, ed. by Gregory T. Doolan (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012), p. 196). The French Jesuit Guy de Broglie treated the Thomistic concept of ‘preambles of faith’ in an article published in the 1950s (‘La vraie notion thomiste des *praeambula fidei*,’ *Gregorianum* 34 (1953), pp. 341-389), which is still of interest. In it, he argued that modern thinkers have mistakenly claimed that for Aquinas the faithful need to support their belief in God by grounding it in the belief that God exists. For more on the concept of ‘preambles of faith,’ see below, notes 63ff.

<sup>45</sup> Price, p. 13.

The readings of Aquinas's view of faith and reason that I have considered so far seem to be affected by lack of consideration of the theological viewpoint, which Aquinas typically assumes. This lack of consideration is pregnant with consequences to the 'inconclusiveness matter' here under consideration. Overlooking the specificity of faith equals reducing debates on faith and reason to any possible debate. As a consequence, the inconclusiveness typical of discussions regarding faith and religion should characterize any subject. This, however, is clearly false. It is therefore advisable to proceed to explore the inconclusiveness that is typical of debates on faith's credibility by taking into account what is specific of faith. To offer a comprehensive account of faith and its specificity in Aquinas's thought is precisely that which I intend to do in the next section.

### **3.2 Aquinas's View of Faith and Reason: Evidentness, human Will, and the divine Grace**

According to Thomas, faith is 'an act of the intellect assenting to the Divine Truth at the command of the will moved by the grace of God.'<sup>46</sup> Following the order in which Thomas treats the intellect, the will, and the grace of God, I intend first to concentrate on the relationship between the act of the intellect, evidence and faith, and then to consider the singular shape this relationship takes because of the intervention of human will and divine grace.

The concept of evidence and that of faith are strictly related to each other, not only in Aquinas's thought but also in many other perspectives. If faith is often considered lacking in intellectual dignity and hard to harmonize with reason, this is due to the fact that, as Aquinas and many other thinkers claim, the truths of faith are not *evident*.

But what does 'evidence' mean in Aquinas's thought? In accordance with a position shared by other medieval thinkers, which spans at least until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Thomas employs the concept of '*evidentia*' by analogy with the sense of vision to mean that which 'marks the domain both of certainty and of *Scientia*.'<sup>47</sup> He makes use of a number of expressions among which 'visus,'

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<sup>46</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 2 a. 9. Due to space constraints, I will avoid citing the Latin text, unless I need to explain why I propose a translation that is different from the one I usually adopt. As I have already said (see above, Introduction, note 4), 'evidence' is one of the words that, unlike the translation by the Dominican Fathers, I think should not be used to render Aquinas's text into English. For Aquinas, in fact, faith is not characterized by 'evidentia,' because 'evidentia' is the characteristic of what is *seen*, either by intuition or demonstration. Thus, I prefer 'full evidence' or 'evidentness' to 'evidence.' See also below, note 47.

<sup>47</sup> Robert Pasnau, *After Certainty. A History of Our Epistemic Ideals and Illusions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 189. This author offers a short but effective historical description of the employment of the Latin word '*evidentia*' from Cicero and Augustine to Aquinas. In Aquinas's works, he

‘apparens,’ ‘manifestus,’ ‘per se notum,’ ‘cognitus,’ and only rarely does he employ ‘evidentia’ and its corresponding adjective ‘evidens.’ However, Aquinas always intends to mean the characteristic of ‘those things...which, of themselves, move the intellect or the senses to *knowledge* of them.’<sup>48</sup>

Thus, for Aquinas ‘evidentia,’ which I will translate as ‘evidentness’ to avoid confusion with ‘evidence,’ typically characterizes what is *known*, i.e. what is intellectually apprehended

- (1) directly, and not by way of testimony;
- (2) certainly, i.e., accompanied by a sense of immoveableness

and, in some cases,

- (3) self-authenticatedly, i.e., without any need for outside evidence.

Aquinas also says that one achieves knowledge in two ways, intuitively and demonstratively. He sets forth this distinction and states that the object of knowledge

is known either by itself (as in the case of first principles, which are held by the habit of understanding), or through something else already known (as in the case of conclusions which are held by the habit of science [*scientia*]).<sup>49</sup>

Obviously enough, Thomas is looking at the intellectual virtues of understanding and *scientia* as defined by Aristotle. As is known, Thomas mainly adopts the Aristotelian philosophical view among the ones available at his time.<sup>50</sup>

The Aristotelian epistemology constitutes the basis on which Aquinas subsequently builds his account of faith. He starts his reflection by considering faith in terms of propositions, the content they convey, and the rational support they require. He, therefore, adopts this epistemological approach at the beginning of the so-called treatise on faith, which is contained in *Summa*

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says, “‘evidentness’ is used to distinguish *scientia* of all kinds from mere opinion and faith’ (p. 190). Pasnau also mentions other views, such as Scotus’s. According to Scotus, evidentness can also be due to authority, from which it follows that the Christian faith, too, can be characterized by evidentness.

<sup>48</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 1 a. 4, emphasis added. The Latin word Aquinas employs here is ‘cognitio.’

<sup>49</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 1 a. 4.

<sup>50</sup> The Aristotelian point of view was, in Aquinas’s time, questioned by those theologians who preferred an Augustinian account of cognition. As Timothy Noone has pointed out, the main contrast between the Aristotelian and the Augustinian account is the fact that the agent intellect is a human power in the former and a divine one in the latter. (See Timothy Noone, ‘The Franciscans and Epistemology: Philosophy and Theology on the Issue of Universal Causality.’ In *Medieval Masters: Essays in Memory of Msgr.E.A.Synan*, ed. by R. E. Houser [Houston: University of St. Thomas, 1999], p. 68).

*theologiae*.<sup>51</sup> In the first questions of this treatise, which are devoted to exploring the nature of the Christian faith, Aquinas treats, in order, the object of faith (q. 1), the act of faith (qq. 2-3), and faith taken as a theological virtue (q. 4).

Aquinas, therefore, first conducts an enquiry into the epistemological features of what is believed and the act of believing; he then shows that such epistemological approach and the employment of Aristotelian views only partly allow him to explain the nature of faith. Unlike knowledge, in fact, faith does not have a fully evident object, i.e., its object is not characterized by evidentness, which is why Aquinas says it is unable to move the intellect to knowledge either intuitively or demonstratively.<sup>52</sup> As a result, although ‘faith implies assent of the intellect to that which is believed’,<sup>53</sup> the assent in question can only be given ‘through an act of choice:’

the intellect assents ... not through being sufficiently moved to this assent by its proper object, but through an act of choice, whereby it turns voluntarily to one side rather than to the other: and if this be accompanied by doubt or fear of the opposite side, there will be opinion, while, if there are certainty and no fear of the other side, there will be faith.<sup>54</sup>

Aquinas is accurately distinguishing knowledge, in which case the intellectual content is *seen* and leads the intellect to assent, from faith, in which case the intellectual content is instead *unseen*, which is why the intellect needs to be pushed to assent by the will. On the basis of this distinction, therefore, it can be concluded that, unlike knowledge, faith is to be taken as unresponsive to rational criteria, since the believers give their assent only because they *will* to.<sup>55</sup>

Note that in the passage under consideration Aquinas is distinguishing faith not only from knowledge but also from opinion. Although he is focusing on the fact that faith consists in an act of choice, and this—so he says—is common to both faith and opinion, Thomas seems to want to

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<sup>51</sup> Any aspect of Thomas’s reflection in *Summa theologiae* should attentively be taken into account, since it is known that this masterpiece is usually regarded as the most clear and concise presentation of Aquinas’s ideas.

<sup>52</sup> Mere observation may partly confirm this theological view: ‘There must be few persons who come to faith through a weighing of the probabilities for and against God as a super-celestial object. While one should not exclude this possibility out of hand, it seems that faith seldom arises through a probability calculation that God’s existence is above 0.5 on a scale from zero to one. Several features of faith render this scenario unlikely’ (David Fergusson, *Faith and Its Critics: A Conversation* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011], p. 35).

<sup>53</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 1 a. 4.

<sup>54</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 1 a. 4.

<sup>55</sup> This is effectively summed up by Hick, according to whom faith ‘consists in believing strongly various propositions, of a theological nature, which the believer does not and cannot *know* to be true. To know here is taken to mean either to observe directly or to be able to prove by strict demonstration. ...the lack of rational compulsion to assent is compensated by an act of will’ (Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, p. 11).

avoid, even for a moment, the impression that he is taking faith as a mere act of choice. Only something other than the mere will to believe can in fact explain why, though opinion and faith are both acts of choice, the latter, unlike the former, is certain. Something that is more than the mere will to believe, therefore, is to be found. As I am going to show below, Aquinas will argue that it consists in the intervention of God, whose grace allows believers to assent firmly to what is unseen.

Before taking into account theological considerations so as to determine why faith is certain though it lacks evidentness, I need to show that the distinction between, on the one hand, knowledge and opinion, and, on the other hand, faith, is somehow attenuated by Thomas. If we take into account Aquinas's responses to the objections raised in the passage under consideration, it will immediately be clear that his treatment of the subject is more articulated than I have shown so far. Thomas seems even to deny the distinction just mentioned:

Those things which come under faith can be considered in two ways. First, in particular; and thus they cannot be seen and believed at the same time, as shown above. Secondly, in general, that is, under the common aspect of credibility; and in this way they are seen by the believer. For he would not believe unless, on the evidence of signs, or of something similar, he saw that they ought to be believed.<sup>56</sup>

In the second part of this passage, Aquinas seems to deny what he affirms in the course of the *respondeo* that I have cited above. He says that there are cases in which the truths of faith can be *seen*; more precisely, what can be seen is not the object of faith but a host of signs that point to such an object ('object of faith,' as I have said above, stands for that which the faithful are expected to believe). In other words, Aquinas only partly reiterates his conviction that one either knows or has faith, and that the truths of faith are not characterized by evidentness. He now argues that this does not apply to the *signs* of faith. They are characterized by evidentness ('they are seen by the believer') and constitute arguments which, though not conclusively, support the truth of the object of faith. As a result, it can be said that Aquinas finds a mediation between faith and knowledge. Unlike the latter, the former remains unseen by the believer, though this regards only its object and not its signs.

The relationship just mentioned between evidentness of signs and lack of evidentness of the object is confirmed by Aquinas in his reply to an objection regarding the episode of St Thomas the Apostle, which is narrated in the Gospel according to John. The episode in question is usually taken as a paradigmatic coincidence of knowledge and faith. It is usually believed that only because Jesus renders himself evident to Thomas, the latter agrees to believe. Jesus himself, according to the

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<sup>56</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 1 a. 4 ad 2.

Gospel, unequivocally addresses Thomas as follows: ‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.’<sup>57</sup> Therefore, as the objector concludes, ‘vision and faith regard the same object.’<sup>58</sup> In reply, Aquinas quotes Gregory the Great who distinguishes what the Apostle saw from what he believed: ‘He saw the man, and believing him to be God, he made profession of his faith.’<sup>59</sup> According to Aquinas, therefore, the Apostle saw a man present in the flesh and believed that that man was the Lord.

Aquinas’s reading of such a famous story may be seen as somehow clumsy, especially if we consider that the episode at stake ends with the Lord reproaching the Apostle because the latter believed only to the extent that he saw. This seems to unequivocally confirm that the Apostle’s believing coincides with his knowing. Jesus, however, does not say that Thomas saw and believed *the same thing*. No contradiction can therefore be seen with Aquinas’s explanation. Moreover, a noticeable distinction between seeing a man and believing who he is should be considered. The former coincides with immediate knowledge while the latter depends on a number of reasons none of which—at least in the case in question—can really compel one to believe. This is a sharp distinction, which the way the episode in question is usually read tends to blur. The reasons in support of the belief that the man seen by the Apostle is Jesus are so numerous that one spontaneously becomes convinced that one simply knows the object in question. As a consequence, knowing and believing are seemingly coincident with one another. The number of arguments involved is impressively high and it is hard to deny that it is Jesus the man who miraculously shows himself to us after we have challenged him by claiming that, if he does not appear to us, we will not believe. Not surprisingly, the episode of St Thomas the Apostle remains something unique for Christian believers, and as such it has famously been conveyed through millennia. At any rate, this episode seems to confirm the typically Thomistic distinction between object and signs. I mean that, however numerous and seemingly convincing they may be, the signs are not compelling, nor are they able to bridge the gap between the assent (to the object of faith) and the reasons (signs of faith) for assenting, a gap which Aquinas says is typical of faith.

The relationship I have just mentioned between the assent to the object of faith and the arguments that lead one to assent allows me to explain Aquinas’s conviction that faith neither is due to reason nor is irrational. In other words, faith is not due to rational arguments because no conclusive evidence can be offered in support of the act of faith. At the same time, faith does not totally miss

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<sup>57</sup> John, 20, 29. Hereafter, bible quotations are from NRSV translation unless otherwise specified.

<sup>58</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 1 a. 4 obj 1.

<sup>59</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 1 a. 4 ad 1.

arguments in its support.<sup>60</sup> There are signs that point to the object of faith; however, they are only probable arguments, from which it follows that, on their basis, the object at hand can be *believed* and not *known*.<sup>61</sup>

The believers, therefore, do not see the object of faith in itself, that is to say, they do not know that the object of faith is true. They only know that faith is internally consistent, or, to employ Aquinas's words, 'not impossible:'

The reasons employed by holy men to prove things that are of faith, are not demonstrations; they are either persuasive arguments showing that what is proposed to our faith is not impossible, or else they are proofs drawn from the principles of faith, i.e. from the authority of Holy Writ, as Dionysius declares. Whatever is based on these principles is as well proved in the eyes of the faithful, as a conclusion drawn from self-evident principles is in the eyes of all.<sup>62</sup>

An exception must be registered; there are Christian beliefs whose truth Aquinas holds can be demonstrated. He calls them 'preambles of faith' (*praeambula fidei*) because without them other truths of faith cannot be logically believed:

Things which can be proved by demonstration are reckoned among the articles of faith, not because they are believed simply by all, but because they are a necessary presupposition to matters of faith, so that those who do not know them by demonstration must know them first of all by faith.<sup>63</sup>

In the course of the objection to which Aquinas is responding, the truths in question are said to be 'the existence and unity of God, and so forth.'<sup>64</sup> They are believed through faith by the vast majority of the faithful, who are unable to attain them by way of demonstration.<sup>65</sup> Aquinas coins the expression 'preambles of faith' because, from a logical viewpoint, they constitute the necessary

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<sup>60</sup> This dialectic between the presence of arguments and the absence of conclusive proofs in support of faith is argued not only by Aquinas; it also belongs to a great part of the Christian tradition, though variously maintained. On this, see Renford Bambrough, 'Reason and Faith.' In *Religion and Philosophy*, ed. by Martin Warner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 31f.

<sup>61</sup> The faithful 'know them [the things that are of faith], not as by demonstration, but by the light of faith which makes them see that they ought to believe them' (*Summa theologiae* II-II q. 1 a. 5 ad 1).

<sup>62</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 1 a. 5 ad 2.

<sup>63</sup> As I have already said (see above, notes 46f.), there are problems with this translation. Unlike this translation, which employs 'knowledge' in regard to both demonstration and faith, the Latin text employs different words: 'Ea quae demonstrative probari possunt inter credenda numerantur, non quia de ipsis sit simpliciter fides apud omnes: sed quia praeexiguntur ad ea quae sunt fidei, et oportet ea saltem per fidem praesupponi ad his qui horum demonstrationem non habent' (*Summa theologiae* II-II q. 1 a. 5 ad 3).

<sup>64</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 1 a. 5 obj 3.

<sup>65</sup> It is well known that, for Thomas, 'if this truth (the divine revelation) were left solely as a matter of inquiry for the human reason... few men would possess the knowledge of God.' (Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, tr. by A. Pegis, J. F. Anderson, V. J. Bourke, and C. J. O'Neil [New York: Hanover House, 1955-57], I, 4).

presupposition of those truths which can only be believed by faith. From this, however, it does not follow that one cannot have faith without having previously demonstrated the preambles,<sup>66</sup> otherwise, faith would be attained by reason, which is just unacceptable in Aquinas's view.

At any rate, faith implies a form of reasoning. This relationship constitutes a significant part of the Christian tradition. It has been encapsulated in the well-known Augustinian conception of faith as 'to think with assent.' While reflecting on this, Aquinas is asked to respond to the following objection:

The Latin word 'cogitatio' ('thought') implies a research, for 'cogitare' seems to be equivalent to 'coagitare', i.e. 'to discuss together'. Now Damascene says that faith is 'an assent without research'. Therefore thinking has no place in the act of faith.<sup>67</sup>

In reply, Thomas claims that John of Damascus is right to the extent that 'research' stands for the demonstrative process whose outcome is conclusive evidence. There is, however, also a different meaning of 'research,' which is compatible with faith:

Faith has not that research of natural reason which demonstrated what is believed, but a research into those things whereby a man is induced to believe, for instance that such things have been uttered by God and confirmed by miracles.<sup>68</sup>

Faith is, therefore, 'thinking with assent,' namely, it combines the assent given to truths that lack evidentness with the investigation aimed at finding probable arguments in their support.

On the basis of what I have said so far, Aquinas should conclude that the assent of faith is at best probable; he claims, instead, that faith enjoys certitude, i.e. 'the firmness of the adherence of the cognitive power to its knowable object.'<sup>69</sup> While comparing opinion (*opinio*), science (*scientia*) and faith, he says that faith should be placed between the other two, because it shares certainty with science and lack of evidentness with opinion:

Science is incompatible with opinion about the same object simply, for the reason that science demands that its object should be deemed impossible to the otherwise, whereas it is essential to opinion, that its object should be deemed possible to be otherwise. Yet that which is the object of faith, on account of the certainty of faith, is also deemed impossible to be otherwise; and the reason why science and faith cannot be about the

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<sup>66</sup> See above, note 44.

<sup>67</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 2 a. 1 obj 1.

<sup>68</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 2 a. 1 ad 1.

<sup>69</sup> Aquinas, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum*, ed. by Pierre F. Mandonnet and M. F. Moos (Paris: Lethielleux, 1929-1947), III, d. 26, q. 2, a. 4, tr. by John J. Griffin, 'The Interpretation of the Two Thomistic Definitions of Certitude,' *Laval Theologique et Philosophique* 10 (1954), p. 11.

same object and in the same respect is because the object of science is something seen whereas the object of faith is the unseen, as stated above.<sup>70</sup>

The idea that faith lacks evidentness and nonetheless enjoys the certitude that typically characterizes demonstrative knowledge is manifestly controversial. How is it possible for propositions deprived of evidentness to be maintained with certitude? According to Aquinas, this is possible in the case of the Christian faith, as he explains while commenting on the famous definition of faith contained in the *Epistle to Hebrew*. As is known, the author of that Epistle says that faith, among other things, is 'the evidence (*argumentum*) of things not seen.' (Unlike the English translation I usually use, let me remind the reader that, as I have already said above, in order to translate Aquinas's 'evidentia,' I prefer 'evidentness' to 'evidence.')

Someone predictably objects that attributing evidentness to 'things not seen' constitutes a contradiction. In fact, so the objection goes, evidentness about certain things or propositions makes one see them. To put it otherwise, a proposition cannot remain non-evident (non-characterized by evidentness) once evidentness in its support has been provided. In reply, Aquinas focuses on the meaning of the word 'argumentum,' which is employed by the author of the Epistle:

'evidence' is taken for the result of evidence. For evidence induces the intellect to adhere to a truth, wherefore the firm adhesion of the intellect to the non-apparent truth of faith is called 'evidence' here. Hence another reading has 'conviction,' because to wit, the intellect of the believer is convinced by Divine authority, so as to assent to what it sees not.<sup>71</sup>

According to Thomas, therefore, the certainty that he attributes to faith in God is not due to evidentness.<sup>72</sup> Unlike any other kind of assent, faith is not caused by human reason. As anticipated at the beginning of this section, the assent in question is due to the will of the faithful:

The intellect of the believer is determined to one object, not by the reason, but by the will, wherefore assent is taken here for an act of the intellect as determined to one object by the will.<sup>73</sup>

Aquinas digs into the experience of the believers and offers an explanation of how they are expected to firmly assent to divine revelation though such a revelation can epistemically be seen at best as 'not impossible.' The fact that the faithful simply will to believe, if taken alone, makes the act of faith unreasonable. A different cause of faith must therefore be individuated, which is what

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<sup>70</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 1 a. 5 ad 4.

<sup>71</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 4 a. 1.

<sup>72</sup> Consequently, there are those who, like Penelhum, conclude that Aquinas's doctrine is weak (see Penelhum, 'The analysis of faith in St. Thomas Aquinas,' pp. 151-3).

<sup>73</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 2 a. 1 ad 3.

Aquinas intends to do while devoting the sixth question of his treatise on faith to the causes of faith.<sup>74</sup>

According to Thomas, 'two things are requisite for faith:' first, the prospective believer happens to get in contact with divine revelation; second, s/he gives his or her assent to such revelation. The cause of both divine revelation and human assent must be God. In fact, since it appears to be superior to human comprehension, divine revelation cannot be either caused or understood by human beings. Only God is, therefore, the cause of both such revelation and human adhesion to it.

That said, how does God cause us to believe? More precisely, how does he lead us to adhere to his revelation? And what is the role played by the signs of faith, to which I have referred so far?

Aquinas distinguishes between two factors that he believes produce the adhesion to the object of faith. One of them is

of external inducement, such as seeing a miracle, or being persuaded by someone to embrace the faith: neither of which is a sufficient cause, since of those who see the same miracle, or who hear the same sermon, some believe, and some do not.<sup>75</sup>

Aquinas refers to miracles and arguments, namely, the signs of which I have said so far that are only probable proofs for faith. As he argues, it is not because of them that one believes in God's revelation, let alone in the firm way I mentioned above. The same can be said of the intention to believe. Aquinas refers to the Pelagians, who typically defended the merely human effort to adhere to God. They

said that the beginning of faith is from ourselves, inasmuch as, to wit, it is in our power to be ready to assent to things which are of faith, but that the consummation of faith is from God, Who proposes to us the things we have to believe. But this is false.<sup>76</sup>

Aquinas firmly claims that not only signs or reasons but also our will are unable to make us believe. The will, however, is unable to render us believers only in the sense the Pelagians took it. Unlike them, Aquinas takes the will as caused by divine grace. To those who object that, according to Augustine, 'faith depends on the believer's will,' Aquinas responds that

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<sup>74</sup> Herbert McCabe appropriately highlights the importance 'to disentangle two senses of "wishful thinking:" a bad sense, in which I think religious belief isn't necessarily wishful thinking, and a good, or at least harmless sense, in which I think it is' (*Faith within reason*, ed. by Brian Davies, [London: Continuum, 2007], p. 2) .

<sup>75</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 6 a. 1.

<sup>76</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 6 a. 1.

To believe does indeed depend on the will of the believer; but man's will needs to be prepared by God with grace, in order that he may be raised to things which are above his nature.<sup>77</sup>

The assent of faith must be caused by something that, unlike probable reasons or the mere will to believe, can effectively explain why Aquinas sees the Christian faith as certain:

Since man, by assenting to matters of faith, is raised above his nature, this must needs accrue to him from some supernatural principles moving him inwardly; and this is God. Therefore faith, as regards the assent which is the chief act of faith, is from God moving man inwardly by grace.<sup>78</sup>

The certainty that Aquinas attributes to faith—at least to its paradigmatic instantiations—is even superior to that of demonstrative knowledge. Aquinas compares faith to intellectual virtues. Among them, art and prudence can easily be judged as less certain than faith, since they deal with contingent matters. (Faith is, therefore 'preferable in point of certitude, by reason of its matter, since it is about eternal things.')

More interesting for our purposes is the comparison with the other three intellectual virtues, which share with faith the necessity of their object. Aquinas starts this comparison by elaborating on the concept of certainty:

Certitude can be looked at in two ways. First, on the part of its cause, and thus a thing which has a more certain cause, is itself more certain. On this way faith is more certain than those three virtues, because it is founded on the Divine truth, whereas the aforesaid three virtues are based on human reason. Secondly, certitude may be considered on the part of the subject, and thus the more a man's intellect lays hold of a thing, the more certain it is. On this way, faith is less certain, because matters of faith are above the human intellect, whereas the objects of the aforesaid three virtues are not. Since, however, a thing is judged simply with regard to its cause, but relatively, with respect to a disposition on the part of the subject, it follows that faith is more certain simply, while the others are more certain relatively, i.e. for us.<sup>79</sup>

Aquinas distinguishes two different points of view, that of the cause of certitude and that of the person who is certain. Obviously, this distinction is made by Aquinas since, from his theological point of view, he assumes that faith is caused by God. Were Aquinas an unbeliever, the distinction

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<sup>77</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 6 a. 1 ad 3. To those who may object that free-will is incompatible with any external influence it must be replied that for Aquinas, as Frederick Bauerschmidt points out, 'God can move the will without compromising human freedom' (Bauerschmidt, *Thomas Aquinas: faith, reason, and following Christ* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013], p. 147). Bauerschmidt also refers to Aquinas's treatment of grace as both 'operating,' attributable to God, and 'cooperating,' attributable to the human being. This treatment is contained in *Summa theologiae* I-II q. 111 a. 2 ad 2, where Thomas says that 'God does not justify us without ourselves, because whilst we are being justified we consent to God's justification by a movement of our free will. Nevertheless, this movement is not the cause of grace, but the effect.'

<sup>78</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 6 a. 1.

<sup>79</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 4 a. 8.

at hand would not make sense because the faithful would be seen as the cause of faith, and consequently there wouldn't be any distinction between the cause of faith and the person who has faith. At any rate, once the distinction has been made, it can easily be said that, from the viewpoint of the cause, faith is more certain than any intellectual virtue. If the cause of faith is God and that of the intellectual virtues is human reason, then it is wholly reasonable to conclude that the cause of faith, unlike human reason, cannot be mistaken. The other point of view examined by Aquinas—that of the person who reasons or has faith—simply reverses the order I have just mentioned. In this case, intellectual virtues appear to be more certain than faith since they meet the believer's need for evidentness, which faith by definition cannot satisfy. That said, Aquinas seems to attribute equal dignity to the two kinds of certainty mentioned above. He individuates two points of view, from each of which any of those two kinds of certainty appears to be superior to the other. The two related points of view, however, do not have equal dignity. According to Aquinas, that of the cause is more important because it allows for determining the nature of the object caused. In contrast, from the viewpoint of the person who believes or knows a certain object, it is only possible to determine what of that object can be seen from the specific viewpoint of that person. This argument is philosophically compelling. Aquinas brings it to the table so as to state that from the viewpoint that appears to be more decisive, that of the cause, faith is more certain. In this way, he can conclude that 'faith is more certain simply.' Nevertheless, this is only due to his faith, because of which he believes that the cause of faith is God. In fact, once assumed that God is the cause of faith, Aquinas obviously puts himself in a position to support his thesis that faith is more certain than any intellectual virtue.

Note that Aquinas's treatment of certitude shows his awareness that the certitude in question is not to be confused with a mere psychological state. The reason Aquinas finds for supporting the plausibility that faith is expected to firmly be held emphasizes his conviction that this firmness not only equals but even surpasses that of knowledge. Consequently, it should not coincide with 'the feeling of certitude alone' that, as appropriately pointed out by J. Hick in regard to the relationship between certitude and knowledge, does not count 'as a sufficient basis for the claim to know.' This claim requires 'the *right* to feel sure,' which is not due to 'a merely causal absence of doubt but to a stable and tested certainty which has withstood critical scrutiny.'<sup>80</sup> True, this certainty regards knowledge and not faith, the certitude of which—so Aquinas claims—is due to God's grace. As a consequence, the faithful do not display any right to be sure that follows from withstanding critical scrutiny, otherwise they would believe because of the possession of arguments and not because

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<sup>80</sup> Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, pp. 206f.

their will to believe is caused by God. (The reasons provided by those who, like Aquinas, argue for the certainty of faith are in fact not aimed at demonstrating the revealed truth but only its consistency or non-impossibility.) As a result, only previously assumed theological reasons render reasonable the certitude of the faithful, which is why some authors such as Penelhum consider Aquinas's view 'weak.'<sup>81</sup> From this, however, it does not follow that the certitude of knowledge is in a significantly better shape. As Hick appropriately argues, 'to specify the exact amount of criticism necessary to constitute rational certainty' is not possible. We should consequently rest content with 'a sense of intellectual satisfaction, of security...which is for us the inner hallmark of knowledge' and make us convinced that 'anyone else confronted with the same evidence or reasoning can likewise be certain of it.' In this way—so Hick goes on to argue—knowledge 'displays an objective character,' namely, 'it is *the same for everyone*' in the sense that everyone may in principle know what I know.<sup>82</sup> (Obviously enough, this may at first sight seem to imply a usually held distinction between, on the one hand, knowledge as achievable by everyone, and, on the other hand, faith as tenable only by some. In reality, what Hick argues may apply to both the knower and the believer. In fact, there is no reason for denying that not only the former but also the latter may believe that, once put in his or her own condition, everybody else would know or believe the same thing.)

When all is said and done, Aquinas's view of faith comes to light as built on three different factors. First, the faithful assent to propositions that God has revealed; second, they give their assent since they want to; third, they want to believe since they are caused to do so by God who acts into their interiority. While providing his definition of faith, Aquinas combines all of these three components, namely, the intellectual act, the will to believe, and the relationship with God who ultimately causes the will of the believer. Faith is, therefore, 'an act of the intellect assenting to the Divine Truth at the command of the will moved by the grace of God.'<sup>83</sup>

This resembles another of Aquinas's tripartition, which traces back to Augustine. On the basis of such partition, faith means 'believing in a God' (*credere Deum*), 'believing God' (*credere Deo*), and 'believing in God' (*credere in Deum*):

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<sup>81</sup> See above, note 72. Similarly, on the basis of the assumption that knowledge claims must be supported with propositional evidence, Kenny argues that religious commitment is 'irrational', since there are no reasons for believing divine revelation with a degree of certainty that resembles that of knowledge (See *What is Faith?* pp. 56f.).

<sup>82</sup> See Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, p. 207.

<sup>83</sup> See above, note 46.

The object of faith can be considered in three ways. For, since ‘to believe’ is an act of the intellect, is so far as the will moves it to assent, as stated above, the object of faith can be considered either on the part of the intellect, or on the part of the will that moves the intellect. If it be considered on the part of the intellect, then two things can be observed in the object of faith. ... One of these is the material object of faith, and in this way an act of faith is ‘to believe in a God; because, as stated above nothing is proposed to our belief, except in as much as it is referred to God. The other is the formal aspect of the object, for it is the medium on account of which we assent to such and such a point of faith; and thus an act of faith is ‘to believe God,’ since, as stated above the formal object of faith is the First Truth, to Which man gives his adhesion, so as to assent to its sake to whatever he believes. If the object of faith be considered in so far as the intellect is moved by the will, an act of faith is ‘to believe in God.’ For the First Truth is referred to the will, through having the aspect of an end.<sup>84</sup>

It is clear that only the first of these three dimensions of faith takes God as an object of belief (*credere Deum*), thus defining the intellectual character of faith: that is, it is an act of the intellect with its noetic contents (*fides quae*, which—as is known—must be distinguished from *fides qua*, the act of faith that is meant by the two other aspects). The second aspect (*credere Deo*) allows us to see that the act of faith depends on God, in the sense that there is no faith without divine revelation. The third aspect (*credere in Deum*) allows us to see that the object in question is also the ultimate goal; it is the good that should be looked for and not a mere truth or a person like any other. To put it another way, the first two aspects concern the content of faith (the material object: *credere Deum*) and the way in which it is proposed to the believer (the formal object: *credere Deo*); the third aspect determines the proper task of the will, which, since it aims at the highest good, leads the intellect to give assent to the revealed truth.<sup>85</sup>

Aquinas manifestly insists that faith is formally an act of intellect; at the same time, he ‘does recognize the large part which the will plays in the act of faith.’ Consequently, for him ‘the act of faith is an act intrinsically determined by affective elements.’<sup>86</sup> Moreover, and more importantly, Thomas does not see faith as limited to human activity. In the case of faith, the object (*credere Deum*) is also the source of belief. As I have already said while focusing on Aquinas’s treatment of the causes of faith, God causes the believers to assent *exterius* because ‘those things which are of faith ... do not come to man’s knowledge (*non cadunt in contemplatione hominis*), unless God reveals them’ (*credere Deo*). *A fortiori*, God causes them *interius* because ‘since man, by assenting

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<sup>84</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 2 a. 2.

<sup>85</sup> A similar tripartition is emphasized by Hick, according to whom, on the ‘Thomist-Catholic’ view, faith is intellectualist, fideistic, and voluntaristic: ‘It is intellectualist, in that it regards faith as a propositional attitude; fideistic, in that it regards faith and knowledge as mutually exclusive; and voluntaristic, in that it sees faith as the product of a conscious act of will’ (Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, p. 23). Based on what I have said so far, however, for Aquinas faith and knowledge are only in part ‘mutually exclusive,’ which is why his view does not seem to be ‘fideistic.’

<sup>86</sup> Peter Riga, ‘The act of faith in Augustine and Aquinas,’ *The Thomist* 35 (1971), p. 168.

to matters of faith, is raised above his nature, this must needs accrue to him from some supernatural principle moving him inwardly; and this is God.<sup>87</sup> That God is the source of faith can also be viewed as an aspect of *credere in Deum*; that is, the determination of the will to the good. God is the good, by definition, since he is the end of all things. At the same time he is the principle of everything. Thus, the faithful tend to God because of what he has revealed (*exterius*), and love him thanks to the work he does in their interiority (*interius*) to move them to assent.<sup>88</sup> For Aquinas, the believer believes for many reasons, as I have pointed out while treating his doctrine of signs. However, what moves the believer to assent to the revelation is principally ‘the inward instinct of the divine invitation.’<sup>89</sup> Thomas is convinced that God is ‘the chief and proper cause of faith.’<sup>90</sup>

Once faith has been examined by considering all of the aspects mentioned above, it is possible to see its relationship with the other theological virtues of hope and charity. In regard to the relationship with hope, let me recall that, according to Aquinas, the faithful tend to God, the union with whom they see as their highest possible good. This good, however, cannot be completely achieved by them in this life. It is ‘eternal life, which consists in the enjoyment of God himself,’<sup>91</sup> and the achievement of such a good implies eternal happiness, which is precisely ‘the proper and principal object of hope.’<sup>92</sup> In regard to the relationship between faith and charity, it must be said that, if the faithful tend to God, this is due to the fact that God guides human beings to partake of him by generating in them the desire to love him more and more and believe what he has revealed.<sup>93</sup> According to Thomas, love for God, which is granted by God himself, is the very center of the

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<sup>87</sup> See above, note 78.

<sup>88</sup> Stump insightfully presents this fundamental aspect of Aquinas’s view of faith: ‘On Aquinas’s account of faith, what is happening in such cases (or, at any rate, in the case of true conversions) is not that the intellect is weighing and judging epistemological considerations but that the will is drawn to a love of God’s goodness and in consequence moves the intellect to assent to the propositions of faith’ (‘Aquinas on Faith and Goodness.’ In *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology*, ed. by Scott MacDonald [Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1991], p. 207).

<sup>89</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 2 a. 9 ad 3.

<sup>90</sup> Aquinas states that ‘science begets and nourishes faith, by way of external persuasion afforded by science; but the chief and proper cause of faith (*principalis et propria causa fidei*) is that which moves man inwardly to assent’ (*Summa theologiae* II-II q. 6 a. 1 ad 1).

<sup>91</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 17 a. 2.

<sup>92</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 17 a. 2.

<sup>93</sup> Riga has summarized this perspective in the passage I have already partially quoted above: ‘For St. Thomas faith is the assent to the true on the authority of the one who reveals this truth, and thus faith is formally an act of the intelligence. Yet, Thomas does recognize the large part which the will plays in the act of faith. Love renders the act of faith meritorious and, as it were, informs and gives life to faith and the adherence itself is a work of love so that the act of faith is an act intrinsically determined by affective elements’ (Riga, p. 168). William Mann insists on the fact that faith is not simply cognitive or propositional in nature, and emphasizes a similarity between Aquinas and Luther: ‘For both accounts [Aquinas’ and Luther’s], then, genuine faith entails love of God and neighbour’ (William Mann, ‘Theological virtues.’ In *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Edward Craig, (London—New York: Routledge, 1998), vol. 9, p. 329).

Christian faith.<sup>94</sup> Charity is the source of faith's perfection: 'Charity is called the form of faith in so far as the act of faith is perfected and formed by charity.'<sup>95</sup>

Aquinas also offers a definition of faith while commenting on the *Epistle to Hebrew*, which I have already partly mentioned above. According to that Epistle, as I have said, faith is 'the substance of things hoped for' and 'the evidence (*argumentum*) of things not seen.' Even if these words 'are not arranged in the form of a definition,' Aquinas looks at them as including all of the components of faith.

To show that the seeming definition at hand does not lack any aspect of faith, Aquinas proceeds to explain how the two parts it consists of should be interpreted. This explanation is necessary because both the concept of substance and evidentness, which are used in the first and second part, respectively, seem at least at first sight to be mistakenly and even contradictorily employed. While saying that faith is 'the substance of things hoped for,' the sacred author seems to misunderstand the meaning of 'substance,' which is something other than a virtue or act. While saying that faith is 'evidence of things not seen,' the author in question seems to go so far as to contradict himself, because—as I have already said above—evidentness aims at making the things to which it applies seen and not unseen.

In defence of the sacred text, Aquinas finds a solution to both issues. Regarding the employment of the concept of substance, he says that it can stand for 'the first beginning of a thing, especially when the whole subsequent thing is virtually contained in the first beginning.' He provides an example from epistemology and says that 'we might say that the first self-evident principles are the substance of science, because, to wit, these principles are in us the first beginnings of science, the whole of which is itself contained in them virtually.' It is therefore possible to conclude that

faith is said to be the 'substance of things to be hoped for,' for the reason that in us the first beginning of things to be hoped for is brought about by the assent of faith, which contains virtually all things to be hoped for.<sup>96</sup>

Regarding the employment of the concept of evidentness, I have already shown above the solution that Aquinas provides.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Dawes emphasizes that, for Aquinas, 'it is charity, a love for God as first truth, which leads us infallibly towards what ought to be believed' (Dawes, p. 71)

<sup>95</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 4 a. 3. While commenting on Aquinas's view of faith, Mark Wynn says that 'the assent of faith is both "cognitive" (insofar as it involves beliefs) and action-orienting (since it serves a practical goal, and requires an associated mode of life here and now).' ('Religious Faith.' In *The Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Philosophy of Religion*, ed. by Graham Oppy [London: Routledge, 2015], p. 2).

<sup>96</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 4 a. 1.

Having concluded his analysis, Aquinas turns the seeming definition at hand into one that he claims can properly be said to be a definition: ‘Habit of the mind, whereby eternal life is begun in us, making the intellect assent to what is non-apparent.’<sup>98</sup> This definition emphasizes the fact that faith is a virtue and not only an act (not surprisingly, this occurs at the beginning of question 4, which Aquinas devotes to faith as a virtue.) Faith is, therefore, a good habit, which makes the intellect assent to divine revelation. By faith, the believers desire to do good and become better, which is precisely what a virtue is able to produce.<sup>99</sup> Aquinas’s definition focuses, therefore, not only on the role of the intellect but also on that of the will; not only on the initiative of the believer but also on the gratuitous intervention of God which allows the faithful to firmly trust in him.

This does not coincide with the readings of Aquinas’s doctrine of faith that insist on its intellectual feature. According to Swinburne, for example, Aquinas looks at faith as mainly ‘belief-that,’ while it is another view of faith, which Swinburne calls ‘Lutheran,’ that ‘involves *both* theoretical beliefs-that (Thomist faith) *and* a trust in the Living God. The person of faith, on this view, does not merely believe that there is a God (and believe certain propositions about him), he trusts Him and commits himself to Him.’<sup>100</sup> From what I have argued so far, however, it emerges that Aquinas’s view involves all of the elements in question.<sup>101</sup>

Crucial to Thomas’s reflection is his considering faith an intellectual act as well as a theological virtue. On the one hand, he assesses with philosophical rigour the relationship between faith and evidentness, and takes faith as a propositional attitude. On the other hand, from this it does not follow that he is impeded from arguing with theological reasons for the peculiarity of the intellectual act of faith, a peculiarity which is due to grace. For Thomas, the believers place a firm trust in God, which God himself grants to them, and can consequently steadfastly stick to their belief, however convincing contrary arguments may be. If my argument is correct, Aquinas’s insistence on the intellectual aspect of faith should not be taken as somehow opposed to the view of faith as a personal relationship, characterized by love and trust, between God and the faithful. As is known, this opposition has instead been often proposed in the course of the last century. Hick has

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<sup>97</sup> See above, note 71.

<sup>98</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 4 a. 1.

<sup>99</sup> Aquinas totally agrees with Aristotle, for whom ‘virtue is that which makes its possessor good, and his work good likewise’ (see *Summa theologiae* I-II q. 55 a. 3 s.c.). In the same question, Aquinas also points out a more clearly theological character of virtue, and makes reference to Augustine, according to whom ‘virtue is a good quality of the mind, by which we live righteously, of which no one can make bad use, which God works in us, without us’ (a. 4 obj 1 and s.c.).

<sup>100</sup> Richard Swinburne, *Faith and reason*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 140.

<sup>101</sup> For a reading of Thomas and Luther that supports this interpretation, see Mann’s considerations that I mentioned above (note 93).

incisively commented on a ‘desire to escape from the older image of faith as merely the acceptance of theological propositions, and to draw into the doctrine of faith the “I-Thou” encounter between God and man which has been so much stressed in modern Protestant theology.’<sup>102</sup> Hick looks at the abovementioned desire directed ‘toward a less rigidly intellectualist view’ as something that ‘sounds very different from the traditional view of faith as a believing of theological propositions on the authority of God who has revealed them.’<sup>103</sup> At any rate, if, as he says, ‘God, these theologians have insisted, is the divine Thou, who deals with us as a Person with persons, as a Father with children,’ this does not seem to sound significantly different from Aquinas’s view as it emerges from the investigation I have conducted so far.

For Aquinas, since God gives rise to an intimate relationship with them and intervenes in their interiority, human beings come to believe in him *firmly*. This gives rise to the inconclusiveness here under consideration. In fact, if they believe firmly in God, they must not have reasons for changing their mind, however convincing contrary argument may be. Once the believer is persuaded because of the influence God exerts on him that revealed beliefs cannot be mistaken, it obviously follows that s/he will remain steadfast in his or her religious conviction, no matter how intriguing contrary arguments may be.

From what I have said so far it seems to emerge that, on the basis of Aquinas’s view of faith, believers are expected to not change their mind while debating with non-believers. In the next section, I intend to show that this stance is manifestly confirmed by Aquinas’s reflection on how to employ rational arguments in support of faith.

### **3.3 The Inconclusiveness of Debates between Believers and non-Believers as a Consequence of the peculiar Nature of Faith**

At the beginning of his *Summa contra Gentiles*, Aquinas takes St Hilary’s words as orientation for his reflection: “I am aware that I owe this to God as the chief duty of my life, that my every word and sense may speak of him.”<sup>104</sup> For Thomas, this is a *duty*, as it is confirmed by the words he uses—‘*officium*’ and ‘*debere*.’ Such a duty arises from his *desire* to completely devote himself to reflecting on God and his works.

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<sup>102</sup> Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, p. 23.

<sup>103</sup> Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, p. 23.

<sup>104</sup> Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, I, 2.

Obviously enough, Aquinas applies St Hilary's words to his scholarly activity. More precisely, he employs these words at the beginning of a work which is purposely devoted to how to conduct disputes with those who do not believe in Christ. The words in question effectively show Thomas's disposition toward debates on religious matters: taking such debates as an opportunity to spread the faith in Christ and make interlocutors convert to Christianity.

From this, however, it by no means follows that Aquinas believes that nothing can be learned from those who do not share his faith. It is well known that he extensively takes advantage of pagan philosophers' teachings; accordingly, he states that 'no doctrine is so false as not to have some truth mingled with error.'<sup>105</sup> (Furthermore, Thomas is aware that not every aspect of the object of faith, *as perceived by believers*, is necessarily true. The fact that the faithful firmly hold the Christian belief does not exclude that they may mistake their own conjectures for the Christian faith.<sup>106</sup>)

Faith, therefore, if taken as the assent to revelation granted by God, is simply infallible because God cannot be mistaken. Believers are therefore expected to totally rely on the revealed truths. As a result, any debate conducted with those who do not believe should consequently be aimed at converting them to the Christian faith.

This is seen by Aquinas as highly meritorious. Rational investigations—so he argues—do not deserve merit if the investigators are ready to accept any possible news, including the replacement of the religious truth. Rational inquiries are instead meritorious to the extent that they are conducted by believers who, having already accepted the Christian beliefs, intend to confirm their truth also by way of rational investigation. This is what Aquinas argues while comparing two kinds of arguments in support of faith, those which one develops before adhering to faith and those which one employs after having already adhered to it:

Human reason in support of what we believe, may stand in a twofold relation to the will of the believer. First, as preceding the act of the will; as, for instance, when a man either has not the will, or not a prompt will, to believe, unless he be moved by human reasons: and in this way human reason diminishes the merit of faith ... Secondly, human reasons may be consequent to the will of the believer. For when a man's will is ready to believe, he loves the truth he believes, he thinks out and takes to heart whatever reasons he can find in support thereof; and in this way human reason does not exclude the merit of faith but is a sign of greater merit.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> *Summa theologiae* I-II q. 102 a. 5 ad 4.

