

UNBELIEVABLE PREAMBLES: NATURAL KNOWLEDGE AND SOCIAL COOPERATION IN ACCEPTING SOME REVELATION

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Abstract. There is a claim that the natural *capacity* for knowledge of God (but not its complete *exercise*) is presupposed by the acceptance of any revelation. We inquire into whether this restriction is satisfactory. There is a stronger claim that natural knowledge has to be exercised for someone to welcome revelation. There is an additional claim that natural knowledge of the preambles to the articles of faith may not obtain. We try to make sense of this doctrine of impeached preambles to faith, by considering its phrasing not only in the first person singular (where it generates a Moore’s paradox), nor in the third person (where the role of the preambles still remains problematic), but in the first plural person, where it may suggest a kind of social division of tasks among believers.

There is a Thomistic claim that faith presupposes some natural knowledge as a necessary condition, the so-called preambles to faith. Indeed, there is a weak form of the claim that at least the natural capacity for knowledge of God (but not forcedly its complete exercise) is presupposed by the acceptance of any revelation¹. I intend to show that this qualification is not facilitating the possibility of this acceptance and that, somehow, natural knowledge has to be exercised for someone to accept a revelation as such, which is the strong form of the claim.

Anyway, there is an additional claim that natural knowledge of the preambles to the articles of faith may not obtain. (Those claims will be sourced more precisely in the following.) The conjunction of the claims raises a problem: how could then anyone believe any article of faith, being deprived of the necessary conditions thereof? In this paper I try to make sense of this doctrine of impeached preambles to faith, by considering its phrasing not only in the first person singular (where it generates a Moore’s paradox), nor in the third person (where the role of the preambles still remains problematic), but in the first plural person, where it may suggest a kind of social division of tasks among believers, the ones favouring the acceptance of the preambles for those to whom the access to the preambles is denied.

I. PRAEAMBULA FIDEI

I do not intend to renew the interpretation of the Thomistic doctrine of the so-called “preambles to faith” (*praeambula fidei*). McNerny, who has devoted a great deal of work to this issue², argues that there are philosophical propositions (especially in Aquinas’s *Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics*), standing on their own independent of theological commitments. Nevertheless, these propositions can serve as state-

1 See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, § 36, “...God, the first principle and last end of all things, can be known with certainty from the created world by the natural light of human reason.” Without this capacity, man would not be able to welcome God’s revelation”.

2 Ralph McNerny, *Being and Predication: Thomistic Interpretations* (Catholic Univ. of America Press, 1986) deals with Aquinas’ commitment to Aristotle’s philosophical theology. He intends to treat “the negative attitude toward natural theology that is found among these one would have expected to be defenders of it” (ix) (like Gilson, Lubac or Chenu). He focuses on the content of the *praeambula*, and restates Aquinas “philosophical theology” (159-293). His concern is not the epistemology of religious belief (apart from Cajetan’s criticism upon the *potentia obendentialis* in *De veritate* q. 29, a. 3, ad 3).

ments propaedeutic to theological discussions³. They can. But must they? What is exactly their role? How do they operate? Are these statements just ordinary presuppositions, or necessary conditions for accepting revealed articles of faith? McNerny rightly vindicates the autonomy of philosophy “whose arguments do not depend on the acceptance of any revelation”⁴, but does not consider the view that the acceptance of revelation may depend on the preambles. Like McNerny, Nicholas Wolterstorff has paid great attention to the content and status of these preambles, discussing the migration of theistic arguments in Aquinas, Locke’s and Karl Barth’s perspectives⁵. He emphasizes the pedagogical task of removing obstacles to faith. But he does not take into account nor mentions the view that these preambles may be necessary conditions for accepting or welcoming God’s revelation. This will be our concern. This is the issue as to whether the preambles to faith play a foundational role or not, or, as suggested by David Burrell, only a clarificatory or a therapeutic one⁶.

Seemingly⁷, the preambles could represent only a way (among others) of entering the higher way of faith: they do not hold forcedly as a necessary condition for welcoming God’s revelation⁸. They may remain just propositions that human reason *could in principle* come to knowledge of God without the aid of revelation. Nevertheless, I shall try to argue, every piece of revelation presupposes, in order to be accepted *as such*, the admittance of these preambles⁹. It is not the propositional content of the belief which is at stake, but the very fact that the believer has such or such belief qua revealed.

