**Believing the Incomprehensible God: Aquinas on Understanding God’s Testimony**

While there has been recent epistemological interest as to whether knowledge is ‘transmitted’ by testimony from the testifier to the hearer, so that a hearer acquires knowledge ‘second-hand.,’[[1]](#footnote-1) there is another facet of the epistemology of testimony that raises a distinct problem: whether a hearer can receive testimonial knowledge without fully understanding the content of the testimony. Aquinas’ account of faith illustrates the problem of receiving testimonial knowledge without being able to comprehend the content of testimony. As Aquinas conceives of it, revelation provides a case in principle where the content of God’s testimony is ultimately incomprehensible to human beings.[[2]](#footnote-2)

For Aquinas, there are many dogmatic propositions which could only be known by revelation, such as Trinitarian dogma that one God exists in three Persons, because knowing these require knowing the divine nature ‘directly’.[[3]](#footnote-3) I will call this subclass ‘properly revealed truths’ (PRTs). Human beings have no epistemic access to the divine nature and so could neither be able to discover by any *a priori* reasoning nor empirical investigation that God is a Trinity. Thus, for Aquinas, any knowledge we could have of PRTs in this life can only be testimonial knowledge because PRTs concern truths only God, or someone in a similar epistemic position,[[4]](#footnote-4) could know first-hand. Faith is, consequently, a virtue where one trusts God’s testimony about Himself. This epistemic dependence is necessary for coming to understand God, which in turn permits human beings to come to love and be united with God in heaven.

While the incomprehensibility of divine testimony in revelation can appear to be resolved with a sophisticated theology of divine names (i.e., theory of language), a more thorough examination of the nature of divine testimony will show that, for Aquinas, revealed knowledge surpasses the value of natural theological knowledge insofar as the knowledge acquired in revelation is cognitive participation in God’s own knowledge. The cognitive limits on our knowledge of revealed truths remain identical with the limits on natural theological truths, which is to say we do not know God’s essence in this life. But, in faith, a believer acquires direct epistemic dependence both with respect to what God knows and how God knows it.

Nevertheless, there is a difficulty: PRTs are fundamentally *incomprehensible* because they are truths about God’s incomprehensible personal nature. Aquinas claims we do not knowin this life *what* God is and that even revealed knowledge only unites us to God “as to one unknown.”[[5]](#footnote-5) What understanding must the believer have in order to properly ‘receive testimony’ from God in this case? Aquinas shows, I will argue, that we can justifiably suspend some kinds of understanding and yet acquire testimonial knowledge. This is similar to cases where we might need to suspend understanding to receive testimonial knowledge from experts. I will conclude by noting that this makes plausible how we have an epistemic obligation to believe God, given that we can be culpable for failing to rely on expert testimony. Thus, the case of revealed knowledge and divine testimony illustrates how someone can acquire testimonial knowledge, and in fact might have epistemic obligations to do so, even in cases where the content of the testimony is not understood by the hearer.

1. Divinizing Faith

Faith (*fides*) for Aquinas is a cognitive virtue primarily concerning PRTs, rather than belief about God’s existence. This is because of the way knowledge functions in salvation. On Aquinas’ theory of action, the will desires and chooses ends/means for action, but what the will can choose or desire is ‘specified’ by the intellect.[[6]](#footnote-6) Salvation is one such end, and it consists in consummate, final union with God.[[7]](#footnote-7) This union happens progressively, beginning in this life by developing friendship with God. Friendship with God is directly grounded upon a habitual desire or choice: *caritas* or love.[[8]](#footnote-8) But love of God, as an act of the will, thus presupposes some kind of knowledge of God in order for the will to be directed toward Him in desire or choice. Sherwin states it succinctly: “Since communion with God in the good is a prerequisite for friendship with him, unless we believe that such a communion is possible…we will never develop a friendship with him. God might indeed love us, wish us good and do good for us, but unless he makes this known to us, we will not become his friends.”[[9]](#footnote-9) We need to have some knowledge of God that would make our acts of choice and desire appropriate: to direct our desires toward God rather than some other object.