<sup>106</sup> See above, note 30.

<sup>107</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 2 a. 10.

Therefore, those who intend to adhere to faith only once they have found sound arguments in its support do not have merit;<sup>108</sup> by contrast, those who conduct rational investigations to confirm the truth of the Christian faith have merit.

This is based on the conviction that faith in God is meritorious:

Our actions are meritorious in so far as they proceed from the free will moved with grace by God. Therefore every human act proceeding from the free will, if it be referred to God, can be meritorious. Now the act of believing is an act of the intellect assenting to the Divine truth at the command of the will moved by the grace of God, so that it is subject to the free will in relation to God; and consequently the act of faith can be meritorious.<sup>109</sup>

Nothing seems to be more exemplarily meritorious than believing in God, since the Christian faith is by definition a free act moved by God, who is nothing but the Good itself.<sup>110</sup>

The thesis that faith is meritorious is so crucial to Aquinas's thought that defending it leads the medieval thinker to argue for the merit of knowledge (*scientia*) and opinion (*opinio*). This occurs because there are those who question the merit of faith by saying that, since religious belief 'is a mean between opinion and scientific knowledge or the consideration of things scientifically known,' and 'the considerations of science are not meritorious, nor on the other hand is opinion,'<sup>111</sup> then faith is not meritorious. This objection is based on the idea, which Aquinas accepts and supports on several occasions,<sup>112</sup> that faith shares something with science and something else with opinion, namely, certainty in the former case and lack of evidentness in the latter. Consequently, if neither science nor opinion has merit, so the objection runs, how can faith, which is determined by features of either of them, be seen as meritorious? Aquinas shares this view. However, he notes that the objector misunderstands the meaning of 'science,' which s/he confuses with the 'consideration of things scientifically knowns.' According to Aquinas, science includes, on the one hand, the scientist's assent to a scientific fact and, on the other hand, his or her consideration of that fact:

Now the assent of science is not subject to free will, because the scientist is obliged to assent by force of the demonstration, wherefore scientific assent is not meritorious. But the actual consideration of what a man knows scientifically is subject to his free will, for it is in his power to consider or not to consider. Hence scientific consideration may

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<sup>108</sup> As exemplified by the evangelical episode of St Thomas Apostle, on which see above, notes 57ff.

<sup>109</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 2 a. 9.

<sup>110</sup> On the (at least seemingly) paradoxical relationship between God's influence and human freedom, see above, note 77.

<sup>111</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 2 a. 9 obj 2.

<sup>112</sup> See above, note 70.

be meritorious if it be referred to the end of charity, i.e. to the honor of God or the good of our neighbor.<sup>113</sup>

If assent is not a matter of free will (before the ‘force of demonstration,’ one cannot withhold assent), the same cannot be held with respect to *consideration*: this *is* a matter of free will, because one *can decide* whether or not to reflect on something that is already known.<sup>114</sup> As a consequence, merit can be gained if the reflection at hand is ‘referred to the end of charity, i.e. to the honor of God or the good of our neighbor.’

Aquinas says something analogous in regard to opinion.<sup>115</sup> Consequently, both science and opinion can be meritorious from the viewpoint of the consideration of what is already scientifically known or opined, respectively. In both cases, one has merit if one goes on to reflect on what one already knows or opines because of charity, i.e., ‘the honor of God and the good of our neighbor.’

According to Aquinas, therefore, not only in the case of faith but also in that of science and opinion, merit depends on charity, i.e. the love for God which God himself grants to us. Consequently, when one searches arguments in support of faith, one acts meritoriously. For Thomas, the readiness to believe, which is due to charity,<sup>116</sup> enables the faithful to use reason to the best of their abilities: ‘When a man’s will is ready to believe, he loves the truth he believes, he thinks out and takes to heart whatever reasons he can find in support thereof.’<sup>117</sup>

For Aquinas, the opportunity to successfully employ reason in support of faith seems to be proportional to the readiness to believe. From his words, it seems to emerge that, for him, not all believers have the same faith, and the more they love God the more they seem to be ready to believe in him and argue in support of faith. If this is correct, it should be concluded that one who has a paradigmatic faith engages in debates with those who do not believe only to show the reasonableness of one’s religious experience.

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<sup>113</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 2 a. 9 ad 2.

<sup>114</sup> Perhaps this is why Claudia E. Murphy says that for Aquinas ‘it is possible for an agent to have sufficient motivation for believing a proposition, and nonetheless to be able at least to withhold assent from it, or even to dissent from it (that is, to be free with respect to coming to believe it)’ (‘Aquinas on Voluntary Beliefs,’ *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 74, 2000, p. 586).

<sup>115</sup> Of course, in this case ‘there is no firm assent, since it is weak and infirm, as the Philosopher observes (*Poster.* I,33), so that it does not seem to proceed from a perfect act of the will: and for this reason, as regards the assent, it does not appear to be very meritorious, though it can be as regards the actual consideration’ (*Summa theologiae* II-II q. 2 a. 9 ad 2).

<sup>116</sup> ‘...the measure of charity...makes the will ready to believe them [the revealed truths]’ (*Summa theologiae* II-II q. 2 a. 10 ad 2).

<sup>117</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 2 a. 10.

In effect, Aquinas openly claims that the Christian faith can be lived and experienced at *different* levels of intensity. Of course, the fact that believers experience faith at different levels of both certainty and charity is also a commonsense opinion. As Saint Paul says, ‘the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith’ (Rm 1:17). Aquinas deals with this topic and offers a picture which is consistent with his concept of faith. He wonders ‘whether faith can be greater in one man than in another.’ It is worth the trouble to report the whole *respondeo*:

The quantity of a habit may be considered from two points of view: first, on the part of the object; secondly, on the part of its participation by the subject. Now the object of faith may be considered in two ways: first, in respect of its formal aspect; secondly, in respect of the material object which is proposed to be believed. Now the formal object of faith is one and simple, namely the First Truth, as stated above. Hence in this respect there is no diversity of faith among believers, but it is specifically one in all, as stated above. But the things which are proposed as the matter of our belief are many and can be received more or less explicitly; and in this respect one man can believe explicitly more things than another, so that faith can be greater in one man on account of its being more explicit. If, on the other hand, we consider faith from the point of view of its participation by the subject, this happens in two ways, since the act of faith proceeds both from the intellect and from the will, as stated above. Consequently a man’s faith may be described as being greater, in one way, on the part of his intellect, on account of its greater certitude and firmness, and, in another way, on the part of his will, on account of his greater promptitude, devotion, or confidence.<sup>118</sup>

In this passage, Aquinas summarizes in an impressively effective way his view of the different levels of faith. He employs the tripartition of faith which I have already mentioned above.<sup>119</sup>

According to that partition, faith means ‘believing in a God,’ ‘believing God’ and ‘believing in God.’

From the viewpoint of ‘believing God,’ there is no diversity of faith among Christians. In fact, they all assent to that which God has revealed, without which there is just nothing to believe.

Something similar may be said of ‘believing in a God,’ because all Christians are required to believe the same revealed truths. However, a believer can believe explicitly more things than someone else. To explain this stance, Aquinas refers to reasons that regard both the intellect (‘on account of its greater certitude and firmness’) and the will (‘on account of his [of the believer] greater promptitude, devotion, or confidence’). The point Thomas makes is that the faithful believe with more or less certitude, firmness, promptitude, devotion, and confidence. At the heart of this diversity, there is charity, from which the readiness to believe follows. This can easily be seen in Aquinas’s reply to the first objection contained in the article at hand. Let us consider the objection:

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<sup>118</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 5 a. 4.

<sup>119</sup> See above, note 84.

It would seem that faith cannot be greater in one man than in another. For the quantity of a habit is taken from its object. Now whoever has faith believes everything that is of faith, since by failing in one point, a man loses his faith altogether.... Therefore it seems that faith cannot be greater in one than in another.<sup>120</sup>

In his reply, Aquinas emphasizes the role played by the readiness to believe:

A man who obstinately disbelieves a thing that is of faith, has not the habit of faith, and yet he who does not explicitly believe all, while he is prepared to believe all, has that habit.<sup>121</sup>

The objector focuses on the material object of faith ('believing in a God') and claims that, if one fails to believe even only one truth, then one loses his faith altogether. Aquinas shifts the attention from the material object of faith to the virtue of faith, namely, the readiness to believe, which he also names 'the participation of faith by the subject.' Those who 'obstinately' do not believe a thing alone are not worthy of the habit of faith, while those who are 'prepared to believe all,' have such habit. While responding to another objection, Aquinas adds that 'some submit to it [the first truth] with greater certitude and devotion than others; and in this way faith is greater in one than in another.'<sup>122</sup>

Thomas, therefore, emphasizes the role played by the readiness to believe. It is the love for God, which God himself grants to believers, that is not possessed by faithful in equal degree. Consequently, it is especially from the viewpoint of 'believing in God,' that is, the determination of the will to the good, that there is diversity among believers. For Aquinas, therefore, while all believers are animated by charity, they possess it at different levels of intensity.

Let us now turn back to the subject here under consideration, i.e., the inconclusiveness of debates due to believers' wish to stick to their faith, regardless of contrary arguments. It is now possible to argue that those who possess a paradigmatic level of faith are ready to reject any kind of argument which opposes their religious belief. This is exactly what Aquinas openly says in a famous passage devoted to faith and reason. He says that, if natural reason attains conclusions that contradict the truths of faith, the arguments developed are certainly wrong:

If ... anything is found in the teachings of the philosophers contrary to faith, this error does not properly belong to philosophy, but is due to an abuse of philosophy owing to the insufficiency of reason. Therefore also it is possible from the principles of

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<sup>120</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 5 a. 4 obj 1.

<sup>121</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 5 a. 4 ad 1.

<sup>122</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 5 a. 4 ad 2.

philosophy to refute an error of this kind, either by showing it to be altogether impossible, or not to be necessary.<sup>123</sup>

On the one hand, Aquinas maintains that any argument contrasting with the truth of Christian revelation, even if it appears to be rationally convincing, must be rejected as wrong.<sup>124</sup> On the other hand, this conviction ends up highlighting the importance of the role that reason is expected to play, since Aquinas's thesis is that once certain arguments have been rejected—because of their being in contradiction with faith—reason must start anew from the beginning, 'from its own principles.' In so arguing, Aquinas promotes the idea that, on the one hand, *scientia* needs to be grounded in arguments; on the other hand, the search for arguments is to be promoted by the readiness to believe.

In this way, not only does Aquinas highlight his conviction that, unlike rational conclusions, faith is always true;<sup>125</sup> he also emphasizes the intellectual value of 'the love for the truth believed;' that is, the love for God which leads believers to reflect on him and his works in order to attain as many arguments as possible.<sup>126</sup> From this it follows that, for Aquinas, once caused to investigate by faith, reason functions in the best possible way.

Two questions arise. First, is it really possible for faith to exert an influence on reason when it comes to revealed truths that can also be demonstrated (the preambles)? In this case, reason alone is expected to demonstrate their truth. Does Aquinas really claim that faith intervenes in this case? If so, and this is the second question, how exactly can faith exert an influence on reason without depriving the latter of its autonomous way of proceeding?

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<sup>123</sup> Aquinas, *Super Boethium De Trinitate*, q. 2, tr. by R. E. Brennan (New York: Herder and Herder, 1946), q. 2, a. 3.

<sup>124</sup> According to Aquinas, while intellectual virtues are more certain than faith 'relatively' or 'for us' (*quoad nos*), faith is more certain than reason 'simply' (*simpliciter*). See above, note 79. Even more pointedly, Aquinas claims that 'faith is more certain than any understanding [of principles] and scientific knowledge (*omni intellectu et scientia*)' (*On Truth*, tr. by J. V. McGlynn [Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1953], q. 14, a. 1, ad 7). Jenkins, while commenting on this passage, suggests that according to Thomas 'the faithful hold the articles of faith with greater conviction than the principle of non-contradiction' (Jenkins, *Knowledge and Faith in Thomas Aquinas* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997], pp. 167f.).

<sup>125</sup> Again, let me mark Aquinas's awareness that not every stance, which seems to come from God, is authentically revealed by him. See above, note 30.

<sup>126</sup> According to Brian Leftow, Aquinas 'does not raise it [the existence of God] as a matter he seeks to settle by argument. *He takes it for granted that God exists.*' While referring to the *Summa Theologiae*, he also says that it 'contains a lot of sustained philosophical arguments even while presupposing the truth of certain religious beliefs' (Brian Leftow, 'Introduction.' In *Aquinas: Summa theologiae, Questions on God*, ed. by Brian Davies and Brian Leftow [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006], p. ix, emphasis mine).

In reply to the first question, let me point out that for Aquinas faith does play a role in the rational investigation regarding subjects that can be known. In such a case, the faith conceived as a certain amount of non-evident truths disappears, whereas the form of faith—i.e., charity—keeps operating. It is precisely the case of the *praeambula fidei*:

Demonstrative reasons in support of the preambles of faith, but not of the articles of faith, diminish the measure of faith, *since they make the thing believed to be seen*, yet they *do not diminish the measure of charity*, which makes the *will ready to believe them, even if they were unseen*.<sup>127</sup>

On the one hand, since evidentness has been provided, what Aquinas calls ‘the measure of faith’—i.e., its non-evidentness—turns out to be diminished or eliminated, depending on the amount of arguments provided. On the other hand, since the believer does not give up her/his love for God and the beliefs implied by such a love, what Aquinas calls ‘the measure of charity’—the love for God conceded by God himself—keeps functioning.

It can therefore be maintained that the believer can know and believe at the same time, where only at first sight should this seem to negate the well-known Thomistic idea that one object cannot be seen and believed at the same time.<sup>128</sup> In other words, for Aquinas knowing (taken as the adherence to certain statements due to evidentness) cannot replace believing (taken as the adherence to God’s revelation due to charity and divine grace), because divine grace cannot be replaced by human activity: ‘Grace is more perfect than nature, and, therefore, does not fail in those things wherein man can be perfected by nature.’<sup>129</sup> Natural reason, therefore, cannot take the place of the divine grace that has more dignity. As a result, even if reason has attained evidentness, faith keeps operating to the extent that it is conceived as adherence to God due to the love for him and what he has revealed.<sup>130</sup> According to Aquinas, therefore, faith always accompanies the rational investigation performed by the believer.

In reply to the second question, let me show how exactly Aquinas believes and argues that faith keeps exerting an influence on reason without depriving the latter of its autonomy. Let us recall

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<sup>127</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 2 a. 10 ad 2, my emphasis.

<sup>128</sup> See above, note 56.

<sup>129</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 9 a. 1.

<sup>130</sup> A conviction that is widespread among Christians, as rightly pointed out by Penelhum, can therefore be rejected: ‘It is common for Protestant, as well Catholic, thinkers to say that there cannot be conclusive reasons for the commitment that faith involves, since if there were such reasons, there would be no freedom in the commitment and hence no merit in making it’ (Penelhum, ‘The analysis of faith in St Thomas Aquinas’, p. 140). On the contrary, ‘perhaps what makes faith voluntary is not that its grounds are inconclusive, but that even if they are conclusive, men are free to deceive themselves and refuse to admit that they are’ (p. 153).

what he claims when he wonders whether or not faith is more certain than other intellectual virtues such as intellect, science, and wisdom.<sup>131</sup> As a believer, Aquinas affirms that, with respect to the cause of faith, faith is more certain since the cause in question is God and not human reason. But with regard to the subject of faith (i.e., the believer), he states that ‘the more a man’s intellect lays hold of a thing, the more certain it is,’ and ‘on this way, faith is less certain.’ If reason searches for evidentness, faith, taken as assent to statements that are not characterized by evidentness (*credere Deum*), gives no help. It follows that from the viewpoint of the subject of faith, the certainty can be attained only by natural reason, which functions without being under the influence of faith.

This portrayal of the relation Aquinas sees among faith, reason, and charity can be easily found in the abovementioned passage he devotes to the possibility that rational arguments negate truths of faith. Aquinas’s thesis is that once those arguments have been rejected—because of their contrast with faith—reason must start anew from the beginning, ‘from its own principles.’ Aquinas acknowledges that only reason is able to look for arguments. He shows a noteworthy trust in its potentialities and this is why, in spite of the mistakes it might have made, reason is supposed to recommence its work.<sup>132</sup> This follows from Aquinas’s firm conviction that faith coincides with the truth and that reason can only be consistent with faith because it is not possible to demonstrate what is false:

Since faith rests upon infallible truth, and since the contrary of a truth can never be demonstrated, it is clear that the arguments brought against faith cannot be demonstrations, but are difficulties that can be answered.<sup>133</sup>

Notice that the trust Aquinas places in reason is not strictly due to reason. It is based on two principles, neither of which is affirmed by way of argument. In fact, the former (faith rests upon infallible truth) is clearly due to faith, the latter (it is impossible to demonstrate what negates the truth) is proposed by Aquinas neither as a first principle nor as a demonstration (after all, such a demonstration would fall into circularity). In conclusion, believers’ love for God and the consequent certainty they feel about his revelation<sup>134</sup> constitute the *orientation* of their rational inquiry, which they develop as further confirmation of the revealed truths and as a means to clear away objections and criticisms. At the same time believers take the truth believed and loved as a

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<sup>131</sup> See above, notes 79 and 124.

<sup>132</sup> For a similar account of reason provided by Reid, see Chapter 2, notes 36ff.

<sup>133</sup> *Summa theologiae* I q. 1 a. 8.

<sup>134</sup> The certainty of faith consists of *adherence*—‘to adhere’ (*inhaerēo*)—to the revealed truths. Faith, therefore, can be seen as surer than any rational certainty: ‘In so far as science, wisdom and understanding are intellectual virtues, they are based upon the natural light of reason, which falls short of the certitude of God’s word, on which faith is founded’ (*Summa theologiae* II-II q. 4 a. 8 ad 3).

*criterion* of their speculative investigation, since it is on the basis of the agreement or disagreement with such truth that they either accept or reject reason's conclusions, respectively.

The fact that, even if influenced by faith, reason can work in full accordance with its own principles is shown by Aquinas while comparing the difference between a rational investigation that starts from purely rational principles and that which instead starts from God:

God is indeed that by which all things are known, not in the sense that they are not known unless he is known (as obtains among self-evident principles), but because all our knowledge is caused in us *through his influence*.<sup>135</sup>

These words respond satisfactorily to the second question here under consideration. On the one hand, Aquinas points out that rational knowledge is ultimately grounded on self-evident principles. Consequently, the truths of faith cannot participate in the rational investigation, since they do not enjoy evidentness. On the other hand, Aquinas states that it is thanks to God's influence that everything can be known (characterized by evidentness). By virtue of such influence believers love God, trust him, and consider true whatever he has revealed. Consequently, they take the truths of faith as *orientation* and *criterion* for their rational inquiry: *orientation* because they aim to confirm by reason what they already believe; *criterion* because in case of a contradiction, reason must be considered surely mistaken and rational investigation must start anew from the beginning.

In conclusion, in this Chapter I argued that Thomas Aquinas's reflection on the nature of faith and its relation to reason does offer a viable view of how believers combine the influence of divine revelation with the autonomy of reason's employment. In other words, Aquinas's view may explain how believers are not expected to change their mind, however convincing contrary arguments may appear to be, and at the same time are expected to appropriately and competently engage in rational debate. They are encouraged to think so not only because they are expected to maximally trust in God and rely on the truth of what he has revealed. They are also expected to rely on natural reason, which, according to Aquinas, once under the influence of such a religious faith, can best function in accordance with its own rules. Obviously enough, this supports believers' tenacity of faith in the face of counter-evidence, which gives rise to the inconclusiveness here under consideration.

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<sup>135</sup>

*Summa contra Gentiles*, I, 11, my emphasis.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Rethinking the Nature and Purpose of Debates**

In the last chapter, I argued that, according to Aquinas, Christian believers are supposed to stick to their belief against contrary evidence, however compelling this evidence may seem to be. In this chapter, I first show that this is incompatible with what I call ‘mere epistemology,’ according to which one should always prefer beliefs supported by more evidence to beliefs supported by less evidence. I then consider and refute some perspectives that more or less implicitly minimize this incompatibility. Finally, I argue that the Christian faith offers an opportunity to rethink the nature and purpose of debates, which allows for a wider epistemological view than mere epistemology. In this new light, intellectual investigations and debates should ultimately be directed by the search for good.

#### **4.1 Mere Epistemology and the Christian Faith**

In Chapter 3 I have focused on how Aquinas believes that the Christian faith should relate to rational investigations and debates. In short, faith mainly consists of a relationship with God, which God himself grants to believers. Because of this privileged relationship, which includes cooperation on their part, believers become convinced that divine revelation is true and cannot be refuted by rational arguments, however compelling these arguments may appear to be at first sight. Consequently, the faithful—at least the paradigmatic ones, who firmly believe in God and trust Him—are expected to hold on to their religious beliefs when confronted with arguments that, in regard to such beliefs, may arouse serious doubts. In the same vein, the faithful are supposed to trust human reason and make use of it to the best of their abilities, since they are expected to believe that no sound and truthful arguments against divine revelation can be found.

I decided to focus on Aquinas’s thought since it can convincingly be labelled ‘a touchstone for Christian reflection on faith’.<sup>1</sup> This probably led me to spill more ink than necessary on typically Thomistic arguments, and nonetheless enabled me to offer a view of some aspects of the

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<sup>1</sup> William Jay Wood, ‘Faith’s Intellectual Rewards.’ In *Religious Faith and Intellectual Virtue*, ed. by Laura F. Callahan and Timothy O’Connor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 37.

relationship between intellectual activities and the Christian faith that are widely accepted by Christians. Among these aspects, there are the firmness with which the believers should adhere to the divine revelation; the conviction that such a firmness is a divine gift and must consequently be seen as superior to the one that our cognitive faculties can provide; the idea that, from what I have just mentioned, the autonomous and unprejudiced employment of those faculties should be encouraged and not limited, as may seem to be the case at first sight.

As I have said, these aspects of the way the Christian faith requires to be related to rational investigations are widely accepted among Christians. In Chapter 2 I showed that they are part of Thomas Reid's reflection also, no matter how distant this reflection is from Aquinas's as to philosophical perspectives and competence in the field of theology. Let me now show that they (the abovementioned aspects) can equally be found in another stream of thought of the Christian theological and philosophical tradition. I am referring to the Franciscan tradition and more specifically to its chronologically first source, namely, the *Summa Halensis*, to which the whole subsequent Franciscan reflection traces back. (The work in question was written by the first Franciscan thinkers, among whom Alexander of Hales [1185 ca. – 1245], the first Franciscan friar to hold a University chair, certainly stood out.) In this authoritative work, the superiority of the firmness of faith over that of reason clearly anticipates the distinction adopted by Aquinas some decades later:

There is a certitude of intellect and a certitude of affection...I say, then, that the theological approach is more certain by the certitude of experience, by the certitude of affection, which is by way of taste ... but not more certain as far as intellectual speculation goes, which operates by way of seeing.<sup>2</sup>

The affinity between the concept of 'certitude of affection' employed in this passage and the 'adhesion' mentioned by Aquinas<sup>3</sup> is striking, especially if one takes into account the substantive differences that characterize, on the one hand, the Franciscan tradition and, on the other hand, the 'Dominican' one,<sup>4</sup> and more specifically Aquinas.

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<sup>2</sup> Alexander of Hales et al., *Doctoris irrefragabilis Alexandri de Hales Ordinis minorum Summa theologica Halensis* (Quaracchi, Florence: Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1924-1948), vol. 1, q. 1, c. 4, a. 2, tr. O. Bychkov, in Oleg Bychkov, 'Appendix: Alexander of Hales, *The Sum of Theology*,' *Franciscan Studies* 66 (2008), pp. 63-99. The fact that this work exerted an influence on Aquinas's *Summa* has recently been emphasized. See Lydia Schumacher, *Early Franciscan Theology: Between Authority and Innovation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> See above, Chapter 3, notes 79, 124 and 134.

<sup>4</sup> An insightful approach to some differences between the Franciscan stream of thought and the one which, by contrast, can be called 'Dominican,' was recently offered by Eleonore Stump in

Note that the affinity in question is of crucial importance for my purposes. It witnesses to a widespread inclination among Christians to contrast the firmness of faith with the one attained by natural reason. (And this inclination is of vital importance to my thesis that there is an unbridgeable gap between a merely epistemological approach and a religious one to belief.) The consequences of such a widespread inclination are worthwhile. If the certitude of faith is different from that achieved by reason, then no criticism can be addressed against the former because it does not conform to the criteria of the latter; but criticisms against the Christian faith have usually been advanced from the viewpoint of reason; therefore, the believers have often been led to respond to these criticisms by cultivating the idea that their beliefs, as well as their own way of thinking, cannot seriously be questioned. As Harry Blamires famously said, ‘thinking Christianly is not the same as thinking about Christian matters’ because there is a specifically ‘Christian mind.’<sup>5</sup>

The belief that there is a specifically Christian mind, whose criteria are other than evidence, may be confirmed by looking at a widespread epistemological conviction, which dates back to Socrates and Plato and can be summarized as follows:

I am one of those who are very willing to be refuted if I say anything which is not true, and very willing to refute anyone else who says what is not true, and just as ready to be refuted as to refute; for I hold that this is the greater gain of the two, just as the gain is greater of being cured of a very great evil than of curing the evil in another. For I imagine that there is no evil which a man can endure so great as an erroneous opinion about the matters of which we are speaking; and if you claim to be one of my sort, let us have the discussion out, but if you would rather have done, no matter;—let us make an end.<sup>6</sup>

Plato is depicting Socrates as the perfect philosopher, who is interested in attaining the truth, no matter in what the truth consists. What matters, on the contrary, is that any discussion should be conducted correctly from what I call mere epistemology, that is to say, only what is based on sufficient evidence should be considered true.

Note that a sort of moral obligation seems to characterize the passage here under consideration. Socrates mentions ‘a very great evil’ of which the debaters aim at ‘being cured,’ which emphasizes the crucial role that has been ascribed to the search for evidence and justification from the beginning of the history of philosophy. I have already made reference to the proportion between

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*Wandering in Darkness. Narrative and the Problem of Suffering* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). See below, note 98.

<sup>5</sup> See Harry Blamires, *The Christian Mind: How Should a Christian Think?* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1963), p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> Plato, *Gorgias*, 458 a3—b3, tr. by B. Jowett, in *The Dialogues of Plato* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). See above, Introduction, note 2.

statements and proofs, a proportion which at the dawn of modern age was considered the main feature of correct reasoning by thinkers such as Locke,<sup>7</sup> and was later established by W.K. Clifford's celebrated dictum: 'It is wrong always, everywhere, and for everyone to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.'<sup>8</sup> As a consequence, N. Wolterstorff has spoken of 'ethics of belief,'<sup>9</sup> and Plantinga has pointed out that 'the fundamental notions of justification ... have been deontological notions, or notions analogically but intimately related to deontological notions.'<sup>10</sup>

From the viewpoint of this epistemological and deontological perspective, which spans the whole history of philosophy, no plausibility seems ascribable to the faithful's conviction that they should hold on to their beliefs regardless of opposite arguments. (This lack of plausibility, however, is usually minimized by those who attempt to provide religious faith with rational arguments—an attempt which *in itself* is completely acceptable. In the last chapter I made reference to some thinkers—especially Maritain and, in his footsteps, Wippel—and refuted their proposals.<sup>11</sup>)

This viewpoint may be extended to include a popular philosophical doctrine of our time such as the so-called relativism, and nonetheless the faithful's conviction here under consideration would remain implausible. (Of course, relativism consists in clusters of views rather than single theories. For my purposes, however, it is sufficient to take it as the widely accepted conviction that notions like truth, justice, good, and their opposites as well, can be defined only *relatively*, namely, once a framework of assessment has been determined.<sup>12</sup> It goes without saying, however, that this definition falls into a self-referential contradiction, because, if truth can only be defined relatively, then the truth of this statement is to be defined relatively also.) From the viewpoint of relativism, as A. Bloom points out, the believers who tenaciously hold on to their faith are not only mistaken but also dangerous:

The true believer is the real danger. The study of history and of culture teaches that all the world was mad in the past; men always thought they were right, and that led to wars,

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<sup>7</sup> See above, Introduction, note 3.

<sup>8</sup> William K. Clifford, 'The Ethics of Belief.' In *Lectures and Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1879), p. 186.

<sup>9</sup> See Wolterstorff, *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief*, especially Chapter 1.

<sup>10</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 188.

<sup>11</sup> See above, Chapter 3, notes 22ff.

<sup>12</sup> See Maria Baghramian and Adam J. Carter, 'Relativism.' In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/relativism/> (accessed on July 1, 2018).

persecutions, slavery, xenophobia, racism, and chauvinism. The point is not to correct the mistakes and really be right; rather it is not to think you are right at all.<sup>13</sup>

In this passage, Bloom emphasizes the typically relativistic stance according to which believing ‘is but one option among others.’<sup>14</sup> It follows that, if one thinks that ‘one is not right at all,’ then one cannot sensibly claim that one’s religious belief is true. Like the mere epistemologist, therefore, the relativist cannot accept the tenacity of the Christian believers.

The Christian faith, however, seems to require a unique relationship with the employment of cognitive faculties. As I have said above, it seems that there is a specifically Christian mind, and an equally specific way of thinking Christianly. The Christian believers may be expected to be responsive to God and not to epistemological criteria elaborated by way of reasoning. According to John Stackhouse, ‘Christian thought is supposed to be responsive to God and responsive to the world God created, sustains, loves, and redeems.’<sup>15</sup> This gives rise to a striking contrast with the various ways of dealing with knowledge that are currently developed by epistemologists. Surrender and capitulation to current culture, therefore, become a serious possibility: ‘Some Christians practice an intentional form of this mode, consciously trying to adapt the Christian tradition to a contemporary ideology of some kind.’<sup>16</sup>

Capitulation to the current cultural mainstream may also be encouraged by a sort of inclination to conformity, which seems to play a decisive role in the contemporary academic context. In a book suggestively titled *Academic Freedom in an Age of Conformity*,<sup>17</sup> Joanna Williams makes a point that is of interest here. She first points out that threats to academic freedom are usually thought of as originating from outside of the academia, especially from the political terrain. These threats, however, are easily identifiable, and are consequently equally easy to oppose. ‘More frequent and insidious’ are instead those threats ‘that occur within universities’ since they ‘can often go unnoticed.’<sup>18</sup> The author then lists the threats she says are inside academia:

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<sup>13</sup> Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished The Souls of Today’s Students* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), p. 26.

<sup>14</sup> This is what Charles Taylor rightly says is a feature of modern age: *A Secular Age: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished The Souls of Today’s Students* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> John Stackhouse, *Need to know. Vocation as the Heart of Christian Epistemology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 18.

<sup>16</sup> Stackhouse, p. 14.

<sup>17</sup> Joanna Williams, *Academic Freedom in an Age of Conformity. Confronting the Fear of Knowledge* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

<sup>18</sup> Williams, p. 2.

Restricting the terrain of discussion, placing some topics beyond challenge, presenting knowledge as simply individual perspectives and blurring knowledge, beliefs and values all contribute towards the creation of a culture of conformity in academia. Such enforced consensus is the antithesis of academic freedom.<sup>19</sup>

The fact that the faithful stick to their belief against contrary evidence is simply incompatible with the conformity in question. Doing so, they contradict the conviction that no stable truth can be found, a conviction that follows the idea that knowledge is to be taken ‘as simply individual perspectives.’

It may be objected that, since the very conformity under consideration includes the idea that there are topics ‘beyond challenge,’ the tenacity of the Christian believers may align with current academic conformism. However, the topics mentioned above, which are considered ‘beyond challenge,’ consist in philosophical or scientific views—which are proposed by way of arguments and evidence—and not in religious stances—which are, at least ultimately, based on divine revelation.

It may still be objected that the faithful here under consideration do not pay attention to contrary evidence only because they are confident that further research will eventually confirm their own beliefs, which is plausible from the viewpoint of mere epistemology. There is, however, at least one unavoidable and substantive distinction between the attitude of the believer who holds on to her belief in the face of controversy and the philosopher (or scientist) who at first sight acts similarly. The latter is expected to either *suspend* her belief or accept it as a plausible working hypothesis until confirmation by way of argument is provided, whereas this cannot be said of the former, otherwise her religious belief would appear to be grounded in rational arguments, and even talking about *faith* would no longer make sense.

In conclusion, the fact that believers should hold on to their beliefs against contrary evidence seems totally incompatible with mere epistemology. Among the believers who reflect on the relationship between faith and reason, there are those who support this incompatibility and consequently oppose faith and reason to each other; there are those who, on the contrary, tend to minimize the incompatibility at hand. The former initiative, which takes shape in various forms of fideism, has often been discouraged. It implies that faith is irrational, from which follows that rational discussions of matters of faith no longer make sense. The latter initiative, on the contrary, has often been encouraged. It is based on a principle that is widely accepted by those who rationally reflect on faith, namely, there are common aspects between faith and reason. Among the proposals advanced

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<sup>19</sup> Williams, p. 15.

from this perspective, there are the ones I explored (and refuted) in the previous chapter, while referring to scholars committed to interpret Aquinas's thought. Other attempts, which do not focus on Aquinas, will be taken into consideration in the next section. After having argued so far that the typically Christian inclination to persevere in the face of controversy is untenable from the viewpoint of mere epistemology, I will explore perspectives according to which such an inclination may instead, at least in some cases, be epistemologically plausible and shareable by any researchers, unbelievers included.

## 4.2 Refuting the Views that minimize the Gap between mere Epistemology and the Christian Faith

### 4.2.1 Basil Mitchell on Neutrality and Commitment

Basil Mitchell devoted an extensive reflection to the relationship between the commitment to sticking to one's beliefs and the impartiality to acknowledge the difficulty raised by opposing evidence. It is indicative of the decisive role this subject played in his reflection that, in his inaugural lecture delivered at the University of Oxford in 1968,<sup>20</sup> he focused precisely on the concepts of 'commitment' and 'neutrality.'<sup>21</sup>

According to Mitchell, both concepts are part of the scholarly activity. In fact, 'any philosopher (and, *mutatis mutandis*, any academic) has this problem of reconciling his neutrality as a philosopher with his commitment as a man...'<sup>22</sup> Since philosophy 'touches life, at least potentially, at all points,'<sup>23</sup> philosophers are expected to deal with their philosophical arguments as well as with the intuitions and commitments that emerge from their life experience. (Something analogous can also be said of any academics, in proportion to the importance that their life experience has to their scholarly activity.<sup>24</sup>) Negative outcomes would follow if they did not pay attention to the needs of both academic research and human experience:

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<sup>20</sup> Basil Mitchell, *Neutrality and Commitment. An inaugural lecture delivered before the University of Oxford on 14 May 1968* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968).

<sup>21</sup> While in the work in question Mitchell makes use of the concept of *neutrality*—which clearly means absence of bias toward every position involved in a debate—he will later use the concept of *impartiality*, taken as the ability to not minimize the difficulty faced by one's thesis (see more below, note 31).

<sup>22</sup> Mitchell, *Neutrality and Commitment*, p. 14.

<sup>23</sup> Mitchell, *Neutrality and Commitment*, p. 10.

<sup>24</sup> In this connection, Plantinga's famous essay 'Advice to Christian Philosophers,' originally published in *Faith and philosophy* (see above, Chapter 1, note 30), was later provided with 'a special, new

A man who is prepared to accept in everyday life for true nothing which he cannot philosophically defend will either become practically ineffective and humanly incomplete, or else philosophically unadventurous.<sup>25</sup>

In the footsteps of Newman and his criticism against the typically Lockean conviction that a philosopher should proportionate every belief to the available evidence, Mitchell reiterates Newman's idea that our way of reasoning is often 'tacit and informal.' For him,

in estimating the force of the evidence and in deciding what is to be believed on the strength of it we are rightly influenced by considerations other than those provided by the evidence itself.<sup>26</sup>

As a consequence, any scholarly activity, in proportion to its ability 'to touch life,' depends on personal considerations and private assumptions, no matter how questionable they may be.

Like Newman before him, Mitchell shows that the influence exerted by personal assumptions and commitments, be it conscious or not, is inevitable and positive as well. Without their influence, no progress could be made, although a balance between these assumptions and the need to impartially assess the available evidence is required. Otherwise, a scholar would inevitably be exposed to 'a double temptation, that of distorting the philosophical arguments so as to bring them into line with his personal commitment, and that of abandoning his personal commitment prematurely when the philosophical going gets difficult.'<sup>27</sup>

To highlight the influence exerted by personal assumptions over rational investigation—both philosophical and scientific—and the positive role they play in the search for truth, Mitchell makes use of the concept of 'tenacity.' A 'principle of tenacity' is a positive component of rational enquiry. It promotes research because all the parties involved, if tenaciously committed to holding on to their view, will do their best to find any possible argument in support of their position and against the contrary one:

Scientists operate what has been called a 'principle of tenacity', in virtue of which they do not let go of their fundamental beliefs when things get difficult, but rather persevere in the hope, or—shall we say?—the faith, that the problem will eventually be resolved.<sup>28</sup>

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preface for Christian thinkers from different disciplines' and published on the website of the journal in question ([http://www.faithandphilosophy.com/article\\_advice.php](http://www.faithandphilosophy.com/article_advice.php), accessed on July 5, 2018).

<sup>25</sup> Mitchell, *Neutrality and Commitment*, p. 12.

<sup>26</sup> Basil Mitchell, *Faith and Criticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 14.

<sup>27</sup> Mitchell, *Neutrality and Commitment*, p. 14.

<sup>28</sup> See Mitchell, *Faith and Criticism*, p. 18.

But how exactly the principle under consideration can be reconciled with the impartiality to assess the available arguments, which for Mitchell is equally vital to any rational investigation? It is precisely to make this point clear that Mitchell refers to the concluding sentences of *The Origin of Species*, in which Darwin, on the one hand, is confident about the possibility of solving the problems that still persist with his theory, and, on the other hand, takes seriously the problems in question.<sup>29</sup> According to Mitchell,

two things are to be noticed here. One is that Darwin does not at all minimize the difficulties. He is, in that sense, open-minded and impartial. The other is that, in spite of fully acknowledging them, he continues to trust his theory. And it is apparent, I think, that both these attitudes are essential to scientific progress.<sup>30</sup>

For Mitchell, therefore, one's inclination to not minimize the difficulties faced by one's thesis, which is an obvious indication of impartiality and open-mindedness, can align with the wish to stick to one's personal commitments.<sup>31</sup>

While arguing that these two aspects (impartiality and personal assumptions) should align with one another to promote science and philosophy, Mitchell defends those scholars who are also religious believers against the charge of being partial and epistemological unreliable when they reflect on religion. On the basis of a well-known and widespread opposition between reason and religious faith that dates back to the Enlightenment, believers have often been considered unfit to conduct rational investigations that have to do with their religious faith. (Note that this view has been so popular in the last three centuries that Karl Barth, who famously rejected the fundamental claims of the Enlightenment, involuntarily supported it. According to his well-known 'dilemma,' in fact, one who is a believer and intends to discuss religion with non-believers either blasphemously gives up on one's faith or dishonestly engages in the discussion.<sup>32</sup>)

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<sup>29</sup> 'A crowd of difficulties will have occurred to the reader. Some of them are so grave that to this day I can never reflect on them without being staggered; but, to the best of my judgement, the greater number are only apparent; and those that are real are not, I think, fatal to my theory' (Charles Darwin, *Origin of Species* (London: John Murray, 1859), p. 171, cit. in Mitchell, *Faith and Criticism*, p. 18).

<sup>30</sup> Mitchell, *Faith and Criticism*, p. 18.

<sup>31</sup> Note that, for Mitchell, 'impartiality is a fundamental academic virtue. It requires one to be scrupulous in assembling the evidence, honest in recognizing arguments against one's position, fair in assessing the force of these arguments, sympathetic in representing the position of those with whom one disagrees. Academics all too often fail to satisfy these requirements, but failure nevertheless it is, and the requirements are absolute'. Probably more importantly, 'impartiality does not imply neutrality.' Unlike neutrality, in fact, impartiality can be exhibited 'while holding fast to firm convictions of one's own.' (Mitchell, *Faith and Criticism*, pp. 24f.).

<sup>32</sup> See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, tr. by G. T. Thompson and H. Knight (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956), volume 1, part I, pp. 93-95.

Mitchell, however, does not seem to consider what specifically pertains to religion and, still more specifically, to the Christian faith. To deal with the abovementioned accusations brought against scholars who are also religious believers, he does not take into account the specific way in which faith may lead those believers to approach debates. In the footsteps of Newman,<sup>33</sup> he rather holds that it is the way *reason* functions that needs to be more appropriately investigated and assessed:

The contention that openness to criticism is incompatible with commitment derives from a certain familiar conception of the way reason works, which associates reason with complete open-mindedness and a readiness at every moment to be swayed entirely by the state of the evidence as it appears at that time. ... The inadequacies of this view are exposed by Newman, who notes that in all matters of importance we tend to hold on to our central beliefs despite fluctuations in the state of the evidence.<sup>34</sup>

As a consequence, Mitchell's view leads us to minimize the problem that I have shown in the previous section is typical of the Christian believers who rationally discuss the contents of their faith. Mitchell arguably says that not only the contents of such a faith but also those of philosophy and any other academic discipline involve deeply personal convictions. However, his idea that distinctions between reason and faith should only be seen as due to 'differing degrees' is not equally convincing:

The dilemma in which Christian faith is said to be involved between the need for whole-hearted conviction and the requirements of rational criticism is not unique, but applies to any reflective philosophy of life. Instead of the sharp dichotomy between science and religious faith which is said to generate the dilemma, what we actually find is a continuum in which, in differing degrees, elements of faith and criticism are found at each stage.<sup>35</sup>

The differing degrees in which elements of faith (taken as 'whole-hearted conviction') and criticism are found at each stage of the continuum in question are apparently due to the equally differing degrees in which each stage 'touches life.' Religion, philosophy, and science occupy different stages, in increasing order of detachment and neutrality.

Mitchell, therefore, minimizes the problem with religion and faith that I have instead highlighted so far. No uniqueness is ascribed to the way religious believers engage in debates, and their tenacity in holding on to their beliefs is also ascribed to everyone who may have reasons for sticking to one's convictions.

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<sup>33</sup> See above, Chapter 1, note 66.

<sup>34</sup> Mitchell, *Faith and Criticism*, p. 22.

<sup>35</sup> Mitchell, *Faith and Criticism*, p. 67.

In the same vein, Mitchell argues that, in any field, tenacity is a resource for the best employment of reason. In fact, one's inclination to not overlook contrary evidence leads one to employ reason to the best of one's abilities. Furthermore, this inclination is proportionate to the commitment to one's personal assumptions. Consequently, it is the commitment in question that may be seen as the ultimate cause of progress in research. In other words, the more one sticks to one's personal commitments, the more appropriately one conducts one's research. As I have already shown above, for Mitchell debaters will do their best when they 'persevere in the hope, or—shall we say?—the faith, that the problem will eventually be resolved.'

There is a problem, however, with this attempt to minimize the distinction between, on the one hand, religion and faith, and, on the other hand, any other personal commitment. Mitchell mentions hope, tenacity and perseverance with the aim of showing that they successfully take part in the rational debate, and must therefore be seen as indispensable components of scholarly investigation. On a closer inspection, however, it emerges that their employment is successful only to the extent that it is based on commonly accepted evidence, and allows to find new evidence. According to Mitchell, in fact, if debaters persevere in the faith that their thesis will eventually be proven to be true, then it is plausible to expect that they would succeed. Mitchell quotes Stuart Mill, according to whom—in Mitchell's words—'in general, truth is better served by having a variety of systems of belief in vigorous competition with one another than by allowing the expression only of what is currently held to be the truth.'<sup>36</sup> To summarize, if debaters stick to their beliefs even against contrary evidence, this would likely contribute to the advancement of knowledge more than their giving up on the beliefs in question once confronted with opposing arguments. Obviously enough, this means that the tenacity against contrary evidence *is based on evidence*, that is, the abovementioned belief that persevering in the hope of being successful contributes to progress in knowledge more than the attitude of those who give up on their convictions. Mitchell confirms this view:

In the light of these considerations it would seem that the tendency of people to develop persistent convictions which are underdetermined by the evidence is not only a widespread phenomenon, as Newman noted, but one that is justified as a means to discovering truth. Truth is more likely to be found if people join together in developing a set of ideas with a considerable degree of perseverance than if they allow their opinions to fluctuate readily in response to changes in the evidence.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Mitchell, *Faith and Criticism*, p. 29.

<sup>37</sup> Mitchell, *Faith and Criticism*, p. 30.