In the following, I proceed to examine whether the doctrine of *praeambula fidei* is consistent with some other statements concerning the difficulty for human reason to have an unaided access to those preambles. I will first formulate the doctrine and its commitments (II). I will then turn to consider to what extent the doctrine is undermined by the claim that human reason is deprived of the effective and fruitful use of the allegedly inborn faculty of grasping the preambles to faith (III). I will finally try to dismiss these problems by phrasing this puzzle in the first person, in the third person, and ultimately in the first person plural (IV).

3 See McNerny’s abundant and precise quotes from Aquinas commentaries on Lombard’s *Liber Sententiarum* and on Boethius’ *De Trinitate* Ralph McNerny, *Praeambula fidei: Thomism and the God of the Philosophers* (Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 27–28.

4 McNerny, *Praeambula fidei*, 35.

5 Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Practices of Belief: Volume 2, Selected Essays*, ed. Terence Cuneo (CUP, 2010), 203–5.

6 David B. Burrell, “Philosophy and Religion: Attention to Language and the Role of Reason”, *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 38, no. 1-3 (1995): 118.

7 In a passage heralding the doctrine of preambles to faith, Aquinas claims: “The existence of God and other like truths about God, which can be known by natural reason, are not articles of faith, but are preambles to the articles; for faith presupposes natural knowledge, even as grace presupposes nature and perfection the perfectible (*Deum esse, et alia hujusmodi quae per rationem naturalem nota possunt esse de Deo ... non sunt articuli fidei, sed praeambula ad articulos; sic enim fides praesupponit cognitionem naturalem, sicut gratia naturam, et ut perfectio perfectibile*)” *STh Ia*, q. 2, a. 2. We shall not enter considerations of other presentations of the preambles to faith that are to be found in chapter 30 of the *SCG*, or in *III Sent. D. 24, a. 3, sol. 1* where Aquinas holds that, while “natural knowledge comes before faith, and this faith presupposes and reason can prove, such as that God exists and that God is one, incorporeal, intelligent and other like things”, nevertheless “faith sufficiently inclines to such that one when hasn’t arguments for them assents to them through faith”.

8 This role of necessary condition is of course to be distinguished from the role of a grounding premiss, as McNerny already noticed: “... when natural theology is successful it does not provide any grounds for faith in any strict sense of *grounds*. That is, if natural theology succeeds in its initial task, to prove the existence of God, no *de fide* truth follows from this as a consequence. If it did, the *de fide* truth would be transformed into a known truth” McNerny, *Being and Predication*, 251.

9 In a general audience given on March 20th, 1985, Pope John Paul II emphasized that “One can know God by the natural light of human reason”, that “man is capable of knowing God by reason alone” and recalls often “the possibility of a rational knowledge of God”. One can, but must one? “God, he adds, would not have been able to reveal himself to the human race if it were not already naturally capable of knowing something true about God.” Here the claim may sound a little too strong. Why couldn’t God reveal himself to humans, even if they were not already capable of knowing something true about him? Let us nevertheless remark that the necessary condition required for God’s ability to reveal himself to humans is NOT that they already know something true about him, but that they are already able to. This shift from actual knowledge to mere ability may play some role in the resolution of the case. More on this later.

II. STRONG AND WEAK VERSIONS OF THE PRAEAMBULA FIDEI

The traditional account of the doctrine of the Preambles to Faith (hereafter PF) seems to imply that: quite apart from faith and revelation, human intelligence can (or could) reason to the existence of God and thus prepare the human intellect to acknowledge some truths provided by divine revelation. If so, some religious beliefs could be anchored in natural intelligence. But what does this preparation and this anchorage amount to? Is it just the natural rational capacity for knowledge of God (vs its complete exercise) which is presupposed by the capacity to accept revelation? What notion of presupposition is involved in the praeambula? Are we to construe the preambles to faith like necessary conditions, or just like eventually accessible motives of credibility? Let us distinguish two versions of PF, a weak (WPF) and a strong one (SPF). The weak version rests on the distinction between the capacity (natural reason) and its complete exercise (natural knowledge of the preambles).