Aquinas thinks God is naturally discoverable as First Cause, but that this natural knowledge is inherently limited because of our cognitive capacities.[[10]](#footnote-10) Natural knowledge is indirect knowledge of God as the cause of the universe. This limits how we could desire God: we could desire Him only insofar as He is naturally discoverable as cause, but not as a friend.[[11]](#footnote-11) To illustrate Aquinas’ point, we can only abstractly desire friendship with ‘the person who mows my neighbor’s lawn’; but we can concretely be friends with Steve, whom I know personally and who in fact mows the lawn. Friendship with God is intended by Christianity to be personal, not merely abstract, uniting our cognitive and affective powers to share in His own willing and knowing.[[12]](#footnote-12) So an analogously similar personal knowledge of God is what Aquinas claims is required for our coming into union with God.[[13]](#footnote-13) The virtue of faith is that by which we acquire personal knowledge of God, because we believe PRTs, which are the same truths which God knows about Himself.[[14]](#footnote-14) Faith is, on Aquinas’ picture, internally related to salvation: personal knowledge of God in PRTs is the same knowledge that will be perfectly understood in heaven (the Beatific Vision) and which will then constitute perfect happiness.[[15]](#footnote-15)

This personal knowledge of God would need to be *revealed* knowledge because, given Aquinas’ theory of knowledge, we could only naturally arrive at knowledge of God as cause, not as He is personally. We acquire *personal* knowledge of God, Aquinas thinks, because God has chosen to tell us about Himself so as to allow us to enter into relationship with Him. Faith is the cognitive virtue of appropriately trusting God in order to receive testimonial knowledge from Him (PRTs) and makes possible our relating to Him in a personal way.

1. Justifying Faith

If faith is a cognitive virtue by which we acquire testimonial knowledge from God, we run into a problem. Aquinas claims no one, in this life, has direct epistemic access to God. God is not a material object which we could empirically investigate with our senses[[16]](#footnote-16) or a possible object of *a priori* reasoning (in the broad Aristotelian sense of what is *per se nota* and accessible to us).[[17]](#footnote-17) There is no *personal* knowledge of God apart from and prior to faith, although we can have some indirect knowledge of Him through our natural powers of reasoning.[[18]](#footnote-18) Aquinas believes we can come to infer certain truths about God’s nature from study of the physical universe (this enterprise is ‘natural theology’), but this is only inference from God’s effects rather than direct access to His personal being or essence.[[19]](#footnote-19) But, if we believe *God*, we would need to know Him in some fairly definite personal way in order to have faith in Him. We can think of this difficulty as a vicious circle. Why should a convert think *this* particular set of propositions was revealed by God? What are actually received by a potential convert are truths *asserted* to be revealed by God, whether in Scripture, some creedal statement, or a particular sermon by a preacher. Every convert would need knowledge of God to decide whether some proposition was truly revealed by Him. We need PRTs to know God’s nature, but believing PRTs with justification seems to require evidence. Because PRTs are truths about God’s nature, the only possible evidence for their truth would be evidence pertaining to God’s nature.

The circle is one that raises the question of the epistemic justification for acts of faith. Natural theology would only function as an indirect limit on testimony. We could reject certain messages as clearly neither about God or from Him if they conflicted with what we concluded in natural theology. But we would not have positive knowledge by which to confirm PRTs because we have no access to what God is. Consequently, natural theology could not justify assent to PRTs. Aquinas further thinks faith requires one not only to believe in the right content (PRTs), but also to believe with the right *attitude*: trust in God.[[20]](#footnote-20) The view that trust is a necessary condition for testimonial knowledge is echoed in contemporary ‘local reductionism.’[[21]](#footnote-21) Elizabeth Fricker has argued that “belief in the teller’s trustworthiness must be at least dispositionally present, in a minimally rational trusting hearer.”[[22]](#footnote-22) This requires the hearer to have some evidence of this trustworthiness with respect to their testimony, that the testifier is competent and sincere.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Aquinas’ holds that the assent of faith – trust in God’s testimony – requires some reason for assent, and that reason in the case of faith is that we believe God is truthful.[[24]](#footnote-24) By contrast, inference to truths of PRTs from natural theology, even if it were possible, would be like coming to believe my friend’s testimony that there is a cat on the mat because I looked out the window and saw the cat there myself – it would be belief in the truth of the testimonial content, but not belief *because* of my trust. Aquinas too requires trust as an essential aspect of faith because faith is *testimonial* knowledge, rather than any other kind. He thinks assent to PRTs from inference, rather than trust, isthe case for demons. Demons have better cognitive powers than humans and can know when true miracles are performed. Because they know when someone is acting as God’s messenger, and that God cannot lie, they are rationally compelled to believe whatever is revealed. However, the belief of demons is not faith, because they do not *believe God*.[[25]](#footnote-25) The problem in the case of demons is that they do not have this trust in the testifier (God). It is as if the demons heard revealed truths addressed to someone else and made an inferential judgment. In other words, they come to belief in the truth of PRTs in a deviant manner. The demons do not accept the testimony on God’s “say-so,” but because of some inference.[[26]](#footnote-26)