If the tenacity and persistence treated by Mitchell ‘is not only a widespread phenomenon ... but one that is *justified* as a means to discovering truth’ (my emphasis), then Mitchell’s analysis minimizes the basic distinction that I have argued there is with the tenacity that is typical of the Christian faith. Unlike the one treated by Mitchell, the perseverance that the Christian believers are expected to maintain is not *justified*, is not based on *common evidence*, and no publicly acceptable explanations can be offered in its support.

It may be objected that Mitchell’s account of tenacity does not deny that Christians behave in a certain way *by divine grace*; if divine grace is not against reason, as the Christian tradition usually maintains, then it must be possible to offer plausible explanations in its support also from a rational point of view. This—so the objection might go—is what Mitchell might have tried to do while arguing that the behaviour of the faithful is ‘justified.’ (Furthermore, this is fully consistent with Aquinas’s famous conviction that the faithful must be confident that their belief, though mainly due to divine intervention, can be successfully defended by using rational arguments.<sup>38</sup>)

However, there are at least two reasons for rejecting this objection. First, Mitchell says that philosophers and scientists ‘persevere in the hope, or—shall we say?—the faith, that the problem will eventually be resolved.’ Obviously enough, the faith or hope at stake does not have anything to do with the *firmness* with which the Christian believers are supposed to hold their beliefs. The faith or hope mentioned by Mitchell is proportioned to the abovementioned evidence that there are cases in which persevering in the face of controversy eventually produces new satisfactory evidence. In contrast, the firmness of the Christian believers is not proportionate to evidence. Second, the researcher who hopes to find new evidence continues persevering against the available evidence only within a reasonable period of time, beyond which her hope should be abandoned. The believers who persevere in the face of controversy may instead be ready to do so for an indefinite time. True, like Aquinas and Reid, they can be convinced that reason will sooner or later be able to confirm a certain statement related to their faith; this, however, may happen after the reasonable period of time mentioned above, beyond which they would be seen as simply unjustified and unreasonably tenacious.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> See above, Chapter 3, notes 132ff.

<sup>39</sup> From this it does not follow that I completely reject Mitchell’s overall conviction according to which ‘there is not that sharp dichotomy between scientific explanation and other kinds of explanation which led so many nineteenth-century thinkers to dismiss rational theology as beyond redemption’ (Mitchell, *Faith and Criticism*, p. 78). I find this view acceptable *to the extent that* it refers to explanations that are offered by both believers and non-believers when evidence in support of their theses *can* be provided. In such a case, they both are required to argue in support of their views. Instead, if no evidence in support of

#### 4.2.2 Faith, Belief in the Face of Controversy, and Commitment to a risky Act

Another way of minimizing the problem with the Christian faith here under consideration emerges from recent investigations conducted on the nature of faith. Those who carry out these investigations focus on a *general* concept of faith, both religious and non-religious. D. Howard-Snyder, for example, believes that the idea that there is something like a religious or Christian faith, as distinguishable from other types of faith, is simply a mistake. He ironically compares such an idea to the conviction that ‘there’s a distinctive form of religious or Christian ingestion and excretion, or pain and pleasure, or belief and desire—which is absurd.’<sup>40</sup> This view is echoed by Lara Buchak, according to whom ‘faith statements in religious contexts and in more mundane contexts express the same attitude and so share some typical characteristics.’<sup>41</sup>

While focusing on the nature of this general notion of faith, Buchak argues that those who have faith commit to acting on the claim that they maintain by faith, no matter if counter-evidence is provided;<sup>42</sup> they are consequently able to engage in long-term, risky projects, which may be profitable for them. This is why Buchak says that faith can serve ‘an important purpose in human life.’<sup>43</sup> For her, faith ‘means *not looking for further evidence* for the specific purpose of deciding whether to act on the proposition, or not basing one’s decision on how *the evidence* turns out.’<sup>44</sup> This is not irrational at all, because there are circumstances in which the worse strategy, contrary to what is usually believed, is precisely looking for more evidence: ‘There are situations in

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one’s belief shows up, whereas evidence that opposes one’s thesis is available, then non-believers are expected to change their mind, whereas believers *qua* believers are expected to be tenacious mainly by way of divine grace, which make them trust in God.

<sup>40</sup> Daniel Howard-Snyder, ‘Does Faith entail Belief?’, *Faith and Philosophy* 33 (2016), p. 14. By the same author, see also ‘Propositional faith: what it is and what it is not,’ *American Philosophical Quarterly* 50 (2013), pp. 357-372; ‘Schellenberg on propositional faith,’ *Religious Studies* 49 (2013), pp. 181-194. Howard-Snyder’s persuasion resembles positions which have often been advanced in regard to the idea of ‘Christian philosophy,’ to which I referred in Chapter 3, section 1. According to such positions, Christian persuasions cannot exert any influence on the nature of philosophy. Howard-Snyder seems to rely on the idea that the same is to be said of the nature of faith, which for him does not change if applies to religion. From a merely philosophical point of view—he seems to say—we can only focus on the concept of faith *in general*.

<sup>41</sup> Lara Buchak, ‘Can It Be Rational to Have Faith?’. In *Probability in the philosophy of religion*, ed. by Jake Chandler and Victoria S. Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 226.

<sup>42</sup> The subject of faith ‘must care whether the proposition is true, must have a positive attitude towards the proposition, and must not be certain of the proposition on the basis of his evidence alone—his evidence must leave it open that the proposition is false’ (Lara Buchak, ‘Faith and steadfastness in the face of counter-evidence,’ *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 81 (2017), p. 114).

<sup>43</sup> Buchak, ‘Faith and steadfastness in the face of counter-evidence,’ p. 113.

<sup>44</sup> Lara Buchak, ‘Rational faith and justified belief.’ In *Religious Faith and Intellectual Virtue*, p. 55, my emphasis.

which, because of the structure of the available acts and the available evidence, it is instrumentally rational—rational *from the point of view of getting what you want*—to act rather than to examine additional evidence.<sup>45</sup>

According to Buchak, therefore, faith in some propositions requires one to take risks on those propositions before examining further evidence. Faith can be stronger or weaker along a couple of dimensions. The first one is ‘how much counterevidence the individual would be willing to tolerate (the tenacity of his commitment);’ the second one is ‘the size of risk he is willing to take; the bigger risks he is willing to take, the stronger his faith is.’<sup>46</sup>

Obviously enough, Buchak’s view of faith does not align with the concept of religious faith I am focusing on in this dissertation. Buchak maintains that faith ‘means *not looking for further evidence*,’ and makes clear that ‘in many cases, a decision to eschew further evidence will be based on evidence one already has: faith need not be “blind” faith.’<sup>47</sup> I agree with her that ‘faith need not be blind faith,’<sup>48</sup> but from this it does not follow that not looking for further evidence and sticking to one’s faith against opposing arguments ‘will be based on evidence one already has.’ Grounding faith into evidence which is already possessed may apply to mundane faith but not to religious faith, whose ultimate foundation is supposed to be God’s grace.

Unlike Buchak, who simply *assumes* at the outset that there is no ultimate difference between religious faith and mundane faith, Evan Fales *argues* in support of the same conviction. In a way that resembles Mitchell’s reflection, he says that

Having faith ... may mean simply that, while the evangelist has no effective response to offer to the objections, he or she remains confident that there is such an explanation, compatible with her worldview, even if neither he/she nor anyone else at present knows what it is. And this confidence need not be at all irrational. After all, scientists regularly remain committed to their theories in the face of what Kuhn called anomalies.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Buchak, ‘Faith and steadfastness in the face of counter-evidence,’ p. 115.

<sup>46</sup> Buchak, ‘Faith and steadfastness in the face of counter-evidence,’ p. 120. See also p. 115: ‘S has a higher degree of faith in X to the extent that he is willing to take more risks on X without looking for further evidence’. Michael Pace disagrees with Buchak, since he believes that different degrees of faith cannot be explained only on how big the risk involved by the act of faith is. In his view, Buchak should also make mention of ‘a degree of confidence, belief, or any other cognitive attitude as even partially constituting faith’ (Michael Pace, ‘The strength of faith and trust,’ *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 81 (2017), p. 142).

<sup>47</sup> Buchak, ‘Rational faith and justified belief,’ p. 55.

<sup>48</sup> See Chapter 3, notes 56ff., where I focus on Aquinas’s view that, although the object of faith lacks of evidentness, the same cannot be said of its signs.

<sup>49</sup> Evan Fales, ‘Making and Breaking Faith.’ In *Religious Faith and Intellectual Virtue*, p. 130.

I agree with the idea that, while persevering in their belief against contrary evidence, the believers remain confident that evidence in support of their choice will eventually be found.

I disagree with Fales, however, when he says that *the same* happens to scientists *qua* scientists. While discussing Mitchell's position, I have individuated two unbridgeable differences between those who remain confident by faith and those who remain confident by reason. They can be profitably employed in response to Fales's conviction.<sup>50</sup>

In the same book in which Fales's essay is published, John Bishop focuses on the fact that, if it is God the person in whom the faithful trust, then the trust in question should be taken to the fullest possible extent:

If it really is *God* to whom we are related as person-to-person, an overall practical orientation of trust seems justified to the fullest extent, beyond anything justifiable in human relationships. ...<sup>51</sup>

I agree with the idea that trust in God is justified beyond any rational justification. This coincides with what I have argued so far, namely, that the steadfastness with which the believers are supposed to hold on to their conviction against opposing evidence is beyond rational justification, and is consequently a problem for debaters. There is one aspect of Bishop's reflection, however, that may still pave the way for minimizing the difference between the Christian faith and other motivations or commitments. Bishop mentions *our* trust in God without mentioning that, if 'it really is *God* to whom we are related,' then we trust in God mainly because of *His* initiative. On closer inspection, it is this initiative that seems to be the only plausible cause of the firmness with which we can believe 'beyond anything justifiable in human relationships.'

#### 4.2.3 On Disagreement

The concept of disagreement is obviously crucial to the subject here under consideration.<sup>52</sup> The researches that have recently been carried out on this concept, therefore, make a substantive

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<sup>50</sup> See above, note 39.

<sup>51</sup> John Bishop, 'Trusting Others, Trusting in God, Trusting the World.' In *Religious Faith and Intellectual Virtue*, p. 165.

<sup>52</sup> Discussions on exclusivism started with discussions on religious exclusivism, and soon it was understood that exclusivism as well as disagreement may also apply to other areas of human experience like philosophy, politics, and science. (See Peter Van Inwagen, 'We're right. They're wrong.' In *Disagreement*, ed. by Richard Feldman and Ted A. Warfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 11).

contribution to the reflection I am conducting here. Like debates on faith in the face of controversy, these researches minimize the difference between Christian faith and any other view in regard to rational debates and related disagreement. While depicting some traits of these researches, I will show that, when it comes to religious disagreement, those who conduct such researches take for granted that no attention is to be paid to specifically religious considerations.

Let me start by noting that it may seem commonsensical that the vast majority of the beliefs that people held are expected to become subject to disagreement and are consequently supposed to be either substantially revised or totally abandoned. On closer inspection, however, this position, which has been called ‘conformist’ or ‘conciliatory,’ is not the only possible one; another one is the ‘non-conformist’ or ‘steadfast.’<sup>53</sup> The former, which is held, among others, by David Christensen, Richard Feldman, and Hilary Kornblith, argues that one cannot continue holding on to one’s beliefs if one does not have reasons that are not related to the disagreement itself. In other words, rational disagreement among peers—those who participate in a debate from an equal cognitive point of view—is unacceptable. By contrast, the latter view, which is held, among others, by Thomas Kelly and Richard Foley, argues that one can stick to one’s thesis even if one does not have reasons that are independent of the disagreement itself. For non-conformists, in other words, rational disagreement among peers is acceptable.

Both conformists and non-conformists support the minimization here at stake. The non-conformist view supports the conviction that perseverance in the face of controversy is plausible from the viewpoint of what I call mere epistemology. And from this it follows that there is no unbridgeable gap between religious and non-religious debaters. The conformist view endorses the minimization in question also; to show this, however, I need to give more details. In fact, since this view does not accept rational disagreement among peers, it may appear to support the gap in question: debaters give up on their beliefs in the face of controversy, whereas this does not apply to religious debates. However, this distinction between non-religious debates and religious debates is not taken into consideration. As a consequence, the unacceptability of disagreement extends to religious matters. Let me consider D. Christensen’s claim that one has to distinguish areas in which disagreement is not really possible from areas in which it is instead a serious possibility. If this distinction occurred between, on the one hand, any realm of knowledge excluding religion and, on the other hand, religious faith, then it would align with my thesis that, unlike other subjects of debate, religion is an obstacle to agreement. In reality, Christensen proposes a distinction between some areas of

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<sup>53</sup> See *The Epistemology of Disagreement: New Essays*, ed. by David Christensen and Jennifer Lackey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 2.

knowledge such as mathematics and sciences ‘that are not subject to significant peer-to-peer disagreement,’ and ‘areas of morality, religion, politics, and economics, and, unfortunately, philosophy which are rife with disagreement.’<sup>54</sup> Of course, Christensen’s distinction confirms the idea that religious contents are not the only ones that can generate disagreement. As a result, this view is part of the minimization here under consideration.<sup>55</sup>

After having referred to conformism and non-conformism, let me now point out that these are only some of the views that can emerge before disagreement. For a more complete overview, as R. Audi has pointed out, a ‘kind of compromise view’ between the views mentioned above and ‘variants of each’ should be considered.<sup>56</sup>

Thus, disagreement regards any debates, including the ones that regard disagreement. This should not surprise us if we consider the variety of the factors of disagreement, a list of which is offered by Frances and Matheson:<sup>57</sup>

cognitive ability had while answering the question; evidence brought to bear in answering the question; relevant background knowledge; time devoted to answering the question; distractions encountered in answering the question; relevant biases; attentiveness when answering the question; intellectual virtues possessed.

While elaborating on the notion of ‘epistemic peers,’ J. Lackey, too, mentions these factors. She first says that ‘A and B are epistemic peers relative to the question whether  $p$  when A and B are (roughly) equally justified in their beliefs regarding this question.’<sup>58</sup> She then offers a definition of

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<sup>54</sup> David Christensen, ‘Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News,’ *The Philosophical Review*, 1 April 2007, 116 (2), p. 214. It is worth the trouble to quote the reasons why Christensen says the distinction he individuates obtains: ‘Why is this? It seems clear that disagreement flourishes when evidence is meager or poorly distributed, or when, due to our emotional or intellectual limitations, we are just not very good at reacting correctly to the evidence. In other words, disagreement flourishes when epistemic conditions are bad. To focus in on my own field, I think that we all should acknowledge that epistemic conditions are not so great in philosophy’ (ibid.)

<sup>55</sup> The same can be said of another reflection on the fact that disagreement may vary depending on the nature of the subject. Hilary Kornblith rightly points out that disputes such as the one regarding the restaurant bill, famously employed by discussants of the notion of disagreement, and those which concern, say, internalism and externalism, are importantly different from one another. (See Hilary Kornblith, ‘Belief in the face of controversy.’ In *Disagreement*, pp. 33ff.). Trying to understand what is the share of tablemates is ‘a disagreement about a single claim against the background of complete agreement about all other issues on the same general subject’ (p. 52). Dealing with it will certainly be easier than disagreement on topics that imply a wide range of related issues, such as the internalism/externalism controversy.

<sup>56</sup> See Robert Audi, ‘Cognitive Disparities, Dimensions of Intellectual Diversity and the Resolution of Disagreements.’ In *The Epistemology of Disagreement*, p. 222.

<sup>57</sup> See Bryan Frances and Jonathan Matheson, ‘Disagreement’. In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2018/entries/disagreement/>, accessed on November 1, 2017.

<sup>58</sup> See Jennifer Lackey, ‘Taking Religious Disagreement Seriously.’ In *Religious Faith and Intellectual Virtue*, p. 313.

‘equal justification,’ which coincides with the factors mentioned above, although the nomenclature she employs is different:

I suggest that we are justified in thinking two people, A and B, are equally justified in their conflicting beliefs whether  $p$  when (i) A and B have been thinking about the subject matter in question for a sufficiently long time and in significant detail, (ii) A and B are both sufficiently intellectually virtuous with respect to whether  $p$ , and (iii) neither A nor B is in sole possession of evidence that both would (after careful consideration) take to be decisive on the claim in question.<sup>59</sup>

Note that these factors are so numerous and deeply rooted in our cognitive structures that a ‘cognitive disparity,’ as R. Audi names it, can easily obtain.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, disparity regarding the meaning of those factors can make someone consider the definition itself of epistemic peers ‘opaque.’<sup>61</sup>

In this connection, S. C. Goldberg even wonders whether or not the notion of ‘peer disagreement’ applies to religious matters. For him, ‘it is not clear whether the sorts of disagreements on religious matters should be seen as peer disagreements.’ Believers may in fact hold that non-believers lack ‘some sort of crucial insight;’ non-believers may instead consider themselves in possession of ‘what they regard as a deflationary (perhaps psychology-based) account of the origins of religious belief.’<sup>62</sup>

This reflection on religious peer disagreement offers a faithful depiction of how believers and non-believers usually look at each other.<sup>63</sup> My thesis is that believers may have at least one reason for not seeing unbelievers as their peers. This reason is specifically Christian, in the sense that believers hold that God has granted them the firmness with which they continue believing in the face of

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<sup>59</sup> See Lackey, p. 314.

<sup>60</sup> According to Audi, such a disparity does not regard only beliefs but also other ‘truth-valued attitudes, as well as dispositions to form beliefs.’ He mentions ‘internal cognitive differences’ as well as ‘potential differences,’ which may occur *intrapersonally*, and ‘differing or conflicting cognitive elements in two or more persons,’ which may occur *interpersonally* (See Audi, pp. 206f)

<sup>61</sup> John Hawthorne claims that ‘what is meant by “peer” in the disagreement literature is opaque, in part because the relevant notion of evidence used in glosses on peerhood is not fully spelled out’ (‘Disagreement Without Transparency Some Bleak Thoughts.’ In *The Epistemology of Disagreement*, footnote 15).

<sup>62</sup> Sanford C. Goldberg, ‘Does Externalist Epistemology Rationalize Religious Commitment?’. In *Religious Faith and Intellectual Virtue*, p. 286.

<sup>63</sup> This epistemological consideration has been advanced also by Plantinga and Van Inwagen. For both of them, if one has special and incommunicable evidence that other parties lack, then one is within one’s right to maintain one’s own belief. (See Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 457; Peter Van Inwagen, ‘It is Wrong, Always, Everywhere, and for Anyone, to Believe Anything, Upon Insufficient Evidence.’ In *Faith, Freedom, and Rationality*, ed. by Jeff Jordan and Daniel Howard-Snyder [Hanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996], pp. 137–154).

contrary evidence. As a consequence, they are expected to confidently maintain their belief that unbelievers lack ‘some sort of crucial insight.’

R. Feldman focuses on another aspect of disagreement that deserves attention, that is, the difference between belief and action. According to him, we may act in a way that is not related to our belief. Once we come to a fork in the road, we can act in a way (choose either one or the other path) that is not related to our belief (we do not believe the path we chose is necessarily the right one).<sup>64</sup>

The example Feldman offers can serve the purpose of minimizing the difference between ordinary and religious belief here under consideration. Nevertheless, although it is true that we may choose a path without believing that it is necessarily the right one, it is also true that the faithful, however mistaken they might be, are supposed to believe that the path they choose *is* the right one.

Finally, let me mention a proposal to solve the problem of disagreement offered by L. Zagzebski while discussing religious belief. She distinguishes *theoretical* reasons from *deliberative* ones:

By *theoretical reasons* for believing *p* I mean facts that are logically or probabilistically connected to the truth of *p*. They are facts (true propositions) about states of the world that, taken together, give a case for the fact that *p*. Reasonable persons care about getting the truth, ... Theoretical reasons can be shared with others—laid out on the table, so they are third personal. What we call evidence is most naturally put in this category of reasons, although the notion of evidence is used in many different senses, and I do not insist that what we mean by “evidence” is limited to theoretical reasons. In contrast, what I mean by *deliberative reasons* has an essential connection to *me and only to me* in my deliberations about whether it is the case that *p*. .... They are not reasons at all for other persons. They are irreducibly first personal.<sup>65</sup>

This effective distinction allows us to take into account the typically irreducibly first personal character of the religious belief, which the believer sees as mainly due to the relationship she has with God. However, Zagzebski’s reflection on the first personal character in question also applies to other forms of beliefs. Consequently, it implicitly minimizes the ultimate difference between a religious and a non-religious approach to intellectual debates and related disagreement.

#### 4.2.4 ‘Quasi-fideism’ and its Potential

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<sup>64</sup> See Richard Feldman, ‘Reasonable Religious Disagreements.’ In *Philosophers without Gods: Meditations on Atheism and the Secular Life*, ed. by Louise M. Antony (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 194–214.

<sup>65</sup> Linda Zagzebski, ‘Trust, Anti-Trust, and Reasons for Religious Belief.’ In *Religious Faith and Intellectual Virtue*, pp. 232f.

Like the debates I have taken into account so far (in sections 2.1-3), an even more recent treatment of religious belief aims at showing that Christian belief is not ultimately different from the non-religious one. I am referring to Duncan Pritchard's proposal of a view of the Christian faith that he calls 'quasi-fideism.'<sup>66</sup> Pritchard argues that faith is grounded on a-rational commitments, i.e., commitments too deep for rational defence and *unresponsive* to rational criteria, and that this is not conducive to fideism, namely, it does not render faith *extraneous* to epistemological evaluation. In fact—so Pritchard argues—a-rational commitments constitute the ground for non-religious or ordinary belief as well. As a result, there is no reason for considering Christian belief ultimately different from other types of belief.

On the one hand, this leads us to see that religion cannot be reduced to merely intellectual or cognitive considerations; on the other hand, since non-cognitive considerations also regard non-religious matters, Pritchard's proposal ends up equalling religious and non-religious debates.<sup>67</sup> From this it follows that his proposal seems to not add anything original to the debates I have taken into consideration in the previous sections. On closer inspection, however, focusing on a-rational matters may imply unexpectedly interesting consequences for my reflection. But let me proceed to briefly present Pritchard's proposal.

Pritchard backs up his thesis using Wittgenstein's final notebooks published as *On Certainty*, and also takes into account Newman's *Grammar of Assent*.<sup>68</sup> Both works, in fact, point out that the epistemic status of ordinary beliefs is different from what we ordinarily assume it to be, because such beliefs seem often to be rationally groundless.

Pritchard refers to the metaphor of a *hinge* employed by Wittgenstein. For the author of *On Certainty*, 'the *questions* that we raise and our *doubts* depend upon the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges on which those turn.'<sup>69</sup> Wittgenstein says that we

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<sup>66</sup> Duncan Pritchard, 'Faith and reason,' *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements* 81 (2017), pp. 101-118.

<sup>67</sup> The well-known *parity argument* is therefore applied in a new way. While Plantinga, Alston and others have used this argument to show that religious belief can be as rational as other kinds of belief ordinarily considered rational, 'quasi-fideism takes a more radical line. According to the quasi-fideist, our everyday beliefs that we take to be through-and-through rational in fact presuppose fundamental a-rational commitments—i.e., commitments which are not rationally grounded.' (Pritchard, 'Faith and reason,' p. 3) In other words, instead of insisting on the shared possession of rationality between faith and reason, it is the a-rational ground of any belief that should be explored.

<sup>68</sup> See above, Chapter 1, note 54.

<sup>69</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ed. by Gertrude E. M. Anscombe and Georg H. von Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969), §§ 341-343, cited in Pritchard, 'Faith and reason,' p. 5.

cannot doubt every belief, because this would ‘drag everything with it and plunge it into chaos.’<sup>70</sup> A similar stance is held by Newman, whose view of the foundation of belief expressed in the *Grammar* may have influenced—so Pritchard hypothesizes—Wittgenstein’s view of hinge commitments.<sup>71</sup> As a matter of fact, Wittgenstein’s remarks mentioned above manifestly remind of Newman’s claim about the possibility of universal doubt. The author of the *Grammar* firmly rejects the hypothesis that ‘we ought to begin with a universal doubt.’ Ironically, so he argues, this ‘is of all assumptions the greatest,’ because ‘doubt itself is a positive state, and implies a definite habit of mind, and thereby necessarily involves a system of principles and doctrines all its own.’<sup>72</sup> Newman’s refusal of universal doubt was clearly due to his conviction that not only religious belief but also the ordinary one lacks the high epistemic support proposed by Locke in the fourth book of his *Essay*. Like Wittgenstein, the author of the *Grammar* was convinced that our beliefs seem often to be groundless and at the same time indubitable, which is precisely the conviction supported by Pritchard, who claims that ‘it is in the very nature of rational evaluations that they take place relative to hinge commitments which are both groundless and indubitable.’<sup>73</sup> As a result, if not only faith but also rational belief lies on a-rational commitments, then there is no reason to see faith as extraneous to the epistemological viewpoint from which ordinary beliefs are usually considered:

If the alleged epistemic defect in religious belief were shown to be found in non-religious belief, then this would not be grounds for scepticism about the epistemology of religious belief, specifically, but rather grounds for a general epistemological scepticism.<sup>74</sup>

The a-rational commitments which are of interest to Pritchard are the abovementioned hinge commitments. As any a-rational commitment, they are not even beliefs. They are unresponsive to rational considerations,<sup>75</sup> as it is manifest when one retains one’s commitment even if one recognises that one has reason at all for regarding the target proposition as true.

This stance seems to be perfectly acceptable from the viewpoint of the Christian faith. Does this mean that Pritchard’s view bridges the gap between the Christian faith and religious belief, on the one hand, and mere epistemology and ordinary belief, on the other?

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<sup>70</sup> Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, § 613, cited in Pritchard, ‘Faith and reason,’ p. 5.

<sup>71</sup> See Duncan Pritchard, ‘Wittgenstein on faith and reason: the influence of Newman.’ In *God, Truth, and Other Enigmas*, ed. by Mirosław Szatkowski (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2015), pp. 197-216.

<sup>72</sup> Newman, GA, IX,3,2,2, p. 294.

<sup>73</sup> Pritchard, ‘Faith and reason,’ p. 5.

<sup>74</sup> Pritchard, ‘Wittgenstein on faith and reason: the influence of Newman,’ p. 206.

<sup>75</sup> This is one of the various interpretations of Wittgenstein’s hinges, on the nature of which a well-developed discussion is being conducted. For more on this, see Annalisa Coliva, ‘Which Hinge Epistemology?’, *International Journal for the Study of Skepticism* 6 (2016) 2-3, especially pp. 84ff.

My thesis is that, although Pritchard's view seems to be aimed at bridging the gap in question, the gap remains unbridged. Pritchard argues that, when it comes to the hinges, one sticks to one's commitment even if one acknowledges that there are reasons for regarding the target proposition as true. As I said above, this at first sight matches the viewpoint of the religious belief which I have considered so far. It remains, however, a significant difference, which emerges when Pritchard says that one should show 'the willingness to change her mind if that is demanded by the evidence.'<sup>76</sup> Of course, this is perfectly reasonable from the viewpoint of mere epistemology. It is not, however, from that of the Christian faith, from which follows that the gap here under consideration is not minimized.

In support of the thesis that to minimize the gap in question does not seem possible is the fact that Wittgenstein's hinge commitments, as I said above using Wittgenstein's words, 'are exempt from doubt,' which obviously cannot be said of the Christian faith.

When all is said and done, however, I do not exclude that Pritchard's reflection may reveal unexpected *potential* and lend itself to new interpretation. If not only religious matters but also non-religious ones imply a-rational motivations, then an opportunity of arguing that there are deep affinities between religious and non-religious belief may more effectively be regained. In this direction, Aquinas's views presented in Chapter 3 might already have offered significant suggestions. In a passage on which I will focus in the next section,<sup>77</sup> Aquinas considers the possibility to continue reflecting on something that denies previous convictions even if conclusive evidence in its support has been provided. He mentions 'the honor of God or the good of our neighbor' as motivations, which are clearly *a-rational*, to continue reflecting before evidentness. May such a-rational commitment to God and our neighbor, *or something analogous*, play a role—even only partly—in the epistemological discussion? May this reflection on the Christian faith promote a new consideration of the way *any* type of belief is debated? May this lead us to propose a more comprehensive epistemological view in which to include mere epistemology? To respond to these questions, to which I will devote Part 3 of this dissertation, I first have to consider nature and purpose of debates in a new light. This is the aim of the next section.

### 4.3 Rethinking the Nature and Purpose of Debates for both Believers and Unbelievers

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<sup>76</sup> Duncan Pritchard, 'Intellectual Humility and the Epistemology of Disagreement.' In *Knowledge and Justification: New Perspectives*, ed. by Rodrigo Borges and Ernest Sosa, in *Synthese*, special issue, 2018, p. 9. For more on this, see below, Chapter 6, notes 65ff.

<sup>77</sup> See below, note 99.

I have focused so far on various perspectives that, more or less explicitly, minimize the difference between the religious and the non-religious approach to rational debates and interpret the former from the viewpoint of the latter. That such a minimization is sought by many scholars and streams of thought should not surprise. As C. Taylor has pointed out,

the great invention of the West was that of an immanent order in Nature, whose working could be systematically understood and explained on its own terms, leaving open the question whether this whole order had a deeper significance, and whether, if it did, we should infer a transcendent Creator beyond it. This notion of the ‘immanent’ involved denying—or at least isolating and problematizing—any form of interpenetration between the things of Nature, on one hand, and ‘the supernatural’ on the other, be this understood in terms of the one transcendent God, or of Gods or spirits, or magic forces, or whatever.<sup>78</sup>

Unlike the perspectives I have taken into consideration so far, I intend to argue that the interpenetration between natural and supernatural mentioned by Taylor suggests a more profitable approach to rational debates.

In chapter 3, which I devoted to Aquinas’s view of reason as related to faith, I have shown that Christians are expected to conduct intellectual investigations bearing in mind aims that are not merely cognitive. The nature of their interest in such investigations shouldn’t therefore be limited to the search for truth.

According to J. Stackhouse, the aim of the Christians who deal with epistemological matters is not ‘to provide assured knowledge on every subject for everyone,’ God may in fact allow or even direct us ‘to believe things that are not true in order to make us most useful in his service.’<sup>79</sup> Christians seem rather to be expected to develop ‘a vocational understanding of epistemology,’ which implies their active cooperation with God aimed at attaining the good:

We cannot ... presume that practicing even the most responsible Christian epistemology guarantees epistemic success, if such success is understood in the normal sense of arriving at warranted truth. We can presume instead, however, that practicing responsible Christian thinking fulfills the will of God and thus corresponds to and cooperates with his overarching good plan for each of us and for the world. Like any other practice of the Christian life, therefore, Christian thinking is undertaken in faith that “God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose”.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pp. 15f.

<sup>79</sup> Stackhouse, p. 20 and note 23.

<sup>80</sup> Stackhouse, p. 86.

Stackhouse appropriately quotes Rom. 8:28 to emphasize that any action the Christians are expected to undertake, knowing process included, is aimed at accomplishing the good, which is the goal God wishes them to achieve. For them, the good in question is union with God, which regards the whole of the human person<sup>81</sup> as well as her overall flourishing. E. Stump points out that, in Aquinas's account of the nature of love, the union in question is the ultimate good and the ultimate flourishing of the human person.<sup>82</sup> This union is shown by the desire for what God desires: 'God desires the good for all things, insofar as a human person desires the good for herself or for any other persons.'<sup>83</sup>

Christians have traditionally emphasized the idea that only by pointing to the good itself our overall flourishing is possible and any other good can be satisfactorily achieved. As C. S. Lewis famously said, 'you can't get second things by putting them first; you can get second things only by putting first things first.'<sup>84</sup>

The love of God and the related desire of union with him seems to be so crucial to Christianity that, if one of its outstanding exponents seems to argue for a moment that the search for truth may be successfully conducted without that love, then a contradiction with the rest of his thought arises.

This is what seems to happen to Aquinas when he wonders whether or not faith can function without charity, a reflection which is indicative of a tension in Aquinas's thought between the search for truth and that for good. Thomas wonders 'whether faith is the first of the virtues.'<sup>85</sup> (The order that is taken into account here is 'the order of generation.'<sup>86</sup>) If faith is the first of the virtues, charity included, then the former can exist and operate without the latter.

Let us then consider the argument in question. According to Aquinas, 'one thing can precede another in two ways: first, by its very nature; secondly, by accident.'

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<sup>81</sup> Clive S. Lewis perfectly summarized the impossibility for Christians to limit the relationship with God to only one aspect of their life: 'If you are thinking of becoming a Christian, I warn you, you are embarking on something, which will take the whole of you' (Clive S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* [New York: Macmillan, 1952], Bk. 3, Section 2).

<sup>82</sup> See Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, p. 102.

<sup>83</sup> Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, p. 100.

<sup>84</sup> As a result, 'by valuing too highly a real, but subordinate good, we have come near to losing that good itself' (Clive S. Lewis, *God in the dock. Essays on theology and ethics* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1994], p. 280).

<sup>85</sup> See *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 4 a.7.

<sup>86</sup> 'Order is twofold: order of generation, and order of perfection' (*Summa theologiae* I-II q. 62 a. 4)

Let me first consider the point of view of the nature of faith. In this case ‘faith precedes all other virtues.’ When it comes to the relationship between faith and charity, Thomas says that ‘the last end must of necessity be present to the intellect before it is present to the will, since the will has no inclination for anything except in so far as it is apprehended by the intellect. Hence . . . the first of all the virtues must, of necessity, be faith.’<sup>87</sup> Aquinas’s thesis is that faith precedes charity because one cannot love what one does not know.<sup>88</sup> However plausible this stance may be in the case of knowledge in general, it seems to be untrue about the Christian faith, as Aquinas takes it. For him, in fact, one is unable to assent to divine revelation if one is not ready to believe, that is to say, if one’s intellect is not commanded *by the will*, which is in turn moved *by charity*.<sup>89</sup>

Let me now consider the point of view of the relationship between faith and other virtues ‘by accident.’ Aquinas says that

some virtues can precede faith accidentally . . . that which removes an obstacle is a kind of accidental cause, according to the Philosopher: and in this sense certain virtues may be said to precede faith accidentally, in so far as they remove obstacles to belief . . . although there are no real virtues, unless faith be presupposed, as Augustine states.<sup>90</sup>

From the point of view in question, Aquinas first concedes that other virtues may be prior to faith; then refers to Augustine’s view that ‘there are no real virtues, unless faith be presupposed.’ It is therefore unclear which one of these two opposite beliefs Aquinas holds. At any rate, the passage he quotes from Augustine does not support the idea that charity, which stands out among the real virtues mentioned, presupposes faith. In fact, Augustine refers to faith taken as working *through love*, and not, as Aquinas says, to faith taken as *presupposed to charity*. (In this passage, Augustine is employing the words *dilectio* and *amor*, and not *caritas*. Up through Peter Lombard, however, theologians tended to use indifferently these words.<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, Augustine openly says that this love is ‘the love of God which leads one to God,’ the love that ‘is only from God the Father through Jesus Christ with the Holy Spirit’). I shall limit myself to citing just a few of the numerous sentences of the passage in question, from which it emerges that Augustine is not speaking of faith taken apart from charity:

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<sup>87</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 4 a. 7.

<sup>88</sup> See also Aquinas, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum*, Bk III d. 23 q. 2 a. 5 ad 5.

<sup>89</sup> For Aquinas, charity ‘makes the will ready to believe’ (*Summa theologiae* II-II q. 2 a. 10 ad 2).

<sup>90</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 4 a. 7.

<sup>91</sup> See Philip W. Rosemann, *Peter Lombard* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 85ff., 140ff.

Whatever good is done by man, yet is not done for the purpose for which true wisdom commands it be done, may seem good for its function, but, because the end is not right, it is sin (chap. 3. 21). Therefore, certain good acts can be done when those who do them are not doing well. It is good to help a man in danger, especially an innocent man. But, if a man acts loving the glory of men more than the glory of God, he does a good thing not in good way, because he is not good when his act is not done in a good way (chap. 3. 22). He who does not perform his good works with the intention of the good faith, the faith that works through love, his whole body, which is as it were composed of the works as members, will be darkened, that is, full of the blackness of sin . . . All other works which seem praiseworthy among men may seem to you to be true virtues and they may seem to be good works and to be carried out without any sin, but as for me, I know this: They were not performed by a good will, for an unbelieving and ungodly will is not a good will . . . I shall win my point that the love of the world by which a man is a friend of this world is not from God, and that the love of enjoying any creature whatsoever without love of the Creator is not from God; but the love of God which leads one to God is only from God the Father through Jesus Christ with the Holy Spirit. Through this love of the Creator everyone uses even creatures well. Without this love of the Creator no one uses any creature well (chap. 3.33).<sup>92</sup>

Although it was not my intention to focus on the position of Augustine, I quoted so many sentences from his work to make it undoubtedly clear that Aquinas, while arguing that faith can also be taken independently of the intervention of charity, supports his argument by referring to the author of *Against Julian* who holds, instead, that there is no real virtue without that intervention.

It may be objected that when Aquinas refers to Augustine's view that 'there are no real virtues, unless faith be presupposed,' he (Aquinas) is taking for granted that we need charity if any virtues are to be really real, and that the reader will realize that faith is presupposed to all *real* virtue because faith is presupposed to charity.

In reply, it must be said that Aquinas mentions the passage in question to support his view that faith is presupposed to charity, and that this purpose is not served by mentioning Augustine's reference to 'the faith that works through love.' Furthermore, Aquinas argues that faith is presupposed to charity by employing an argument that, as I have shown above, is inconsistent with his view of faith.<sup>93</sup>

Furthermore, that faith precedes charity seems inconsistent with the idea, which is crucial to Christianity, that by participation in God's love, we are given an opportunity of transformation that

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<sup>92</sup> Augustine, *Against Julian*, Bk. 4, Chapter 3, tr. by Matthew A. Schumacher (New York: Father of the Church, Inc., 1957).

<sup>93</sup> See above, notes 88ff.

leads us beyond human perfection.<sup>94</sup> It is hard, in fact, to see how faith can be presupposed to such a transformation, because faith is a significant aspect of it.

Christians are expected to pay special attention to the abovementioned participation in God's love. A passage from the *Summa Halensis* unsurprisingly reads that theology, which its authors obviously see as the highest among the sciences, 'perfects the soul by way of affection, moving it towards the good through the principles of fear and love.'<sup>95</sup>

Thus, theology should be cultivated by way of love, as also Bonaventure points out: 'The rightness of mind is rooted in love.'<sup>96</sup> And elsewhere he claims:

First, it must be said that devotion leads us to know what is true and beneficial...God grants his gifts to all creatures, but he grants knowledge of true things only to those who act devoutly.<sup>97</sup>

Note that this reference to the Franciscan theological and philosophical tradition does not imply any opposition to other Christian streams of thought, Thomism included. Of course, significant distinctions can be found between Franciscans and Dominicans;<sup>98</sup> however, my aim is to argue that, beyond those differences, a priority ascribed to the good itself and the will over the truth and the intellect, respectively, should be seen as a sign of every Christian approach to human experience. This remains true in spite of some inconsistencies such as the ones that I have argued can be found in Aquinas's reflection. After all, Chapter 3 was devoted precisely to arguing that Aquinas's thought is mainly characterized by the will to adhere to God's revelation, which God himself grants to believers. Believers think of God as the good itself and believe that his revelation is true because they are previously been granted love for him. This guides them in any activity they take, including the rational one, and not only when the subject is religion.

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<sup>94</sup> See Taylor, *A secular age*, p. 20.

<sup>95</sup> Alexander of Hales et al., vol. 1, q. 1, c. 1.

<sup>96</sup> Bonaventure, *Commentaria in quatuor libros Sententiarum Magistri Petri Lombardi: in librum II*. In *Opera omnia* 1-4 (Quaracchi, Florentiae: Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1885), d. 3, 2 a. 3 q. 1 (my translation).

<sup>97</sup> Bonaventure, *Collationes de septem donis Spiritus Sancti*. In *Opera omnia* 5 (Quaracchi, Florentiae: Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1891), collatio VIII, n. 5 (my translation).

<sup>98</sup> Such distinctions are of no interest for my purposes, except one aspect that was recently marked by E. Stump. She associated Aquinas and more generally Dominicans with an inclination to think that 'knowledge about God, and thus knowledge about the ultimate foundation of reality, could be gotten best through philosophical and theological argument;' on the other hand, she argues that for Franciscans 'a personal relationship to Christ or to Christ through relationship to Francis is at the core of the order's mission. According to (*typologically understood*) Franciscan views, then, the good life for human beings has as an essential ingredient living a life in personal connection to a personal God and manifesting that life to others' (Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, p. 47).

In this connection, it is worthwhile to refer to a passage, which I have already taken into consideration in Chapter 3, and which is usually neglected by the existing literature.<sup>99</sup> In it, Aquinas shows that, while before evidentness, one cannot withhold assent, and nonetheless one *can decide* whether or not to reflect on something that is already known. Aquinas concludes that the reflection at stake ‘may be meritorious if it be referred to the end of charity, i.e. to the honor of God or the good of our neighbor.’ (It could be objected that a contradiction arises here with that which Aquinas says in the same article; namely, that the believer ‘has not, however, sufficient reason for scientific knowledge, hence he does not lose the merit.’ From this passage it seems to follow that in the case of demonstrative knowledge there cannot be merit. However, it is easy to realize that, saying so, Aquinas is not referring to demonstrative knowledge in general, but only to *assent*, which he conceives as not being susceptible to merit or demerit.)

Aquinas, therefore, argues that the believer should reason on the basis of a *previous* decision, and emphasizes the connection between arguments, which are *rational motives*, and previous decisions, which are *a-rational commitments*.

Equally interesting for my purpose is the fact that the passage under consideration offers thoughts on the epistemic nature of demonstrative knowledge that may apply to non-believers as well. But let me proceed gradually to develop this important point.

I have so far focused on whether or not *believers* may appeal to factors that are not susceptible of a rational treatment while conducting their research. I have concentrated upon believers without taking into account the hypothesis that the same may be effectively explored in regard to unbelievers. This choice, however, was manifestly due to the fact that the believer openly refers to motivations that may not be epistemologically explicable, whereas the same cannot be said of unbelievers. *Qua unbelievers*, they traditionally see themselves as animated by reasons that, even if not demonstrable, can be rationally treated and explained.

Aquinas’s passage on assent and consideration, instead, implicitly points to motivations non-susceptible of a rational treatment that unbelievers, and not only believers, may have. Aquinas claims that ‘scientific consideration may be meritorious *if* it be referred to the end of charity, i.e. to the honor of God or the good of our neighbor’ (my emphasis). This obviously implies that the scientific consideration at stake may also be *non-meritorious*. In that case, it would not be referred to the end of charity. It would instead be guided by other motivations, which for Aquinas we can

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<sup>99</sup> See above, Chapter 3, note 113.

imagine would not be commendable. At any rate, from this it follows that the unbeliever, and not only the believer, might hold on to one's belief against contrary evidence. This may be either meritorious (the unbeliever's reflection is referred to the good of the neighbor) or non-meritorious (the reflection at stake is referred to something other than the good in question).

Note that this affinity between believers and unbelievers does *not* have anything to do with the minimization of the distinction between them that I have refuted in the last section of this chapter. Unlike that minimization, which consisted in reconciling the tenacity of beliefs with mere epistemology, the affinity here under consideration concerns *a-rational* motivations. These are *unacceptable* from the viewpoint of mere epistemology, and necessarily require a different and more comprehensive version of this epistemology.

At any rate, referring to a-rational aspects of the intellectual activity and the role that, in Aquinas's words, the honor of God or the good of our neighbor may place in this activity may surprise only at first sight. It is, in fact, uncontroversial that epistemologists have traditionally employed words and concepts that apply to both epistemology and ethics, as I have already noted above.<sup>100</sup> Epistemologists and ethicists

have both employed 'justified,' applying this to beliefs or acts respectively. They talk about what is 'permissible,' what does or doesn't violate 'rules,' what is or isn't under a person's control, what may or may not be his 'duty,' and what is 'good' or 'bad.'<sup>101</sup>

Considering nature and aims of rational debates as *not merely intellectual* should therefore be seen as inevitable for those who engage in these debates, be they believers or unbelievers. While arguing that some non-evidentialist based beliefs are permissible, M. S. McCormick points out that both beliefs and actions are caused by agency, and that our doxastic practices have an unavoidable practical character:

If a world existed where true beliefs and knowledge ceased to be at all helpful in achieving one's goals they would cease to have value. ...If we lived in a world where true beliefs had no benefits, then, in my view, a proposition being true would not count at all in favor of its being believed.<sup>102</sup>

In other words, practical reasons, that is to say, the search for good and not simply for truth, seem to characterize any engagement in debates, by believers and unbelievers as well.

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<sup>100</sup> See also above, notes 7ff.

<sup>101</sup> Callahan and O'Connor, 'Introduction.' In *Religious Faith and Intellectual Virtue*, p. 10.

<sup>102</sup> Miriam McCormick, *Believing against the evidence. Agency and the ethics of belief* (New York and London: Routledge, 2015), p. 45.