According to WPF: “A person cannot believe any article of faith without the natural capacity to achieve knowledge of the preambles; but she can believe any article of faith, though she has not achieved natural knowledge of the preambles.”

To put it otherwise: “A person can welcome God’s revelation only if she has the capacity of natural reason; but even if she is not in a position to exercise that capacity to completion, she can welcome God’s revelation”.

In this claim it is not the effectiveness of rational knowledge of God, which is a necessary condition for welcoming God’s revelation, but the mere capacity of knowing God’s existence by natural reason alone. The claim is NOT: “S can welcome God’s revelation *only if* S has exerted her rational capacity of knowing God’s existence without the help of grace”; BUT: “S can welcome God’s revelation *only if* S is able to know God’s existence without the help of grace”.

Contrarily, the strong version does not admit that the mere unexercised capacity for natural knowledge of God is sufficient for the possible acceptance of any revealed belief.

Then, according to SPF: “A person cannot believe any article of faith without exercising her natural power of knowledge of the preambles”.

In the following, we proceed to suggest that the WPF is irrelevant, and that the more demanding view (SPF) is more likely to be held.

What is wrong with WPF? According to Aquinas’s pervasive principle, grace does not destroy nature but brings it to completion. You may then accept some revealed piece that will bring your rational nature to completion. In this sense, your acceptance of some revelation presupposes the natural power of knowledge that it brings to completion. But it does not imply that your rational capacity has been exerted. This rational capacity does not play any crucial role. As Aquinas himself acknowledges, most people for all of their lives, and all people for at least a substantial part of their lives, will have to believe in God on the basis of revelation because they cannot (or cannot yet) attain natural knowledge of God. Therefore Aquinas’ talk of faith as “presupposing” natural knowledge does not imply that one cannot come to faith but through natural knowledge.

But then, what does “welcoming God’s revelation” amount to? What does “coming to faith” mean?

My first worry with WPF is that it mentions, as a necessary condition, a capacity for natural knowledge of God, whose actual exercise does not matter, is not required at all.

Suppose you are told you cannot cross the border, unless you are able to show your passport, BUT that anyway, you cannot exercise this ability. So that if you were asked to, you could not show your passport. Well, isn’t it a very strange counterfactual requirement that you will need to be able to show the passport, since if you were asked to, you could not exert this ability?

Or think of a space rocket, which could not reach the height of 42 miles (that is out of the Earth’s atmosphere) without being endowed with a lower stage including boosters, that have the capacity to produce the thrust propelling the rocket to this height, but which nevertheless could reach this height without firing the engines of the lower stage? This is my first worry: how can an unemployed capacity be a necessary condition for whatever? My concern is then: How can access to revelation depend on the

possession of a power which is not actually exerted? How can the mere possession of this power play any role in the acceptance of revelation if this power is actually impeached? How could a non-effective ability, how could a counterfactual statement remain a necessary condition for any occurrence of any event? How can “S could have known God’s existence by reason alone” remain a necessary condition for S’s welcoming God’s revelation if “S doesn’t know God’s existence by reason alone”? According to WPF, a person’s legitimate belief in the articles of faith presupposes only that knowledge of the preambles to these articles is naturally attainable for her, whether or not she *actually attains* that knowledge. How could mere unexercised attainability-for-her could play this important role? Once again: how can then a counterfactual play the role of a necessary condition?

And I have a second worry with WPF: How are we to describe one’s state of mind acquainted with revealed creeds but deprived of any non-supernatural belief about the plausible existence of a revealing source? I would like to suggest that a person must come to some natural knowledge of God, or at least to the acceptance of such knowledge, in order to “welcome God’s revelation”. For, if some person is said to welcome God’s revelation, either she does it explicitly or not. That is, either she just happens to believe some revealed creed, but she does not confess it *qua* revealed. Either that, or she holds some revealed creed as such, being aware that this creed comes “neither from flesh nor from blood” but from a heavenly inspiration. Clearly, in the latter case, the person is committed to acknowledge the existence of the source of revelation. And, either this acknowledgement is a piece of natural knowledge, or it is granted through revelation too. But can we seriously construe the belief in a revealed truth as follows: “I believe *p*, for an angel revealed *p* to me; and, I believe the existence of angels, for this too has been revealed to me, by other supernatural beings, whose existence was on its turn revealed to me, and so on”. A kind of infinite testimonial regress.¹⁰