One should note that, as a consequence of Aquinas’ denial that anything less than trust in God Himself could suffice for faith, the believer is not receiving testimonial knowledge from some other human being. It is unimportant to Aquinas’ theory whether a believer were to receive the content of revealed testimony to PRTs in person from Jesus Christ, or in a prophetic vision, or in written Scripture or the preaching of a missionary; all of these are means by which God’s testimonial knowledge is transmitted to us.[[27]](#footnote-27) All of this does not substantially alter the fact that the believer is held to acquire knowledge second-hand from God, as she comes to believe in PRTs because God asserts them to her and not because she knows them first-hand. But this epistemic dependence of each individual on God’s knowledge means that faith is ‘infallibly certain’ because it always has God as its object of trust, not a fallible testifier. Whatever is believed by the believer is only believed insofar as God reveals it. And, as whatever He reveals cannot be false, all that is believed by faith is necessarily true.[[28]](#footnote-28) While this might pose other difficulties, this illustrates how Aquinas values immediate epistemic dependence on God’s knowledge, rather than on a chain of testifiers.

1. Understanding Faith
2. *Understanding of the Testifier’s Trustworthiness*

While Aquinas argues that we could infer that God exists and is trustworthy,[[29]](#footnote-29) there is a problem: the only possible evidence for the truth of PRTs would seem to be evidence pertaining to God’s nature. We would seem to only be able to have evidence to accept God’s testimony as to His essential nature if we already had understanding of that essential nature. But this is merely a variation of a problem common to all testimonial knowledge. So, as in contemporary discussions of the justification of testimony, one acquires a separate kind of justification for knowledge through the say-so of the testifier that is distinct from the kind of justification we have first-hand. Robert Audi has also made this point: testimony conveys or transmits knowledge from the testifier to the hearer, but does not convey the testifier’s justifications.[[30]](#footnote-30) As a consequence, we can distinguish between kinds of justification as it pertains to testimony and to ordinary cases. But further, as Aquinas notices, if we frame knowledge of the testifier’s trustworthiness as a kind of ‘understanding,’ we have an appropriate analogy for how the believer can both understand and not understand the content of God’s testimony: as we need not understand *how* God’s beliefs are justified, so we need not understand *how* PRT’s are true of God.

There is no consensus in contemporary epistemology on what ‘understanding’ consists in, and often the term is used to refer to ‘systematic knowledge.’[[31]](#footnote-31) Aquinas employs a technical terminology inherited from Aristotle who distinguishes two cognitive virtues which have a connection to ‘understanding’: *scientia* (‘scientific knowledge’) and *intellectus* (‘understanding’). We can distinguish these virtues is in terms of their characteristic cognitive operations: *scientia* involves relating one’s knowledge in a coherent whole, drawing inferential conclusions well in a given area of inquiry, whereas *intellectus* involves grasping essences or fundamental principles of reasoning.[[32]](#footnote-32) Understanding is epistemically prior to other cognition because it provides the content for other acts and is a form of ‘intellectual perception’.[[33]](#footnote-33) This is illustrated in the process of coming to assent to a conclusion, which happens either because understanding the object itself would make the conclusion necessary (e.g., a necessary truth), or because one already has understanding of other objects that would permit a deductive inference to the conclusion.[[34]](#footnote-34) For example, an understanding of ‘human beings’ involves knowledge that humans are mortal, and so would epistemically ground my knowledge of the truth of the proposition that ‘all humans are mortal.’ This in turn allows the drawing of inferences from that truth (e.g., Socrates, as a man, must be mortal). Understanding is therefore called the ‘light’ of the intellect by Aquinas, and some form of understanding is the epistemic ground of any reasoning.[[35]](#footnote-35)