In the next part of this dissertation, I will investigate how exactly the search for good may relate to and shape rational investigations and debates. I will show that unexpected developments may follow with regard to the way of conducting such investigations and debates.

## PART 3

### The Spiritual Turn: why and how to take it

In this part, I focus on how the spiritual turn, which is the subject of this dissertation, takes place. (This explains why this part is longer than the previous ones. Also, it explains why I provide it with a longer introduction than the previous parts and place a substantive conclusion at the end of both chapters 5 and 6.)

In the second part of this dissertation, I have argued that the inconclusiveness of debates between unbelievers and believers is due to a-rational commitments. Believers often recognize that such commitments play a crucial role in any activity they engage in, including intellectual ones.

Drawing from the Christian doctrine of faith and reason, especially Aquinas's, I have argued that for believers these commitments are grounded in their love for God, which—they believe—God himself grants to them. This love is proportionate to the firmness with which they believe, which means that the more the faithful love God the more they sustain their faith.

From this follows that, if love for God is love for the good itself, as believers think, the firmness with which they maintain their faith is equally proportionate to their love for the good. As a result, the more they believe and search for further evidence in support of their faith, the more they should aim at doing good and loving their neighbour, including their interlocutors and/or competitors. (Note that I take *the act of doing good* as equivalent to *the act of loving the good*. This is due to my adherence to the conviction that 'the absolute good of man consists in good operation, or the good use of something possessed.'<sup>1</sup>)

On the basis of Aquinas's doctrine, I showed that analogous considerations may be advanced with regard to those who do not believe in God. It is true that they traditionally claim that they only adopt a rational stance before religious matters. From this follows that, unlike believers, they should be ready to change their mind if their own convictions are shown to be unreasonable. Nonetheless, there is no significant difference between the number of those who by way of study convert to religion and those who convert in reverse order. In addition, as I showed while focusing on

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<sup>1</sup> *Summa theologiae* I q. 48 a. 6. According to Aristotle, 'the good and the chief good' is 'some end of the things we do, which we desire for its own sake.' It coincides with happiness, which is 'something final and self-sufficient, and is the end of action' (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 1094 a 18-20 and 1097 b 21, tr. William D. Ross [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1915]).

Aquinas's reflection on assent and consideration, the will, which by definition aims at what is believed to be good, plays a decisive role in everyone's research. As a consequence, unbelievers too may conduct their intellectual investigations with the aim of doing good.

Conducting investigations with the aim of doing good is the *spiritual turn* that I intend to argue should be taken in epistemology (ST). It is a turn from the idea that the intellectual activity must first determine the nature of good and that the activity in question is to be taken independently of any concept of good. In other words, ST is a turn from the conviction that only once the good has been known can one proceed to do good.

Those who do research on the basis of this conviction don't openly plan to stick to their beliefs against contrary evidence. I call them *mere epistemologists*, be they believers or not. They declare that they practice a mere epistemology, which means that they exclude from the outset any influence that a-rational commitments may previously exert on their epistemological conduct. In other words, they are expected to only trust reason, which means that they should rely on the outcomes of the intellectual activity and change their mind only by accepting whatever evidence will emerge from debates.

In contrast, taking the ST means that, before launching any initiative, the intellectual one included, one is openly committed to doing good and to those beliefs that the commitment in question involves. This commitment is therefore *a-rational*, since the idea of good that it presupposes has not been attained by way of rational research. (This means that a-rationality stands for lack of justification. However, when one has already conducted rational investigations, a-rationality can still occur. In this case, it is due to the fact that commitments and beliefs seem to be too deep for rational explanation. In Chapter 3, I showed that this is the way in which, according to Aquinas, belief in God works before and after rational investigation, respectively.) Thus, the ST occurs from the mere search for truth to the act of doing good.

Shifting from the search for truth to the act of doing good does not mean that the ST is a *moral* turn. Instead, it is *spiritual*, that is to say, the good to do is taken as the ultimate perfection of the whole human person. ('Spiritual' stands for the perfection at stake, which is why it will not be taken as opposed to 'physical' or 'non-religious.')

Obviously enough, aiming at the perfection of the whole person structurally includes an opportunity to equally perfect any human activity, including debates and the intellectual research. The mere intellectual investigation only requires the possession of sufficiently vivid cognitive faculties as well as the purpose of employing them as effectively as possible. The spiritual enhancement of the self requires much more. The perfection of the whole

person involves their whole experience, including the relationship with other people, and often implies choices that, in the absence of the ST, one is unable or simply does not want to make.

Showing how the ST takes place and is beneficial to researchers and debaters is the subject of this part of the present dissertation.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **The spiritual Turn: Process and some Benefits**

In this chapter, I first explore the exact meaning of the relationship between the search for truth and the act of doing good. I then show some of the benefits that the ST can offer to debaters. To this end, I focus on two substantive subjects that have traditionally stimulated debates between believers and unbelievers, i.e. the existence of God and the problem of religious diversity. I treat them by considering suggestions that emerge from the Christian tradition in regard to the relationship between love and knowledge. While discussing the existence of God, I show that focusing on one's spiritual betterment, which is an indispensable aspect of the ST, prevents both believers and unbelievers from engaging in endless and sterile intellectual oppositions. Moving on to treating religious diversity, I dig into some aspects of Aquinas's reflection on faith and reason. They enable me to show that focusing on one's spiritual betterment puts believers in the best possible condition to employ reason, which is obviously beneficial to researchers and debaters.

#### **5.1 Aiming at doing good *shapes and includes* the Search for Truth**

How exactly does the ST in epistemology occur? Why should one shift from the search for truth to the act of doing good? What exactly does this shift mean? And which opportunities, if any, may it provide? I will devote this section to answer these questions. I will start my reflection arguing that the act of doing good is the ultimate end of the search for truth, which means that the former *shapes and includes* the latter.

##### *5.1.1 How exactly the Act of doing good can be related to that of searching for Truth*

An ultimate end implies by definition the existence of an intermediate end, where the former does not replace the latter. I take the act of doing good as the ultimate end of the search for truth, in the sense that the act of doing good includes the search for truth. The act of doing good, however, does not replace the search in question. (Moreover, if the latter disappeared, there would simply be no reason for us to conduct the present research, which concerns epistemology.)

This can be explained by referring to Aquinas's doctrine of the relationship between the acts that are aimed at attaining some ends and the acts that are aimed at attaining related means or, which is the same, the acts aimed at attaining super-ordinate and subordinate ends, respectively. While referring to the second book of *Physics* by Aristotle, Aquinas says that

since every agent acts for an end, as was shown above, the principle of this motion lies in the end. And hence it is that the art which is concerned with the end, by its command moves the art which is concerned with the means; just as the 'art of sailing commands the art of shipbuilding' (Phys. ii, 2).<sup>2</sup>

While treating charity and the ways it informs other virtues, Aquinas argues that a virtue that directs the acts of another virtue gives the form to the latter: 'It is charity which directs the acts of all other virtues to the last end, and which, consequently, also gives the form to all other acts of virtue: and it is precisely in this sense that charity is called the form of the virtues.'<sup>3</sup>

Someone may object that the search for truth, since it is expected to remain in itself an *intellectual* enterprise, must be taken as separate from the good taken as its ultimate end. Let me respond in two ways. First, an act aimed at attaining a subordinate end does not lose its autonomy. The shipbuilder must put into practice the art of shipbuilding, which implies, among other things, a specific way to shape the various materials that are employed to build a ship. The act of the shipbuilder remains a servile work whose proper purpose is to build ships. In the case here under consideration, the search for truth remains an *intellectual* act, whose proper purpose is to attain *the truth*. Second, if this act is ultimately aimed at attaining a super-ordinate end, it cannot be consistently performed without aiming at the end in question. All of the choices made by the shipbuilder—which materials to employ, for example—inevitably involve the consideration of the ultimate end of his or her work, which is the act of sailing. When it comes to our case, this means that the intellectual activity cannot

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<sup>2</sup> *Summa theologiae* I-II q. 9 a. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 23 a. 8. Why the end gives the form is something Aquinas explains in the previous section of the same work: 'Acts are called human, inasmuch as they proceed from a deliberate will. Now the object of the will is the good and the end. And hence it is clear that the principle of human acts, in so far as they are human, is the end' (I-II q. 1 a. 3).

be appropriately conducted if their agents do not primarily aim at doing good, which is their ultimate aim.<sup>4</sup>

These considerations are of great interest to my argument, since they help us understand that taking the ST in epistemology, namely, carrying out the intellectual activity with the aim of doing good, does not mean that the aim of attaining the truth is put aside. On the contrary, aiming it at its ultimate end should perfect the knowing process, which would in this way be put in a condition to avert any departure from its natural path. If the truth is an intermediate end toward the good seen as the ultimate end, then any departure from the path to the good would involve a departure from the path to the truth. To be more explicit, any departure from doing good would imply a *mistake* from the epistemological viewpoint. This is why it can be said that the act of doing good *includes* that of searching for truth.

Someone may object that it is in reverse order that the abovementioned relationship occurs. In other words, it is the search for truth that includes the act of doing good, and the latter would be aimed at the former. This is the way in which some streams of virtue epistemology work. I will consider those streams in the next chapter. For now, let me propose two general considerations.

First, everyone agrees that truth is something good along with justice, generosity, honesty, and so on. This implies that the good in itself is more valuable than the mere truth, which is good only to the extent that it somewhat takes part in the good itself. As a result, it would be unwise to consider something more valuable (the good) a *mean* to attain something less valuable (the truth).

Second, if the good in itself works as a mean to attain something good, a contradiction arises, because something that is good and is not the good in itself may oppose other things that are equally good, and this opposition would not be good. One commendably pursues the truth, and yet this pursuit involves much less commendable choices, such as robbing a bank to financially support one's scholarly research. As a result, truth, which is something good, gets into conflict with honesty, which is something good also. A memorable 'thought' by Pascal makes precisely this point: 'We make an idol of truth itself; for truth apart from charity is not God, but His image and idol, which we must neither love nor worship.'<sup>5</sup> For Pascal, truth may become an idol, whereas the same cannot be said of that which he considers the ultimate end, charity, which for him coincides with God. What can easily follow from Pascal's *pensé* is that truth, since it is something good and

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<sup>4</sup> That is why, according to Aquinas, an incomplete grasp of their final ends makes the practice of virtues not completely satisfactory. For more on this, see Chapter 6, notes 115ff.

<sup>5</sup> Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, tr. by A. J. Kreilshimer (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), L926/S755.

not the good itself, can be employed to do something that is not good, whereas charity cannot be employed in a way that is inconsistent with its nature. In fact, if charity were employed in a way that is not good, e.g., against other people, then it would simply cease to be charity. Moreover, if one aims at doing good, which is the ultimate end of any action one can take, then any other action will spontaneously be conducted in accordance with its own nature, and will consequently be put in a condition to lead to success. Taking the ST, therefore, means that *the ultimate end must somewhat be known before starting any possible action*, the intellectual one included. This is what I mean by saying that the commitment to doing good *shapes and includes* the search for truth.

### 5.1.2 Why does the Question emerge?

I intend now to elaborate on the way, which I have just mentioned, in which doing good shapes and includes the search for truth. To this end, I will concentrate upon the reason *why* to proceed to such an inclusion. Focusing on the reason *why* to act in a certain way, in fact, offers insights into *the nature* of the act in question, as a long philosophical tradition teaches.<sup>6</sup>

As I have said throughout this dissertation, the inclusion under consideration, which corresponds to the act of taking the ST, is suggested by the consideration of the inconclusiveness of debates about the truth of religion. It may therefore seem that the inconclusiveness at stake causes one to wonder whether or not a more efficient procedure could be individuated to attain conclusiveness. This, however, would mean that the ST is adopted so as to primarily answer an epistemological question. In other words, focusing on the love for good would be aimed at a more effective search for truth, which I have already said is the way adopted by some virtue epistemologists and not those who take the ST.

Adopting the ST is due to other reasons. It is aimed at reaffirming an order among human activities, which traces back to the origins of the Christian tradition. This order does not emerge from the need to solve particular problems, such as the ones that pertain to epistemology. The order in question regards instead—and tries to solve—the more general problem of how to flourish and make sense of human existence. Those who start from this viewpoint, once they are before epistemological

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<sup>6</sup> As is known, Aristotle inaugurated the study of the four causes, among which the final one is included, in order to better understand the being of everything. In the first book of his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle ‘shows why his predecessors could have answered their own questions better by recognizing the four causes’ (Terence Irwin, *Aristotle’s First Principles* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988], p. 159). In his footsteps, Aquinas shows that it is the final end that gives the form to voluntary acts (see above, note 2).

issues, are not so much interested in solving such issues. Rather, they wonder how and why those issues should be of interest to them, given that their main concern is for their flourishing. (In this connection, not believing ‘too much,’ so to say, may be preferable to unshakable certainties, if lack of such certainties appears to be more helpful to attain one’s flourishing. In this view, ‘the fundamental human problem is not ignorance, a deficiency in the intellect. . . . It is sin, a defect in the soul.’ Sin ‘corrupts the mind just as it corrupts the heart.’ Because of sin, ‘we tend to see what we *want* to see, to hear what we *want* to hear.’<sup>7</sup>)

Christianity seems to offer an unequivocal picture of how all of the human activities should relate to the ultimate end of life, which for believers consists in experiencing communion with God.<sup>8</sup> If God is charity, then communion with him coincides with the act of becoming charitable,<sup>9</sup> and nothing is worth pursuing and practicing apart from charity, as Paul claims in his hymn to charity.<sup>10</sup> In this view, charity is the end of any initiatives, which is why none of them can be perfected without aiming at charity.<sup>11</sup>

It does not follow, however, that those initiatives are *in themselves* deprived of value. On the contrary, if God is the all-powerful, omniscient and perfectly loving creator of everything, whose becoming incarnate in Christ was aimed at redeeming everything, then everything he created, including our intellectual faculties, should be held in high esteem. The more such faculties are valued, the more are they employed in accordance with their origin and end. To put it otherwise, the more one esteems one’s last end, i.e. communion with God, the more is one stimulated to employ one’s faculties in the best possible way, which coincides with happiness. Doing the right thing at

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<sup>7</sup> Stackhouse, p. 21.

<sup>8</sup> A non-believer such as J. Schellenberg rightly considers communion with God the highest possible good for humans, given God’s existence. It is by focusing on this that he attempts to demonstrate that God does not exist. See below, section 2.

<sup>9</sup> ‘Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is begotten of God, and knoweth God’ (1 John, 4:7, ERV).

<sup>10</sup> ‘If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And if I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profiteth me nothing.’ (1 Cor, 13:1-3, ERV).

<sup>11</sup> How crucial charity is considered to be to any kind of human activity can be shown by looking at the relationship between such a virtue and the possession of any other desirable attainment, the intellectual one included. As John Langan says, ‘Augustin’s doctrine of the unity of the virtues in charity results in an understanding of the moral life which makes the crucial division not between the sage who possesses virtue perfectly and the unwise who fall short of the ideal of apathy, but between those who possess charity even in a rudimentary degree and those who, whatever their other attainments, lack charity and so lack true virtue altogether’ (John Langan, ‘Augustine on the Unity and Interconnection of the Virtues,’ *Harvard Theological Review* 72 (1979), p. 93).

the right time, in fact, is that which brings with it happiness, because it allows to achieve the end of action.<sup>12</sup>

### 5.1.3 An incidental Question: is prior Knowledge of the ultimate End paradoxical?

That which I have just said implies that no appropriate employment of created things occurs, and no related happiness is achieved, without previously recognizing their ultimate end. However, the fact that the ultimate end should already be recognized before conducting the intellectual activity seems to be paradoxical. At the beginning of our philosophical tradition, Plato memorably dealt with this subject. He argued that, on closer inspection, the paradox seems to be ascribable to the opposite conviction, namely, that we can search for something that we still don't know:

And how will you enquire, Socrates, into that which you do not know? What will you put forth as the subject of enquiry? And if you find what you want, how will you ever know that this is the thing which you did not know?<sup>13</sup>

There are disputes about how to interpret the various replies Plato offers to *Meno's* paradox. G. Fine collects four of the main interpretative options. According to one of them, the dilemma in question can be solved because *not having knowledge* may simply mean *having true belief*, and having true belief requires the act of inquiring. According to another interpretation, the dilemma is unsound because 'it relies on a misguided "all-or-nothing" model of knowledge,' whereas 'there are intermediate conditions—such as partial knowledge and true belief—that permit inquiry.'<sup>14</sup> M. Meyer proposed that if we consider the 'problematological difference,' i.e. the difference between questions and answers, then the paradox disappears: 'I know what I am looking for insofar it is a *question*, but at the same time I do not know it, *because* it is a question.'<sup>15</sup> This seems to confirm that knowledge is somewhat present at the beginning of the knowing process, since no questions can emerge from lack of knowledge.<sup>16</sup>

When all is said and done, it remains plausible to claim that there is always something that is previously known and is not inferred from any other sentence. Various ways of putting this run

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<sup>12</sup> This is Aristotle's doctrine of happiness. See above, note 1. See also Geraldine Markel and Gary Madvin, *Finding Happiness with Aristotle as Your Guide* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse 2012), p. 26.

<sup>13</sup> Plato, *Meno*, 80 D, tr. by B. Jowett, in *The Dialogues of Plato*.

<sup>14</sup> Gail Fine, *The Possibility of Inquiry: Meno's Paradox from Socrates to Sextus* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 91f.

<sup>15</sup> Michel Meyer, *Of Problematology: Philosophy, Science, and Language*, tr. by D. Jamison (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 91f.

<sup>16</sup> In this connection, Newman argued that doubts emerge from certainties. See below, note 32.

through the history of philosophy. For Aristotle, not everything is demonstrable, which means that there are things we know immediately.<sup>17</sup> In the modern age, Thomas Reid has pointedly emphasized the importance of common sense knowledge, with which everyone is provided by nature.<sup>18</sup>

Although from a totally different viewpoint, Georg W.F. Hegel, too, emphasized the contradictory attitude of those who do not recognize that, while they are preliminarily attempting to determine the method of knowledge, they are already putting into practice the method in question.<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, it seems fully plausible, from a philosophical viewpoint, that there are beliefs, which we implicitly hold and cannot dispense with. This should be all the more understandable if we shift from a merely intellectual experience, such as the philosophical one described by the author of *Meno*, to a religious one, in which a relationship with a supernatural being is involved. If a supernatural being exists, nothing impedes him or her from intervening in human experience in ways that we are unable to foresee. (Let me point out that I don't mean to say that no substantial difference between the philosophical and the religious perspective can be detected. I have already argued against any minimization of this difference in Chapter 4. What I intend to say is that, if even from a philosophical viewpoint the paradox here under consideration cannot totally be solved, it shouldn't surprise that the paradox in question emerges when it comes to the religious experience.) We may therefore find ourselves with a-rational commitments and related beliefs, which may spur us to effectively conduct our intellectual investigations. For example, we may be given a pre-comprehension of the ultimate end of our knowledge, and this may naturally improve the related knowing process. This, of course, is not susceptible of justification, and nonetheless from this does not follow that it is implausible.<sup>20</sup> As I will show in the third section of this chapter, while

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<sup>17</sup> Against those who 'claim that it is possible to demonstrate everything, since they take circular and reciprocal demonstration to be possible,' he replies that 'not all knowledge, is demonstrative, and in fact knowledge of the immediate premises is indemonstrable. Indeed, it is evident that this must be so; for if we must know the prior things (i.e., those from which the demonstration is derived), and if eventually the regress stops, these immediate premises must be indemonstrable.' Even more interesting is that which follows: 'Besides this, we also say that there is not only knowledge, but also some origin of knowledge, which gives us knowledge of the definitions' (Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, 72 b 17-26, tr. by Terence Irwin and Gail Fine [Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1995]).

<sup>18</sup> See above, Chapter 2, especially note 2.

<sup>19</sup> As is known, Hegel rejects Kant's criticism according to which 'we must know the faculty of knowledge before we can know.' To Hegel, this is simply circular, 'for to investigate the faculties of knowledge means to know them; but how we are to know without knowing, how we are to apprehend the truth before the truth, it is impossible to say.' Then Hegel suggestively employs 'the old story of the σχολαστικός who would not go into the water till he could swim' (Georg F.W. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, tr. by E. S. Haldane and F. H. Simson 1896 [London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955], vol. III, p. 428).

<sup>20</sup> Exemplary of this balanced attitude, from a philosophical viewpoint, is Reid's treatment of the inclination to rationalistically explain everything, on the one hand, and, on the other, to sceptically

considering how Christians may deal with the incompatibility between their belief that Christianity is true and the need to respect other religious views, merely philosophical perspectives may suffer from analogous limitations. Unlike that which I will call a ‘super-naturalistic assumption,’ which is the assumption that a supernatural being exists and intervenes in our experience, philosophical views should be able to offer an explanation of their points of departure. Instead, as I will show, this is not the case, from which follows that pre-comprehension or prejudice seems to heavily condition philosophical perspectives and not only the religious ones. After all, denying the existence of prejudices, if not appropriately demonstrated, is contradictory. H.G. Gadamer has famously made this point by arguing that this would mean to be ‘prejudiced against prejudice.’<sup>21</sup>

#### *5.1.4 Turning back to Inconclusiveness: for Believers, this Inconclusiveness can be a Sign of spiritual Progress*

The faithful believe that they are already in possession of the ultimate truth by way of divine grace. They also believe that, while perfecting themselves from a religious and spiritual viewpoint, they can equally attain other truths by way of reason. To put it otherwise, on the basis of their faith they are persuaded that they already know what concerns the most fundamental questions, such as the meaning of life and human eternal destiny. Furthermore, they also believe that their intellectual faculties, once employed in accordance with their own nature, enable them to effectively develop rational enquiries and successfully uncover the truth, which they firmly believe cannot contradict their faith.<sup>22</sup>

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declare that truth cannot be attained. Referring to this attitude, Stackhouse says that the Scottish thinker ‘dispenses with modern hubris on the one side and postmodern despair on the other’ (Stackhouse, p. 233).

<sup>21</sup> Hans G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd ed. tr. by J. Weinsheimer and D. Marshall (London-New York: Continuum 1989), p. 273. As is known, this is the blame directed by Gadamer against Enlightenment, which he argues denied tradition its power. For him, no antithesis between reason and tradition should obtain, which is why Gadamer also criticized Romanticism for having assumed, in reverse order, an analogous extremist position. At any rate, that which is of interest here is to remark that prejudices can be crucial to philosophical understanding. Georgia Warnke has punctually summarized this view by saying that prejudices ‘reflect the experiences and shared understandings of previous generations and comprise the background consensus they hand down to us for making sense out of our world’ (Georgia Warnke, ‘Introduction.’ In *Inheriting Gadamer*, ed. by Georgia Warnke [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016], p. 4).

<sup>22</sup> This clearly emerges from Aquinas’s thought, as I have shown in Chapter 3. However, it may easily be found in the thought of other outstanding representatives of the Christian tradition. For example, the first chapter of Anselm’s *Proslogion* is a prayer, which the author says is ‘excitatio mentis’ aimed at making humans know what in order to know they have been created (‘ad te videndum factum sum’). This means that, *as believers*, they are put in the best possible condition to conduct research that, *as humans*, they are naturally led to conduct. Marilyn McCord Adams points out that, especially in his

Obviously enough, they are expected to be satisfied with the fact that they possess the fundamental truths of life. Being aware of what the meaning of life consists of and knowing various related truths is of primary importance to them. If communion with God is their main interest, then it's the devotion to this primary end and the firmness with which this is pursued that should first and foremost interest them. This is shown by the fact that, among those who have faith, some know more details than others, and some of those who don't know many details, might believe with more devotion and firmness than those who know lots. The saints of Old Testament times had faith, and some a very firm faith, though revelation was still unfolding. A devout child, or 'simple believer,' might only be able to recite the Creed, but might well *believe* it much more firmly and devoutly than those who are able to give a lecture series on the development of the doctrine of the Trinity or of grace. Only fundamental beliefs, therefore, and the firmness with which they are held, are expected to be of main interest to believers.

From this, however, it does not follow that knowing all the rest is of no importance. On the contrary, it is precisely because of their faith, according to which God has created everything for our sake, that believers should be interested in knowing everything is possible.

Among all of the possible questions they may want to ask themselves, there is the question how to effectively conduct rational investigation and to remedy the inconclusiveness here under consideration. The answer seems to depend on the content at stake. On the one hand, inconclusiveness regarding the fundamental truths mentioned above, and the related a-rational commitments, cannot be an issue to them. As I have argued especially in Chapter 3, they consider fully plausible and desirable to stick to such truths even against contrary evidence. On the other hand, when it comes to the rest of human knowledge, including beliefs that are more or less peripherally related to their faith, nothing makes the faithful sure that their investigation will always be consistent with the fundamental truths they already possess. They may be mistaken in regard to both the outcomes of their investigation and the will to stick to them.<sup>23</sup> Mainly, the more they love the fundamental truths, which they consider vital to them, the more are they expected to be aware of the possibility to fall into the abovementioned mistake. If sticking to those truths is due to their love for them as well as for God and their neighbor, then they are expected to scrupulously conduct any further investigation by constantly checking whether any step of this investigation is consistent with

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*Proslogion*, Anselm makes fully explicit the divine-human collaboration, which he sees as the basis of intellectual enquiry ('Anselm on faith and reason.' In *The Cambridge Companion to Anselm*, ed. by Brian Davies and Brian Leftow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 36f.).

<sup>23</sup> The fact that the faithful firmly hold the Christian beliefs does not exclude that the faithful in question may be wrong. Aquinas is well aware that they may mistake their own conjectures for the Christian revelation. See above, Chapter 3, note 30.

the fundamental truths in question.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, a deviation from an effective research conduct should be seen as due to a deviation from love for God and the neighbor, whereas success in knowing should be seen as mainly due to their sticking to such a love. This implies that they distinguish between, on the one hand, sticking to God and his truth, and, on the other hand, sticking to their own convictions and, what is more, to love for themselves.<sup>25</sup>

From this follows that believers are expected to be interested in remedying *a particular form* of inconclusiveness, and not inconclusiveness in itself. The inconclusiveness that they should remedy has to do with various subjects that are more or less close to the fundamental matters they deeply care about. The other form of inconclusiveness, which regards those fundamental matters, is instead indispensable for them. Actually, they are put in a condition to fight against the former kind only because they care about the latter. It is in fact only their firm adhesion to their fundamental beliefs, including the conviction that such beliefs are due to their love for God and the neighbor, that allow them to wonder whether or not their intellectual research is shaped by love for God and the neighbor.<sup>26</sup> In this connection, I have argued in the previous chapter that the inconclusiveness that is typical of believers can be seen as both *a problem and a solution*. It becomes a problem when it regards the fundamental truths, and, strictly speaking, becomes a problem only to an external observer and not to believers. It becomes a solution when it regards the rest of knowledge, because if one aims at promoting oneself spiritually, which means that one aims at freeing oneself from self-love, then one obviously frees oneself of those convictions that one holds because of self-love.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Scrupulosity is for Aquinas one of the main characteristics of religion: ‘Religion would seem to take its name from reading over those things which belong to Divine worship because we ought frequently to ponder over such things in our hearts’ (*Summa theologiae* II-II q. 81 a. 1).

<sup>25</sup> As is known, the opposition between love for God and self-love traces back at least to Augustine, who ascribes the ‘city of God’ and that ‘of men,’ respectively, to these two kinds of love. Of course, Augustine is also aware that self-love, if taken in accordance with the nature of humans as creatures, does coincide with love for God. As a consequence, seemingly mutually incompatible sentences such as ‘the primal destruction of man was self-love,’ ‘there is no one who does not love himself,’ and ‘indeed you did not love yourself when you did not love the God who made you’ can be found in his work, as O. O’Donovan has appropriately argued (see Oliver O’Donovan, *The Problem of Self-Love in St. Augustine* [Yale: Yale University Press, 1980], p. vii).

<sup>26</sup> Not surprisingly, even some forms of secularism ‘can be seen as the upshot of distinctively religious convictions.’ For example, ‘the recognition that a religiously diverse society facilitates choice and human responsibility does not always have to be the possession of secular liberalism’ (Fergusson, *Faith and Its Critics*, pp. 8-9).

<sup>27</sup> I will later show how Aquinas argues that sin, which obviously emerges from self-love and from lack of love for God and the neighbour, impedes one from satisfactorily employing one’s intellectual faculties. See below, note 131.

The problem of inconclusiveness, therefore, is for believers first and foremost *an opportunity* to reflect on their own spiritual progress, which they are expected to value incomparably more than conclusiveness.

If my argument is right, the question here under consideration emerges for believers to the extent that they take seriously their spiritual progress. Crucial to their life should only be their participation in the life of Christ. This communion with God, however, is to be experienced and reinforced *in action*. Among the various kinds of action, the intellectual one can obviously be included. It can therefore become a way for believers to test and consequently to enhance their communion with God. This should result in an equally positive intellectual enhancement, which implies that inconclusiveness can for some aspects be overcome. This remains, however, a secondary goal, whereas the first one will always be the believer's spiritual progress.

J. Stackhouse provides an interesting example of how believers are expected to relate these two goals to each other. Consider the case that 'one's interpretation of Scripture seems to lead to beliefs or actions that do not square with what else one thinks one knows.' A Christian believer 'will then pray and particularly pray that God will direct her to whatever option will best advance God's purposes in the world.' This means that

she will not pray primarily to come to a right conclusion. She may well pray for that—of course she should. But her primary prayer will be *vocational* and *missional*, truly pragmatic. For she knows that God's purposes normally are indeed advanced best by Christians believing true things, but not always.<sup>28</sup>

Searching for the good in itself, which Christians identify with God, is the ultimate end to which the whole human life, including the intellectual activity, should be aimed. According to Augustine, 'man has no other reason for philosophizing than that he may be happy.'<sup>29</sup>

My references to various Christian thinkers suggest that believers have always been expected to act in the way I have just described, and the ST is not a *new* method to engage in debates and related investigations in a way that makes it easier to attain conclusiveness. Thus, I speak of a 'turn' only because the protagonists of philosophical and theological debates on the truth and credibility of the Christian faith are often *unaware* of the crucial role that a spiritual approach to those debates may play. A turn *from their explicit views* seems therefore necessary. Not surprisingly, I devoted the first chapter of this dissertation to prominent Christian debaters who seem to have benefited from the

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<sup>28</sup> Stackhouse, p. 152.

<sup>29</sup> Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, xix, 1, tr. by Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1890).

spiritual approach in question and nonetheless did not point out its criticality. In the second chapter I treated Reid's approach, which partly betrays a form of awareness of the ST in epistemology. I finally focused on Aquinas's thought, in Chapter 3 and partly in Chapter 4, from which the ST seems to emerge quite clearly, though Aquinas does not explicitly formulate it either.

#### 5.1.5 For Unbelievers and mere Epistemologists, Inconclusiveness should be no Issue

I can now move on to consider non-believers and, more generally, *mere epistemologists*, who participate in debates related to faith and its credibility. I am referring to people whose life is not aimed at the abovementioned spiritual achievements, which means that it is not shaped by a-rational commitments. (To be more precise, since I am also referring to some believers, it is their *intellectual* activity that does not seem to be shaped by those commitments.) Mere epistemologists deal with any problem by way of reason alone. Of course, they may still want to search for good and pursue spiritual perfection. However, since they reject any pre-comprehension, they need to rely on mere reasoning in order to first understand how things are and then decide how to deal with them.<sup>30</sup>

This attitude is exemplified by Descartes's famous choice to start from the beginning as if nothing were written before. On closer inspection, however, such a choice does not appear to be neutral. On the contrary, it was due to an impressive host of arguments, some of which ended up contradicting Descartes's choice. As is known, the author of the *Discourse on the Method* justified his decision to start any reflection anew from the beginning by claiming that, among all of the things he had studied, only doubts and errors emerged: 'I found myself embarrassed with so many doubts and errors that it seemed to me that the effort to instruct myself had no effect other than the increasing discovery of my own ignorance.'<sup>31</sup> It must be noted that, on the one hand, Descartes claimed that he could not firmly claim anything; on the other hand, he firmly claimed that a new method should be found in order to finally remedy the abovementioned doubts and errors. In this connection, J.

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<sup>30</sup> One may object that the principle of non-contradiction as well as beliefs such as that we have two hands are taken for granted and accepted *without any demonstration* (see above, note 17). Even in this case, however, a form of evidence is expected to be provided. As is known, in the fourth book of *Metaphysics*, Aristotle offered a demonstration *ad hominem* to show that the principle of non-contradiction cannot be denied. Similarly, while focusing on the belief that we have two hands, Wittgenstein argues that there is no evidence to deny such a belief. If one denies that, one should also deny that one's sight functions appropriately, and should in turn end up doubting any other possible belief (See Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, § 250).

<sup>31</sup> René Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, in *Discourse on Method and Meditations*, tr. by E. S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 2003), Part I, p. 5.

Newman argued that Descartes's claim to generate a completely new philosophical method was utterly unjustified. For Newman, those who believe 'that we have no right in philosophy to make any assumption whatever, and that we ought to begin with a universal doubt,' do not realize that this 'is of all assumptions the greatest.'<sup>32</sup>

In this connection, F. Kerr has highlighted that aiming at being absolutely objective 'brought with it the uncanny thought that the only perfect depiction of any reality would have to be from nobody's point of view—or, if there is any difference, from God's.'<sup>33</sup>

In the next chapter, I will try to assess to what extent those who declare that they only rely on natural reason can take the ST. I will confirm that, because of mere epistemologists' deceptive neutrality, the ST turns out to be preferable to mere epistemology.

For now, however, I intend to point out that the question whether or not inconclusiveness may stimulate a reflection that leads to the ST should simply not emerge on the side of an exclusively rational position. It is true that inconclusiveness in itself should appear to be of interest to every philosopher. A philosopher, however, typically ascribes it to a merely mistaken employment of reason, which consequently stimulates a search for remedies. This has been done throughout the history of epistemology. Philosophers have always engaged in more or less successful attempts to understand how people should reason to avoid mistakes and attain the truth. Especially from such thinkers as Locke and Spinoza on, all of these attempts have been made from a viewpoint that the thinkers in question considered merely rational. The conviction, which no one has ever openly expressed, was formed that every subject, including the religious one, needed to be considered without taking into account the hypothesis that a supernatural being may exist and exert an influence on human life and understanding. From now on, I will refer to this conviction as a 'naturalistic assumption' (NA). Because of the NA, the idea that a spiritual progress, taken as

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<sup>32</sup> See above, Chapter 4, note 72. Newman goes on to offer another interesting reason against the assumption of the universal doubt, which was repeated one century later by Bernard Lonergan as follows: 'It was Newman who remarked, apropos of Descartes' methodic doubt, that it would be better to believe everything than to doubt everything. For universal doubt leaves one with no basis for advance, while universal belief may contain some truth that in time may gradually drive out the errors.' (Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* [New York: Herder and Herder, 1971], p. 223). It must be said, however, that Descartes's doubt concerning human reason does not seem to be just arbitrary and willful. Georges Dicker has pointed out that two Descartes contemporary scholars such as Alan Gewirth and Harry Frankfurt had already defended the author of the *Meditations* in regard to this point. See Georges Dicker, *Descartes: An Analytic and Historical Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 170 ff. At any rate, it has been noticed that Descartes tried to find absolute beginnings of knowledge, which, on closer inspection, don't seem to exist. For more on this, see Charles Larmore, 'The First Meditation: skeptical doubt and certainty.' In *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes – Meditations*, ed. by David Cunniff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 48-67.

<sup>33</sup> Fergus Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein* (Oxford-New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 24.

mainly due to the relationship with a supernatural and all-perfect being, should be seen as an aim that is already known and pursued before any process of knowledge starts, has never been considered. I will call the assumption of this idea a ‘super-naturalistic assumption’ (SA). Obviously enough, accepting the SA is seen as unacceptable by those who are accustomed to believing that the rational approach is the only way to attain the truth and eventually do good.

From this does not follow that they do not consider the role that a spiritual regeneration may play in every human activity, the intellectual one included. They may be ready to believe that doing good may constitute both the aim and the promotion of knowledge. However, such supporters of reason alone would want to convince us that, before embracing any view of morality and spirituality, this view should be first individuated and assessed by way of reason. This is what I have called mere epistemology, which, when it comes to religion, coincides with the NA. (According to the NA, one first demonstrates whether a supernatural being exists and then believes in divine revelation. According to mere epistemology, one first understands what the good is, and then does good.) Among those who exerted great influence on modern thought, Locke held this view while arguing that one can believe in divine revelation if one has good arguments for stating that God authored such a revelation.<sup>34</sup> Analogously, Spinoza claimed that ‘love for God springs from knowledge of Him, and knowledge of Him should be derived from general ideas, in themselves certain and known.’<sup>35</sup>

As I have said above, in the next chapter I will focus, among other things, on how mere epistemologists may participate in the ST. But before I do that, let me show how exactly the ST takes place. This can be explored mainly using believers’ convictions—unlike mere epistemologists, believers offer reflections that, more or less implicitly, contain the ST. I will take into account two prominent topics in contemporary debates on religion. They are the existence of God, more precisely the idea that there may be non-resistant unbelievers, and the problem of religious diversity. In both cases, I will show how the ST can take place.

Let me note that, in the case of religious matters, the ST coincides with the SA. I have already shown above that an analogous relationship can be found between mere epistemology, which opposes the ST, and the NA, which opposes the SA. Adopting the SA means that one somewhat

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<sup>34</sup> See above, Chapter 1, note 8.

<sup>35</sup> Baruch Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-politicus*, tr. by R.H.M. Elwes (London: Bell, 1883). Of course, this does not mean that Spinoza must be considered an atheist. It only means that ‘proponents of a philosophical religion would surely be delighted to find in Spinoza a fellow-advocate of the intellectual worship of God’ (Carlos Fraenkel, *Philosophical Religions from Plato to Spinoza: Reason, Religion, and Autonomy* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012], p. 213).

knows of God and proceeds to worship him before demonstrating his existence and other related beliefs. Taking the ST means that one somewhat knows of the good and proceeds to do good before demonstrating what the good is.

Let me also note that, as I have shown in the course of the previous chapters, the Christian faith naturally implies a primacy of the search for good over the search for truth. The former shapes and includes the latter, of which is the ultimate aim. By contrast, those who stick to the NA—they are not only unbelievers but also those believers who share in mere epistemology—are prevented from considering the ST and making it a reality.<sup>36</sup>

## 5.2 Reflecting on *no-fault Unbelief* as an Opportunity of spiritual Enhancement

An insightful strategy aimed at arguing that God does not exist has been proposed in the course of the last two decades. I am referring to the so-called ‘divine hiddenness problem’ and the related conviction that there are those whose unbelief is a ‘no-fault’ one. The problem in question has matched the problem of evil as a prominent argument for atheism. Among the several versions that have been collected, that championed by J. Schellenberg<sup>37</sup> (hereafter: DHA) has often been seen as ‘the most widely discussed articulation of the problem.’<sup>38</sup>

According to the DHA, if God exists, he would be an all-loving, all-powerful and totally perfect being. Consequently, he would be able to grant us an opportunity to have a reciprocal relationship of love with him. (This would obviously be the greatest possible good for us, given the existence of such a perfect being.) To this end, God would make his existence so evident that there can be no reasonable or inculpable lack of belief in him.<sup>39</sup> However, belief in God’s existence seems

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<sup>36</sup> For believers this may be even counterproductive. According to M. Buckley, Christian response to the development of modern atheism, being exceedingly grounded in philosophical and scientific ground, led to its further development, which is why ‘atheism is essentially parasitic,’ and ‘depends upon theism for its vocabulary, for its meaning, and for the hypothesis it rejects’ (Michael Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* [Yale: Yale University Press, 1987], p. 15).

<sup>37</sup> See John L. Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, Ithaca (NY: Cornell University Press, 1993, 2ed. 2006).

<sup>38</sup> Michael Rea, ‘Divine Hiddenness, Divine Silence,’ in *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology*, ed. by Louis Pojman and Michael Rea (Boston MA: Wadsworth/Cengage, 2013), p. 275.

<sup>39</sup> Schellenberg refers to the evidence ‘sufficient’ to believe. However, the notion of ‘sufficient’, as he employs it, needs to be determined more precisely. On the one hand, it seems to correspond to ‘undeniable’, because evidence that is not undeniable gives rise to doubt, and, consequently, is expected to be refused by Schellenberg. On the other hand, Schellenberg states that he does not refer to

sometimes to be accompanied by reasonable doubt. According to the DHA, there are those who do not believe though they do not resist divine revelation. They are ‘inculpable,’ which implies that God is ‘culpable,’ because, though he is omnipotent and omniscient, he does not provide them with the opportunity to believe and consequently achieve the greatest possible good. If he exists, however, God is a perfectly good being; consequently, God does not exist. On Schellenberg’s view, therefore, the lack of sufficient evidence—not only rational but also experiential—is, in itself, proof of God’s non-existence, although this has been acknowledged only in recent times.<sup>40</sup>

Some thinkers have opposed the DHA with numerous and intellectually penetrating reasons why God does not make his existence more evident.<sup>41</sup> Some have pointed out that God may ensure our happiness and ultimate well-being in a way that is, at first sight, incomprehensible to us. For P. Moser and D. Howard-Snyder, for example, ‘the Jewish-Christian God hides at times for a range of reasons, not all of which seem clear to humans.’<sup>42</sup>

Here I intend to focus on Schellenberg’s proposal that there are reasonable and inculpable unbelievers (I call this view ‘no-fault unbelief,’ NFU). It frontally opposes the view, which believers have traditionally held, that unbelief is either unreasonable, because it is due to intellectual mistakes, or culpable, because is due to moral flaw (I call this view ‘fault unbelief,’ FU). In the footsteps of various Christian thinkers, I will first focus on this view, which only contributes to increase endless inconclusiveness and mutual opposition between debaters. I will then focus on believers—and also unbelievers, although to a lesser extent—to show that they can avoid getting stuck in this opposition by shifting attention from their interlocutors to themselves and their own spiritual growth, which is an indispensable aspect of the ST.

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‘incontrovertible reasons:’ ‘the reasons for Divine self-disclosure suggested by reflection on the nature of love are not reasons for God to provide us with some incontrovertible proof or overwhelm us with a display of Divine glory’ (Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, pp. 212f.).

<sup>40</sup> See John Schellenberg, ‘Divine Hiddenness.’ In *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, ed. by Charles Taliaferro, Paul Draper, and Philip Quinn (Oxford: Blackwell, 2010), p. 509.

<sup>41</sup> See John Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument. Philosophy’s New Challenge to Belief in God*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 133-139, where an impressively long bibliography of what has been published on the DHA is provided.

<sup>42</sup> Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul Moser, ‘Introduction.’ In *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays*, ed. by Howard-Snyder and Moser (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 2. These authors compile a list of possible explanations of how God’s existence and his hiddenness may coexist. Especially noteworthy among these explanations is the idea that, if God didn’t hide, ‘we would be coerced in a manner incompatible with love’ (p. 9). Another interesting reply to the DHA is the ‘responsibility argument’, which was introduced by Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford UK: Clarendon Press, 1979), pp. 189ff. and was employed in response to the DHA by Travis Dumsday, ‘Divine Hiddenness and the Responsibility Argument,’ *Philosophia Christi* 12 (2010), pp. 357-371.

### 5.2.1 A Depiction of the FU, i.e., Unbelief is unreasonable and culpable

Numerous examples of how unbelievers have throughout history been blamed for their unbelief quickly come to mind. Psalm 53 famously reads: ‘Fools say in their hearts, “there is no God.” They are corrupt, they commit abominable acts; there is no one who does good.’<sup>43</sup> Equally famously, St. Paul reproaches

those who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them ... So they are without excuse; for though they knew God, ... they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles.<sup>44</sup>

Though less pointedly, all of the debates and arguments developed by great philosophers and theologians like Augustine, Anselm and Aquinas in defence of the reasonableness of faith support the conviction that there is something morally and/or intellectually wrong with unbelievers. At the dawn of the modern age, Calvin manifestly accuses them of being mentally insane and morally corrupt. For him, all human beings, not only those who are able to develop sophisticated rational arguments, have been provided with a *sensus divinitatis*, which consequently renders them inexcusable if they do not believe:

To prevent anyone from taking refuge in the pretence of ignorance, God himself has implanted in all men a certain understanding of his divine majesty. ... Since, therefore, men one and all perceive that there is a God and that he is their Maker, they are condemned by their own testimony because they have failed to honour him and to consecrate their life to his will. ... Indeed, the perversity of the impious, who though they struggle furiously are unable to extricate themselves from the fear of God, is abundant testimony that this conviction, namely, that *there is some God*, is naturally inborn in all, and is fixed deep within, as it were in the very marrow.<sup>45</sup>

If all have been provided by nature with the conviction at stake, God’s existence and revelation can be denied only because of mental insanity or moral culpability.

Following in the footsteps of Calvin, Plantinga has argued that sin and moral corruption can impede the correct functioning of cognitive faculties, and has proposed the concept of ‘warranted Christian belief.’ On the basis of this concept, it can be said that, if God exists, then it is highly probable that we all are provided with cognitive faculties able to lead us to believe in him. A considerable obstacle in this direction, however, is sin, which can deform the appropriate employment of our intellectual faculties:

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<sup>43</sup> Psalm 53,1.