Of course, in the point of view of the third person, one can easily conceive of someone just believing a revealed article of faith *p*, with neither preambles, nor commitments to acknowledging the existence of the source of revelation. The person just happens to believe *p* (eventually is caused to have this belief) and it occurs that *p* is not a piece of natural knowledge. After all, as a matter of fact, many of our beliefs are not subject to inquiry (except in the books devoted by scholars to the problems of epistemic justification). So long as we just describe beliefs in the third person, there is no worry. WPF holds. It is not epistemically vicious. However, in the first person, we need a natural preamble to the acceptance of a revealed truth *qua* revealed. If some person claims she believes any article of faith, on no other evidence than the mere fact that it has been revealed to her, she is ipso facto committed to acknowledging the existence of the revealing source.

And there is something puzzling here: suppose you happen to believe that “Jesus is the son of the living God”. Well I agree that you’re not to be suspected of any epistemic disease. Such a belief does not require evidence. It might be defeated in case of some counter-evidence such as: “there is no God” or “Jesus has not existed” or “the phrase ‘son of the living God’ cannot refer to anything”. But suppose you are told that you cannot hold this belief unless it has been revealed to you, and suppose you admit that you cannot hold this belief unless it has been revealed to you, then you are committed to believe that someone has revealed it to you, so you have to admit that a supernatural influence can be exerted on your thoughts. Then, seemingly, in the first person: there is no acceptance of revelation without an acknowledgment of the existence of the one that reveals himself. And this acknowledgment can hardly be on its turn a piece of revelation, or if it is, it can hardly be supported by an infinite regress of revelations. At some step, you must believe that some supernatural agent can influence your beliefs. (I do not claim that this belief in the existence and intervention of supernatural revelatory source has to be supported by evidentialist reasons.) To this extent, I suggest that we rephrase Clifford’s principle as follows: “it is

¹⁰ It may be objected that the source of religious beliefs is some experience as a form of revelation and this experience contains both the belief in God and the belief that God is speaking to me. Later, this experience can circulate by testimony. If I believe in revelation I believe in God. And I believe in revelation because of my parents’ testimony. I believe in the whole story, not in a separate belief. But following this scenario, there is no way to distinguish a justified belief from a naïve or superstitious one.

wrong, always, everywhere and for anyone to believe anything upon sufficient counter-evidence (instead of: upon insufficient evidence)”.

Surely, I could have given more chance to WPF, by suggesting a more charitable interpretation. For example, one could conceive of this mere ability to reach natural knowledge about God as playing a preparatory role for the coherence of the epistemic life of the person who is about to welcome revelation. Suppose that you can perform only 80% of a proof of God's existence, or that you miss one step in an argument to the existence of God, you would nevertheless accept more easily the non-closure of physical world under causality, and so be open to some supernatural intervention or revelation. Nevertheless, for the sake of the argument, I will not enter this charitable interpretation of WPF, and stick to the perplexing version.

III. THE CLASH

Let us now turn to apply the preceding considerations to the magisterial problematic of the preambles to faith. Let us consider two claims for human capacity to achieve the knowledge of preambles to faith.

There is a claim “that God, the first principle and last end of all things, can be known with certainty from the created world by the natural light of human reason”¹¹. And there is the claim that “human reason is, strictly speaking, truly capable by its own natural power and light of attaining to a true and certain knowledge of the one personal God, who watches over and controls the world by his providence, and of the natural law written in our hearts by the Creator”¹². Those claims sum up what has been over centuries and still is the programme of natural theology, although the degree of certainty and the kind of inference (deductive/inductive) involved in this knowledge was and remains subject to discussion. This alleged rational capacity of attaining by its own natural power and light to a true and certain knowledge of God has been mainly vindicated by the Catholic Magisterium, and often challenged by philosophers and/or theologians like Martin Luther, Blaise Pascal, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Søren Kierkegaard, Karl Barth, and Martin Heidegger.