For these reasons, we might think of *intellectus* as ‘objectual understanding’ of individual persons, things, or abstract entities (e.g., terms in a proposition). Understanding would then not be merely knowledge that a proposition about an object is true. Instead, we might characterize a ‘grasp’ of the object of understanding as knowing its intrinsic properties, relations to other things, and so forth. ‘Understanding’ is then, for my purposes, is a kind of knowledge *how*, knowing what it means for some proposition to be true because one knows the essential nature of the terms or referents of the proposition. By contrast, ‘scientific knowledge’ would be knowledge thatsomething is true in light of relating one epistemic object or proposition to what is more fundamental.

Understanding a testifier’s trustworthiness is typically regarded as a kind of knowledge *that* a testifier is justifiably asserting some proposition. For ‘local reductionists’ about testimonial knowledge, knowledge of the trustworthiness of the speaker serves as a kind of premise by which the hearer can infer that the assertion can be accepted. Elizabeth Fricker is a local reductionist of this sort and argues that testimonial knowing requires that “one needs to always assess the trustworthiness of a speaker,” even if unconsciously done in an automatic and dispositional way by the hearer. [[36]](#footnote-36) But this knowledge of the testifier is not a ‘deep’ objectual understanding of the testifier: one does not need to understand the testifier’s full personal life to know that they are competent and sincere in asserting some proposition *p* to me.[[37]](#footnote-37) One can thus distinguish between trust grounded upon personal knowledge of the trustworthiness of a speaker and trust given a more general knowledge thattestimonial assertion has been addressed to me by a person in an appropriate role.

Fricker has argued that all that is needed to receive testimonial knowledge is the more general belief that the testifier “is such that not easily would she assert P, vouch for the truth of P, unless she knew that P.”[[38]](#footnote-38) This trustworthiness need be correlated, for example, with their social role relative to me, or to a general norm that one does not assert what one does not know (a social ‘norm of assertion). [[39]](#footnote-39) While commonly held to be a kind of knowledge, this knowledge of trustworthiness is perhaps better portrayed as a type of understanding that grounds the truth of various beliefs about the testifier’s trustworthiness. One can understand how social or epistemic roles indicate trustworthiness, and such a grasp of roles can lead immediately to knowing that a person is trustworthy without explicit inferential reasoning. We could imagine in cases of ‘simple trust,’ as where children acquire language through trusting their parents, that children recognize parents *as* trustworthy in some way without making any conscious inferences to ground their parents’ trustworthiness on the basis of track record arguments, etc.[[40]](#footnote-40) It would appear it is this grasp of appropriate epistemic sources that allows children to believe what is told with justification and acquire knowledge through testimony, even if the particular situation of children allows them to not need to have to make some inference between trustworthiness of the speaker and accepting their testimony.[[41]](#footnote-41)

It would seem to be that, in testimonial knowledge, recognition of the testifier as competent, sincere, or in an appropriate epistemic role, etc., is what provides the hearer justification in accepting their testimony that *p* and so acquiring knowledge that *p*. The hearer does not need to have first-hand acquaintance with the justification that the testifier possesses for *p,* as the hearer’s justification is that the speaker has asserted *p* competently and so forth. In the theological case, such a recognition or understanding that God is a trustworthy testifier is fundamentally different. We cannot see God and judge His facial expressions, naturally. So too judging a particular prophet to be trustworthy does not provide us evidence that God, whose message the prophet claims to be relaying, would be trustworthy (assuming that the message is relayed perfectly).

We might think that Aquinas’ ‘natural theology’ would provide a certain kind of indirect understanding of God. The believer could infer and know that God is Truth itself, and so always universally trustworthy. But this knowledge would justify only a general (virtuous) cognitive disposition to be ready to accept God’s testimony if He were to offer it. It would not be, here and now, to justify accepting some truth that I believe God is offering for my belief. In ordinary cases, such a general disposition to trust a given person *would* lead to assenting immediately to testimonial knowledge, barring perceptual delusions or deception, when we physically perceived the testifier to testify to us. But we cannot physically perceive God’s testimony. All that is physically perceived by the believer is Scripture, or a preacher’s assertion that God wants me to believe some truth. While we might theorize that the content and assertoric force of revealed testimony are in the physical means used to convey God’s testimony to the believer (e.g., Scripture or a preacher’s sermon),[[42]](#footnote-42) as a letter would also convey such testimonial content and force, a believer does not physically perceive God Himself proposing PRTs. What is additionally needed is knowledge that these physical signs are, in fact, God’s word. We could only acquire testimonial knowledge from God if God was understood by the hearer to be trustworthy as testifying to me in this instance. In other words, one needs a perception both of God’s trustworthiness and of His testifying.