<sup>44</sup> Romans 1,18-23.

<sup>45</sup> Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, bk. 1, chapter 3, pp. 43f.

Sin induces in us a *resistance* to the deliverances of the *sensus divinitatis*, muted as they are by the first factor; we don't *want* to pay attention to its deliverances... The defect there is affective, not intellectual. Our affections are disordered; they no longer work as in God's original design plan for human beings. There is a failure of proper function, an affective disorder, a sort of madness of the will.<sup>46</sup>

Note that those who—like Calvin and Plantinga—support the FU manifestly take for granted that God is a perfectly loving being. Accordingly, they believe that he cannot be faulted for permitting some to not believe and consequently miss the opportunity to be related to him, which is the best possible good for humans, given his existence.<sup>47</sup> More pointedly, Aquinas claims that, if God grants us some good, this is due to his mercy; if he does not grant us anything, this is due to his justice.<sup>48</sup>

J. Greco has proposed a new approach to this subject.<sup>49</sup> He argues that the traditional way to explain unbelief which constitutes the FU 'looks for the explanation of non-belief only in the atheist.' By contrast—so he maintains—the explanation at hand might also be found in the social environment and in believers themselves, that is to say, in the way their personal relationships and their communities may end up promoting non-belief instead of belief.<sup>50</sup>

Unlike Greco, I do not intend to investigate any 'social turn' in religious epistemology; like him, I assume that believers would do well to shift attention from unbelievers to themselves. As I have already said, this is an indispensable aspect of the ST.

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<sup>46</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, pp. 205 and 208.

<sup>47</sup> Analogously, God cannot be faulted for lack of appropriate belief on the part of the faithful. In this connection, P. Moser distinguishes 'people *passively* open to belief in God and people *actively* open to belief in God. People passively open to such belief do not put any serious effort into examining whether God has intervened, for example, in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Such people are 'open' to God with striking indifference. This indifference manifests itself in failure to act in ways that take seriously the availability of evidence for God. ... People actively open to belief in God take a *morally serious* interest in the availability of evidence for God. Such an interest has potential morally transforming effects.' (Paul Moser, 'Cognitive Idolatry and Divine Hiding.' In *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays*, pp. 142f.).

<sup>48</sup> While focusing on the help of grace, because of which we can believe the revealed truths, Aquinas openly claims that 'to whomsoever it [the divine help] is given from above it is mercifully given; and from whom it is withheld it is justly withheld, as a punishment of a previous, or at least of original, sin' (*Summa theologiae* II -II q. 2 a. 5 ad 1); Aquinas relies on Augustine's passages such as *De Correptione at gratia*, 7, xiv.

<sup>49</sup> See John Greco, 'No-fault atheism.' In *Hidden Divinity and Religious Belief*, ed. by Adam Green and Eleonore Stump (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 109-125. Greco employs the word 'atheism,' though he is well aware that not only atheists but also agnostics are involved in the discussion of the subject. However, he does not turn 'flawed atheist response' into 'flawed nonbeliever response' or 'no-fault non-belief,' because the employment of non-belief is 'not nearly as catchy' (p. 109, footnote 2). Therefore, I am using 'unbeliever' instead of 'nonbeliever.'

<sup>50</sup> See Greco, 'No-fault atheism,' p. 109.

Taking the ST in epistemology, in fact, consists first and foremost in avoiding merely intellectual fights and in promoting the act of doing good. This means that one takes advantage of research and debates to reflect *on oneself* so as to see how to promote *one's own ability* to do good.

Before the idea that unbelief can be held reasonably and/or inculpably, which implies God's blameworthiness, the believer who intends to take the ST does not simply espouse the FU. Of course, s/he firmly maintains their belief in God, since God for them is the good itself, and this can cause the FU. However, the believer also wonders how his or her will to do good and to love the neighbour, including the supporters of the NFU, can allow him or her to take advantage of the NFU in order to spiritually grow.

If the believer sees God as the good itself, then s/he should also see any circumstances, including debates on the NFU, as an opportunity to improve their ability to do good. As a consequence, it is precisely their firm belief in God, who is the good itself, that should spur the believers on to look at themselves instead of ascribing faults and responsibilities to others.

The same could be said of the unbelievers who support the NFU, though this similarity only applies if the NFU enables them to do good and to promote their own spirituality. This, however, does not emerge from Schellenberg's proposal, which seems to limit itself to intellectual controversies aimed at showing that *others*, i.e. God, are blameworthy. Unlike Chapter 6, in which I will focus on goods to which unbelievers may sincerely commit themselves in order to improve their own spiritual life, the subjects treated in this chapter—not only God's existence but also religious diversity—don't seem to offer the same opportunity. At any rate, I will try to show that, if supporters of the DHA and the NFU focused on their views while paying more attention to themselves than to others, unexpected consequences would follow in terms of progress in knowledge. Among such consequences, the most interesting would probably consist in the fact that the awareness would emerge that either they are believers or don't have any reason for proposing the DHA and the NFU.

Obviously enough, someone may object that this seems to be nothing but the search for conclusiveness. In other words, the believer may consider themselves the winner of the dispute, and this contradicts any adoption of the ST, which is primarily aimed at one's spiritual betterment. In reply, let me say that showing what may occur if the supporters of the NFU focus on themselves instead of blaming others is not that which the believers who take the ST are expected to do. According to the ST, the believers, like the unbelievers, have to focus *on themselves*. Showing what may occur to the supporters of the NFU is instead an initiative of mine, which is a hypothesis aimed at reflecting on the benefits that they may receive from taking the ST.

### 5.2.2 Unbelievers and the NFU

Let me start by noting that the assumption of the NFU is consistent with both

(1) there is no God

and

(2) there is a God who (at least in some cases) is responsible for religious unbelief.

Clearly enough, (1) manifestly strengthens the idea that one cannot be charged with a cognitive deficiency or moral culpability if one does not believe. The same can be said of (2). If, at least in some cases, God is responsible for religious unbelief, then there really are unbelievers who cannot be charged with either mental insanity or moral blameworthiness.

If we now consider (1) and (2) more closely, we may notice that both of them lead us to advance more remarkable insights. From (1) it follows:

(1a) unbelievers can hold that there is moral and/or intellectual failure in believers.

On the other hand, (2) can be developed as follows:

(2a) there is a God who, since he (at least in some cases) is responsible for religious unbelief, *is evil*

or

(2b) there is a God who, though (at least in some cases) is responsible for religious unbelief, *is good*.

What is of interest for our purposes is that from (1) and (2a) follows that unbelievers are entitled to hold that the believers, *qua* believers, suffer from moral and/or intellectual flaws. Only such flaws can explain belief in and reliance on a God who is evil, not to mention a God who simply does not exist. Unsurprisingly, accusations intended to highlight the flaws in question have regularly and frequently been voiced against believers over the last centuries. To name but a few, Hume, Freud, Russell and, in our time, Harris have famously adopted this stance. Hume placed in the same boat ‘Stupidity, Christianity, and Ignorance’ and saw all three as limits into which the English nation

was ‘relapsing fast.’<sup>51</sup> According to Freud, religion is a psychological disease, ‘the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity.’<sup>52</sup> For Russell, religion originated in barbaric ages and ‘has been and still is the principal enemy of moral progress in the world’. It is therefore ‘no wonder if cruelty and religion have gone hand in hand.’<sup>53</sup> Finally, Harris seems to sum up all of these attacks on religion and especially to the Christian faith by saying that it is now necessary ‘to demolish the intellectual and moral pretensions of Christianity.’<sup>54</sup>

The fact that unbelievers put themselves in a position to ascribe both intellectual and moral flaws to believers somewhat absolves the believers who do the same in the reverse direction from the accusation of being offensive. Or, more precisely, this fact leads to the awareness that this is the way both believers and unbelievers sometimes look at each other. (I say ‘sometimes’ because I am aware that it may not apply to all cases. An unbeliever, for example, might depict religious belief not as blameworthy but as a quasi-natural disposition with some positive practical outcomes, even though this results in false beliefs. The unbeliever in question may, therefore, look at belief without lapsing into a superior judgementalism, though it cannot be excluded that also in this case a kind of intellectual failure may be ascribed to believers.)

This is an unexpected and significant outcome for unbelievers. The assumption of the NFU has been motivated by the impression that accusing unbelievers of being intellectually and/or morally disturbed is in some respect unacceptable. If the assumption in question leads unbelievers to employ the same attitude in the reverse direction, then nothing has changed, except the fact that now unbelievers, and not believers, are responsible for adopting a stance which is usually perceived to be offensive.

Needless to say, this outcome can be achieved by unbelievers if, instead of arguing for their non-culpability, which also implies the culpability of others, they look at themselves, promote self-criticism, and are not afraid of being blamed. This attitude, however, can only follow one’s commitment to doing good, no matter what consequences, in terms of personal success, this may lead to. One, therefore, should stick to the commitment to spiritually perfecting oneself and to the related beliefs. Among these beliefs, it does not seem possible to include the one that God does not

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<sup>51</sup> David Hume, Letter 272 (April 6, 1765), in *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. by J.Y.T. Greig (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932), vol. 1, p. 498.

<sup>52</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, tr.by J. Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1927), p. 43.

<sup>53</sup> Bertrand Russell, ‘Why I am not a Christian.’ In *The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell*, ed. by R. E. Egner and L. E. Denonn (London: Allen and Unwin, 1961), pp. 595f.

<sup>54</sup> Sam Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation* (New York: Knopf, 2006), p. ix.

exist. This belief does not lead to one's spiritual perfection if, as it occurs with the DHA and the NFU, it is grounded in the conviction that the unbelievers are inculpable and reasonable, whereas God is culpable (and believers are unreasonable). Thus, I by no means claim that unbelievers cannot take the ST. Actually, I will argue how they can in the next chapter. What I mean, instead, is that they cannot take the ST *as unbelievers, and especially as supporters of the DHA and the NFU*.

Let me now consider (2b), from which follows that unbelievers are prevented from an opportunity to have a positive relationship with God. This positive relationship must be seen as the greatest possible good for humans to the extent that God exists and is good. Consequently, it seems that exclusion from communion with him through no fault of their own, together with lack of understanding of the reasons why this occurs, should cause unbelievers to suffer tremendously.

Since this view is the center of the DHA,<sup>55</sup> I will consider (2b) while focusing on the DHA. According to the DHA, as I said above, the existence of people who, through no fault of their own are unable to believe in God and attain the good, demonstrates that God does not exist. An omnipotent and perfectly loving being, in fact, should not permit that his creatures miss their greatest good through no fault of their own.

Notice that Schellenberg has recently pointed out that the employment of words such as 'culpable' and 'blameworthy' dates to the period when he began to develop the hiddenness argument. At that time, so he says,

I was inclined to speak of these things in terms of culpability and inculpability rather than in terms of resistance and nonresistance, as I do today. What I had in mind was that given God's loving openness to relationship, no finite creature would ever fail to believe in God *without it being their own fault*. I was in fact thinking about resistance of God but I thought that such resistance, which would have to come in the face of evidence of a good and loving Maker to whom one owed everything, would clearly be blameworthy. ... I now see this focus on culpability and inculpability as a mistake.<sup>56</sup>

However, if the claim that God would be responsible for the failure of those who are non-resistant unbelievers becomes an argument for atheism, this is due to the fact that being responsible for unbelief is evil, which cannot be ascribed to God. As a result, those who are not responsible for their unbelief can appropriately be said to be 'blameless' or 'inculpable.' (There is, furthermore, one more reason for looking at the employment of 'inculpability'—as well as 'reasonableness'—as

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<sup>55</sup> For Howard-Snyder, Schellenberg's fundamental idea 'is that if there is a God, there are no reasonable non-believers, or inculpable non-believers, or non-resistant non-believers (all of these terms have been used); but there are, and so there's no God.' (Daniel Howard-Snyder, 'Divine openness and creaturely non-resistant non-belief.' In *Hidden Divinity and Religious Belief*, p. 126).

<sup>56</sup> Schellenberg, *The Hiddenness Argument*, pp. 54f.

totally appropriate to Schellenberg's argument. By having recourse to both adjectives, Schellenberg can frontally oppose the FU.)

Let me now turn back to the suffering that should accompany these people. Again, focusing on one's suffering reveals a shift of attention from others to oneself, which is possible to the extent that one takes the ST. I mean that, once demonstrated that God does not exist, the unbeliever who doesn't take into consideration the ST, feels satisfied, and doesn't need to continue reflecting. S/he has demonstrated that others are unreasonable and—if his or her atheism is based on the DHA—that God is culpable, whereas s/he is reasonable and inculpable. If s/he continues reflecting and wonders what, in terms of suffering, the outcome of his or her demonstration has caused, this reveals that his or her primary aim is not the mere attainment of the truth. On the contrary, this shows that s/he is primarily interested in the communion with God, the spiritual perfection it implies, and the tremendous suffering its absence is expected to cause. Again, as I have already said above, this is not the attitude that seems to characterize the supporters of the DHA and the NFU. Here I only intend to hypothesize what consequences for them may emerge if they shifted their attention from the DHA and the NFU to the ST.

The argument that hypothetical supporters of both the NFU and the ST may give rise is short and straightforward. God, if he exists, is the maximally great good. As a consequence, the unbelievers in question are expected to suffer because of their non-belief, which prevents them from thriving. If they suffer, however, they cannot consider themselves unbelievers. In fact, one cannot suffer from not having been given a certain good if one believes that the good in question has never existed. On the other hand, if they do not suffer, and do not believe that an opportunity of flourishing has been denied to them, it is simply obvious that they cannot consider God culpable or blameworthy.

Two noticeable objections, however, can be raised against this argument.

First, *one may suffer* from one's lack of belief in God and at the same time may not believe in God's existence. It seems that there are numerous ways in which people can and do hold religious belief to be good, even very good, while they themselves do not believe that God exists. There are the cases of non-believers who admire greatly the service commitment shown by and the sense of peace exhibited by religious believers. Some would like to be believers, but they just can't quite seem to achieve the state, even though they've attempted by practicing many spiritual practices for years. Thus, they don't believe that God exists and nevertheless find the belief in him extremely desirable. As a result, the argument that one cannot suffer from a lack of belief in God if one does not believe that God exists fails.

In reply, let me first notice that, according to this objection, the unbelievers in question find the belief in God extremely desirable because they see extremely desirable dispositions and actions that *some* believers hold and perform, respectively. These unbelievers, however, are likely to also ascribe non-commendable qualities and reprehensible actions to *other* believers. Without going too far back in history, recent scandals—especially the ones related to sex-abused children by some clerics—obviously testify that those who are (or at least declare to be) believers not necessarily exhibit admirable commitments to doing good individually as well as socially. (Furthermore, unbelievers tend more often than not to *accuse* believers of not being coherent with the high spiritual and moral teaching that they—the believers—declare to follow. Not surprisingly, such a lack of coherence is frequently included by unbelievers among the reasons that prevent them from believing.<sup>57</sup>) As a consequence, the unbelievers in question don't have sufficient evidence to attribute *to the belief in God* the commitment to the good that some believers exhibit and that they—the unbelievers—admire.

As a counter-reply one may claim that the unbelievers here under consideration don't admire some dispositions and attitudes that some believers show. Rather, they admire *the religious belief in itself*. In this way, my response that believers may act not only admirably but also deplorably would be neutralized, because our unbelievers look at the belief in itself, not at the believers.

In response, I notice that, at least in the case of the Christian belief, it is hard for unbelievers to say in what exactly the belief in question consists. Believers simply defer to sources of authoritative teaching—first of all the Bible or, more precisely, those books that the denominations to which they adhere authoritatively consider part of the Bible—and are ready to see as Christian belief that which those sources define as such.<sup>58</sup> Nothing comparable can be said of unbelievers. They may enthusiastically adhere to some aspects of the belief in question—the equal dignity of all human beings, for example—and may equally strongly reject others such as authority and obedience, to which especially some denominations—Catholicism, for example—ascribe a crucial role in the life of the believers. Ironically enough, if the unbelievers in question accepted a determined conception of the belief established by one or more Christian denominations, then they would adhere to

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<sup>57</sup> See above, notes 51ff., especially note 53, where I cite Russell and his work eloquently titled *Why I am not a Christian*.

<sup>58</sup> For Aquinas, 'as regards the primary points of articles of faith, man *is bound* to believe them.' In regard to the other points of faith, 'man is not bound to believe them explicitly, but only implicitly, or to be *ready to believe* them, in so far as he is prepared to believe *whatever is contained in the Divine Scriptures*. Then alone is he bound to believe such things explicitly, when it is clear to him that they are *contained in the doctrine of faith*' (*Summa theologiae* II-II q. 2 a. 5, emphasis is mine).

fundamental dogmatic expressions of the relevant Churches, which would obviously contradict them as unbelievers.

Another reply to the objection that those who do not believe in God may nonetheless find the belief in God extremely desirable and suffer from its lack can be offered by making use of an example: Rick suffers from an illness and looks for the relevant medicine. Let me rephrase the example to make it fit the objection under consideration: Rick suffers from the lack of a medicine for his illness even if he believes that this medicine does not exist. (Needless to say, the medicine corresponds to the religious belief as caused by God, health corresponds to the desirable goods that are expected to accompany the religious belief, and the healing power of the medicine corresponds to the religious belief's being cause of the abovementioned benefits.) In reply, let me develop this example as follows. Rick desires to recover from his illness as his friend Erika did. She told him that a medicine restored her health, but the medicine in question does not work with Rick. Rick sought to understand how the medicine in question made Erika recover from her illness, but no convincing explanation emerged. The mere temporal coincidence between Erika's taking medicine and her recovering combined with the fact that the medicine at stake did not work in Rick's case led Rick to doubt that it was really this medicine that allowed Erika to recover. In conclusion, Rick doesn't have the belief in the healing power of the medicine in question, which is another way to say that this medicine, in his case, simply is not a medicine. This, however, is of no importance to him. In fact, it is *health* the good he yearns for, and *not that particular medicine*. He may recover from the illness in question by taking a different medicine or even without taking any medicine at all. Turning back to our discussion, this example helps us to see that believers don't bring sufficient evidence in support of the claim that the belief in God causes such admirable attitudes. As a result, the unbelievers don't have any good reason for believing that the cause of the states they desire and whose lack they suffer is the one that the believers mention. Therefore, the unbelievers are not expected to suffer from lack of belief in God.

Someone may modify the objection to which I have just replied and advance a counter-reply. The medicine mentioned above may be generally effective, but didn't work with Rick because of his unique physiological characteristics. In other words, unlike before, he now believes in the healing power of the medicine in question and nonetheless he suffers from the fact that it does not work with him. A response to this objection is straightforward, and might have been used also above. As I have already said, the healing power of the medicine corresponds to the beneficial effect provided by the belief in God, and 'taking the medicine' corresponds to the act of believing in God. I said that the medicine doesn't work with Rick, which presupposes that he has taken the medicine, that is,

he believes in God. But this obviously contradicts the fact that he is an unbeliever, from which follows that this objection falls into contradiction.

The second objection I intend to consider runs as follows: one *may not suffer* from lack of belief in God and nonetheless such a lack is something evil if God exists. My friend Marc, for example, has never been a believer. He doesn't even conceive of what religious belief is and what benefits the relationship with God may bring with it. He, therefore, does not suffer from not being a believer, though it remains true that, if God exists, there are goods whose lack in his life is an evil that God should not permit.

Consider also the following case. I have a child out there in the world. That child would benefit from having a father active in her life. She does not know that I exist, and has every reason to believe that I am no longer alive. I might therefore be thought to deprive her of goods, even if she never believed I existed. So she may suffer a deprivation even if she is not aware of it.

Before replying to this objection, let me notice that, in line with it, Schellenberg agrees that hiddenness need not (and often does not) cause any subjectively experienced suffering on the part of unbelievers. But he thinks that this in no way weakens the DHA and that to think otherwise may be to confuse the DHA with the problem of suffering. Therefore, such a confusion should accurately be avoided, as Schellenberg has argued in several places.<sup>59</sup> The DHA does not seem to have any direct bearing on issues of suffering. As Schellenberg points out,<sup>60</sup> there are possible worlds in which the problem of divine hiddenness is a good argument for atheism but not the problem of evil, and vice versa.

The objection under consideration is precisely aimed at showing that the DHA cannot be confused with the problem of suffering. As has been said, for Schellenberg 'there is at least one type of nonbelief which clearly does not involve any form of pain or suffering. Here Schellenberg is thinking of a so-called isolated nontheist who has never mentally engaged with or heard of the idea of God.'<sup>61</sup> Marc and the child mentioned above are expected to exemplify this kind of non-theist.

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<sup>59</sup> He argues that, although various interesting relations can be seen between the hiddenness problem and the problem of evil, 'none suggests that the former ... is subsumable under the latter' (John Schellenberg, 'The Hiddenness problem and the problem of evil,' *Faith and Philosophy* 27 [2010], p. 60).

<sup>60</sup> For a similar point, see Peter Van Inwagen, 'What is the problem of the hiddenness of God?', in *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays*, pp. 24-32.

<sup>61</sup> Veronika Weidner, *Examining Schellenberg's Hiddenness Argument* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 86.

However, this type of unbelief does not include the example of the child mentioned above. She is well aware of what s/he was not allowed to have. S/he has evidence of the existence of families. She sees what happens between parents and children and all the enjoyable goods that a father may grant to a child. As a result, this viewpoint does not apply to our discussion. This discussion regards those who are *unaware* of the goods of which they have been deprived and are not in a condition to suffer from such deprivation. From now on, therefore, I will only consider Marc's case.

Let me distinguish between what can be said from the viewpoint of the unbeliever—Marc—and that which an external observer can say. Marc is not aware of what he could enjoy had he a relationship with God. As a consequence, he has no reason for suffering and for blaming God.

An objection may be that, on closer inspection, he does suffer, in the sense that he suffers 'implicitly.' In other words, while some goods are in fact available, Marc hasn't an opportunity to enjoy them. His implicit suffering is therefore a form of deprivation, regardless of the fact that he is unaware of it.

A reply should first point out that the concept of 'implicit suffering' seems a bit arbitrary. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the concept of suffering 'implies conscious endurance of pain or distress.'<sup>62</sup>

For the sake of argument, however, let me accept the idea that Marc suffers implicitly. This, in fact, allows me to argue that such suffering can only be seen *by an external observer*. In fact, that Marc suffers 'implicitly' is equivalent to say that he is *unaware* of the fact that something good, which he might have enjoyed, was denied to him. It is only from the observer's viewpoint, therefore, that what occurs to Marc can be said to be evil.

The observer in question, however, can consider Marc's lack of religious belief a form of unfair deprivation only on the basis of the belief that God exists. Let me remind the reader of the objection here under consideration that Marc may not suffer (explicitly) for his lack of religious belief, and nonetheless such condition remains a deprivation that God, *if he exists*, should not permit. In other words, *if* God exists, then considering the condition in question a deprivation makes sense. Something analogous can be said of the case of my imaginary child mentioned above. Something unfair is perpetrated against her only to the extent that I—her father—am alive and nonetheless let her grow up without a family.

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See <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/suffering> (consulted on July 25, 2019).

Let me add that what I have just argued is grounded precisely in the DHA, according to which it is God's existence that renders the lack of religious belief a form of evil. Since God cannot be culpable for this evil—so the DHA runs—then God does not exist, from which also follows that the evil in question disappears or, more clearly, what was considered evil in conjunction with God's existence can no longer be seen as evil. The conclusion of the DHA is that God does not exist, from which follows that the lack in question can no longer be seen as a form of deprivation. Therefore, the objection here under consideration falls into contradiction. If God does not exist, it cannot be said that those who do not believe in him suffer from a form of deprivation.

### *5.2.3 Believers who take the ST before the NFU*

As I have said above, those who adopt the DHA don't seem to have any reason for taking the ST. In the last section, I have described a hypothesis, which I wanted to advance only to show the fruitful consequences that, from an epistemological viewpoint, would follow in case the proponents of the DHA and the NFU adopted the ST. By contrast, the believer naturally finds themselves with many reasons for taking the ST, which more or less implicitly characterize religious traditions, especially the Christian one. In this section, I will show how, on the basis of suggestions emerging from this tradition, they can make the ST a reality. In regard to the DHA, this consists in taking seriously the NFU and wondering whether they, the believers, and not the unbelievers, believe in God and do good in full compliance with their faith.

Let me start by saying that, of the consequences that—as I have shown above—follow the assumption of the NFU, believers can only accept (2b). In fact, (1) and—at least from the point of view of the theistic world religions--(2a) are incompatible with religious belief. (True, (2b), too, is somewhat incompatible with Judaism, Christianity and Islam, or at least with their main branches. Note, however, that (2b) follows from combining theism and the assumption of the NFU. I mean that I assume (2b) for my purposes and not because I see it as entirely compatible with the religious view mentioned above.)

While assuming (2b), the faithful are led to take into consideration a worthwhile aspect of their religious experience. It is part of their belief—especially the Christian one—that only rarely do they find themselves satisfactorily provided with the positive relationship and the communion with God that I have mentioned in the previous section. In the Gospel according to Luke 'the apostles said to

the Lord, “Increase our faith!”<sup>63</sup> which is a clear indication of their awareness that, however close to him they might have been, they needed to move on to a more satisfactory level of communion. Augustine consecrates himself to God by proclaiming: ‘I love Thee alone, Thee alone follow, Thee alone seek, Thee alone I am ready to serve.’ Nonetheless, in the same passage, he also addresses this prayer to God: ‘Increase my faith, increase my hope, increase my charity.’<sup>64</sup> Kierkegaard says to the Christian who practices the sacraments: ‘You have come here today because you feel drawn to him, but from this it does not follow that you dare to think that he has already drawn you *wholly* to himself.’ Kierkegaard then concludes by quoting the passage of the Gospel I have mentioned above: ‘Lord, increase my faith.’<sup>65</sup> Aquinas proposes penetrating thoughts on this point while reflecting on religious devotion, which he defines ‘the will to give oneself readily to things concerning the service of God.’<sup>66</sup> Thomas wonders whether or not this fundamental religious act causes joy in the devotees.<sup>67</sup> In a nutshell, his answer is that, though devotion causes joy because the act of giving oneself to God cannot but produce joy, it also ‘causes a certain sorrow.’ In fact—Aquinas goes on to argue—if we consider God’s goodness, then we see that those ‘who do not yet enjoy God fully’ suffer from this. If we consider one’s own failings, then again we see that one is led to suffer from lack of communion with God. (Note that in the first case Aquinas refers to ‘those who do not yet enjoy God fully’ (*in his qui nondum plene Deo fruuntur*), as if he, Aquinas, was not associable with them. In the other case, instead, Aquinas seems to refer to everyone, including himself, and says: ‘When one thinks over one’s own failings’ (*...recogitando proprios difectos*). It is plausible to hold that in both cases Aquinas includes himself among those who have not yet achieved full communion with God.)

The communion at stake would certainly allow the believers to attain incomparably valuable benefits of any sort. As Schellenberg says, ‘to be personally related to unsurpassable goodness is a great good in itself.’<sup>68</sup> Besides, this would make available ethical benefits, that is, ‘certain resources for dealing with the moral weakness endemic to humanity.’<sup>69</sup> Consequently, the believers, and not only the unbelievers, as it may seem to be reasonable at first sight, are expected to suffer because of a lack of appropriate communion with God.

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<sup>63</sup> Luke 17:5.

<sup>64</sup> Augustine, *The Soliloquies* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1910), vol. 1, 1:5.

<sup>65</sup> Sören Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, ed. by H. V. Hong and E. H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 156.

<sup>66</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 82 a. 1.

<sup>67</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 82 a. 4.

<sup>68</sup> Schellenberg *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, p. 21.

<sup>69</sup> Schellenberg *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, p. 18.

It may be objected that this is only a peripheral problem for believers, since lack of full communion with God is expected to concern just those faithful who are equally peripherally involved in religious experience. Those who more passionately devote themselves to God, on the contrary, should not be affected by the problem in question.

In response, it must be noticed that, at least in respect to the Christian faith, the more the believers have faith and adhere to revelation, the more they are expected to ask God to increase their faith. I have already mentioned above some passages from various authors which may contribute to support this thesis. Furthermore, in Chapter 3 I have also referred to Aquinas's reflection about the fact that people experience faith at different levels of intensity. This implies the idea that faith in God and love for him are proportionate to a desire to adhere more strictly to his revelation. For Aquinas it is the love for God, which God himself grants to believers, that is not possessed by faithful in equal degree. The more they love God, the more they are ready to believe what he has revealed and to argue in support of such a revelation. Obviously, one who is ready to believe and to reason is also aware of one's need to believe and reason. Therefore, readiness and need to believe are directly proportionate to one another. (This may be echoed in the Gospel according to Luke, where it reads, 'from everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.'<sup>70</sup>)

If my argument is correct, it can be said that from Aquinas' reflection on the different levels of faith it follows that the suffering of the believers is to be considered proportionate to the intensity of their faith. In other words, the more one believes, the bigger is the void one feels the need to fulfill. As a result, the more one believes, the more one wishes to increase one's faith.

This may be confirmed on biblical grounds. Jesus clearly says: 'Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant,'<sup>71</sup> and, while echoing him, Paul says to the Philippians: 'In humility regard others as better than yourselves.'<sup>72</sup> This may be explained by saying that the more one loves God, the more is one inspired by love for others, which causes one to value them in a directly proportional way. On the other hand, those who are inspired by such a love should value themselves in an inversely proportional way, because the more one wishes something, the more one feels to be in need of it. If the thing one feels the need of achieving is love for others, then one finds oneself unable to love, however exaggerate this impression may seem to be to others. From this,

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<sup>70</sup> Luke 12:48b.

<sup>71</sup> Mark 10:43.

<sup>72</sup> Phil 2:3.

Paul's warning may follow: 'If you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall.'<sup>73</sup> In other words, those who cultivate their belief in God need to be constantly concerned about their own insufficient level of faith. (However, this does not mean that faith only causes suffering. As I have shown above, Aquinas points out that the suffering due to fact that these believers are aware of their defects is proportionate to the joy they experience because they are sure that God's mercy overcomes their defects, from which follows that being close to him causes joy.)

In conclusion, those who take the ST in epistemology are expected to focus on their spiritual life and the wish to increase its level of intensity. The mere opposition of arguments between them and those who oppose their views only leads to inconclusiveness. Both the DHA and the NFU, on the one hand, and, on the other, the FU are representative of this attitude. It is true that, unlike the FU, the DHA and the NFU don't openly blame those who support other views. On the contrary, Schellenberg seems to limit himself to emphasize the fact that unbelievers may in some cases be non-resistant, reasonable and inculpable. It remains true, however, that, according to the DHA, the culpability for some forms of unbelief is ascribed to God, whereas no failures ascribable to unbelievers are taken into account. By contrast, taking the ST requires debaters to shift attention from others to themselves because no spiritual growth is possible without taking this step. In this section, I have argued that, once this step is taken before the DHA, the believer and—at least hypothetically—the supporter of the DHA and the NFU can see the DHA as an opportunity to promote their spiritual growth.

I intend now to treat the problem of religious diversity to show how exactly the spiritual growth in question can play a role in epistemology.

### **5.3 Religious Diversity, spiritual Progress, and epistemological Advancement**

As is known, religious diversity became a substantive problem for the truth of the Christian religion in modern age. Animosity and wars among Christians led eventually to the persuasion that a peaceful, tolerant, and respectful coexistence among religions is incompatible with the conviction that only one of them is true. Let me call such a persuasion 'incompatibility problem' (IP).

The IP's first expression may be found in Locke's first *Letter concerning Toleration* (1689). In it, Locke focused on the conflicts and wars that plagued Europe in his time, which were often the

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<sup>73</sup>

1 Corinthians 10:12.

result of religious intolerance. Locke noted how this was obviously in contradiction with the basic message of peace conveyed by the Gospel. He identified tolerance with ‘the chief characteristic mark of the true Church’<sup>74</sup> and Christianity with ‘the most modest and peaceable religion that ever was.’<sup>75</sup> Some decades later, Hume concentrated upon the relationship between religions and peace. Unlike Locke, he criticised the conviction that only one religion is true. In his *Natural History of Religion* (1755), he argued that from that conviction (that only one religion is true) inevitably followed conflicts and violence:

While one sole object of devotion is acknowledged, the worship of other deities is regarded as absurd and impious. Nay, this unity of object seems naturally to require the unity of faith and ceremonies, and furnishes designing men with a pretence for representing their adversaries as profane, and the objects of divine as well as human vengeance.<sup>76</sup>

Hume’s conviction has come down to the present times.<sup>77</sup> Thinkers such as P. Quinn claim that, if believers don’t support the superiority of their religion over other religious perspectives, then they will be more tolerant toward those perspectives.<sup>78</sup> Similarly, R. McKim notes that, confronting religious diversity, one should be open to accepting the hypothesis ‘that the position one had thought to be correct may be wrong,’ and that ‘one of the other positions may be right.’<sup>79</sup> In other words, giving up the conviction that only one religion is true would solve IP. It would promote a more inclusive society, based on diversity of opinion.

I intend to argue that the IP is the result of what I call a ‘naturalistic assumption’ (NA). Starting with this assumption, religious beliefs and faiths are explored intellectually as if they did not involve any reference to a super-natural being and his revelation. This is confirmed by the fact that the methodology employed by those who hold the IP applies indifferently to religious experience

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<sup>74</sup> John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, tr. by W. Popple (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1950), p. 1.

<sup>75</sup> Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, p. 11.

<sup>76</sup> David Hume, *The Natural History of Religion*, ed. by H. Root (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1956), p. ix.

<sup>77</sup> See, for example, Jan Assmann’s *The Price of Monotheism*, tr. by R. Savage (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010). According to this famous Egyptologist, religious violence, including the one among the practitioners of various monotheisms, is grounded in the Mosaic exclusive monotheism. Assmann contrasts monotheism with ancient polytheism, which he finds intrinsically ready to accept otherness.

<sup>78</sup> See Philip Quinn, ‘Religious Diversity and Religious Toleration,’ *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 50 (2001), pp. 57–80; ‘Epistemology in Philosophy of Religion.’ In *The Oxford Handbook on Epistemology*, ed. by Paul Moser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 533–537.

<sup>79</sup> Robert McKim *Religious Ambiguity and Religious Diversity* (Oxford: Oxford Press, 2001), pp. 154–55.

and other experience as well.<sup>80</sup> My thesis is that, when it comes to religious matters, NA should be abandoned and replaced by a ‘super-naturalistic assumption’ (SA), which I have said above is nothing but the ST, once it comes to religion. Assuming the existence of a super-natural being who reveals himself to us and takes part in our religious experience may help us reconcile the two poles of IP. In other words, the SA may promote respect and peace among religions and, at the same time, a firm belief that only one of them is true.

### 5.3.1 IP implies NA: Hick’s Reasons for religious Pluralism

If the IP applies to the religious realm as well as traditions, cultures, philosophies, and suchlike, then the IP grounds in NA or, put otherwise, it does not take into consideration SA.

The fact that the IP does not apply only to the religious realm can be demonstrated by taking into consideration the three reasons which J. Hick—one of the most famous proponents of the IP<sup>81</sup>--brings forth in support of his famous theory of religious pluralism.<sup>82</sup> The first reason is grounded in the idea that all of the world’s religions are ‘transformational,’ namely, they provide their followers with ‘transformation from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness.’<sup>83</sup> This transformation makes them morally better, because they are no longer interested in their individual salvation (as if religion dealt with acquiring a ‘ticket’ to eternal life), but aim to liberate themselves from their desires and to orient their existence around the divine. The normative core of religion is to be transformational, and all major religions can equally be considered salvific. (I have just shifted my attention from religious truth to salvation and ultimate destiny. However, as Hick himself has persuasively stated, ‘the truth-claim and the salvation-claim cohere closely together and should be treated as a single

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<sup>80</sup> Like the IP, the NA is widely held in Contemporary Western society. While introducing a book devoted to naturalism’s success, Georg Gasser says that naturalism has shaped ‘the philosophical landscape like no other philosophical tradition in the second half of the last century’ (Georg Gasser, ‘Introduction.’ In *How Successful is Naturalism?*, ed. by Georg Gasser [Frankfurt, Paris, Ebikon, Lancaster, New Brunswick: Ontos Verlag, 2009], p. 3).

<sup>81</sup> As Wolterstorff notes, ‘Hick assumes that any “post axial” religion that does not accord equal religious significance to all post-axial religions perforce harbours within itself the threat of coercion and violence, thereby being a menace to peace’ (Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Why Can’t We All Just Get Along with Each Other?*. In *Religious voices in public places*, ed. by Nigel Biggar and Linda Hogan [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009], p. 23).

<sup>82</sup> For this clear individuation of the three reasons in question, I am indebted to David Basinger, ‘Religious Diversity (Pluralism),’ *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2018/entries/religious-pluralism/>, accessed on July 1, 2018.

<sup>83</sup> John Hick, ‘The Philosophy of World Religions,’ *Scottish Journal of Theology* 37 (1984), p. 229.

package.<sup>84</sup>) The second reason for supporting religious pluralism is that ‘in the great majority of cases—say 98 to 99 percent—the religion in which a person believes and to which he adheres depends upon where he was born.’<sup>85</sup> Evidently, the fact that one was born in a particular part of the world cannot be considered a plausible reason for identifying one’s religion with the only true religion. Third, Hick argues that in the present century we have become aware that there are substantially different patterns and not only one to interpret human experience.<sup>86</sup> In this new light, the attitude of those who believe that their own gospel is true ‘and that other gospels are false in so far as they differ from it’<sup>87</sup> becomes simply untenable.

Hick supports his view of religious pluralism with arguments that could be applied to any realm of human experience, from which follows that he adopts NA. This is especially evident in the case of the second reason. The fact that one’s beliefs may depend upon where one was born is not indicative of the truth of such beliefs—whether or not they are religious. The same can be said of the third reason. Once we become convinced that various interpretations can be offered to understand our experience, we should adopt a pluralistic approach to all of our beliefs, and not only the religious ones. Things may seem different in the case of the first reason given by Hick, i.e., all of the world’s religions are transformational. This reason, in fact, relates to the existence of a super-natural being and the afterlife, which is why it may seem to be extraneous to NA. (This reference to a super-natural reality may appear not entirely plausible, as has been pointed out: ‘Even if we accept that our ultimate goal is or should be the overcoming of self-centeredness, why should anyone suppose that we need religion in order to achieve that goal?’<sup>88</sup> My interest, however, is not in the internal coherence of Hick’s argument; I am rather interested in establishing whether or not he adopts the NA, however correct the argument he proposes may be.) On closer inspection, however, it is clear that the line of reasoning proposed by Hick in support of ‘transformational parity’ among religions may apply to every human experience. If genuine religion is salvific and transformational, and if there are many transformational experiences, none of them can presume to be the only genuine religion. It is obvious, therefore, that this argument in support of ‘transformational parity’ among religions does not depend on the reference to a super-natural being and the influence he may exert on human experience.

### 5.3.2 *Two Arguments against the Employment of the NA*

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<sup>84</sup> John Hick, *Problems of religious pluralism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1985), p. 46.

<sup>85</sup> John Hick, *God Has Many Names* (London: Macmillan Press, 1980), p. 44.

<sup>86</sup> See Hick, ‘The Philosophy of World Religions,’ p. 232.

<sup>87</sup> Hick, *Problems of religious pluralism*, p. 28.

<sup>88</sup> Graham Oppy, *Reinventing Philosophy of Religion: An Opinionated Introduction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 12.

I intend now to propose two arguments for the claim that the NA, which the IP presupposes, is not applicable to religious matters.

The first argument is implicit in what I have argued in the previous section—therefore, presenting this argument will take little time. I showed that the IP applies indifferently to religious and non-religious subjects. This means that the IP overlooks that which is specific to religion. As a result, the IP may successfully apply to various experiences except the religious one. Not taking into consideration any possible aspect of a particular experience, in fact, is not the best possible viewpoint from which to achieve an understanding of it. The hypothesis that a super-natural being exists and participates in the religious experience of believers might later prove to be untrue. However, the decision to exclude from the outset this hypothesis seems to limit one's understanding of how believers experience their faith and everything related to it, including how they view other religions.

In addition to this rebutting argument, let me now propose an undercutting one. Let me start by noting that NA traces back to Locke's view of faith and reason, according to which assent to propositions comes in degrees and we should proportion our degree of assent to the available evidence. As I have already said in the previous chapters, for Locke, we should not entertain 'any proposition with greater assurance than the proofs it is built upon will warrant.'<sup>89</sup> These proofs are public and that which they prove to be true is accepted by everybody. The same cannot be said of that which is believed by those whom Locke calls 'enthusiasts,' who don't offer any proof on the basis of which what they believe can be believed by everybody else.<sup>90</sup>

Locke's view of faith and reason became the 'dominant model' in which philosophers and non-philosophers were trained in the course of modern age.<sup>91</sup> It implies that a complex of experiences and relevant beliefs, which only faithful may have, cannot be taken into account, which is precisely what I mean by NA. Like any other subject, religion can be investigated only by way of rational arguments that *everyone* believes.<sup>92</sup> To put it formally,

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<sup>89</sup> See above, Introduction, note 3.

<sup>90</sup> See above, Chapter 1, note 9.

<sup>91</sup> See above, Chapter 1, note 3.

<sup>92</sup> 'What in principle everybody knows,' is the expression that has been used by Ralph McInerny to stress the autonomy of philosophical reflection from the influence of religious belief. To put it in McInerny's own words, 'philosophy is a discourse that pins itself to truths that are in the public domain, so that an argument must always be hooked up to the things that in principle everybody knows.' (Ralph McInerny, 'How I became a Christian philosopher,' *Faith and Philosophy* 15 [1998], pp. 145-146). Let me add that perhaps Plantinga's words make the meaning of 'what in principle everybody knows' clearer: 'What

- (1) Only statements that everyone believes (or follow from what everyone believes) can be employed to attain the truth about human experience, including religion and matters related to it.

However, (1) is not believed by everyone. Religious believers may believe—no matter whether rightly or not—that reason alone is insufficient to achieve an understanding of that which pertains to God and religion. They may believe that a divine revelation, which does not coincide with that which everyone believes, is necessary for them to achieve an understanding of religion and, along with it, of matters such as the existence of only one God, the existence of only one true religion, and how to treat the followers of other religions. Again to put the point formally:

- (2) Not everyone believes (1)
- (3) From (2) follows that (1) is to be rejected.
- (4) Given that (1) is equivalent to the NA, the NA is to be rejected, and the SA is to be adopted.

SA is to be adopted, since it frontally contradicts the NA. Of course, someone may object that the SA is just an assumption, which is why it cannot solidly support a rational enterprise. Two effective replies, however, can be offered. First, if one has to demonstrate everything, this is due to the NA, which I have already shown is to be refuted. Second, it is true that the SA is an assumption. Adopting it, however, seems fully reasonable, not least because its alternative, the NA, is self-contradictory. It may also be objected that God's existence and the content of his revelation cannot be treated in the same way. This is especially true for Locke, who was convinced that God's existence, unlike the divine revelation, was knowable by way of demonstration.<sup>93</sup> Nevertheless, the belief that God exists has become more and more debatable in the course of the last centuries.<sup>94</sup> Thus it is no longer seen as a statement that, at least in principle, everyone can know.

I will argue in a moment that, once the SA is adopted, the IP may be dismissed as not constituting a problem. Before proceeding, however, two considerations need to be taken into account.

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we all or nearly all know or take for granted or firmly believe, or what at any rate those conducting the inquiry know or take for granted or believe' (Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 272).

<sup>93</sup> See above, Chapter 1, note 12.

<sup>94</sup> A prominent Catholic historian of philosophy such as Gilson, while asking himself if philosophy alone, without the help of revelation, is able to affirm the truth of God's existence beyond doubt, referred to the philosophers of the Twentieth-Century as follows: 'Some of them say there is no God; others say that there is a God but that His existence cannot be demonstrated; still others say there is a God and they can prove His existence, but their demonstrations fail to carry conviction, or else what they call God in no way resembles the object of our religious worship' (Gilson, 'What is Christian philosophy?', pp. 180f.).

First, attempts may be made to oppose the IP without adopting SA. They, however, don't seem to dismiss the IP as untrue, which is why the necessity of assuming the SA is confirmed.