And, there is an additional claim, according to which “Without this capacity, man would not be able to welcome God's revelation.”¹³, which is an instance of WPF. What is then exactly the role of these preambles? Is it required that that capacity have been fully exercised to the point of having acquired a firm and certain natural knowledge of the existence of God, in order to be able to welcome God's revelation? This seems to be too high a requirement (SPF). But, on the other hand, how could a mere unexercised ability be a necessary condition for whatever?

So what about the preambles to faith? In his encyclical letter entitled *Faith and Reason*, Pope John Paul II suggested that we need “to recognize the importance of rational knowledge and philosophical discourse for the understanding of faith, indeed for the very possibility of belief in God.” (§ 55). Does the importance of rational knowledge for the very possibility of belief in God amount to the status of a necessary condition? It looks so. “Recalling the teaching of Saint Paul (cf. Rom 1:19-20), the First Vatican Council pointed to the existence of truths which are naturally, and thus philosophically, knowable; and *an acceptance of God's Revelation necessarily presupposes knowledge of these truths*”¹⁴ (my emphasis). And here, the actual knowledge, not only the capacity for the knowledge of these truths seems to be presupposed. This is also an instance of SPF. Does it imply that natural knowledge of the preambles must precede acceptance

11 Vatican Council I, *Dei Filius* 2: DS 3004 .

12 Pius XII, *Humani Generis* 561: DS 3875.

13 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, § 36.

14 *Fides et ratio*, § 67. The text goes further: “In studying Revelation and its credibility, as well as the corresponding act of faith, fundamental theology should show how, in the light of the knowledge conferred by faith, there emerge certain truths which reason, from its own independent enquiry, already perceives”. Seemingly, John Paul II's point is that the task of the theologian is to defend the credibility of revealed doctrine by showing how it builds on naturally knowable truths. But there is still a fundamental issue as to whether one person can say: “God has revealed to me such and such things” without implying that she already acknowledges that the revealing person (God) exists.

of revelation on the part of each individual? Maybe the relationship of presupposition here is only a logical one. That God's existence, for example, is a logically necessary condition for God's revealing to some person such or such deed or creed, is clear enough. But isn't it equally an internal requirement for the person who declares she believes what has been revealed to her? Can any one confess, like Woody Allen ironically suggests: "There is no God but we are his Chosen people"? It seems we can make the following statement: every explicit (that is internal) acceptance of some revelation, or of some belief as a revealed one, implies the acceptance of the belief in the existence of the revealing source. And this acceptance on its turn is either supernaturally or naturally believed. At any rate, any person believing some creed on the ground that it is or has been revealed to her, is committed to accept that a revelation has occurred. She is then committed to accept that the necessary conditions for a revelation are holding. She could not say, for instance: "Well I do not know, I have no idea as to whether the world is closed to any supernatural intervention; but I confess such and such creed since it has been revealed to me (or to some other person on whom I am relying)".

All this seems to support the Strong version of the Preambles to Faith (SPF): No actual natural knowledge of God, no possibility of belief in God; no actual preambles, no faith.

Let us grant that the weak version of Preambles to Faith (WPF) is insufficient to account for the possible acceptance of revelation, and that the strong version (SPF) is required. We have now to face a problem. For this claim (SPF) is totally undermined, by additional considerations of the "obstacles which prevent reason from the effective and fruitful use of this inborn faculty"¹⁵: "This is why man stands in need of being enlightened by God's revelation, not only about those things that exceed his understanding, but also 'about those religious and moral truths which of themselves are not beyond the grasp of human reason, so that even in the present condition of the human race, they can be known by all men with ease, with firm certainty and with no admixture of error'."¹⁶ So what are the preambles to faith useful for? Accordingly, it seems that some truths may on some occasions be revealed to us, despite the fact that the access we would have on our own to the necessary presuppositions of their acceptance is actually denied. And this raises a difficulty, or rather a clash, for if:

(SPF) Faith presupposes (actual) natural knowledge of the preambles to the articles of faith as a necessary condition

and if:

(NoPF) Natural knowledge of the preambles to the articles of faith does not obtain

then:

(C) Faith does not obtain

I will consider this conclusion as obviously false, and the problem is then which one of the premises is to be changed.