Among those attempts is Plantinga's argument aimed at rejecting a philosophical view that includes the IP. According to this view, there is something wrong in claiming that, among the existing religions, one is true and the others are not. (As I said, this accusation, which I call SW (*something wrong*), includes the IP. In fact, the IP emphasizes that the claim that there is only one true religion is unacceptable because is incompatible with peace among religions, while SW more generally points out that there is something wrong with the claim in question.) Plantinga argues that, on the contrary, it is SW that is wrong. As he says, if one believes that one possesses knowledge that others do not, one cannot be blamed for being convinced that one's own view is better than others' views. As a result, one would not have any reason for modifying one's conviction. Of course, this is the condition in which those who affirm the exclusive truth of their religion find themselves. What is more interesting, however, is that the detractors of religious exclusiveness find themselves in this condition as well. More precisely, everyone seems to reason in this way. Anyone who believes that they find themselves, even without any merit of their own, in a condition which is epistemically superior to that of others, would end up considering their position better than others' positions and would consequently refuse to exchange it for any other. This regards also those, like Hick, who spoke of the need to put aside Christian exclusivism: 'In the light of our accumulated knowledge of the other great world faiths, [Christian exclusivism] has become unacceptable to all except a minority of dogmatic diehards.'<sup>95</sup> Plantinga's conclusion is therefore hard to reject: 'The abstemious pluralist who brings charges of intellectual arrogance against the believer is in a familiar but perilous dialectical situation; he shoots himself in the foot, is hoist with his own petard, holds a position that in a certain way is self-referentially inconsistent in the circumstances.'<sup>96</sup>

Plantinga's argument shows that those who hold the IP, and claim that it can be solved if religious exclusivism is given up, are exclusivists too. They are not ready to abandon their view either. (Plantinga's position is to be numbered among the ones that, in the current debate on disagreement, can be defined 'non-conformist' or 'steadfast'<sup>97</sup> and support the conviction that perseverance in the face of controversy is epistemologically plausible. In this, Plantinga is joined by P. Van Inwagen,

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<sup>95</sup> Hick, *God Has Many Names*, p. 27.

<sup>96</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 446.

<sup>97</sup> See above, Chapter 4, note 53.

for whom, if one has incommunicable evidence that other parties lack, then one is within one's right to maintain one's own belief.<sup>98</sup>)

Let me now point out that the argument offered by Plantinga does not provide any reason to solve the IP. It limits itself to show that, if SW is true, then the same may be said of any possible view, including SW's negation. From this follows that Plantinga's argument may even end up reinforcing intolerance and conflicts. If there is nothing wrong with the person who believes that s/he possesses knowledge that others do not, and accordingly prefers his/her view—and his/her religion—to others, then the person in question may reasonably consider himself/herself superior to others, and somewhat morally obliged to force them to accept his/her views.

Another attempt to dismiss the IP as not representing a problem without having recourse to the SA can be seen in P. Byrne's reflection on tolerance and religious pluralism.<sup>99</sup> Byrne convincingly argues that tolerance as a virtue implies that one holds strong convictions and also welcomes that which one tolerates, opening up the possibility for a re-examination of one's own convictions. In other words, practising the virtue of tolerance, which Byrne also calls 'full tolerance,' seemingly reconciles the two poles of the IP. As far as I can see, however, the fully tolerant 'sees value in the differing and opposing convictions of others' *only if* the coexistence of such convictions with his/her own beliefs is part of his/her own beliefs. In other words, only at first sight is the fully tolerant welcoming the convictions *of others*; on closer inspection, s/he is putting into practice (and confirming) his or her own beliefs. As a consequence, the *difference*, i.e., one of the conditions that Byrne insightfully considers necessarily related to tolerance,<sup>100</sup> is set aside. Also, Byrne says that the fully tolerant 'will be prepared to go further and examine whether the different life styles and opinions they confront provide grounds for re-examining the worth of their own life-styles and opinions.'<sup>101</sup> It is plausible to think, however, that the tolerant person in question will not be ready to revise *every* belief and opinion. A Christian believer may be ready to revise many of the views s/he usually holds. Nevertheless, the fact that there is only one God, that Jesus is the son of God, that he came into the world for our salvation, etc. are beliefs that even a fully tolerant Christian is not expected to revise.

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<sup>98</sup> See above, Chapter 4, note 63.

<sup>99</sup> See Peter Byrne, 'Religious Tolerance, Diversity, and Pluralism.' In *Philosophy and Religion*. Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement: 68, ed. by Anthony O'Hear (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 287-309.

<sup>100</sup> 'Difference: agents who tolerate other people's behavior, words, or thoughts note that others' behaviour etc. is different from their own' (Byrne, p. 288)

<sup>101</sup> Byrne, p. 294. See also p. 300, where Byrne mentions the re-examination of 'religious beliefs' and not mere 'opinions.'

Before proceeding to consider how the SA may provide a solution to the IP, let me note that rejecting (1) and adopting the SA does not coincide with

- (5) Commonly accepted rational criteria, including the principle of non-contradiction, must be abandoned when it comes to religion.

In other words, my proposal should not be associated with the one advanced in the course of last decades by influential scholars such as J. Hick, W. Cantwell Smith, and P. Knitter. They have argued that the principle of non-contradiction should not apply to religious beliefs. According to Hick, it is the Aristotelian concept of truth, which is intrinsically related to the principle of non-contradiction, that must be abandoned: it is ‘a matter of either-or. It is either this or not this: it cannot be both.’<sup>102</sup> For Cantwell Smith, ‘in all ultimate matters, truth lies not in an either-or but in a both-and.’<sup>103</sup> Finally, Knitter denies the employment of the principle of non-contradiction since ‘all religious experience and all religious language must be two-eyed, dipolar, a union of opposites.’<sup>104</sup>

Obviously, the employment of the principle of non-contradiction in any matter, including the religious ones, may seem to be due to the NA. Consequently, its rejection may look similar to the rejection of the NA and the adoption of the SA. To put it otherwise, (4) and (5) would be equivalent to each other, and would both contradict (1).

The similarity in question, however, holds only superficially. It is true that (1) and (5) are two opposite extremes. According to (1), religious statements can only be explored by way of commonly accepted beliefs, including the principle of non-contradiction. According to (5), on the contrary, principles such as the one at stake should be abandoned, which is the view maintained by the scholars mentioned above. However, (4) does not equal (5), and should rather be situated between (1) and (5). In fact, (4) differs from (1) and resembles (5) on the ground that beliefs that are due to a divine revelation may allow us to understand aspects of religion otherwise inconceivable. On the other hand, (4) resembles (1) and differs from (5) on the ground that a contradiction between common experience and religious experience should not arise. Aquinas’s doctrine of faith, to which

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<sup>102</sup> John Hick, ‘The Outcome of Truth: Dialogue into Truth.’ In *Truth and Dialogue in World Religions: Conflicting Truth-Claims*, ed. by John Hick (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974), pp. 152f.

<sup>103</sup> Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Faith of Other Men* (New York: New American Library, 1963), p. 17.

<sup>104</sup> Paul Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1985), p. 221. The idea that a ‘two-eyed’ approach to religion should replace a ‘one-eyed’ one, i.e., an approach that conveys the conviction that there is only one exclusivist truth about religious matters, traces back to the New Testament scholar and theologian John Robinson’s book titled *Truth is Two-Eyed* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979).

I will appeal in the next section while proposing to adopt the SA, includes the conviction that, if God is the author of both faith and reason, no contradiction is acceptable between them: ‘Since both kinds of truth are from God. God would be the author of error, a thing which is impossible.’<sup>105</sup>

### 5.3.3 *The IP can be dismissed if the SA replaces the NA*

It is now time to explore the hypothesis that the introduction of the SA, which can be seen as the ST once it applies to the Christian faith, may dismiss the IP as not representing a problem. If a supernatural person, who is the good itself, exists and grants religious believers a special relationship with him, they are expected to be first and foremost interested in this relationship. Any other aspect of life may consequently be enlightened, which is why these believers may keep believing that only their religion is true and, at the same time, that they should not consider themselves superior to others.

In continuity with the perspective I have taken until now, I will adopt Aquinas’s reflection on faith and its propagation. Of course, the way I will use this reflection goes beyond Aquinas’s intentions and real claims. I will use thoughts of him that can apply to religious pluralism, although Aquinas did not do this. Let me also point out that nothing prevents us from considering some of Aquinas’s thoughts as applicable to other religious traditions. God’s omnipotence and love, for example, is shared by at least the major world’s religions. Consequently, at least some of the responses to the IP that emerge from Aquinas’s thought can apply to other religions as well.

Some may still object to the adoption of the SA from the viewpoint offered by only one religion. In other words, some may claim that, even if the choice I have just made is temporarily acceptable, our final aim should be to adopt the SA from the viewpoint of all of the existing religions. In reply, let me note that this objection follows either from (1) or from religious traditions. In the former case, the objection should be rejected with (1), since I have shown so far that (1) is to be rejected. In the latter case, the objection at hand can only emerge from *some* of those traditions, because at least the

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<sup>105</sup> Aquinas, *Super Boethium De Trinitate*, q. 2, a. 3. This matches a widespread philosophical conviction, according to which rejecting the principle of non-contradiction is self-referentially contradictory. As is known, in the fourth book of his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle argues that rejecting this principle implies that the principle in question is wrong and its opposite is right, which obviously re-affirms the validity of the principle (see Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 4, 4, 1006a35ff.) In regard to religious pluralism and the question of truth, it has been said that ‘one who abandons the principle of non-contradiction is reduced to utter silence, for he or she has rejected a necessary condition for the coherent and meaningful statement of any position whatsoever’ (Harold Netland, *Dissonant Voices: Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth* [Vancouver, British Columbia: Regent College Publishing, 1991], p. 145).

outstanding branches of Christianity, Judaism and Islam would not accept the idea that truth in religion can only be achieved from a viewpoint that is common to them. As a consequence, the objection ends up confirming my choice and the related thesis that it is from *some* religious traditions and not from all of them that we may adopt the ST.

I can now start my investigation of how such adoption may dismiss the IP. (As I will show, this is exactly the way the ST can take place.) I begin by taking into account Aquinas's reflection on how religious faith should be held, cultivated and propagated.

As I said in Chapter 3, Aquinas argues that faith is 'an act of the intellect assenting to the Divine Truth at the command of the will moved by the grace of God.'<sup>106</sup> It is by way of will moved by divine grace that believers take as true various statements that, for them, are divinely revealed. God is, therefore, 'the chief and proper cause of faith.'<sup>107</sup> By faith, believers become aware of things that 'surpass human reason. Hence, they [the things in question] do not come to man's knowledge unless God reveals them.'<sup>108</sup>

It may seem, at least at first sight, that for Aquinas believers are passively involved in the act of faith. An objection raised against Aquinas's view of faith is precisely that, according to Augustine, 'faith depends on the believer's will.' Aquinas responds that 'man's will needs to be prepared by God with grace.'<sup>109</sup>

Only the intervention of God can justify the certainty that for Aquinas characterizes the Christian faith in things that are above nature. Aquinas holds that the certainty at issue—at least in its paradigmatic instantiations—is even superior to that of demonstrative knowledge.<sup>110</sup>

From these considerations emerges that, if the certainty of faith is caused by the omnipotent and omniscient God, who neither errs or deceives, the believers who find themselves with such certainty will not have any reason to abandon their faith. As Plantinga and van Inwagen argue,<sup>111</sup> the faithful may consider themselves gifted with knowledge, which others did not receive, and may

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<sup>106</sup> See above, Chapter 3, note 46.

<sup>107</sup> See above, Chapter 3, note 90.

<sup>108</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 6 a. 1.

<sup>109</sup> See above, Chapter 3, note 77, which includes extensive reference to Bauerschmidt's observation that, according to Aquinas, God's intervention and human freedom are perfectly compatible with one another.

<sup>110</sup> See *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 4 a. 8, where Aquinas compares the certainty of faith with that of the three intellectual virtues that share with faith the necessity of their object: science, wisdom, and understanding.

<sup>111</sup> See above, note 98.

consequently find that they are right not to want to give it up in the face of controversy and religious pluralism.

Once individuated good reasons for sticking to one's faith and keeping to believe that only one's religion is true, no matter how many other religious traditions exist, what can be said about the need of peaceful coexistence with them? Will this coexistence be at risk, once affirmed the truth of one's faith and the (even relative and partial) falseness of the others?

Aquinas's reflection offers a reasonable response. Although faith is an intellectual act, its perfection can be achieved only by way of charity, i.e., love for God which God himself grants to believers. This is explained by the conviction that 'the act of faith is directed to the object of the will, i.e. the good, as to its end: and this good ... is the end of faith, viz. the Divine good'. The divine good 'is the proper object of charity. Therefore charity is called the form of faith in so far as the act of faith is perfected and formed by charity.'<sup>112</sup>

Thus, the commandment of love is the very centre of the Christian belief.<sup>113</sup> Based on it, believers must make a commitment to increase their love for God and their neighbour.<sup>114</sup> Given the fact that this love perfects faith, we may also say that increasing such a love is matched by a parallel increase of faith, which is precisely that which Christians are expected to desire: 'The apostles said to the Lord, "increase our faith."<sup>115</sup> Obviously enough, this presupposes that believers experience both faith and love for God certainly at different levels of intensity.

For Aquinas, it is by way of this inextricable connection between faith and charity that God grants faith to believers. Given this connection, claiming the truth of one's religion does not exclude, actually implies a peaceful attitude toward other religions. Believers who are guided by love for God and the neighbour should be the best possible candidates to promote the attitude in question.

At least three decisive considerations follow, which can decisively help us move away from the IP.

First, if assent to divine revelation is granted by God and is not due to personal efforts, those who have been graciously received it should not feel superior over those who were not equally gifted. While focusing on the pre-Christian era, Aquinas argues that salvation might also have been possible for people who had not received any divine revelation. Some Gentiles—so he says—might

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<sup>112</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 4 a. 3.

<sup>113</sup> Significant observations on this are offered by Riga and Mann. See above, Chapter 3, note 93.

<sup>114</sup> 'And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more' (Phil 1:9).

<sup>115</sup> Lk 17:5.

have accessed eternal salvation because ‘though they did not believe in Him explicitly, they did, nevertheless, have implicit faith through believing in Divine providence, since they believed that God would deliver mankind in whatever way was pleasing to Him.’<sup>116</sup> In other words, they believed the divine revelation ‘implicitly,’<sup>117</sup> which means that they were ‘prepared to believe whatever is contained in the Divine Scriptures.’<sup>118</sup> In this connection, a famous verse of the Gospel reads: ‘Tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you.’<sup>119</sup> This warning, which is addressed by Jesus to his disciples, points out that those who have been granted familiarity with him, who the Gospel says is the truth, should not consider themselves better than others.

Second, if it is charity that perfects faith, then those who firmly believe that their religion is true, do so because they love God as well as their neighbour. They are committed to making progress in their spiritual perfection, which includes proportionate high levels of moral attitude, given the fact that charity consists in love for God and the neighbour as well. They should, therefore, be committed to the dismissal of the IP by promoting a peaceful relationship with other people, including adherents to different religious traditions. Obviously, such a commitment will be seriously taken only by those who equally seriously intend to perfect themselves spiritually and morally. It follows that, even if some dismiss the IP, the IP remains true for all the remaining believers, or more precisely, remains true in proportion to the lack of believers' spiritual and moral progress.

Someone may object that Aquinas should be numbered among those believers who lack the progress in question. What he thinks of all of the other religious faiths seemingly aligns with the IP, because neither a peaceful nor a respectful attitude toward adherents of other religions emerge from his conviction that his religion is the only true one. For him, heretics, Saracens, Moors, Jews and Pagans commit a grave sin such as the sin of unbelief, which ‘is greater than any sin that occurs in the perversion of morals.’<sup>120</sup> It is true that Aquinas suggests that those who engage in false worship can be tolerated.<sup>121</sup> He also says, however, that heretics deserve ‘to be severed from the world by death.’<sup>122</sup> They ‘corrupt the faith which weakens the soul,’ which—so Aquinas’s argument goes on—is ‘a much graver matter...than to forge money;’ consequently, ‘if forgers of money and other

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<sup>116</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 2 a. 7 ad 3.

<sup>117</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 2 a. 5.

<sup>118</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 2 a. 5. Let me point out that being ready to believe whatever is taken to be revealed by God does not exclude the error. See above, Chapter 3, note 30.

<sup>119</sup> Mt 21:31.

<sup>120</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 10 a. 3.

<sup>121</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 10 a. 11.

<sup>122</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 11 a. 3.

evil-doers are forthwith condemned to death by the secular authority, much more reason is there for heretics.’<sup>123</sup>

In reply, it can be said that this seeming lack of peaceful disposition toward those who believe in ‘false gods’ is not relatable to the IP. The IP regards the relationship between peace and *religious doctrines*, whereas Aquinas’s view regards the ability of religions to meet *social and political needs*. In Aquinas’s time, lack of distinction between politics and religion was customary; as a result, every religious doctrine and/or practice other than Christianity was automatically seen as politically and socially dangerous. This called for any remedy that appeared to be appropriate, however unacceptable it may seem from Contemporary Western society’s viewpoint. This is why, if we move from Aquinas’s political and social perspective and go back to the merely religious doctrinal concern, which is typical of the IP, it is possible to confirm the thesis that Aquinas’s account of faith and charity helps to reject the IP. The IP implies that those who firmly believe that their religion is the only true one should force the adherents of other religions to convert. This, however, is at odds with Aquinas’s conviction that no one should force others to deviate from their conscience, even if there are good reasons for believing that the conscience in question is erroneous. Aquinas very clearly claims that ‘every will at variance with reason, whether right or erring, is always evil’;<sup>124</sup> consequently,

in like manner, to believe in Christ is good in itself, and necessary for salvation: but the will does not tend thereto, except inasmuch as it is proposed by the reason. Consequently, if it be proposed by the reason as something evil, the will tends to it as to something evil; not as if it were evil in itself, but because it is evil accidentally, through the apprehension of the reason.<sup>125</sup>

Third, if those who are considered to be guided by erroneous conscience in their religious faith cannot be forced to convert, then the only action that should be taken toward them is the ‘fraternal correction,’ which is an act of charity because ‘is directed to the amendment of the sinner.’<sup>126</sup> This correction involves the employment of reason, which Aquinas trusts. If faith is perfected by charity, then those who firmly believe that their religion is true, are expected to love God and any of his creatures, including human reason. For Aquinas, reason is fully reliable and consistent with the Christian faith. He claims that ‘the contrary of a truth cannot be demonstrated,’ and ‘arguments

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<sup>123</sup> *Summa theologiae* I-II q. 11 a. 3.

<sup>124</sup> *Summa theologiae* I-II q. 19 a. 5.

<sup>125</sup> *Summa theologiae* I-II q. 19 a. 5. In the same vein, Aquinas rejects the view that the children of unbelievers are to be baptized against their parent’s will (see *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 10 a. 12).

<sup>126</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 33 a. 1.

brought against faith cannot be demonstrations.<sup>127</sup> Of course, Aquinas is aware that ‘abuse’ and ‘insufficiency of reason’ can occur, but ‘it is possible from the principles of philosophy to refute an error of this kind, either by showing it to be altogether impossible, or not to be necessary.’<sup>128</sup> This implies that reason is expected to be valued and used to the best of human abilities. Given this high level of trust, no limits should be imposed on its employment. Not surprisingly, Aquinas relies on the employment of reason when it comes to dialogue among traditions, cultures and religions that do not have anything else in common.<sup>129</sup> After all, he believes that there are no doctrines that can only be full of errors.<sup>130</sup> If so, it is by way of a patient, optimistic and open-minded employment of our cognitive faculties that the truth mingled with error can be found. In this connection, Aquinas seems to be in the best possible condition to employ reason in such an open-minded way, given his conviction that no demonstrations can be found against that which he cares most about, i.e., his faith.

Furthermore, Aquinas is convinced that believers can crucially contribute to the best possible employment of the cognitive faculties by renouncing certain sins. In his treatise on faith, he focuses on the blindness of mind and the dullness of sense, and claims that they are due to carnal vices, i.e. gluttony and lust, which are ‘pleasures of touch.’ For Aquinas,

these are the most impetuous of all pleasures of the body. For this reason these vices cause man’s attention to be very firmly fixed on corporeal things, so that in consequences man’s operation in regard to intelligible things is weakened, more, however, by lust than by gluttony...Lust gives rise to blindness of mind, which excludes almost entirely the knowledge of spiritual things, while dullness of sense arises from gluttony, which makes a man weak in regard to the same intelligible things.<sup>131</sup>

Loving God and renouncing the sin, therefore, is expected to improve our cognitive faculties. Abstinence and chastity, virtues that oppose the vices in question and that believers are warmly advised to practice, ‘dispose man very much to the perfection of intellectual operation.’<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> See above, Chapter 3, note 133.

<sup>128</sup> See above, Chapter 3, note 123.

<sup>129</sup> ‘Against the Jews we are able to argue by means of the Old Testament, while against heretics we are able to argue by means of the New Testament. But the Muslims and the pagans accept neither the one nor the other. We must, therefore, have recourse to the natural reason, to which all men are forced to give their assent.’ (Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, I, 3).

<sup>130</sup> See above, Chapter 3, note 105.

<sup>131</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 15 a. 3.

<sup>132</sup> *Summa theologiae* II-II q. 15 a. 3.

## 5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how exactly one can take the ST and some of the benefits this can offer to debaters and researchers. To this end, I have first focused on the relationship between the act of doing good and the search for truth. I have then treated two outstanding subjects in the field of philosophy of religion and theology, i.e. God's existence and religious diversity.

Focusing on the former only allowed me to show that one cannot take the ST without shifting attention from others to oneself. Reflecting on one's spiritual growth and one's will to do good is, for both believers and unbelievers, an indispensable aspect of the ST.

Focusing on the latter subject has allowed me to show how exactly taking the ST puts debaters in the best possible condition to satisfactorily conduct investigations and discussions. I have shown that a considerable epistemological problem such as the IP may be solved when it comes to religious beliefs that push one to take the ST. If one believes that charity and firmness of faith are inextricably connected with one another, then one may plausibly be led, on the one hand, to firmly hold the truth of one's religious experience and, on the other hand, to love other people and to respect their conscience, however erroneous it may be. (In this way the IP is dismissed as no problem. Someone may object that this does not have to do with the *ST in epistemology*. Epistemology should in fact deal with the truth and the way to attain it. What I have described and argued so far, instead, seems only to be a matter of respect and tolerance among religions. On closer inspection, however, the IP *is* a strictly epistemological problem. It is based on the idea that affirming the exclusive truth of one's religion can only exclude the truth of other religions and prevent from developing respect and a peaceful coexistence, which dialogue and debates presuppose.)

I have emphasized that taking the ST is an eminently personal process, which must constantly be pursued. As I have shown so far, from the idea that a religious view potentially offers a dismissal of the IP by no means follows that all of the adherents to that view are able to dismiss the IP. This dismissal is instead possible in proportion to the attempt that those who experience a love-relationship with a super-natural and perfectly loving being make to perfect themselves spiritually and morally. (Of course, I am referring only to believers who take the ST. In the next chapter, I will also focus on unbelievers.)

It is the attempt to spiritually perfect oneself that is of primary interest to those who take the ST, not the solution of epistemological problems. However, since the search for good shapes and includes,

among other activities, the search for truth, adopters of the ST are not only expected to be respectful and charitable toward those who believe differently; they are also expected to be capable of employing reason to the best of their abilities. In this way, they generate the best possible condition to participate in intellectual research and debates. As I will show in the next chapter, this means that taking the ST can in some cases substantially benefit the intellectual activity by increasing the possibility to achieve conclusiveness.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **Comparison and Reinforcement: some more Reasons for taking the ST**

In this chapter, I first compare the ST with perspectives that only seemingly resemble it. I then reinforce my thesis, i.e. the idea that the ST should be taken. I argue that mere epistemology is affected by self-referential contradiction, because their practitioners are a-rationally committed to avoiding any a-rational commitments. I then show that the abovementioned practitioners implicitly take on various commitments, which regard goods and related beliefs that in contemporary Western society are seen as indispensable and undeniable. As a consequence, they too may take the ST and find themselves in the best possible condition to improve intellectual investigations and debates. I conclude that all debaters, and not only adopters of the ST, can in some cases increase the possibility to achieve conclusiveness.

#### **6.1 More Reasons for taking the ST**

In the last chapter, I have explored the way in which the ST should be taken and some benefits it may bring to the knowing subject. This exploration, however, was prevalently one-sided. It did not sufficiently consider the situation of unbelievers or more generally *mere epistemologists*, who think that moral and spiritual aims, if any, must first be established by way of intellectual investigation. As a matter of fact, given the primary importance that mere epistemologists ascribe to the cognitive faculties and the way they should be used, inconclusiveness—and the related question whether or not the ST is to be taken—is expected to be dismissible as no problem. Once the right way to make use of the cognitive faculties has been found—so Descartes and many others have maintained, and still maintain—solving the problem of inconclusiveness will be possible by simply making the will follow the faculties in question. In contrast, the Christian tradition offers many suggestions in support of the possibility for intellectual research to be guided by the will and the aim of searching for good. That is why I have so far limited myself to exploring the possibility of the ST on the basis of the Christian tradition.

In this chapter, I intend to somewhat remedy this deficiency.

I first concentrate upon those epistemologists whose method seemingly resemble the ST. I am referring to virtue epistemologists, more precisely to those among them who focus on *character virtues* and the way these virtues may exert an influence on the intellectual research. I intend to show that, on closer inspection, virtue epistemology offers a version of mere epistemology, though a more sophisticated one. Unlike the latter, in fact, the former does not simply focus on evidence; it also considers epistemic emotions, from which a multi-faceted view of knowledge emerges.

I then propose three reasons for all debaters, both believers and unbelievers, to take the ST and abandon mere epistemology.

One reason is that a self-referential contradiction characterizes *any kind* of mere epistemology. Mere epistemology, in fact, can be seen as the view that beliefs supported by more evidence must always be preferred to beliefs supported by less evidence—which can also be described by saying that beliefs supported by evidence must always be preferred to beliefs that are due to a-rational commitments. This view, however, does not seem to be supported by more evidence than its negation. The belief that *one should always prefer beliefs supported by more evidence than beliefs supported by less evidence* is not supported by more evidence than the belief that *one should not always prefer beliefs supported by more evidence than beliefs supported by less evidence*.

Another reason to abandon mere epistemology is that, in contemporary Western society, there are states of affairs and related beliefs, such as the existence of universal fraternity and the unacceptability of racism, to which all, including mere epistemologists, seem to commit themselves, no matter if contrary evidence, at least at first sight, seems to convince them of the contrary. It follows that, to the extent that the beliefs in question promote one's spiritual betterment, those who maintain these beliefs can be seen as people who take the ST.

One final reason is that, in this view, the way in which debaters conduct investigations and discussions can significantly improve. I mean that, when those who adopt the ST don't focus on the beliefs that they consider undeniable and only discuss the remainder of their noetic structure—which, on closer inspection, is the greatest part of it—they find themselves in the best possible condition to achieve conclusiveness. Therefore, those who take the ST can substantially improve their ability to participate in debates. Although they are not primarily interested in conclusiveness, they end up being more able than mere epistemologists to increase this conclusiveness.

Before proceeding, let me explain why this chapter bears in its title words such as 'comparison' and 'reinforcement.' I *compare* the ST with virtue epistemology to show in what the fundamental

difference between these two seemingly parallel epistemological methods consists. Unlike the latter, the former involves a-rational commitments to beliefs that its supporters consider undeniable, whether or not the available evidence convinces them of the contrary. I then *reinforce* my proposal by showing, in various ways, that the ST, from the epistemological viewpoint, is more beneficial than mere epistemology to both believers and unbelievers.

## 6.2 Virtue Epistemology is *mere Epistemology*

The version of virtue epistemology that may at first sight appear to be similar to the ST is called *responsibilist* (as opposed to the version that is called *reliabilist*). My thesis is that this kind of virtue epistemology is, on closer inspection, a kind of mere epistemology. I argue this thesis in three steps. First, I look at the origins and aims of virtue epistemology. Second, as a result of this survey, I show in what the *nature* of this epistemological view consists. Finally, I specifically focus on one intellectual virtue, i.e. intellectual humility.

### 6.2.1 Origins and Aims

This section is aimed at offering a brief outline of *how* and *why* the responsibilist version of virtue epistemology has developed in the course of the last decades of the Twentieth century. (Focusing on the responsibilist version of virtue epistemology is due to the fact that I am only interested in this version, which deals with the role of *character traits*. The reliabilist one, which regards the *cognitive functions*, is instead of no interest, because only the former may appear to be similar to the ST. Furthermore, offering the present outline of *how* and especially *why* the responsibilist version of virtue epistemology has developed is due to my conviction, which I have already put into practice,<sup>1</sup> that it is by focusing on the aims of human actions that the nature of such actions can adequately be shown.)

After the publication of the famous two-and-a-half-page article by E. Gettier in 1963,<sup>2</sup> several epistemologists, in a bid to solve the problems raised by that article, started shifting their attention from the idea of knowledge as due to *how we form our beliefs* to a new idea of knowledge as due to *how our belief-forming faculties function*. Their attempt was to show that our beliefs are justified or

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<sup>1</sup> See above, Chapter 5, Section 1.

<sup>2</sup> See Edmund Gettier, 'Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?', *Analysis* 23 (1963), pp. 121-

warranted to the extent that they result from a reliable or properly functioning working of our faculties, and not from the fact that we are internally convinced that they—our beliefs—are justified or warranted.

This turn from the traditional ‘internalist’ view to an ‘externalist’ approach to epistemology was the main attempt (I say ‘main’ because it does not exclude that there are internalists post-Gettier) to solve the so-called ‘Gettier problem.’<sup>3</sup> This problem emphasized the fact that a *true justified belief*—which had traditionally been seen as the only definition of knowledge—may still be not knowledge, and may be due to a lucky guess.<sup>4</sup> Solving the problem seemed to be possible by either re-conceiving justification<sup>5</sup> or introducing a fourth condition. After decades of debates, in an essay eloquently titled *The Inescapability of Gettier Problems*,<sup>6</sup> L. Zagzebski argued that any attempt to find a fourth condition was susceptible to Gettier-style counterexamples.<sup>7</sup> This led various scholars to develop a *virtue epistemology*, which is sometimes seen as one of the possible versions of the ‘externalist’ move mentioned above.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> I need to limit myself to just a few words about the problem in question, which in 1979 K. Lehrer already said had ‘been explored and developed to such an extent that it is [was] worthwhile stating just what the problem is [was].’ (Keith Lehrer, ‘The Gettier Problem and the Analysis of Knowledge.’ In George Pappas [ed.], *Justification and Knowledge: New Studies in Epistemology* [Boston-London: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979], p. 65). While introducing the most recent treatment of the Gettier problem, Stephen Hetherington says that post-Gettier epistemology is still under way and asks himself: ‘What is the Gettier problem’s future? Will it be solved? (Has it already been solved?) Will it continue being so epistemologically influential? What would post-post-Gettier epistemology be like?’ (Stephen Hetherington, ‘Introduction: Meet the Gettier Problem.’ In *The Gettier Problem*, ed. by Stephen Hetherington (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 10).

<sup>4</sup> The view that knowledge is a kind of achievement—intellectual success through ability, for which the knower is creditable—is a widespread one. As Pritchard points out, almost all epistemologists accept what he calls ‘*epistemic luck platitude*,’ i.e. the claim that ‘knowledge excludes luck’ (Duncan Pritchard, *Epistemic Luck* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), p. 1). Pritchard has recently called this approach to the Gettier problem ‘luck Gettier problem,’ which he distinguishes from the ‘analytic Gettier problem.’ In one of his most recent publications, he speaks of the former by saying that it consists in wondering ‘what kind of condition would exclude veritic luck,’ whereas the latter ‘is the problem of offering a plausible, informative—and possibly reductive—theory of knowledge’ (Duncan Pritchard, ‘The Gettier Problem and Epistemic Luck.’ In *The Gettier Problem*, p. 96).

<sup>5</sup> This is the attempt that, among others, Roderick Chisholm famously made in *Theory of Knowledge*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1977), Chapter 6.

<sup>6</sup> Linda Zagzebski, ‘The Inescapability of Gettier Problems,’ *The Philosophical Quarterly* 44 (1994), pp. 65-73.

<sup>7</sup> Note, however, that her argument only affects a fourth condition that’s independent of the third. It doesn’t afflict the anti-luck virtue epistemology proposal championed by Duncan Pritchard, ‘Anti-Luck Virtue Epistemology,’ *The Journal of Philosophy* 109 (2012), pp. 247-279.

<sup>8</sup> Although there are internalist versions of it, Rodrigo Borges points out that three kinds of externalist solutions have been proposed to the Gettier problem: reliabilism, truth-tracking theories, and virtue epistemology (Rodrigo Borges, ‘The Gettier Problem and Externalism.’ In *The Gettier Problem*, p. 66).

According to virtue epistemologists, knowledge is achieved if it is the output of a *virtuous* cognitive process. One knows that *p* only if one's belief that *p* is true and is true because it is the output of a virtuous cognitive process.

However, there is a substantial difference between the two forms of virtue epistemology mentioned above, the reliabilist one and the responsibilist one. The difference depends on what exactly virtue is taken to be. In the former case, virtues are taken as *cognitive functions* such as eyesight, hearing, memory, inferential reason, and so on. E. Sosa championed this view.<sup>9</sup> In the latter case, virtues are *character traits* such as intellectual courage, generosity, tenacity, humility, etc., which more properly resemble the way in which the philosophical tradition as well as contemporary ordinary language speak of 'virtue.'<sup>10</sup> This view was inaugurated by L. Zagzebski,<sup>11</sup> on the basis of L. Code's and J. Montmarquet's reflection.<sup>12</sup>

A. Plantinga has taken part in this debate by offering an influential view of the intellectual virtues as 'cognitive faculties properly functioning in congenial environments.'<sup>13</sup> This seems to associate Plantinga's with Sosa's reflection. As Roberts and Wood point out,<sup>14</sup> however, Plantinga's religious commitment seems to lead the author of *Warranted Christian Belief* to focus on 'the deep and character-involving knowledge of God,' which is inevitably expected to exert an influence on character traits and appetitive dispositions. (This is of interest here since it is precisely a religious

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<sup>9</sup> See at least Ernest Sosa, 'The Raft and the Pyramid: Coherence versus Foundations in the Theory of Knowledge,' *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 5 (1980), pp. 3-26 and *A Virtue Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>10</sup> An insightful description of character traits is offered in the following way: Unlike faculties and skills, they 'are dispositions of thinking and/or feeling and/or motivation and/or action that ground normative evaluations of persons as such. An agent's character traits express her central beliefs or desires or emotions or motives (inclusive disjunction) and serve to predict and explain how she will act in a given situation' (Nathan King, 'Intellectual Perseverance.' In *The Routledge Handbook of Virtue Epistemology*, ed. by Heather Battaly (New York–London: Routledge, 2019), p. 259).

<sup>11</sup> See L. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtues and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge* (New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>12</sup> Lorraine Code was probably the first to use the concept of 'responsibilism' as opposed to that of 'reliabilism' championed by Sosa. For her, epistemic responsibility is the virtue 'from which other virtues radiate,' and implies a more 'human' approach to epistemology, which does not restrict to abstract doxastic properties such as knowledge and justification. See Lorraine Code, *Epistemic Responsibility* (Hanover, NH: Published for Brown University Press by University Press of New England, 1987), p. 44. James Montmarquet emphasizes the importance of 'epistemic conscientiousness,' which he characterizes as a desire for truth and the avoidance of error (see James Montmarquet, *Epistemic Virtue and Doxastic Responsibility* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1993), p. 21). The desire in question—he argues—needs to be regulated by additional intellectual virtues such as impartiality, sobriety, and courage (see *ibid.*, pp. 21 ff.).

<sup>13</sup> See Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) as well as *Warranted Christian Belief*.

<sup>14</sup> See Robert Roberts, and William Jay Wood, *Intellectual Virtues: An Essay in Regulative Epistemology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 7f.

tradition that, I maintain, offers significant suggestions when it comes to promote a spiritual impact on epistemology.)

Virtue epistemology, therefore, focuses on the human person *taken in its entirety* and not just considered from the cognitive viewpoint. The central question of virtue epistemology regards what makes *a person* intellectually good. This is especially true of the responsibilist version of virtue epistemology, which applies aspects of virtue ethics to epistemology.<sup>15</sup> For L. Zagzebski, intellectual virtues are in fact a subset of moral virtues, as shown by her conviction that the beliefs held by those who are intellectually virtuous are expected to be due to *habituation* and *deliberate choice*.<sup>16</sup>

Zagzebski argues that no difference can be found between intellectual and moral virtues as to three significant aspects of their working:

Both require training through the imitation of virtuous persons and practice in acting virtuously. Both also involve handling certain feelings and acquiring the ability to *like* acting virtuously. Both also have stages in between vice and virtue consisting of *akrasia* and self-control.<sup>17</sup>

This—so Zagzebski argues—is confirmed by the crucial role that, in Aristotle’s thought, *phronesis*, which is an intellectual virtue, plays in regard to the moral virtues.<sup>18</sup>

Aristotle’s view of *phronesis*, however, needs some rethinking, and we need to ‘understand its [*phronesis*’s] connection to the moral and the intellectual virtues differently from the way Aristotle

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<sup>15</sup> Unlike deontology, which is agent-based, and consequentialism, which is outcome-based, virtue ethics is character-based. Character traits are stable dispositions that require the right desire and the right reason. The *persons* who possess such traits and act accordingly are *virtuous*. Tracing back to Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, Gertrude E. Anscombe famously argued in support of this view. Zagzebski opportunely refers to her famous 1958 essay and says that ‘probably the first major attempt in recent philosophy to call attention to the advantages of focusing ethics on virtues rather than on acts was Elizabeth Anscombe’s important paper *Modern Moral Philosophy*’ (Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, p. 17). For more on the historical development of the study of virtue from the ancient times to contemporary age, see Nancy Snow, ‘Introduction.’ In *The Oxford Handbook of Virtue*, ed. by Nancy Snow (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 1f.

<sup>16</sup> This may support the view that responsibilists, who focus on character virtues, do not have anything to do with reliabilists, who focus on excellences of faculties. In reality, as John Greco shows, they cannot divorce each other. Character virtues may promote excellences of faculties, as can be easily seen by considering that intellectual carefulness can promote reliability, intellectual courage can promote power, and so on. Greco arguably shows that something similar can be said of the distinction between internalism and externalism, which may at first sight appear to apply only to responsibilism and reliabilism, respectively. For more on this, see John Greco, ‘Virtues in Epistemology.’ In *Oxford Handbook of Epistemology*, ed. by Paul Moser (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>17</sup> See Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, pp. 157f.

<sup>18</sup> See Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, p. 212.

did.<sup>19</sup> Something similar can be said of Aquinas, as W. Jay Wood has opportunely pointed out. Like Aristotle, Aquinas clearly argues in support of the interconnection between intellect and will.<sup>20</sup> And nonetheless,

to speak of intellectual humility would have struck Aquinas—and strikes some contemporary philosophers—as something of a category mistake... This is because, according to Aquinas's strict division of cognitive labor, generosity, humility, and courage seek the good, not the true, and thus are the work of the will, not the intellect: two types of truth grounded in two distinct parts of the soul.<sup>21</sup>

At any rate, how faithful the responsibilist version of virtue epistemology is to ancient and medieval treatment of virtues is beyond my interest here.<sup>22</sup> I have so far focused on its origins and aims only because this will now allow me to emphasize its seeming similarity as well as its real difference with the ST.

### 6.2.2 *Virtue Epistemology and the ST*

The virtue epistemologists to whom I have referred so far argue that the intellectually good person is especially qualified to know, and that knowledge is achieved if *belief arises out of acts of intellectual virtue*.<sup>23</sup> If one is, say, reflective, fair-minded, perseverant, intellectually careful, then one is more likely than those who lack these qualities to achieve knowledge. Obviously enough, those who possess these traits are better *persons*, and placing emphasis not only on virtues but also on the human person in his or her entirety resembles the ST. Those who take the ST, in fact, focus on their flourishing as human persons, which they expect will imply the development of single virtues as well as the achievement of specific forms of success, the intellectual one included.

There is, however, a substantial difference between the ST and the virtue epistemology here under consideration. Those who take the ST are primarily interested in their human flourishing and *only*

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<sup>19</sup> See Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, p. 212.

<sup>20</sup> 'The good and the true include one another, since the good is a kind of truth, insofar as it is grasped by the intellect when intellect understands the will to be willing the good or even insofar as it understands that something is good. So too the true is a good of the intellect which thus falls to the will insofar as a man will to understand the true.' (Aquinas, *Disputed Questions on Virtue*, a. 6, ad 5, cit. in Wood, 'Faith's Intellectual Rewards,' p. 40).

<sup>21</sup> W. J. Wood, 'Faith's Intellectual Rewards,' p. 40.

<sup>22</sup> For more on the distance between Aquinas's treatment of virtues and Zagzebski's, see Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*, pp. 70ff. They show that of the two elements, which for Zagzebski constitute the conception of a virtue ('success component' and 'motivational component'), Aquinas, in the footsteps of Aristotle, says that only the former makes disposition into a virtue.

<sup>23</sup> See Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, p. 271.

*secondarily* in any other success, whereas virtue epistemologists, *being epistemologists*, are obviously interested in that particular achievement that is the attainment of knowledge.<sup>24</sup> Of course, one may aim at achieving eudaimonia through intellectual activity and the related solution of epistemological issues. Nothing impedes virtue epistemology from ultimately aiming at the wider project constituted by one's spiritual betterment, and this seems to render virtue epistemology fully compatible with the ST. On closer inspection, however, conducting an intellectual activity and solving epistemological issues as a pre-condition to understand what one's spiritual betterment and related beliefs are obviously means that the betterment in question and the related beliefs do not play any role in the solution of those issues. In contrast, those who take the ST are expected to keep sight of their spiritual fulfilment and the related beliefs, which they think can lead one to any other accomplishment, including the solution of epistemological issues.

This attitude, as I have shown in Chapters 3-4, is typically championed by Aquinas when he says that, if believers are confronted with arguments that seem to disprove their beliefs, then they should reject such arguments and starting reasoning anew. The adhesion to God and the commitment to the related beliefs are seen as the end of one's life, and it is on their basis that any other activity, including the intellectual one, needs conducting. In a similar way, Anselm, who, like Aquinas, is usually seen as fully representative of the way religious belief can maximally stimulate and promote rational research, starts his famous investigation contained in his *Proslogion* by asking God to help him: 'O Lord my God. Teach my heart where and how to seek you, where and how to find you.'<sup>25</sup> For Anselm, God is expected to answer the prayer of believers by revealing them where to seek and find him. In other words, communion with God orients the intellectual research and works as its criterion. Unsurprisingly, at the beginning of another of his famous works devoted to rationally exploring God's existence and attributes, Anselm goes so far as to claim that

if in this [investigation] I say anything that a greater authority does not teach, I wish to be understood in this way: even if I present a conclusion as necessary on the basis of arguments that seem compelling to me, I mean only that it can *seem* necessary for the time being, not that it is therefore in fact altogether necessary.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> This remains true though virtue epistemology is no longer seen as a mere attempt to solve the Gettier problem. As Battaly has recently said, 'while it continues to engage some of the problems that were part of its original impetus (e.g., the Gettier problem), it has also grown rich enough to generate new research topics of its own—e.g., the credit or achievement theory of knowledge, theories of active knowledge and understanding, and analyses of epistemic virtue' (Heather Battaly, 'Introduction.' In *The Routledge Handbook of Virtue Epistemology*, p. 1).

<sup>25</sup> Anselm, *Proslogion*, 1, tr. by T. Williams, in Anselm, *Monologion and Proslogion* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1995).

<sup>26</sup> Anselm, *Monologion*, 1, tr. by Thomas Williams, in Anselm, *Monologion and Proslogion*. As two scholars of Anselm point out while citing his *De Concordia*, 'Anselm believes that "Holy Scripture

As I will show later in the course of this chapter, the same may be said of those who commit themselves to beliefs such as the equal fundamental dignity of all human beings and to related values such as universal freedom and fraternity. Those who, in contemporary western society, maintain these beliefs are likely to continue supporting them even if contrary reasons suggested that they change their mind. Among such reasons, there are behaviours of individuals as well as practices spread among cultures, religions, and the like, which may reflect such deplorable attitudes that, from their knowledge, the negation of the existence of a common dignity of human beings may easily follow. Not surprisingly, pointing to such reasons is a familiar strategy for those who support forms of discrimination. However, the people who commit themselves to the beliefs mentioned above will be likely to argue that such reasons are either wrong or not necessary. In this way, they show a-rational commitments, which depend on neither rational investigations nor the solution of related epistemological issues, and make these people prefer beliefs they may see as supported by less evidence to beliefs they may consider supported by more evidence.

Those who take the ST, be they believers or unbelievers, commit themselves to states of affairs and the related beliefs, which they consider orientation and criterion of any activity. This is due to their looking at these states of affairs and beliefs as representing and conveying the good itself, i.e., that which cannot cause any form of evil. (That God is love and all human beings have the same fundamental dignity, for example, seem to be beliefs from which no evil, unless inconsistently, can follow.) Being committed to such beliefs is expected to lead one to successfully conduct related and less fundamental activities, among which the intellectual one is to be numbered since it aims at achieving a particular good, that is, the truth, and not the good in itself. The existence of universal fraternity as well as the unacceptability of racism, for example, can be considered among the fundamental beliefs mentioned above. Being committed to these beliefs will plausibly render the person who takes the intellectual activity maximally interested in the good of his or her opponents. Becoming convinced that they lack knowledge will sadden him or her and stir feelings of compassion towards them. All other factors being equal, this is likely to give rise to the best possible condition to employ and promote intellectual virtues such as humility, open-mindedness, and the like.

These virtues are expected to lead one to value what one's interlocutors or opponents believe. Practising them, however, should not lead one to doubt the fundamental beliefs to which one is

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contains the authority of every conclusion of reason" and "gives aid to no falsehood"; consequently, he is confident that if his rational arguments go astray in some way, Scripture will provide the materials to correct them.' (Sandra Visser and Thomas Williams, *Anselm* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2009], p. 17. The two passages they cite are from *De Concordia*, III, 6).

committed and on the basis of which one promoted the abovementioned virtues. No matter whether or not contrary evidence appears to be sufficient to make them change their mind, those who take the ST should reject this evidence and continue searching for arguments in support of their original convictions. (Of course, this does not mean that aspects of the committed belief cannot be rethought and seen in a new light. It only means that, from the viewpoint of the ST, beliefs such as ‘God is love,’ ‘Jesus is the son of God,’ ‘no one can be discriminated because of race or religion,’ once are considered committed beliefs, cannot be given up.)

This is a decisive difference between the ST and virtue epistemology. The proponents of the latter will never agree to (a-rationally) maintain beliefs against which more evidence is provided. (Note that maintaining beliefs against contrary evidence, as I take it, does not resemble the so-called non-conciliatory stance in case of peer-disagreement.<sup>27</sup> This stance, in fact, regards circumstances in which equal evidence in support of *both* of mutually opposing views is available, not circumstances that show more evidence on one side and less evidence or even only a-rational commitments on the other.)

I will focus on this difference in more details while treating intellectual humility, and will confirm that, unlike the ST, virtue epistemology is a version of mere epistemology.

Before proceeding, however, let me point out that the crucial role played by a-rational commitments in regard to the ST does not have anything to do with the fact that epistemic emotions such as a passion for truth or repugnance at intellectual dishonesty are essential to intellectual virtues and play, therefore, a crucial role in virtue epistemology. Motivations and motives—sometimes employed with different meanings by virtue epistemologists<sup>28</sup>—have traditionally been seen as components of distinctive intellectual virtues. M. Brady rightly shows this fact while referring to Aristotle’s account of virtue, according to which ‘the virtuous person is the person with the correct emotional dispositions.’<sup>29</sup> The benevolent person, for example, needs to be guided to act benevolently by adequate emotions that make him or her wish the well-being of others.

As I said, however, this does not have anything to do with the emotions and the related a-rational commitments to the beliefs I mentioned above in regard to those who take the ST. Those beliefs are propositional representations aimed at representing reality *as it is*, and being a-rationally committed

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<sup>27</sup> See above, Chapter 4, especially note 53.

<sup>28</sup> Zagzebski distinguishes motives, ‘as occurring at a particular moment of time,’ from motivation, ‘as a persistent tendency to be moved by a motive of a certain kind’ (*Virtues of the Mind*, p. 132).

<sup>29</sup> Michael Brady, ‘The role of emotions in intellectual virtue.’ In *The Routledge Handbook of Virtue Epistemology*, p. 50.

to them means that one commits oneself *to their truth*, no matter whether or not evidence is provided in their support and even if the available evidence seems to convince one of the contrary. In contrast, virtue epistemologists have an approach to epistemic emotions, which is not only different but also more reasonable, at least at first sight. They expect such emotions to enable them to do what they intellectually *ought*. Nevertheless, they are aware that ‘emotions could also be the motivational components of epistemic vices,’<sup>30</sup> which is why they believe that ‘the virtuous thinker will need to possess certain *regulatory* virtues,’<sup>31</sup> the most important of which is probably wisdom. And regulating epistemic emotions obviously means, among other things, that one abandons a-rational commitments if they can be replaced with evidence. A love for the truth, which is a motivational component of various epistemic virtues, would turn into epistemic vice if it supports beliefs that the available evidence disproves.

Let me notice that this obviously seems to show that virtue epistemology should be preferred to the ST. Between evidence and a-rational commitment, in fact, it seems to be unreasonable, as required by the ST in regard to some beliefs, to choose the latter and abandon the former.

From what I have said so far, however, at least two problems emerge that render equally if not more unreasonable to adopt virtue epistemology.

First, virtue epistemologists are expected to maintain the view that more evidence must be preferred to less evidence. But this gives rise to self-referential contradiction, as I have already shown while introducing this chapter.

Second, virtue epistemology is affected by circularity. As I have said above, to avoid turning into epistemic vices, epistemic emotions need to be regulated. Tracing back to Aristotle and his doctrine of moral virtues, it may be said that *habituation* and *choice* are necessary to avoid intellectual vices (and develop intellectual virtues). For Aristotle, it is the intellectual virtue of prudence (*phronesis*) that guides choice. In his view, in fact, one needs to deliberate well about what is good rather than making choices on the basis of mere appetite or emotions. For the author of *Nicomachean Ethics*, ‘choice is either desiderative reason or ratiocinative desire,’<sup>32</sup> and right choice presupposes right reason. Habituation, in fact, is learned through an intellectual process, i.e. the deliberative process. Does this cause circularity? It does not in Aristotle’s treatment of moral virtues, since for him we

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<sup>30</sup> Brady, ‘The role of emotions in intellectual virtue,’ endnote 3.

<sup>31</sup> Brady, ‘The role of emotions in intellectual virtue,’ p. 54.

<sup>32</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1139b4-5, tr. William D. Ross. In *The Works of Aristotle*, revised by L. Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

pursue some character traits ‘not in order to know what virtue is, but to become good.’<sup>33</sup> Things radically change, however, if moral virtues are considered necessary to acquire intellectual virtues. (As L. Zagzebski says, ‘many moral virtues such as patience, perseverance, and courage are causally necessary for having intellectual virtues.’<sup>34</sup>) Virtue epistemology falls therefore in a circular argument. In order to acquire intellectual virtues, in fact, we need moral virtues; to acquire moral virtues, however, we need intellectual virtues.

### 6.2.3 *On the Epistemology of intellectual Humility*

Let me now focus in more detail on the difference between the ST and virtue epistemology by concentrating upon intellectual humility. Intellectual humility plays a crucial role among intellectual virtues, and has attracted considerable attention by virtue epistemologists, who have offered a fair number of possible definitions. As I. Church and P. Samuelson point out, ‘there is no shared or even entirely dominant view of intellectual humility in the literature’ and ‘no consensus regarding what we might be confusing intellectual humility with.’<sup>35</sup> A. Tanesini goes so far as to say that intellectual humility ‘is a cluster of strong attitudes,’<sup>36</sup> whereas others see the virtue in question as partly coincident with open-mindedness.<sup>37</sup> Given the fact that the latter is considered an intellectual virtue par excellence,<sup>38</sup> the partial identification between these two virtues confirms the fundamental role that is usually ascribed to intellectual humility among intellectual virtues.

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<sup>33</sup> *Nichomachean Ethics*, 1103b26-29.

<sup>34</sup> Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind*, p. 159.

<sup>35</sup> Ian Church and Peter Samuelson, *Intellectual Humility. An Introduction to the Philosophy and Science* (London-New York: Bloomsbury Academy, 2017), p. 30.

<sup>36</sup> Alessandra Tanesini, ‘Intellectual Humility as Attitude,’ *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 96 (2018), p. 399. The author insists that the bunch of characteristics usually attributed to intellectual humility is heterogeneous (see p. 401). She focuses on modesty and self-acceptance, where the latter is the concern with one’s own limitations and is conceptually distinct from modesty. Their psychological unity, however, makes intellectual humility one single virtue.

<sup>37</sup> According to James Spiegel, intellectual humility is ‘second-order open-mindedness.’ Properly speaking, so he argues, open-mindedness is a first-order attitude toward *one’s beliefs*, whereas intellectual humility regards the attitude we take toward *ourselves as believers*. See James Spiegel, ‘Open-mindedness and intellectual humility,’ *Theory and Research in Education* 10 (2012), pp. 27-38. Note that Spiegel turns Adler’s characterization of open mindedness as a second-order attitude into intellectual humility. I will refer to Adler’s reflection below. See below, notes 72ff.

<sup>38</sup> For Wayne Riggs, ‘to be open-minded is to be aware of one’s fallibility as a believer, and to be willing to acknowledge the possibility that anytime one believes something, it is possible that one is wrong.’ (Wayne Riggs, ‘Open-Mindedness,’ *Metaphilosophy* 41 (2010), p. 180). In other words, ‘open-mindedness seems nothing short of rationality itself’ (p. 179).

At any rate, be this identification correct or not,<sup>39</sup> focusing on intellectual humility offers one more profitable opportunity to compare virtue epistemology and the ST as well as to focus on the problems that affect the former.<sup>40</sup>

Among the numerous definitions that epistemologists have provided of intellectual humility, J. Driver's one seems to constitute an intuitive account.<sup>41</sup> According to her, intellectual humility is 'low self-worth,' holding oneself in low regard, underestimating self-worth to some extent, in spite of the available evidence. This, however, does not mean that the intellectually humble person underestimates their abilities, which is why Driver distinguishes humility from modesty. For her, 'a humble person, unlike a modest person, can paint an accurate, though perhaps unflattering, picture of herself,' whereas 'the modest person needs to underestimate.'<sup>42</sup>

Being intellectually humble, therefore, does not seem to involve ignorance about oneself.<sup>43</sup> P. Hill points out that intellectual humility requires a sense of security and enduring personal worth.<sup>44</sup> This

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<sup>39</sup> For Pritchard, open-mindedness and intellectual humility are not manifestations of one single virtue ('Intellectual Humility and the Epistemology of Disagreement,' p. 7 n. 13).

<sup>40</sup> How crucial is the role played by intellectual humility among the intellectual virtues can also be shown by the fact that, according to Roberts and Wood, humility is opposite to a number of vices, including arrogance, vanity, conceit, egotism, hyper-autonomy, grandiosity, pretentiousness, snobbishness, impertinence (presumption), haughtiness, self-righteousness, domination, selfish ambition, and self-complacency.' (Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*, p. 236). Laura Garcia supports this view, 'for no-one can manifest these flaws without being mightily impressed with herself or some of her respected attributes' (Laura Garcia, 'Being Unimpressed with Ourselves: Reconceiving Humility,' *Philosophia* 34 (2006), p. 418).

<sup>41</sup> Intuitive and pre-theoretical understanding play a crucial role in the evaluation of intellectual virtues. In contrast, for T. R. Bierly the goal of evaluation of intellectual virtues 'is not to discern which of the competing accounts of a trait best matches our pre-theoretical concept of that trait. The goal is instead to determine whether the various traits are valuable and to determine, if they are valuable, in what way they are.' (T. R. Bierly, 'The values and varieties of humility,' *Philosophia* 42 (2014) p. 891). Seeing if the various accounts match pre-theoretical concepts, however, seems precisely intended to determine whether or not the traits described are valuable.

<sup>42</sup> Julia Driver, 'Virtues of ignorance.' In Julia Driver, *Uneasy virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001), p. 115. This is why Driver also says that 'the general principle that ignorance is always bad seems to be violated by a number of counterexamples. My account of modesty as a virtue would constitute simply another counterexample.' (Julia Driver, 'Modesty and Ignorance,' *Ethics* 109 (1999), p. 828). However, not everyone agrees to the persuasion that humility involves accurate conception of one's epistemic standing. According to Pritchard, 'perhaps one is inclined to underestimate one's epistemic standing. Would that preclude one from manifesting intellectual humility? I don't see why' ('Intellectual Humility and the Epistemology of Disagreement,' p. 11).

<sup>43</sup> According to Aristotle, those who are unable to give an accurate account of themselves are foolish, 'but no virtuous man is foolish or silly' (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1123b3-4). In the same vein, contemporary accounts of humility usually exclude ignorance and underestimation. Among them, let me mention the two ones that are often considered the dominant contemporary views in the field. They are the view of humility as 'low concern,' championed by Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*, and the one according to which humility is 'limitations-owning,' proposed by Dennis Whitcomb, Heather Battaly, Jason Baehr, Daniel Howard-Snyder, 'Intellectual Humility: Owning our Limitations,' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 94 (2017), pp. 509-539.

is necessary to reach self-acceptance, recognition of strengths and limitations, ability to avoid biases, freedom from relying on social comparison processes motivated by a concern for social status.<sup>45</sup>

A circular argument, however, emerges from this picture. I agree that being intellectually humble is not expected to involve ignorance about one's strengths. For virtue epistemologists, however, giving an accurate account of oneself is expected to presuppose intellectual virtues, including intellectual humility. Needless to say, this is a circular process. (This circularity parallels the one that, as I have shown above, characterizes all intellectual virtues, given the responsibilist version of virtue epistemology.<sup>46</sup>)

In line with the conviction that intellectual humility does not involve ignorance about oneself, Church and Samuelson provide a 'doxastic account' of the virtue in question, according to which intellectual humility consists in valuing one's beliefs *as one ought*.<sup>47</sup> For them, someone 'cannot be too humble.' Rather, intellectual humility is a mean between, on the one hand, valuing too much one's beliefs and having exaggerated confidence in one's abilities and, on the other hand, undervaluing one's beliefs and overestimating one's failures.<sup>48</sup>

This persuasion that intellectual humility needs to be a mean between opposite extremes (intellectual dogmatism and intellectual timidity) is confirmed by A. Tanesini on the basis of Aristotle's thought on the subject. As she says, 'both vanity and timidity have distorting influences on the relations of dependence that hold among members of epistemic communities.'<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> See Peter Hill et al., 'A Few Good Measures.' In *Handbook of Humility. Theory, Research, and Applications*, ed. by E. Worthington, D. Davis, and J. Hook (New York and London: Routledge, 2017), p. 119).

<sup>45</sup> Roberts and Woods confirm this view by arguing that the humble person 'may appear to be ignorant of her excellence or importance, but if she needs to assess herself, she can give as accurate an account as the next person.' (Roberts and Woods, p. 241). Humility involves, therefore, unconcern about oneself and inattentiveness to one's abilities, and not mere ignorance of one's value or status (see *ibid.*).

<sup>46</sup> See above, notes 32ff.

<sup>47</sup> A convincing criticism has been addressed to this account: 'The disposition to believe as one ought is either the disposition to believe virtuously or the disposition to believe responsibly; but nothing as general as these dispositions is identical with anything as specific as IH' (Whitcomb et al., p. 512).

<sup>48</sup> Church and Samuelson, p. 7.

<sup>49</sup> Alessandra Tanesini, 'Caring for Esteem and Intellectual Reputation,' *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 84 (2018), p. 48. Let me add that, as is known, Aristotle never included humility in his table of virtues. For him, the humble person is 'the servile,' whereas magnanimity, which implies self-assurance and self-fulfillment, is the mean between the two extremes of humbleness and proudness (see his *Nicomachean Ethics*, IV, 3).

Church and Samuelson employ this view of intellectual humility in an attempt to solve the problem of disagreement, which seems to be particularly able to test the virtue in question.<sup>50</sup> Especially before cases of ‘intractable disagreement,’ as the authors in question call them, those who are intellectually humble cannot simply give up their own beliefs, which would be a sign of self-deprecation. They cannot stick to them either, which would be a sign of vanity and arrogance. They are, therefore, expected ‘to be vigilant:’ ‘We should be extra careful and reflective to make sure we are indeed accurately tracking the positive epistemic status of our beliefs.’<sup>51</sup> In other words, ‘sometimes the right way to handle disagreement is to reflect carefully on your own views and try to put yourself in a position to be receptive to the truth.’<sup>52</sup> As they say from the beginning of their book, ‘the world needs more people who are sensitive to their own intellectual failings, who are more likely to “think it possible” that their political, religious, and moral beliefs “may be mistaken.”’<sup>53</sup>

This view, however, seems to make intellectual humility fall into a *self-referential contradiction*. On the one hand, the intellectually humble person is expected to be ‘sensitive to their own intellectual failings’ and ready to ‘think it possible that their views may be mistaken.’ On the other hand, however, they are not equally ready to consider that this very conviction—thinking it possible that their views may be mistaken—may be mistaken.

Those who take the ST seem to be able to avoid both this self-referential contradiction and the problem of circularity mentioned above. Both problems arise of the view that being humble presupposes the ability to give an accurate account of oneself. This ability, however, is of no interest to those who take the ST, nor is it of interest to those who are expected to cultivate intellectual humility from a religious viewpoint. This is confirmed by two recent publications in the field of theology.

First, G. Macaskill argues that intellectual humility, if seen from the viewpoint of the New Testament, isn’t simply ‘a low level of concern to be well regarded by other people;’<sup>54</sup> more importantly, it is due to a commitment to Jesus Christ, to our union with him, which takes the form

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<sup>50</sup> As Pritchard has recently argued, however, ‘the epistemological import of disagreements (both of the ‘deep’ and the ‘epistemic peer’ kind) has been overstated’ (Duncan Pritchard, ‘Wittgensteinian Hinge Epistemology and Deep Disagreement,’ *Topoi* online first p. 8 n 18).

<sup>51</sup> Church and Samuelson, p. 274.

<sup>52</sup> Church and Samuelson, p. 285.

<sup>53</sup> Church and Samuelson, p. 4.

<sup>54</sup> Grant Macaskill, *The New Testament and Intellectual Humility* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p 169. This is the definition that the author draws upon Roberts and Wood, *Intellectual Virtues*.

of ‘dependency on and submission to God.’<sup>55</sup> Giving an account of oneself—the author focuses on the idea of low self-concern/estimate—may be part of the process that makes one humble. At any rate, ‘humility is embedded in a thick account that associates it with a thoroughgoing willingness to set aside all of one’s self-interests (not just intellectual status) in order to bring about the good of others.’<sup>56</sup> It is, therefore, the commitment to the good itself, which Christians are expected to identify with union with God, love for others and related beliefs, that mainly makes one intellectually humble. As I have argued in Chapter 5, the open-mindedness that believers can show while discussing objections to their view is due to their trust in the power of God and the reliable faculties which he grants to them.<sup>57</sup> Believers may therefore feel ready to develop debates in any possible direction not because they trust in their own virtues, but because of their confidence that, if they employ their faculties in accordance with God’s plan, nothing false can be demonstrated. It is, therefore, their commitment to God and the beliefs that convey such a commitment that, so they maintain, can make them intellectually virtuous.

Second, K. Dunnington focuses on the view of humility that emerges from ancient Christianity, including desert monastic tradition. He shows that this view requires ‘that we hold loosely to any cherished self-image, always on guard against the ways we use our self-image to insulate ourselves from the call to complete dependence upon God.’<sup>58</sup> On this basis, Dunnington argues that humility is to be seen as ‘no-concern,’ which he compares with the view of humility as ‘low-concern’ to which I have already referred above. Humility ‘is the disposition to have no concern to develop, clarify, attain, maintain, or safeguard an ego ideal, because of a trust that one’s well-being is entirely secured by the care of God.’<sup>59</sup> Unlike low-concern, which shows an interest in other goods as the proper motive that is behind one’s concern, ‘no concern specifies trust in the care of God as the proper motive.’<sup>60</sup> While referring to another research on humility from the Christian viewpoint proposed by Roberts and West,<sup>61</sup> Dunnington maintains that the pride these authors depict as fundamental to human agency is necessary for moral development *but not for consistent moral action*.<sup>62</sup> Proper prides, so he argues, ‘are goods, essential to the formation of virtue in our fallen

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<sup>55</sup> Macaskill, p. 170.

<sup>56</sup> Macaskill, p. 169.

<sup>57</sup> See above, Chapter 5, note 127.

<sup>58</sup> Kent Dunnington, *Humility, Pride, and Christian Virtue Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press 2018), p. 38.

<sup>59</sup> Dunnington, p. 88.

<sup>60</sup> Dunnington, p. 89.

<sup>61</sup> Robert Roberts and Ryan West, ‘Jesus and the Virtues of Pride.’ In *The Moral Psychology of Pride*, ed. by Adam J. Carter and Emma Gordon (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017).

<sup>62</sup> ‘I affirm the necessary role of proper pride in moral formation, but I deny the necessary role of proper pride in an ongoing and consistent life of virtuous action.’ (Dunnington, p. 123).

condition, but they are penultimate goods.’<sup>63</sup> What, instead, leads us to act virtuously is mainly love: ‘The *no concern* view of Christian humility that I am trying to reclaim and defend takes it as axiomatic that the proper Christian motive of virtuous action is not pride, but love.’<sup>64</sup> On this view, love for God and reliance on him mainly make us virtuous, and our duty consists primarily in keeping sight of the good itself. As I have said in Chapter 5, for those who take the ST, the act of aiming at doing good and the commitment to the related beliefs shapes the search for truth. It is their commitment to the ultimate end, which is the good itself, that allows them to perfect the mean they employ to that end.

These religiously inspired accounts of intellectual humility suggest that, if one is not concerned about the necessity to give an adequate account of oneself, then one avoids both the self-referential contradiction and the circularity that characterize the abovementioned accounts of intellectual humility.

Turning back to an epistemological approach to these matters, it can be said that the results of the theological reflection to which I have just referred also characterize the ST as well as at least one virtue epistemology account of intellectual humility, which has recently been proposed by D. Pritchard.

He lists three accounts of intellectual humility, to the first two of which I have already referred above. They are the ‘ignorance proposal,’ according to which intellectually humble people ‘really do imagine that they are somehow “lesser” than they in fact are,’ and the ‘accuracy proposal,’ which involves ‘a *correct* assessment of the extent of one’s achievements and abilities.’ He then advances his proposal, the ‘non-egotist proposal:’

Humility involves lacking those characteristic dispositions involved in excessive self-regard, such as conceit, arrogance, haughtiness, and so on. In contrast, on this view, humility involves the essentially *other*-directed dispositions of, for example, helping others behind the scenes without seeking the credit for doing so. This is in contrast to the previous two proposals which are in effect self-regarding stances, in that they are focussed on one’s own assessment of one’s achievements and abilities. Note that it is important to the non-egotist proposal that these other-regarding dispositions arise out of a genuine respect for others, and a love of the greater good more generally. For example, superficially displaying the relevant dispositions for, say, merely strategic reasons would not be a genuine manifestation of humility...its

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<sup>63</sup> Dunnington, p. 135.

<sup>64</sup> Dunnington, p. 126.

manifestation involves characteristic dispositions that are rooted in appropriate motivational states.<sup>65</sup>

This long citation should help the reader see the originality of Pritchard's proposal as well as its closeness to the ST. For Pritchard, the first two accounts are both ego-centric and perfectly compatible with epistemic arrogance. As he rightly points out, 'owning one's limitations,' for example, 'could be entirely compatible with being dismissive of others' in case one gives an accurate account of oneself and find oneself intellectually superior.<sup>66</sup> Like the ST, Pritchard's 'non-egotist proposal,' instead, does not pay attention to oneself and one's own abilities. This account of intellectual humility, therefore, escapes the self-referential contradiction and the circularity I mentioned above. Furthermore, again like the ST, the 'non-egotist view,' if arises out of appropriate motivational states, e.g. a love for the truth, which are constitutive of a good intellectual character, genuinely promotes a range of behaviours such as 'considering the other person's reasons for thinking otherwise' as well as 'being willing to respectively discuss the issue further.'<sup>67</sup>

It remains, however, a substantial difference from the ST, which is incisively manifested by another behaviour Pritchard lists with the ones I have mentioned above. For him, the intellectually humble person must show 'the willingness to change her mind if that is demanded by the evidence.'<sup>68</sup> Obviously enough, this is plausible from the viewpoint of mere epistemology but is not acceptable from the perspective of the ST. Those who take the ST commit themselves to beliefs that, no matter whether rightly or wrongly, they are by no means ready to abandon, even if the available evidence were against them.

Pritchard may rightly observe that when he refers to the willingness to change one's mind if that is demanded by the evidence, he is referring to beliefs and not to religious convictions, which, at root, are not a matter of belief. He may agree that one is not obliged to be open-minded about one's hinge commitments,<sup>69</sup> which may render his view similar to the ST. These commitments, however, are exempt from doubt to anybody, namely, they cannot genuinely be doubted. Unlike religious convictions, therefore, they are reconcilable with mere epistemology.

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<sup>65</sup> Pritchard, *Intellectual Humility and the Epistemology of Disagreement*, p. 6.

<sup>66</sup> Pritchard, *Intellectual Humility and the Epistemology of Disagreement*, p. 10.

<sup>67</sup> Pritchard, *Intellectual Humility and the Epistemology of Disagreement*, p. 9.

<sup>68</sup> Pritchard, *Intellectual Humility and the Epistemology of Disagreement*, p. 9. Here is

Pritchard's view in more details: 'According to the non-egotist-proposal, intellectual humility...will involve manifesting such dispositions as an openness to other people's viewpoints, a willingness to listen to counterevidence, and the inclination to change one's mind if the epistemic facts require it, where such dispositions are rooted in appropriate motivational states (i.e., genuine intellectual respect for others, and a love of the intellectual good more generally)' (Ibid., p. 7)

<sup>69</sup> See above, Chapter 4, notes 71ff.

At any rate, there are beliefs that not only the champions of the ST but also the supporters of the ‘non-egotist proposal’ would never abandon. Among them, the beliefs without which the proposal in question would be unrecognizable: the belief that one’s interlocutors should always be treated respectfully as well as the belief that it should always be paid attention to other person’s reasons for thinking otherwise. But what happens if the available evidence seems to suggest that such beliefs should be abandoned? What should the virtue epistemologist who champions the ‘egotist account’ do? She can abandon them, but this implies that the account in question is to be also abandoned. Otherwise, she does not abandon them, but this implies for her to become a champion of the ST, which, again, means that the account in question is to be abandoned.

Before concluding this section devoted to virtue epistemology and intellectual humility, let me take into account a possibility to escape the self-referential contradiction that, as I have argued so far, characterizes the virtue epistemology treatment of intellectual humility. Let me refer to A. Hazlet, according to whom there are situations in which ‘one can reasonably believe p’ and at the same time ‘suspend judgment about whether believing p is reasonable for her:’ ‘This will set the stage for an account of the virtue of intellectual humility, on which humility is a matter of your higher-order epistemic attitudes.’<sup>70</sup> J. Adler holds a similar view while trying to reconcile open-mindedness and belief. (Because of this similarity, I take into account this virtue, no matter how close to intellectual humility it is.<sup>71</sup>) According to Adler, in fact, open-mindedness is ‘a second-order attitude toward one’s beliefs as believed, and not just toward the specific proposition believed.’<sup>72</sup>

Like the specific propositions that one believes, however, higher-order attitudes are part of one’s noetic structure, i.e. the set of beliefs one holds.<sup>73</sup> As a consequence, to use Hazlet’s words, intellectual humility should apply to p, which one reasonably held, and at the same time to the suspension of the judgment about whether believing p is reasonable for her.<sup>74</sup> The distinction between higher-order epistemic attitudes and specific propositions believed, therefore, does not seem able to avoid the self-referential contradiction mentioned above.

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<sup>70</sup> Allan Hazlet, ‘Higher-Order Epistemic Attitudes and Intellectual Humility,’ *Episteme* 9 (2012) 3, p. 205.

<sup>71</sup> See above, notes 37ff.

<sup>72</sup> Jonathan Adler, ‘Reconciling Open-Mindedness and Belief,’ *Theory and Research in Education* 2 (2004), p. 130.

<sup>73</sup> ‘Some of my beliefs are, we might say, on the periphery of my noetic structure. I accept them, and may even accept them firmly, but could give them up without much change elsewhere in my noetic structure.’ (Plantinga, ‘Reason and Belief in God,’ p. 50)

<sup>74</sup> Pritchard notes something similar while reflecting on the relationship between singular beliefs and hinge commitments. For him, ‘changes in one’s wider set of beliefs, which can be made in rational ways, can indirectly lead to changes in one’s specific hinge commitments’ (Pritchard, ‘Wittgensteinian Hinge Epistemology and Deep Disagreement,’ p. 7).

Probably because he, too, is persuaded of the ineffectiveness of this distinction, W. Riggs tries to reconcile the two poles of it. While specifically referring to Adler's proposal, he mentions two characteristics of thought aimed at allowing one's second-order awareness to be translated into genuine open-mindedness.

For him, 'the first and most important of these characteristics is the disposition to seek, and when found, accept, self-knowledge about one's cognitive weaknesses and strengths.'<sup>75</sup> This, however, presupposes the ability to defeat bad habits of thought such as bias, overconfidence, wishful thinking, and the like, which means that one should already be open-minded in a way sufficiently effective.<sup>76</sup>

The second of the characteristics mentioned above is self-monitoring. It regards 'the moment that one is facing the challenge to one's beliefs.' Facing such challenges requires that we discover 'our biases and tendencies to overconfidence and wishful thinking,' which are often hidden from us. To become better at discovering these bad habits, so Riggs says, we should expose ourselves 'to a variety of ideas and worldviews,' because

closed-mindedness can be the result of taking one's own assumptions to be obvious and universal, hence incontrovertible. To discover that those assumptions are not shared by people across time, place, and culture can help one see that one's assumptions are controvertible after all.<sup>77</sup>

This, however, relies on only one of the possible views of epistemic peer disagreement, i.e. the conciliatory one. It does not regard non-conciliatory views, which are equally reasonable.<sup>78</sup>

At any rate, however convincing my perplexity about Rigg's view may be, I was only interested in showing that distinctions between first and second-order epistemic attitudes do not seem to be able to salvage a number of accounts of intellectual humility from self-referential contradiction.

### **6.3 Self-referential Contradiction, Circularity, and mere Epistemology**

Forms of self-referential contradiction and circularity seem to beset any type of mere epistemology, which is one of the reasons why mere epistemology should be replaced by the ST.

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<sup>75</sup> Riggs, p. 182.

<sup>76</sup> Riggs himself says that 'to the extent that one defeats these habits of thought, one is more open-minded.' (Riggs, p. 183).

<sup>77</sup> Riggs, p. 183.

<sup>78</sup> See above, Chapter 4, notes 53ff. Also, see above, note 50.

Let me refer to two passages, one from Plato's *Gorgias* and one from Aquinas's *Summa theologiae*, which I have already quoted on a number of occasions. The point Plato makes is that the philosopher should desire to be refuted if they say something that is untrue.<sup>79</sup> Obviously enough, this implies that this very point, i.e. that the philosopher should prefer to be refuted, cannot be refuted. Aquinas claims that one may *want* to continue researching in support of one's beliefs, no matter how convincing contrary evidence is. Various reasons, among which the desire to honor God and do good to the neighbour, may lead one to do so.<sup>80</sup> Both Plato's and Aquinas's passages suggest that there are assumptions and related unjustified beliefs that play a crucial role in the knowing process. J. Newman openly makes this point while distinguishing assent from inference. According to him, 'sometimes assent fails, while the reasons for it and the inferential act which is the recognition of those reasons, are still present and in force.'<sup>81</sup>

Looking at these doctrines and thoughts suggests that we all firmly possess some beliefs, though they are not justified. (When I refer to beliefs that are *justified*, I include among them the ones that we possess intuitively, such as the principle of non-contradiction and the idea that we have two hands. They can in fact be *indirectly* justified by having recourse to demonstrations *ad hominem*.) More importantly, we all seem to firmly hold beliefs that we are not ready to abandon even if more evidence seemed, rightly or not, to support their negation. Instead, we seem to be ready to seek whatever evidence can be found so as to reaffirm our beliefs.

If so, those who take their beliefs as the mere outcome of the intellectual activity end up contradicting themselves. After all, this very belief—that their beliefs are the mere outcome of the intellectual activity—is not the outcome of the intellectual activity.

Furthermore, circularity follows from self-referential contradiction in cases such as Descartes's view that it is *by way of reason* that the correct working of one's *rational* abilities must be evaluated.<sup>82</sup> Descartes falls into a circular argument even when he refers to God's eternal veracity

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<sup>79</sup> See above, Introduction, note 2, and Chapter 4, note 6.

<sup>80</sup> See above, Chapter 3, note 113ff.

<sup>81</sup> Newman, GA, Bk. VI, § 1. This view famously opposed Locke's claim that assent must be given in proportion to the proof one can offer in its support. See above, Chapter 1, Section 1, devoted to Locke, and Section 3, devoted to Newman.

<sup>82</sup> Michael Losonsky notes that 'the idea that the mind needs to be improved and that its improvement requires the mind's reliance on its own devices is a guiding idea of modern philosophy from Descartes to Kant' (Michael Losonsky, *Enlightenment and Action from Descartes to Kant: Passionate Thought* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001], p. 12).

taken as the warrant that allows one to rely on *one's reason*. For Descartes, in fact, we attain God's eternal veracity *by reason*.<sup>83</sup>

This circularity, which is typically attributed to Descartes, may seem attributable to Aquinas as well, though this is incompatible with the thesis, which I have advanced so far, that Aquinas's thought supports the ST. Taking the ST, in fact, implies a-rational commitments to doing good, which is incompatible with the circularity under consideration. (This circularity emerges when no a-rational views are accepted and every view must first be determined via intellectual enterprise.) To continue supporting my thesis that Aquinas's thought offers adequate support to the ST, therefore, I need to explore the idea that the circularity in question may apply to Aquinas's reflection.

While focusing on Aquinas's epistemology, E. Stump reacted against the conviction, which is often ascribed to Aquinas, that his epistemology is foundationalist and internalist.<sup>84</sup> In doing so, Stump argued the presence in Aquinas's thought of 'a species of externalism, with reliabilist elements.' This externalism is to be thought of as theologically grounded: our cognitive capacities are reliable because they were designed by God to enable us to know. Such reliabilism founded on theism explains how Aquinas can be considered at the same time fallibilist and optimist. Aquinas's theism implies that man is a creature of God immersed in the post-fall condition, while God is the omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good creator of all things. Consequently, on the one hand one cannot be sure that the principles of science are incontrovertibly true and that the processes of demonstration are consistent, even if one seems certain of that. On the other hand, one can be greatly optimistic thanks to the conviction that, if our cognitive faculties have been given us by God in order to let us achieve the truth, then 'when we use sense and intellect as God designed them to be used in the environment suited to them', our cognitive capacities will turn out to be *reliable*.

A question, however, emerges before this reading of Aquinas's perspective. Is this perspective due to reason or to faith? It is known that for Aquinas the existence of God seen as the omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good creator of all things can be attained in two ways – philosophical demonstration and Christian faith:

Even as regards those truths about God which human reason could have discovered, it was necessary that man should be taught by a divine revelation; because the truth about God such as reason could discover, would only be known by a few, and that

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<sup>83</sup> See above, Chapter 2, notes 13f.

<sup>84</sup> See Eleonore Stump, 'Aquinas on the Foundations of Knowledge,' *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* Suppl. Vol. 17 (1992), p. 150. The author reacted to Plantinga's and Wolterstorff's attribution of foundationalism to Aquinas. See Plantinga, 'Reason and Belief in God', p. 48. See also Wolterstorff, *Reason Within the Bounds of Religion*, p. 30.

after a long time, and with the admixture of many errors ... It was therefore necessary that besides philosophical science built up by reason, there should be a sacred science learned through revelation.<sup>85</sup>

Likewise, the reliabilist conviction that God—since he is the almighty and perfectly good creator—endows human beings with reliable cognitive faculties can be based either on faith or on our rational faculties. In the latter case, however, such a reliabilism *falls into a vicious circle*. If the reliability of our cognitive faculties depends on what we know of God, this knowledge cannot, at the same time, depend on the reliability of our cognitive faculties. A certain knowledge (in this case, the knowledge of God) cannot be taken as both the premise and conclusion of the same discourse. Therefore, in order to support the Thomistic reliabilism in question, one needs rather to focus on Aquinas's *Christian faith*, and to ascertain if and how such faith can function as a basis for the above-mentioned reliabilism.

According to Stump, 'because God has designed our cognitive capacities in such a way as to make us cognizers of the truth, it is only in our post-fall condition that error, deception, mistake, or even false opinion is a possibility at all.' The idea that sin and the rejection of the relationship with God constitute the real obstacle to knowing belongs to the entire Christian tradition, and Stump rightly refers to it. However, it is not clear if what she refers to is indeed Christian faith. What she openly affirms leads rather to suppose that the theism taken by her as the basis of Thomistic reliabilism is assumed as purely *rational*. Stump says that 'it is plausible ... that a theory of knowledge at least similar to Aquinas's can form part of a non-theistic worldview';<sup>86</sup> moreover, she never mentions the Christian faith, and only on the last page of her essay does she label 'theological' the externalism at issue. But if Stump's reliabilism is really due to a purely rational theism, her position, as I have already shown, ends up by falling into a vicious circle.

Whatever Stump's position may be, Aquinas's theism, on which such reliabilism depends, can be seen as stemming from a-rational commitments to God in faith. His epistemology seems grounded in these commitments, which means that, in Aquinas's view, one should take the ST from mere epistemology.

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<sup>85</sup> *Summa theologiae* I q. 1 a. 1. That is what Aquinas teaches throughout his works, as Ralph McInerny emphasized: 'Early, middle and late in his writings, St. Thomas speaks of a twofold knowledge of God, one that was achieved by pagan philosophers and which is based on knowledge of material things, another that results from God's revealing Himself to men' (Ralph McInerny, 'On Behalf of Natural Theology,' *Proceedings of The American Catholic Philosophical Association*, 54 [1980], p. 64).

<sup>86</sup> Stump, 'Aquinas on the Foundations of Knowledge,' p. 150.

## 6.4 Nowadays all People, including mere Epistemologists, can take the ST

The circularity that has emerged so far is due to the conviction, which mere epistemologists typically hold, that our cognitive faculties are expected to justify all our beliefs, including those that regard *the way these faculties work*. This omni-pervasive role ascribed to the cognitive faculties and to the justification not only causes the circularity under consideration; it also causes the self-referential contradiction that affects mere epistemology. On the one hand, mere epistemology is based on the conviction that every belief should be justified, be this justification indirect—when it regards beliefs possessed only by way of intuition—or direct—when it regards beliefs that can be acquired by way of demonstration. On the other hand, this very conviction is not based on any justification. It is a mere assumption and is accompanied by numerous other assumptions adopted by mere epistemologists.

A considerable number of such assumptions can easily be found in contemporary Western thought. Nowadays nobody would seriously deny the assumption that there are fundamental rights that all human beings, with no exception, should be put in a condition to exercise, regardless of race, religion, political orientations, and the like. From this fundamental assumption many others follow. Nobody would seriously affirm that the force of law and the punishment of those who have committed crimes should resemble violence or revenge. In the same vein, nobody would seriously deny that some forms of freedom, such as those regarding speech, information and sexual orientation, must be promoted. (Note that saying that we would never seriously deny such beliefs means that we are likely to stick to them against contrary evidence, which is what I have seen, from the outset of this dissertation, as the cause of inconclusiveness of debates.)

Someone may object that these commonly accepted assumptions are grounded at least partly in the Christian religion.<sup>87</sup> If so, the idea that they are held and promoted by not only believers would seem no longer sustainable. As a matter of fact, many thinkers consider at least some of the assumptions under consideration a Christian inheritance,<sup>88</sup> and I myself will focus on this below.

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<sup>87</sup> In regard to human rights, for example, Witte and Green say that ‘the international rights and liberties recognized today have millennium-long roots in various religious, philosophical, and cultural traditions.’ Furthermore, they notice the special role played by Christianity in the definition of such rights and liberties when say that various Asian and indigenous traditions ‘have also maintained a healthy skepticism about modern formulations of human rights, and question whether human rights are truly universal or just the hegemonic creations of Western Christianity and Enlightenment liberalism’ (John Witte and Christian M. Green, ‘Introduction.’ In *Religion and Human Rights: An Introduction*, ed. by John Witte and Christian M. Green [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012], pp. 5 and 17).

<sup>88</sup> Wolterstorff answers the question ‘whether there is some integral connection between Christian thought and the idea of natural human rights.’ His response his that ‘there is. The concept of natural human rights and the declaration that there are such rights articulate what was implicit in the Old and New

This, however, is of no interest here. I am interested in highlighting that the assumptions in question belong to contemporary Western culture. In other words, they are accepted by not only believers but also unbelievers and mere epistemologists, be these assumptions grounded in the Christian religion or not. (In this connection, I employ the famous words J. Maritain uttered in response to the question how people belonging to various traditions and religions could agree to a definitive list of human rights: ‘Yes, we agree about the rights *but on condition no one asks us why.*’<sup>89</sup>)

To assess such a widely-held acceptance, let me refer to the beginning of philosophy of history in the Eighteenth century.<sup>90</sup> For the first time, thinkers and philosophers started considering history a continuous development toward more and more valuable achievements. Some of these thinkers, such as J. G. Herder, G. E. Lessing, and J. F. Schiller, employed the concept of *education of mankind* so as to insist on the persuasion that along history some ideas were going to improve human beings morally and intellectually.<sup>91</sup> Implied by this view was the conviction that a rational plan, in some cases coinciding with the religious concept of Providence, guided the whole history.<sup>92</sup> Especially relevant to this perspective was the French revolution, seen by I. Kant, J. G. Fichte, and G. F. W. Hegel, among others, as the event by which history and its rational plan had openly manifested itself. Just a few years after the revolution, Kant said that a plan inscribed into human nature had in this way appeared.<sup>93</sup> After Kant, both Fichte and Hegel were going to mention the

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Testaments. The recognition of natural human rights is one of the great jewels bequeathed by Hebrew and Christian Scripture to humankind.’ (Nicholas Wolterstorff, ‘Christianity and Human Rights.’ In *Religion and Human Rights: An Introduction*, p. 54).

<sup>89</sup> Maritain was speaking in the name of the members of the drafting committee that, after the end of the World War II, was commissioned to prepare the abovementioned list by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

<sup>90</sup> Speaking of ‘the beginning of philosophy of history in the Eighteen century’ does not mean that reflections that are crucial to philosophy of history, such as the one Augustine delivers in his *City of God*, must necessarily belong to modern age. In his book devoted to modern philosophy of history, Michael Murray considers *origin, culmination* and *consummation* of the discipline in question, which for him corresponds to the reflection of Joachim of Flora, Hegel, and Heidegger. See Michael Murray, *Modern Philosophy of History: Its Origin and Destination* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), Chapter 1.

<sup>91</sup> The titles of some of their works are eloquent enough: Herder, *This Too a Philosophy of History for the Formation of Humanity* (1774); Lessing, *The Education of the Human Race* (1780); Schiller, *Letters Upon the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1794).

<sup>92</sup> As has appropriately been noticed, ‘the belief in a teleology of history, that history has a purpose, either a doom or salvation of humankind, is deeply rooted in religious thinking’ (Dmitri Nikulin, *The Concept of History* [London—New York: Bloomsbury, 2017], p. x).

<sup>93</sup> For him, the French revolution had been caused ‘by anything other than a moral disposition within the human race’ (Immanuel Kant, ‘A Renewed Attempt to Answer the Question: “Is the Human Race Continually Improving?”’ In *Kant’s Political Writings*, ed. by Hans Reiss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 182).

limits of that event, which they argued were due to the ‘abstract’ philosophy of Enlightenment.<sup>94</sup> This, however, did not spoil the overall worthiness of that event, by which values doomed to become indisputable in our history had emerged. As a matter of fact, the assumptions that I have mentioned above were emphasized by the French revolution. The equal worthiness of all human beings, with no exception, is openly relatable to the famous triad of ‘freedom, equality, and fraternity’ that accompanied that historic event. From this view, many facts followed, e.g. the abolition of torture, which in contemporary Western society nobody, including mere epistemologists, would seriously question.

This reference to the modern philosophy of history supports my view that mere epistemologists, be they Christian believers or not, more or less implicitly take for granted and stick to a number of assumptions, no matter how convincing contrary evidence may seem to be at first sight. This allows to conclude that, like Christians who are not mere epistemologists, mere epistemologists can be responsible for the inconclusiveness of debates. (Let me make it clear that when I mention Christians ‘who are not mere epistemologists’ and mere epistemologists ‘who may be Christians or not,’ I mean that Christians *qua* Christians are not mere epistemologists, namely, their religious view doesn’t coherently give rise to mere epistemology. And nonetheless, there may be those who are both Christian and mere epistemologists.)

Before moving on to elaborate on this conclusion, however, let me take into account the objection that the assumptions at stake should not be compared to the ones that I considered while focusing on the Christian revelation. In other words, Christians are expected to firmly maintain certain beliefs against contrary evidence *by way of faith*, whereas the assumptions I have considered so far are due to *rational* processes. These assumptions seem to be solidly grounded in a philosophical view of reality and the human nature. As a consequence, their adoption is by no means responsible for the inconclusiveness of debates.

Two responses can be offered to this objection.

My first response has to do with the conviction that history is guided by a rational plan. It is on the basis of this conviction that the abovementioned assumptions, which have been gained through history, can be seen as gained *rationally*. This conviction, however, as I have already pointed out, is based on a typically Christian view, according to which God, with his reason, directs everything,

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<sup>94</sup> According to Hegel, during the French revolution ‘purely abstract philosophical principles were set up’ (Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, p. 449). Hegel considered Kant’s purely formal concept of will among the causes of the fact that the revolution resulted in the Terror.

history included. Because of their faith, Christians were able to see the seemingly chaotic multitude of events that constitute history as many components of a rational plan designed by God. This is confirmed by the fact that pre-Christian philosophers had not considered history a philosophical object. From a strictly rational viewpoint, in fact, there are no reasons for maintaining that the historical events are related to one another by a rational plan such as the divine one mentioned above.<sup>95</sup> In the same vein, modern philosophers of history have constantly elaborated on the Christian idea of Providence, as K. Lowith has argued.<sup>96</sup> (As I said above, many thinkers attribute to the Christian doctrine various assumptions that are widely accepted in contemporary Western society. I have also said, however, that I am only interested in assessing the crucial role these assumptions may play in epistemology, regardless of the possibility that they are rooted in the Christian doctrines.)