Seemingly, NoPF forces us to abandon SPF and be content with WPF, in order to save the possibility of revealed beliefs. But WPF, as noted above, is perplexing. My suggestion is then to rephrase SPF.

A first answer could consist in the following. It could be said that every believer who is welcoming God's revelation is indeed, at least implicitly, acknowledging the preambles to faith. For someone to accept any proposition as a revealed one, she has first to admit the possibility of a supernatural agent intervening in the course of physical and mental events. In addition, this intervention requires the permission of the creator, for, if there is one, he is the agent on which the course of every physical and mental event ultimately

¹⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, § 37, quoting *Humani Generis*, 2.

¹⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, § 38, quoting *Humani Generis*, 3. The same kind of qualification, if not suspension of the relevance of natural theology, is made in what follows from the famous passage of the *Summa Theologiae* quoted above, note 7. Aquinas himself shows little optimism that unaided human reason should achieve very much success even in its own sphere of Natural Theology. Therefore, he adds: "Nevertheless, there is nothing to prevent a man, who cannot grasp a proof, accepting, as a matter of faith, something which in itself is capable of being scientifically known and demonstrated" (*STh. Ia, q. 2, a. 2*).

depends. Whatever shall be accepted as a revelation implies the acceptance of the existence of Him who reveals or allows the truth to be revealed by some prophet.

My point is that whatever the content of a revelation may be, if someone is to accept it *as* a revelation, she must have reason to believe that some supernatural agent makes it happen. And the best reason (maybe the only one) she has to believe that is that this supernatural agent exerts a creative power (at least upon the area of the world and at the time when and where the alleged revelation occurs, but it is difficult to conceive of a local and part-time creator, who would have to ask for permission to intervene).

Of course, it may be the case that some people hold the creation of the universe by God to be a revelation on its turn. But as soon as they were asked why they believed this, their justification, if it is to escape from circularity, would have to rest on the non-revealed belief that there is a supernatural agent. In this sense, the very welcoming of a supernatural revelation may involve the acceptance of the existence of a creator, which is a preamble to faith¹⁷. But this acceptance is an epistemic implication, not a necessary condition. It is not an obligatory requirement, for some person to believe that God has revealed something to her, that she first acknowledges the createdness of the world. She may have never considered the point. Of course, she could not maintain she believes that God revealed something to her while claiming that the world is self-existent and closed to the delivery of any supernatural message. But our concern with the strong doctrine of the preambles to faith is significantly different, for this doctrine seems to imply that you cannot welcome God's revelation without being already endowed with this aptitude to some natural knowledge about God. And, there still remains a puzzle as to how such or such knowledge can be considered as a necessary preamble to faith, and nevertheless remain an unactualized possibility, without precluding the faith it was supposed to give access to. How can a room, whose access is only possible via a unique door, which is supposed to be closed, be nevertheless accessed? And, if, without having opened the door, you were to be supernaturally transported into the room (through the roof), what role could be played by your ability to open the door on your own?

IV. A WAY OUT

How to reconcile, then:

(SPF) Faith presupposes natural knowledge of the preambles to the articles of faith as a necessary condition

(NoPF) Natural knowledge of the preambles to the articles of faith does not obtain

And nevertheless:

not (C) Faith obtains ?

Let us now try to dismiss these problems by phrasing this puzzle in the first person, in the third person, and finally in the first-person plural.

In the first person, meaning that one and the same person has an epistemic access to the strong doctrine of *preambula fidei*, we get: "I can welcome God's revelation only if I am exerting my ability to know God's existence without the help of grace. So, I cannot believe (any piece of God's revelation) without the preambles to faith". But I know too (or even I am told by the Catechism!) that my ability to know God's existence without the help of grace is impeached. What does it mean? How can a non-employed ability play any role in my epistemic life? What does it mean that I am able to know something that I cannot actually grasp? Did someone convince me: "yes you are able to, but you certainly cannot get the preambles to faith"? And then, how could I welcome any revelation as coming from God, if I had no naturally accessed belief of whether God at least possibly exists or not? Of course, God Himself might have revealed

17 See Paul Clavier, "No creation, no Revelation", *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 73, no. 3 (2013).

to me that He is, although I had no idea before¹⁸. But in order to welcome such a revelation in the first person, I have to acknowledge the existence of the source of the revelation.

To sum up: on the one hand, I would grant *p*: I cannot believe without preambles to faith. And, on the other hand, I would disbelieve *p*, for I would not believe that I cannot believe without the preambles. Which is an instance of Moore's paradox ("*p*, but I don't believe that *p*")¹⁹.

Does it work better in the third person, since it does in Moore's examples (for there is no worry in saying that "it rains, but S does not believe it rains" whereas it is problematic to say, in the first person: "it rains but I do not believe it rains")? Let us try. We get the following statements: "S is in principle able to know God's existence without the help of grace. But S cannot in fact know God's existence without the help of grace. And S' ability to know God's existence without the help of grace is a necessary condition for S welcoming God's revelation". It seems we can, easier than in the preceding case, make sense of these statements, for the internal cognitive dissonance has disappeared. It could just mean that God actually reveals some truths to persons only if they could have known of His existence without the help of grace. In doing so, He would mitigate a defect of some cognitive dysfunction. But we still do not understand what role these unemployed preambles to faith play. For there is a risk that, if any attempt to get some natural knowledge of God fails, the people be less prepared to welcome a revelation, or even convinced that every purported revelation would be best explained in naturalistic psychological or social constructivist terms. To speak with John Schellenberg, God's natural complete hiddenness is not a good context for his supernatural self-disclosure. Suppose someone is given a fishing rod, but is told that with this fishing rod, she can, or rather could have caught some fish, but will actually not, and that she nevertheless has to believe that fishing with this rod is a necessary condition for her to get fish. This looks like a nasty trick, doesn't it? Why should not she directly make the leap of faith that she will catch some fish, without having to believe that fishing with this rod is a necessary condition for her to get fish, whereas the rod does not play any role? Why not appeal to a miraculous fishing?

There may be a way out, by phrasing this strange doctrine of impeached preambles, in the first-person plural: "We can welcome God's revelation *only if* at least one or some of us are able to know God's existence without the help of grace. Most of us do not exert this ability, only a few would actually reason to those preambles²⁰. But this is sufficient for the others, the "bare believers" to make plausible that their assent to such or such creed, as coming from God²¹, is not forcedly a case of self-deception. Don't

18 I may become a coherentist believer, considering "that the existence of God is to be believed since it is taught in the sacred Scriptures, and that, on the other hand, the sacred Scriptures are to be believed because they come from God", René Descartes, *The Meditations: And selections from the Principles of René Descartes (1596-1650)*, ed. John Veitch and Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (United States: Scholar's Choice, 2015), *Letter of dedication to the Very Sage and Illustrious Dean and Doctors of the Sacred Faculty of Theology of Paris*.

19 David Hunt, to whom I am grateful for his advice, carefully objects that it's not crystal-clear how "I know I cannot believe without preambles, but I believe that I can believe without them" is an instance of Moore's paradox, because it's not clear how it exemplifies the form *p*, but I believe that *non-p*. For the sake of the argument, I admit that: "I believe that it is false that I cannot believe without preambles" implies: "I believe that I can believe without preambles". This is to be distinguished from "I do not know the preambles of faith, but I believe what faith commands", which is *not* an instance of Moore's paradox. In our discussion, we do not wish to imply that a paradox arises from the fact that some people may have beliefs without evidence grounding them or without motives of credibility. Our concern is about the doctrine of the preambles to faith. One could develop further considerations on the omissive (*p* & I do not believe *p*) and commissive (*p* & I believe not-*p*) forms of the paradox, cf. John N. Williams, "Moore's Paradox, Defective Interpretation, Justified Belief and Conscious Belief", *Theoria* 76, no. 3 (2010): 221. But they seem to me irrelevant here (or rather, they do not seem to me relevant!).