My second response is that some of the abovementioned assumptions cannot be seen as rationally justified, be their justification *ad hominem* or not. In Chapter 5, I have assumed that adopting the SA should be justified whereas adopting the NA does not need any justification. Obviously enough, this assumption perfectly coincides with the fact that mere epistemology is *taken for granted* in the field of religion. If I deny from the outset that a supernatural being may exist and shape the way in which I live my relationship with him or her, and do so because religious belief lacks justification, I am obviously applying the more general idea that any belief must be justified, including when it regards the religious experience. This idea, however, is self-referentially contradictory, though it is the main assumption of mere epistemology. (Let me point out that, given the aim of my reply, being self-referentially contradictory is of no interest. I aim at showing that mere epistemologists adopt assumptions *without justification*, whether or not these assumptions are self-referentially contradictory.)

If my argument is correct, I can conclude that not only believers but also unbelievers and mere epistemologists adopt assumptions because they *want* to and not because they argue in their support. As I have shown above, this conclusion is corroborated by Aquinas's reflection on the

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<sup>95</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that Hegel, who is probably the most representative among philosophers of history, 'conceives of the event of the Christian Incarnation as the key to the philosophical understanding of history' (John Walker, 'Comment on the History of Religion and the Absolute Religion. In *Thought and Faith in the Philosophy of Hegel*, ed. by John Walker [Dordrecht: Springer, 1991], p. 32).

<sup>96</sup> Löwith's renowned thesis is that the various forms of modern philosophy of history developed a secularized Providence: 'The modern world is as Christian as it is un-Christian... The whole moral and intellectual, social and political, history of the West is to some extent Christian, and yet it dissolves Christianity by the very application of Christian principles to secular matters' (Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* [Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1949], pp. 201f.

relationship between assent and consideration as well as Newman's separation between assent and inference.<sup>97</sup>

Needless to say, adopting certain assumptions and sticking to them even against contrary evidence is not necessarily due to the will *to do good*. Of course, since the subject here under consideration is the ST, I tend to only consider the commitment to promoting one's spiritual betterment. It is opportune to point out, however, that modern philosophy has not only emphasized the emergence of undeniable values such as the assumptions mentioned above. It has also individuated the other side of the coin, i.e., the existence of bodies of beliefs to which there are those who stick, regardless of contrary evidence, and do so because of various interests, especially economic ones. This is the theory of 'ideology,' which emerges from Marx's philosophy.<sup>98</sup> Although Marx did not offer an unambiguous definition of the concept at stake, and his interpreters have to infer definitions from his use of the word, ideology may plausibly be thought of as a form of reasoning that, as B. Parekh says, is 'systematically biased in its orientation' and 'justificatory in its implications.'<sup>99</sup>

From this, two substantial considerations follow.

First, Marx's theory of ideology, when combined with Aquinas's and Newman's reflections that I have mentioned above, confirms the thesis that mere epistemology, on closer inspection, is grounded in a self-referential contradiction. On the one hand, their practitioners declare that one should accept the outcome of the intellectual activity, whatever it shall be; on the other hand, the very statement that one should accept the outcome of the intellectual activity, whatever shall be, is not the outcome of intellectual research. In other words, mere epistemologists' will plays a crucial role in the choices they make, which means that, before contrary evidence, no matter how convincing it is, they will continue reflecting in search for new evidence that can reconfirm their original view.

Innumerable occurrences of this attitude can be found throughout the history of ideas. In Chapter 5, I have made reference to Descartes's attempt to depict reality in a way that is objective though it seems at the same time due to his will to know from God's point of view.<sup>100</sup> I may also mention the

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<sup>97</sup> See above, notes 80f.

<sup>98</sup> To focus on the concept of ideology, the scholars of Marx usually refer to *The German Ideology*, which Marx wrote in 1845-6 and was not published in full until 1932.

<sup>99</sup> Bhikhu Parekh, *Marx's Theory of Ideology* (1982) (London and New York: Routledge 2015), p. v. Let me add another definition, according to which ideology is 'social in origin, illusory in content, and serving class interests' (Steven Lukes, *Marxism and Morality* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985], p. 3).

<sup>100</sup> See above, Chapter 5, note 33.

innumerable and endless debates on the existence of God. They have been conducted by believers, unbelievers, and mere epistemologists. (As I have already said above, both unbelievers and believers can act as mere epistemologists. Unbelievers openly declare that they act in this way. After all, they are unbelievers precisely because they don't want to believe any divine revelation that is not (yet) justified. Believers act as mere epistemologists to the extent that they, too, intend to justify their beliefs while participating in debates that involve their faith. While debating, a believer may in fact decide to not accept any religious belief that has not previously been justified.)

Second, everyone seems to take for granted a-rational commitments and related unjustified beliefs. Marx's reflection on ideology as well as the debates on the existence of God, which I have mentioned above, are probably the best example of the fact that the believers who take the ST are not the only ones who want to stick to their beliefs, regardless of contrary evidence.<sup>101</sup> However, one can take the ST to the extent that the assumptions they adopt lead them *to do good and promote their spiritual betterment*. I have shown so far that significant values have appeared along modern history. Equality, freedom and fraternity among all human beings are values whose stable goodness no one would seriously question nowadays. Those who want to stick to these values, no matter how convincing contrary evidence may appear to be, can appropriately be seen as adopters of the ST.

Adopting the ST, however, implies much more than the adhesion to the abovementioned values and their related beliefs. However sincere such adhesion may be, the values in question are too general, whereas acting on their basis is possible only *in particular circumstances*. Those who commit to the values at stake can consistently take the ST to the extent that they equally commit to a well-structured body of beliefs, which allows them to apply those values to the particular circumstances in which to act. Needless to say, for believers this is much easier than for unbelievers. Believers enjoy a body of beliefs, which they receive from long and established traditions. By contrast, unbelievers who only rely on the values mentioned above, need to locate by themselves the more particular occurrences of those values, which is a hard task.

At any rate, although the task in question requires much less from believers than unbelievers, both of them can successfully take the ST to the extent that they are committed to doing good and promoting their own spiritual growth. This commitment is a *personal* choice that depends on *one's* will to do good. As I have shown in Chapter 5 while treating religious diversity, the existence of a

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<sup>101</sup> Descartes took part in these debates in a memorable way. According to Amelie O. Rorty, he was directed to write his *Meditations* by his will to keep 'running through the proofs for the existence of God over and over, over and over and over.' (Amelie O. Rorty, 'Descartes on Thinking with the Body.' In *Cambridge Companion to Descartes*, ed. by John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 386).

well-established body of beliefs certainly supports one's choices and facilitates their realization. However, improving one's spirituality and taking the ST does not automatically proceed from one's taking part in a specific tradition. Instead, it first and foremost depends on one's will and determination.

### **6.5 Those who take the ST are in the best possible Condition to achieve partial Conclusiveness**

On the view that I have outlined in the previous section, full inconclusiveness seems to be the only outcome when believers, on the one hand, and unbelievers and mere epistemologists, on the other hand, come to discuss the credibility of Christian faith. (As I have already said, believers, too, may act as mere epistemologists. Unlike believers, however, unbelievers *always* act in this way, because they take for granted that the NA is the starting point of their reflection. It can therefore be said that, in regard to religion, the difference between unbelievers and mere epistemologists disappears.)

In Chapter 5, however, I have shown that, when believers take the ST, they may also significantly benefit research and debates, which means that inconclusiveness may at least partly be overcome. Here I intend to show how exactly this occurs. (It goes without saying that, since I have already shown that mere epistemologists, too, can in some cases take the ST, that which I am about to argue regards them as well.)

First, inconclusiveness is due to the fact that interlocutors firmly want to stick to their beliefs. It, therefore, depends on the degree of firmness with which they hold their beliefs. The more they want to stick to them, the more inconclusive their debates will be. Aquinas's argument, which I have mentioned above, supports this view. For him, the *actual consideration* of that which is evident is in some cases due to love for God and the neighbour.<sup>102</sup> As I have shown in Chapter 3, for Aquinas this love seems to always accompany faith, and both love and faith can be experienced at various levels of intensity. It is therefore possible to conclude that the more the faithful love and trust God, the more they want to stick to their belief in him. Something analogous can be said of unbelievers and mere epistemologists. In fact, it is presumable that everybody will stick to their beliefs in proportion to the love they have for them and what is implied by them. An atheist, who intensely loved his only child, and equally intensely suffered for having involuntarily caused her premature death, may want to firmly stick to his conviction that he is not responsible for what happened and that a perfectly loving God should not have permitted such an evil. A famous atheist, whose books

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<sup>102</sup> See above, notes 80 and 97.

were bestsellers, will presumably love reputation, success and money such books provided. It is equally presumable to expect him or her to stick to atheism in proportion to the love s/he has for the reputation, success and money in question.

Second, inconclusiveness also depends on one's noetic structure.<sup>103</sup> I mean that the more crucial to the noetic structure a certain belief is, the more inconclusive the debate regarding that belief will be. The last example I have given above may be considered here. It allows us to see that there are beliefs which are more crucial to one's noetic structure than others. To the bestselling atheist mentioned above the belief that God does not exist is certainly more important than the belief that the hiddenness argument, for example, is correct. The latter may be very useful to support the former; however, it can be replaced by other arguments, whereas the former cannot be replaced by theism, unless the atheist in question stops being an atheist.

Before proceeding to elaborate on the idea that inconclusiveness comes in degrees, let me consider a remarkable objection that may be raised against the two reasons that I have just advanced. Both of them are based on the persuasion that all are in possession of a noetic structure, which is constituted by an indefinite number of beliefs. (Strictly speaking, I referred to the noetic structure while advancing *the second* reason. However, the existence of various beliefs is implied by the first reason as well. If one loves some beliefs more than others, this obviously implies that one is in possession of a number of beliefs.) This persuasion implies that the beliefs in question are distinct from each other and are not subject to historical evolution, which means that they may be replaced by others and be excluded by one's noetic structure but would nonetheless remain defined once and for all. From this follows that, when in ordinary language we say that beliefs evolve, we only mean that the subject who holds them changed his or her mind and now holds other beliefs, which are more or less slightly different from the ones s/he held before. Although this persuasion may appear to be simply obvious, it is based on a concept of truth which is not unquestionable, i.e. the concept of truth as correspondence between a statement and a certain state of affairs that exist independently of their representations.<sup>104</sup>

Is it therefore possible—so the objection at stake may run—that, once the concept of truth adopted has changed, the two reasons I have advanced above are no longer acceptable? Let me consider the

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<sup>103</sup> See above, note 73.

<sup>104</sup> I am referring to the classical theory of correspondence, which traces back to Aristotle and his dictum: 'To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, or of what is not that it is not, is true' (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1011b25-8, tr. by William D. Ross, in *The Works of Aristotle*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1928)).

alternative concept of truth that traces back to idealist thinkers.<sup>105</sup> As is known, it was especially Hegel who rejected the concept of truth as correspondence that had been spontaneously adopted until then. For him, this idea was unacceptable because it implied the conviction that the object, which the subject knows, is separate from the knowing subject. Hegel labeled this conviction ‘abstract’ and took it as due to the ‘abstract intellect.’ Unlike ‘speculative reason,’ the abstract intellect is unable to see that one is strictly related to the things one knows.<sup>106</sup> When we know certain things, these things, on closer inspection, are the outcome of a relationship that along experience and history has developed between us and them. Truth shouldn’t therefore be taken as the correspondence between us and the things that are allegedly placed before us. Truth should instead *include* the history of our relationship with the things in question and should consequently undergo constant revisions due to the prosecution of the historical process at stake. This, however, seems affected by self-referential contradiction. Hegel’s concept of truth, in fact, does not seem to be subject to further modifications. Once it has been advanced, it, too, seems to be placed before us, as separate from us, and susceptible of being known as something other than us. Furthermore, that which we say about it seems to remain constantly true. Not surprisingly, his interpreters constantly re-propose Hegel’s theory as the German philosopher proposed it.<sup>107</sup>

Let me now elaborate on the idea that inconclusiveness comes in degrees, which explains how those who adopt the ST can (partly) achieve conclusiveness. As I have already said, one’s noetic structure is not only constituted by beliefs that debaters consider undeniable. It is also constituted by beliefs

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<sup>105</sup> I am aware that various alternative concepts of truth have been proposed (for an overview, see Richard Schantz, ‘Introduction.’ In *Current Issues in Theoretical Philosophy*, ed. by Richard Schantz, vol. I: *What is truth?* (Berlin—New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2002), pp. 1-8). However, on the basis of the comparison with the concept that emerges especially from Hegel’s reflection—which in turn traces back to Kant’s—I am inclined to believe that the correspondence theory, which grounds in metaphysical realism, is, all things considered, preferable to its various anti-realist objections—they all trace back to idealism and Kant. For an insightful defence of the correspondence theory, see Richard Fumerton, *Realism and the Correspondence Theory of Truth* [Lanham-Boulder-New York-Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002]). That which I am going to say about Hegel’s alternative concept of truth coincides with some reasons Fumerton mentions in defence of the correspondence theory. See below, note 107.

<sup>106</sup> ‘When Hegel refers to something as abstract, he means that it is being treated as separate, drawn apart from some unity or whole to which it properly belongs...To conceive a thing abstractly is to conceive it as merely immediate, not mediated by its relation to some larger whole’ (Philip Grier, ‘The Speculative Concrete.’ In *Hegel, History, and Interpretation*, ed. by Shaun Gallagher [Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997], p. 178).

<sup>107</sup> As I said above (see note 105), my line of reasoning substantially coincides with the reasons which Fumerton employs against anti-realist concepts of truth. For him, ‘anti-realists invariably either implicitly reintroduce into their own views the category of representation-independent fact their position commits them to rejecting, or their view degenerates into incoherence by becoming inexpressible.’ Fumerton, too, believes that, in the end, there is no possibility to understand alternative conceptions of truth without reintroducing the correspondence conception: ‘Indeed, it is through a conception of truth as correspondence that one can coherently capture what truth is suggested by anti-realist positions’ (Fumerton, *Realism and the Correspondence Theory of Truth*, p. xi).

that may be replaced by other beliefs in proportion to their remoteness from the beliefs that the debaters consider undeniable. Consequently, every debater will proportionally be ready to change their beliefs once confronted with contrary evidence.

Although this change of beliefs may be possible to all and not only to adopters of the ST, it seems hard to deny that it is especially true for the adopters in question. One who takes the ST, in fact, promotes the best possible condition to do research and develop discussions, because one's aim is first and foremost one's spiritual betterment. This includes the will and the ability to benefit one's interlocutors, and not the attainment of truth, let alone the demonstration that one's interlocutor is wrong. I have already made this point in Chapter 5 while treating how those who take the ST and believe that only their religion is true may treat the followers of other religions. I have reasoned that benefiting one's interlocutors implies valuing their views, which obviously favours the opportunity to increase mutual understanding. According to Aquinas, the believers should be guided (not only by the love of God but also) by the love of one's neighbor. In other words, debaters should take part in the good itself, and put aside any other goods, especially those that could spoil the search for truth: the exaggerated confidence in one's capabilities, the lack of consideration of the opinions of others, the precipitation in coming to conclusions (especially out of the desire to receive rewards for what one has done) and the like.

Something analogous can be said with regard to those mere epistemologists who, more or less implicitly and against the main assumption of mere epistemology, take the ST, which means that they stick to the widespread values that I have mentioned above. If one does research bearing in mind the aim of equality and fraternity among human beings, then one commits oneself to respecting one's interlocutors and their views. This means that, given the assumption of equality, one is always ready to learn from others, as I have shown in Chapter 3 while considering Aquinas's conviction that 'no doctrine is so false as not to have some truth mingled with error.'<sup>108</sup> Let me point out that substantial evidence is brought to this conviction by another typical aspect of Aquinas's customary way of conducting debates. While replying to objections, he doesn't usually reject them. On the contrary, he typically highlights their validity, and then shows that the validity in question is only partial and needs reconsidering from a wider point of view.

In a similar vein, bearing in mind the ideal of universal fraternity should lead one to conduct research and debates with the aim of benefiting one's interlocutors. This is likely to guarantee that nothing, including the possession of truth, is used against one's interlocutors. The famous *pensé* by

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<sup>108</sup> See above, Chapter 3, note 105.

Pascal, which I have already quoted in Chapter 5, immediately comes to mind: ‘We make an idol of truth itself.’<sup>109</sup> Although Pascal does not explicitly say that truth can be used against others, he would clearly accept that this is possible. For him, in fact, an idol denies charity, which means that an idol, which can sometimes coincide with the truth, leads humans to do evil.

May it be objected that humans are unable to effectively practice virtues apart from religion? After all, Augustine famously claimed that one cannot love things rightly without ordering them to God.<sup>110</sup> If things are not ordered to God, then they are ordered to self, which is the *superbia*, pride,<sup>111</sup> that Augustine says pervades pagan virtues.<sup>112</sup> In Augustine’s footsteps, Luther goes so far as to reject any virtue, not only false virtue. For him, habituation should be replaced by complete passivity before grace.<sup>113</sup> Augustine’s view of pagan virtues, however, seems to be significantly more nuanced:

Augustine bequeathed to subsequent Christian thought a positive account of the Christian life as a life of habituation in virtue, where Christ is the ultimate exemplar of virtue and where imitation of that exemplar is understood simultaneously in terms of the Christian’s aspiration and effort and in terms of divine agency in bringing Christians into conformity with Christ.<sup>114</sup>

This seems to somewhat prepare Aquinas’s view, which

represents the synthesis of Aristotelian and Augustinian traditions of reflection on these issues. Aquinas offers an account of pagan virtue as true if imperfect, directed not toward our true final end but at least toward proximate ends capable of being directed beyond themselves to our true final end.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> See above, Chapter 5, note 5.

<sup>110</sup> See Jennifer Herdt, *Putting on Virtue. The Legacy of the Splendid Vices* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 75.

<sup>111</sup> Augustine ‘charges that pagan virtue not only lacks the right conception of the end, but also includes a mistaken conception of the end, because it expresses arrogance (*superbia*)’ (Terence Irwin, ‘Splendid Vices? Augustine For and Against Pagan Virtues,’ *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 8 (1999), p. 124).

<sup>112</sup> See Herdt, p. 49.

<sup>113</sup> In Luther’s view, as Herdt points out, ‘Christian righteousness requires the complete interruption of ordinary processes of habituation in the virtues and a foundational moment of pure passivity in which human agency is wholly abandoned’ (Herdt, p. 15).

<sup>114</sup> Herdt, p. 12.

<sup>115</sup> Herdt, p. 12. Equally important is to remark that, when Aquinas affirms that ‘even sinners and infidels can perform many good actions, he agrees with Augustine that it is impossible for someone to live a virtuous life if his natural powers are unassisted by grace’ (Thomas Osborne, ‘The Augustinianism of Thomas Aquinas’s Moral Theology,’ *The Thomist* 67 (2003), p. 283)

Although Aquinas's view of pagan virtue is not exempt of ambiguity,<sup>116</sup> the idea that it is a balanced one seems convincing.<sup>117</sup> Herdt describes how Aquinas treats gratitude. He appeals to Seneca, according to whom 'he that hastens to repay, is animated with a sense, not of gratitude but of indebtedness' and 'he that wishes to repay too soon, is an unwilling debtor, and an unwilling debtor is ungrateful.' Following Aquinas's treatment, Herdt notices that, from a Christian viewpoint,

pagan gratitude will fall short of perfect gratitude ... insofar as pagan gratitude is not gratitude to God ... But pagan gratitude to family and community is nevertheless open to being ordered beyond family and community to God; it is not a prideful assertion of self-sufficiency. It is thus true gratitude, not simply a counterfeit, ordered to self, that would undermine even the possibility of choosing virtuous actions for their own sake.<sup>118</sup>

Precisely from a merely Christian viewpoint, therefore, it is possible to recognize the legitimacy of virtues practiced by those who do not have faith. This is even more convincing when we consider that debates on how to sincerely and effectively practice the virtues do not regard only unbelievers. Believers, too, should be stimulated to ask themselves if their way of acting is really consistent with their faith. Herdt appropriately notices that 'not only does Aquinas carve out conceptual space for true virtue among pagans but he also recognizes the possibility of merely apparent virtue among Christians.'<sup>119</sup> Not surprisingly, early modern debates on these topics occurred in a Christian world, and the severe criticism expressed by Luther was directed against both Pagans and Christians, as shown by his attack against both 'putting on virtue' and 'putting on Christ.'<sup>120</sup>

This emphasizes the ability of both believers and unbelievers to seriously commit themselves to doing good and achieving their own spiritual betterment. As I have already said, a body of beliefs and an established tradition certainly help one to make the right choice. The love for good and the commitment to acting accordingly, however, is a personal matter. It comes in degrees, which is why

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<sup>116</sup> 'Aquinas's generous account of pagan virtue relies on distinctions between acquired and infused, moral and theological virtues that prove ambiguous and that thus leave his synthesis vulnerable to later critique' (Herdt, p. 12). Thus, it is not surprising that 'Aquinas's solution is capable of being interpreted in divergent ways. ... it might be seen as reinforcing the separation between natural and supernatural already present within scholastic thought... On a contrasting interpretation... pagan virtue ... is true but imperfect, resting on an incomplete grasp of our final end' (Herdt, p. 76). After all, lending itself to various and sometimes mutually incompatible interpretations is typical of Aquinas's thought more generally: see above, Chapter 3, notes 2ff.

<sup>117</sup> Referring to the contrasting interpretations mentioned above (see previous note), Herdt claims: 'My sympathies are with some version of the latter reading' (Herdt, p. 76).

<sup>118</sup> Herdt, pp. 78f.

<sup>119</sup> Herdt, p. 80.

<sup>120</sup> See Herdt, p. 2.

the act of taking the ST and the success that this can provide in epistemology, i.e. the partial conclusiveness here under consideration, occurs in proportion to such love and commitment.

The personal nature of the commitment in question also provides an explanation of why it does not seem possible to verify whether or not conclusiveness is caused by the ST. If conclusiveness is due to the commitment to doing good, and this commitment has a personal nature, then conclusiveness is due to personal motivations. Consequently, demonstrating, i.e. publicly verifying, whether conclusiveness is due to the act of taking the ST or to other circumstances is a hard enterprise. To this end, one should be able to assess what occurs in the interiority of people involved in investigations and debates, which is obviously impossible.

At any rate, the verification at stake is of no interest here. I am only interested in showing that taking the ST provides the best possible conditions to achieve conclusiveness.

When all is said and done, can it be hypothesized that the mutual trust and understanding, which both believers and unbelievers generate by taking the ST, may induce one's opponent to abandon the assumptions that one considers undeniable? After all, this seems to be consistent with the ST if one is convinced that one's assumptions are true and exclude their negation. Believers should be expected to hope that they will in the end be able to *convert* unbelievers, and so should unbelievers in reverse order. A problem, therefore, would emerge. Both believers and unbelievers would be tempted to convince their interlocutors and make of this end the ultimate end of their researching and debating. Obviously enough, this would contradict the ST. The ST, in fact, is first and foremost aimed at one's moral and spiritual promotion, which, in the case of believers, is joined by one's subordination to God. It is clear, therefore, that the desire that one's interlocutor may change their crucial assumptions should not become the end of the ST.<sup>121</sup>

## **6.6 One final Consideration on the Distinctions between Believers and mere Epistemologists once they implicitly take the ST**

I have so far argued that both believers and unbelievers or more generally mere epistemologists can take the ST. It remains to show some distinctions between them. These distinctions are due to the

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<sup>121</sup> This idea or desire should remain a consequence of one's flourishing, and not its antecedents. To mistake means for the end is not acceptable, which is the mistake ascribed by Augustine to Pagans. Herdt refers to Augustine's idea that 'even the best Romans ... fail to recognize that honor and glory "must be the consequences of virtue not its antecedents;" honor and glory should be put to use in the promotion of virtue, not the reverse' (Herdt, p. 49; cit. from *City of God* V, 12).

fact that, unlike unbelievers, believers search for a good that coincides with *someone* and not just *something*.

From this, two substantial differences follow.

Firstly, let me consider the desire that I have mentioned at the end of the last section, namely, the desire that one's interlocutor may change their mind. Believers can serenely engage in debates and hope that their opponents may one day be graciously provided with faith exactly as they—the believers—were gifted in the past. In this sense, believers may go on to promote their intellectual activity, and any other activity as well, by only caring about their own moral and spiritual promotion, which for them consists in subordinating everything to God's will. Furthermore, they may be convinced that it is their will that God considers, and not the outcomes of their actions.<sup>122</sup> As a result, they may be persuaded that what they haven't yet been able to put into practice will later be realized by God. A less comfortable condition seems instead to be the one in which unbelievers find themselves. Since they do not trust in any superior being who may remedy their limitations, they will inevitably experience anxiety and suffering before such limitations and their incapability of converting the believer to unbelief.

Secondly, a circularity problem seems to emerge in regard to believers, and not unbelievers, when we see that believers typically believe that God exists because—so they say—God himself led them to believe. As J. Bishop says, 'believers are to accept theological truths on divine authority, yet the truth that *there is such an authority* (historically mediated as the relevant tradition maintains) is amongst those very truths that are to be accepted on divine authority.'<sup>123</sup> (This is the way the faithful *typically* believe. There is another way for them to support their faith, which avoids the circular argument in question. It consists in demonstrating that God exists. This, however, regards only a few of them. Furthermore, even in regard to them, it is hard to believe that grounding the Christian belief on a previous demonstration coincides with the Christian faith, as it is usually taken.<sup>124</sup>)

I intend to propose a solution to the problem in question. Before proceeding, however, let me advance two considerations. First, this subject may seem of peripheral importance here, and the

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<sup>122</sup> According to Aquinas, 'virtue is praised because of the will, not because of the ability: and therefore if a man fall short of equality which is the mean of justice, through lack of ability, his virtue deserves no less praise, provided there be no failing on the part of his will' (*Summa theologiae* II-II q. 81 a. 6 ad1).

<sup>123</sup> John Bishop, 'Faith.' In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://plato.stanford.edu/cgi-bin/encyclopedia/archinfo.cgi?entry=faith> (accessed on 15 July 2019).

<sup>124</sup> See above, Chapter 3, notes 43ff.

time that I will devote to its treatment may consequently appear to be excessive. In reality, rejecting the idea that the view maintained by believers falls into circularity turns out to be of primary importance for my purposes here. Otherwise, we should accept the identification of the good searched for by believers with *something* and not *someone*. Consequently, the fundamental distinction between believers, whose ultimate end is God, and unbelievers, whose ultimate end is the good, would disappear. Second, I argue that the circularity problem in question can be dismissed by referring to Aquinas's thought. This is especially effective because Aquinas is often considered a supporter of the abovementioned idea that, before believing, the faithful should ground their belief in the *demonstration* of God's existence, which is a strategy that avoids the circularity in question.

I agree that, for Aquinas, demonstrating God's existence supports the reasonableness of faith usefully and meritoriously.<sup>125</sup> From this, however, does not follow that, to believe in God, one needs to previously demonstrate the preambles; otherwise, faith would at least partly be caused by reason, which is unacceptable to Aquinas. This would manifestly contradict his view of the causes of faith, according to which arguments and miracles are only probable proofs in support of the assent to divine revelation.<sup>126</sup> It would also contradict Aquinas's conviction that, among believers, only a few, and not without mistakes, are able to attain a demonstration of God's existence.

I have already mentioned a convincing reading of Aquinas's preambles proposed by G. de Broglie decades ago. According to de Broglie, when he discusses preambles of faith, Aquinas only refers to propositional faith, i.e. the articles of the Creed.<sup>127</sup> In other words, if faith is taken as a merely intellectual assent to the revealed truths, preambles constitute a necessary logical premise. In contrast, if the act of faith is taken as an assent that is due to the will to believe, which is in turn due to divine grace, then no logical relationship is taken into account, and no logical premise is required.

On the basis of this view, faith is not only an intellectual act. It is also God's gift, which causes its (faith's) firmness. From this follows that, to the extent that faith is a matter of intellectual contents, we *need* to previously be provided with some preambles, which we do not need to firmly believe. It also follows that only divine grace can provide believers with the firmness that Aquinas considers unavoidable in regard to faith. We may, therefore, say that, to believe in God, we need *two factors* that are mutually related to one another. On the one hand, we have to possess beliefs that allow us to get a sense of divine

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<sup>125</sup> See above, Chapter 3, note 107.

<sup>126</sup> See above, Chapter 3, note 75.

<sup>127</sup> See above, Chapter 3, note 44.

revelation, no matter how firmly they are held. We wouldn't even understand that a God is revealing himself to us, if we didn't believe that a God may exist. On the other hand, we need divine grace to firmly adhere to the Christian belief, including God's existence.

Not surprisingly, for Aquinas there is a knowledge of the preambles that is somewhat intermediate between demonstration and faith. It is the knowledge that all people seem to possess, though 'generally' and 'confusedly.' It coincides neither with faith, which regards only believers, nor with natural theology, which regards only educated people. (This is why I do not agree with McInerny's view of this subject. Like him, I believe that the preambles are indispensable; unlike him, I do not believe that it is philosophy that provides us with them.<sup>128</sup>)

C. Rosental has made an attempt to respond to the problem of circularity here under consideration in a way that implies the abovementioned knowledge.<sup>129</sup> He refers to a passage from *On Truth* and notes that for Aquinas, in order to believe in God, 'one can accept that God exists *with some hesitation* ... such a person does not yet have faith, because "God exists" is accepted only hesitantly.'<sup>130</sup> As a consequence, we may say that

(H) To believe in God, God's existence is to be believed, no matter how hesitantly.

For Rosental, Aquinas seems to offer in this way a solution to the abovementioned problem of circularity. God's existence can be believed 'in a general and confused way,' as Aquinas sometimes claims to support the idea that God's existence doesn't necessarily need to be held by demonstration or faith.<sup>131</sup> Practically every person may in this way be provided with the preambles of faith. As a consequence, (H) may adequately replace both the claim that we can believe preambles only by way of demonstration (D) and the one that we can believe preambles only by way of faith (F). Unlike (D), (H) does not contradict Aquinas's teaching on faith and reason; unlike (F), it does not fall into a circular argument. If faith is both an intellectual assent to revelation and an act that is due to the

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<sup>128</sup> 'Flawed understandings of the nature of Christian *philosophy*, a tendency to disparage the natural in favor of the supernatural, the suggestion that the *philosophy* of St. Thomas is to be found only in his theological works, and cannot be separated from them...had the effect of weakening the notion of the *praeambula fidei*' (McInerny, *Praeambula fidei*, p. 32, emphasis mine).

<sup>129</sup> See Creighton Rosental, *Lessons from Aquinas: A Resolution of the Problem of Faith and Reason* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2011).

<sup>130</sup> Rosental, p. 229, my emphasis. This is the passage he cites from *On Truth*, q. 14 a. 9 ad 9: 'Someone can begin to believe what he did not believe before but which he held with some hesitation (*existimatio debilis*).'

<sup>131</sup> 'To know that God exists in a general and confused way is implanted in us by nature, inasmuch as God is man's beatitude. ... This, however, is not to know absolutely that God exists; just as to know that someone is approaching is not the same as to know that Peter is approaching, even though it is Peter who is approaching.' (*Summa theologiae* I q. 2 a. 1 ad1).

will, which is in turn caused by divine grace, then it is plausible to conclude that, on the one hand, before getting in touch with divine revelation, one needs to be in possession of the preambles, since they enable one to get a sense of the revealed truths, no matter how hesitantly those preambles may be held; on the other hand, one can obtain firm possession of the preambles only by divine grace.

Showing that the circularity, which is usually ascribed to the belief in God, can be dismissed as no problem, is of great importance here. This frees from inconsistency my assumption that the believer's search is for *someone* who is good and not simply *something* that is good. This will also allow me to assess one more difference between believers and unbelievers who take the ST. I intend to show this difference in the next section while arguing that for believers, and not for unbelievers, the ST *promotes* research and debates.

### **6.7 One more final Consideration: the ST promotes Research and Debates**

Both believers and unbelievers, once they have taken the ST, are expected to see the assumptions, which the ST implies and which they stick to, as *orientation* and *criterion* for their search for truth. (Of course, the same can be said of mere epistemologists, given the fact that, though only implicitly, they too stick to their beliefs.) *Orientation*, because adopters of the ST are expected to develop their rational activity in order to confirm their assumptions and clear away objections and criticisms. *Criterion*, because it is on the basis of the agreement or disagreement with such assumptions that they either accept or reject reason's conclusions, respectively.

Beyond orientation and criterion, the assumptions that are implied by the ST can also *promote* research and debates.

In Chapter 5, I have shown that Aquinas maximally trusts human reason, which he considers fully reliable and not susceptible to failure if properly employed. True, human beings and their abilities are afflicted by various types of shortcomings. These shortcomings, however, do not regard the faculties that God has created, but only human *sin*, which makes ineffective their employment. A proper employment of human faculties, therefore, would make them effective, which is why Aquinas relies on them.<sup>132</sup>

If believers rely on their intellectual faculties, then they believe that these faculties, when properly employed, cannot contradict that which as believers they maximally care about, which is the

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<sup>132</sup> See above, Chapter 3, notes 132ff.

complex of assumptions that are due to their faith. Consequently, they will be ready to employ reason in any possible direction, with no fear that rational outcomes may end up contradicting the assumptions due to faith.

Of course, from this does not follow that *no aspects* of such assumptions can be changed. Aquinas offers an antidote against the conviction that whatever the faithful believe is correct: they can simply be wrong when they mistake their own opinions for divine revelation.<sup>133</sup> It remains true, however, that they will firmly believe that at least those assumptions which—they are sure—trace back to divine revelation will never be contradicted by any rational enterprise. If any contradiction arises, then the assumptions at stake will function as criterion, and one will start reasoning again from the beginning.

For believers, therefore, taking the ST promotes research in any direction, in a way that is optimistic and open-minded.

The same, however, does not seem possible to unbelievers. Unlike believers, they cannot appeal to someone who may guarantee that human reason, once appropriately employed, cannot be wrong. Of course, they cannot appeal to rational criteria either, because this would make their argument fall into circularity. They may consequently be fearful of the possibility that the outcomes of their intellectual enterprise may contradict their assumptions, which they firmly adopt and consider indispensable. This will inevitably limit their freedom in exploring whatever lines of reasoning may be promoted by research and debates.

## 6.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have first shown that self-referential contradiction affects mere epistemology. I have then argued that, although with some distinctions, both believers and unbelievers can take the ST. I am now able to conclude that various epistemic benefits can follow.

One benefit consists in the fact that the adoption of good habits, which the act of taking the ST brings with itself, along with the persuasion that neither believers nor unbelievers will give up the fundamental assumptions they disagree on, frees both of them from the anxiety to prevail one over

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<sup>133</sup> See above, Chapter 3, note 30.

the other. Aquinas goes so far as to suggest that, for the sake of a greater good, debaters may sometimes *avoid debates*.<sup>134</sup>

Another benefit for researchers and debaters is that they can achieve partial conclusiveness. It is partial, because it excludes the assumptions mentioned above. It only regards the remainder of human knowledge, which, on closer inspection, is the greatest part of it. Any discussion involves many beliefs, and not only the fundamental ones on which debaters may endlessly continue disagreeing. Consequently, regarding the beliefs that are not the fundamental ones, the debaters in question may achieve conclusiveness to the extent that their knowing processes are directed by good habits. It is true that the partial conclusiveness under consideration is possible to all, not only to adopters of the ST. Adopters of the ST, however, are put in the best possible condition to achieve this conclusiveness. From this follows that, although taking the ST is primarily aimed at one's spiritual betterment rather than success in investigation and debates, it paradoxically turns out to be, from an epistemological viewpoint, preferable to mere epistemology.

One more benefit seems to be available only to believers. Both believers and unbelievers see the assumptions that they consider undeniable as orientation and criterion for the intellectual activity. Only believers, however, seem to be put in a position to *promote* an optimistic and open-minded research. They appeal to *someone* who—so they believe—can assure them that, once appropriately employed, reason cannot be wrong. Consequently, believers will be able to feel free to expand research in any possible direction, without fearing that what they first and foremost care about may be found untrue.

This ability, however, does not merely depend on one's beliefs. It is true that being in possession of a body of beliefs such as consolidated religious doctrines, especially the Christian one, substantially helps to do good and to benefit research and investigations. Doing good and spiritually thriving, however, is first and foremost due to one's will and personal motivations. Being part of a venerable tradition does not automatically make one able to take the ST and improve one's research and investigations.

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<sup>134</sup> While focusing on the circumstances in which to dispute, he considers 'whether those who hear the disputation are instructed and firm in the faith, or simple and wavering'. In regard to those who are simple and wavering, Aquinas again distinguishes between those who 'are provoked and molested by unbelievers, for instance, Jews or heretics, or pagans who strive to corrupt the faith in them, or else they are not subject to provocation in this matter.' In the second case, Aquinas says that 'it is dangerous to dispute in public about the faith, in the presence of simple people, whose faith for this very reason is more firm, that they have never heard anything differing from what they believe. Hence it is not expedient for them to hear what unbelievers have to say against the faith' (*Summa theologiae* II-II q. 10 a. 7).

## CONCLUSION

As I have said in the last note of the last chapter, for a believer such as Aquinas, one should not dispute about faith in public, ‘in the presence of simple people,’ because this may be ‘dangerous.’ The simple people in question, in fact, ‘have never heard anything differing from what they believe. Hence it is not expedient for them to hear what unbelievers have to say against the faith.’

This may seem utterly incomprehensible as well as inconsistent with Aquinas’s view, since he firmly holds that our cognitive faculties, once used appropriately, cannot disprove religious belief. Not surprisingly, he devoted his entire life to the intellectual activity. Why, therefore, does he say that the faithful should miss an opportunity to rationally support the belief in question? The response is that, since for Aquinas the commitment of the faithful to God and the related beliefs is of primary importance, to avoid discussions that in some circumstances may render that commitment less firm is highly advisable.

Of course, this only regards those circumstances in which people who are unable to adequately conduct intellectual investigations and debates are involved. No direct relations, therefore, can be established with the subject of this dissertation, which regards those who are familiar with research and debates.

However, an idea that plays a fundamental role in the present dissertation emerges from what I have just said. It is the conviction that commitments exist which are so vital that the intellectual activity, even if it is aimed at supporting them, should be avoided in case it may reduce the firmness with which they are taken on. To put it otherwise, those commitments should in some circumstances stand alone, though it remains true that they can successfully inspire rational debates.

In this dissertation, I have employed suggestions like this to argue that the intellectual activity may improve once inspired and governed by commitments to spiritual betterment. Taking the ST from mere epistemology, namely, devoting oneself to someone or something, including beliefs, that are seen as able to perfect the whole human person, will consequently perfect any human enterprise, the intellectual activity included.

At the end of this research, let me list a number of final considerations.

(1) Taking the ST in epistemology promotes a moderate version of mere epistemology. Mere epistemology, taken as the view that *one should always prefer beliefs supported by more evidence to beliefs supported by less evidence*, is incompatible with the ST, which is based on the readiness to maintain some beliefs even if the available evidence seems to disprove them. No incompatibility, however, emerges if we adopt a moderate version of mere epistemology, according to which *one should with some exceptions prefer beliefs supported by more evidence to beliefs supported by less evidence*.

(2) Adopting a moderate version of mere epistemology improves epistemology. First, it avoids the self-referential contradiction into which mere epistemology inevitably falls. In fact, its moderate version can apply to itself, whereas the same cannot be said of the original one. Saying that *one should always prefer beliefs supported by more evidence to beliefs supported by less evidence*, which is the original version in question, is not supported by more evidence than its negation, which is the belief that *one should not always prefer beliefs supported by more evidence to beliefs supported by less evidence*. Second, a moderate version of mere epistemology, unlike the original version, accounts for inconclusiveness. The moderate version is consistent, in fact, with the idea that in some cases debaters may steadfastly stick to their own beliefs even if the available evidence can convince them of the contrary.

(3) Inconclusiveness is not only due to commitments to human flourishing. Sticking to one's original views regardless of contrary evidence may often be due to vices, intellectual and moral as well. Why, therefore, not devote part of this dissertation to this negative component of inconclusiveness? The answer is that not every cause of inconclusiveness is the subject of this dissertation. I only intended to focus on those causes—the commitments to one's spiritual betterment—that can benefit the intellectual activity.

(4) I have individuated these causes while reflecting on relevant suggestions that typically accompany the Christian belief. Christians are expected to prefer the achievement of spiritual perfection over knowledge. This should lead them to improve the intellectual activity, since committing oneself to one's spiritual betterment should subsequently cause an improvement of any activity one takes.

(5) The ST, therefore, can improve the knowing process although the ST is not a strictly epistemological enterprise. The main interest of those who take the ST is in fact their commitment to God and the good, not the mere search for truth.

(6) The fact that the main interest of those who take the ST is not the search for truth does not imply a frontal opposition between the ST and any other forms of epistemological reflection. Searching for truth can in fact be part of a wider project such as the search for human flourishing, as testified by virtue epistemology, especially some versions of it. The abovementioned frontal opposition remains only between mere epistemology and the ST. The former, because of the primacy of evidence which it always supports, implies that every commitment must first be epistemically individuated and justified. The latter, instead, requires that, in some cases, one can first commit oneself to someone or something, and only subsequently search for rational support. Once adopted a moderate version of mere epistemology, however, the opposition to the ST disappears. According to this version, in fact, one can in some cases commit oneself to certain beliefs, whether or not the available evidence can convince one of the contrary.

(7) Although the ST emerges from a religious perspective, it may also regard those who do not believe. Both believers and unbelievers are responsible for inconclusiveness, as shown by the fact that the number of believers who stick to their beliefs before contrary evidence is not significantly different from the number of unbelievers who do the same on the other side of the spectrum. Why, then, couldn't unbelievers commit themselves, at least in some circumstances, to the good and the human flourishing? As a matter of fact, in Western contemporary culture there are values such as the equal dignity of all human beings or the unacceptability of racism to which both believers and unbelievers are expected to be ready to commit themselves. Who may reasonably oppose these values or accept the possibility that evidence emerges against them? Before such evidence, many of us would be ready to stick to their beliefs and start researching anew from the beginning with the aim of finding further evidence in support of those values. (This means that those who do not believe in God may take the ST while committing to the good. May this also be possible if, *qua* unbelievers, they commit themselves to atheism? Yes, but only if they take atheism as a view that allows them to promote the values in question and to adopt virtuous behaviours.)

(8) The ST regards those commitments and beliefs that lead one to adopt virtuous behaviours. It is expected to cause attitudes from which dialogue, mutual understanding and respect for differences spontaneously emerge. It follows that achieving conclusiveness, with the exception of those circumstances in which this is not possible because debaters are by no means ready to put aside their original views, will be easier than when the ST is not taken.

(9) Given the role that religious experience and the theological reflection have played so far, it may seem that this dissertation is aimed at showing that the Christian beliefs (as well as other beliefs,

which may be seen as somewhat derived from the Christian ones) *are* good. This is not true. In this dissertation, I haven't argued *what the good is*. I have argued that believers and unbelievers, to the extent that they firmly hold certain beliefs they take to be spiritually perfecting the human person, may have an opportunity to create the best possible conditions for dialogue and intellectual activity.

(10) I say that these people '*may* have the opportunity' to improve the intellectual activity because the fact that one proclaims one's commitment to some values does not assure that one is really taking the ST. Taking the ST, in fact, is a *personal* decision and a voluntary engagement, which does not automatically follow from a certain stance.

(11) In a similar way, there is a distinction between, on the one hand, the *theory* of the ST, i.e., someone *is aware* of the fact that committing oneself to God and/or the good can benefit knowledge, and, on the other hand, its *practice*, i.e., someone *behaves* consistently with the commitment in question. One may support the theory of the ST without being able to commit oneself to God and the good. On the other hand, one may not develop any theory, and nonetheless be able to take the ST. This distinction between theory and practice paves the way to explain why the ST is only partly something new. The theory is new because, so formulated, nobody has proposed it so far. The practice, however, is not. It would be unbearably arrogant to believe that there have never been people who have at least in some cases benefited the intellectual activity because of their firm commitment to God and/or the good. The first chapter of this dissertation was devoted to Christian thinkers who haven't offered any suggestion on which to base the ST—no theory of the ST can in fact be found in their works. And nonetheless they have stuck to the Christian belief, regardless of contrary evidence advanced by their opponents. This might consequently have led them, at least in some cases, to develop forms of the ST while taking part in debates.

(12) The ST, in conclusion, has the potential to vastly benefit any intellectual activity. This occurs, however, by mainly caring about one's spiritual betterment. As a consequence, it may largely benefit not only philosophers or theologians. Human flourishing, in fact, regards everybody, which is why everybody is likely to benefit their intellectual activity to the extent that they are really interested in their spiritual betterment.

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