20 According to Aquinas "...truth about God, such as reason can know it, would only be known by a few, and that after a long time, and with the admixture of many errors" (*STh*. Ia, q. 1, a. 1). Cf. Blaise Pascal: "The metaphysical proofs for the existence of God are so remote from human reasoning and so involved that they make little impact, and, even if they did help some people, it would only be for the moment during which they watched the demonstration, because an hour later they would be afraid they had made a mistake" Blaise Pascal, *Pensées (Thoughts)*, ed. A. J. Krailsheimer, Penguin classics (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966).

21 Here I am following Locke's famous definition of faith: "the assent to any proposition, not thus made out by the deductions of reason, but upon the credit of the proposer, as coming from God, in some extraordinary way of communication. This way of discovering truths to men I call revelation", John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Roger S. Woolhouse (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 608.

we sometimes — indeed quite often — believe without seeing? And aren't we sometimes — indeed quite often — justified in believing that there is something to see, for we trust some reliable fellows who claim there is?"

According to this rephrasing, SPF still holds, NoPF may happen to be true for some or even for most of us, but not for all. And nevertheless, we may hold beliefs on revealed matters, although most of us do not get the preambles by themselves.

This may look like a way of begging the question, for in this case, the pre-conditions for faith are to be satisfied by faith—namely, faith in someone *else's* exercise of natural reason. But this justification is not circular, for in this case, the fiducial belief is not a belief sustained by the grace of God who reveals himself to the person. It is a natural unaided fiducial belief that some other person exercising her natural reason has reached natural grounds for accepting that there is a God. You may, especially as a young person, never have conceived of any justification of the sphericity of the earth, or of heliocentrism. Nevertheless, you may rely on your teachers, for you have (most of the time) no reason to suspect them of deceiving you. Similarly, you may have no rational justification that there is a God (you may even consider that the belief that there is a God may be subject to serious objections, such as the occurrence of evil, etc). And nevertheless, you may rely on those who have investigated the point. And then you may have proper religious beliefs and faith in revealed truths, without direct access to the preambles. The person who is unable to grasp the preambles of faith may have a knowledge by proxy of these preambles. By the way, trust in someone *else's* exercise of natural reason helps a lot making a difference between faith in religious tenets and faith in fairy tales. This “doxastic faith”²² rules out the straightforward reduction of religious belief to fictionalism.

Let us compare this epistemic situation with baseball players playing in the dark. In order to be able to catch the ball, they must be able to see it. Therefore they should be endowed by their coach with infra-red glasses. But unfortunately, most of them have broken their infra-red glasses. Nevertheless, some of them have not, and they still can follow the game and eventually guide the moves of their partners (even if unsuccessfully, given the speed of the ball). The blind playing partners have to rely on their fellows in order to believe that the game is worth being played. They may move or run or hit without having had a direct access to the relevant sensorial information. And, with a little training (indeed with an enormous amount of training), they could manage playing, like in Michael D. Moore's classic western thriller “An eye for an eye” (1966), where two bounty hunters, one blinded and the other crippled by a man who double-crossed them, team up to track him down and get their revenge, the blind being taught by the crippled how to shoot without seeing. But this does not mean that seeing is not a necessary condition for shooting.

This is suggesting a kind of social cooperation between believers. It strangely allows that the doctrine of Preambles to faith is individually unbelievable, or at least for most of individuals unbelievable, for any access to the preambles is denied to them. But the doctrine could nevertheless remain socially acceptable, for anyone could satisfy the qualifications for faith by relying on someone else who *did* successfully attain a natural knowledge of the preambles. As members of the human community, we could say that we cannot welcome revelation without having the preambles to faith, even if some of us do the former without satisfying the latter. (To this extent, the doctrine of preambles is less demanding than *prima facie*, for it does not require that all believers attain a natural knowledge of the preambles. SPF still holds, but not universally.) From a theistic point of view, it is suggesting that God favours human cooperation, insofar he promotes it as a genuine access, and for most of us, as the unique access to the acknowledgement of his very existence and of some of his most relevant attributes. But of course, from an atheistic point of view, it has no meaning at all.

22 See Robert Audi, “Belief, Faith, and Acceptance”, *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 63, no. 1-3 (2008): 92.

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