Aquinas holds that this occurs in an immediate and supernatural act of understanding: what he calls the *lumen fidei*, or ‘light of faith.’ For Aquinas, there are two elements to the act of faith. Both are beyond our natural abilities, as God is epistemically inaccessible to our natural powers, and so each must be divinely ‘infused’ into each believer.[[43]](#footnote-43) The first element is an appetitive inclination: God moves the will of each believer internally to assent to His testimony – to trust Him. This, less important for our purposes here, is an inclination to trust God in the right way.[[44]](#footnote-44) But, given the relation Aquinas holds to exist between the intellect and will, the will could only make this act of trust in the right way if there were an intellectual perception, or act of understanding, of God as testifying. This act of infused understanding is what Aquinas calls the ‘light of faith’ (*lumen fidei*). The light of faith is an infused understanding which “makes one to see what is to be believed.”[[45]](#footnote-45) In other words, this is an infused act of understanding by which the believer understands that God revealed some proposition and so belief in the proposition is warranted because of God’s trustworthiness. But this can occur in one act of understanding because of God’s unique character. Aquinas holds God as ‘First Truth’ is the ‘formal’ object of what we believe by faith. Believers then understand God under the description of ‘Truth Himself,’ so that to perceive ‘God’ as revealing in a particular case is nothing other than to perceive Truth Himself as proposing a truth for my belief. This is the ground for why we can accept God’s testimony: if Truth itself were the guarantee of testimony, there is no possibility of error.[[46]](#footnote-46) It would seem, as a result, that Aquinas’ *lumen fidei* would involve a single representational state in which believers simultaneously understand that God is trustworthy and that He proposes something for belief.[[47]](#footnote-47) Thus, “even though all things are to be believed by divine testimony, the divine testimony, like [God’s] knowledge, refers first and principally to itself and consequently to other things.”[[48]](#footnote-48) It should be obvious, however, that our understanding of God’s trustworthiness is altogether unique among cases of testimony; no other being could be essentially trustworthy in this way and so in every other case this kind of understanding of the testifier would be impossible.[[49]](#footnote-49)

Here, however, we see that the understanding of the testifier’s trustworthiness which is required for the hearer’s justified trust in testimony is not understanding of how the testifier’s beliefs are justified. For faith, we need only such knowledge of His trustworthiness as would be required for this act of testimony to be reliable; namely, recognizing that He would know PRTs. We do not need perfect understanding of God’s essence, which would be to understand *how* God could never lie in light of all His essential properties. Aquinas denies that we have either scientific knowledge or perfect understanding of God in this life.[[50]](#footnote-50) The *lumen fidei* is infused understanding that God is epistemically placed to know and testify to the truth of PRTs.[[51]](#footnote-51)We ordinarily do not need deep understanding of someone’s personal character to accept their testimony, but only knowledge that the testifier occupies a privileged epistemic position in regard to the content of the testimony, and that they are competent and sincere. I can reasonably acquire knowledge about my room number from the bell clerk at the hotel because I recognize he is in a social role where he would ordinarily know this information and, if I perceive him sincere and competent, I can trust his say-so without knowing further details of his personal character or the specific way he came to know my room number. By analogy, the *lumen fidei* is sufficient to acquire testimonial knowledge from God, even as Aquinas calls it an ‘imperfect’ understanding.[[52]](#footnote-52) The *lumen fidei* is ‘imperfect understanding’ because it is knowledge thatGod is trustworthy as Truth Himself, rather than comprehensive direct access to His nature. We do not understand everything about God nor in the same way that God would understand Himself, but that understanding God in His essence is not the kind of understanding necessary for receiving testimonial knowledge.

2. *Understanding the Content of PRTs*

The second object of understanding which is required for a hearer to receive testimony is that the hearer has to understand the *content* of testimony. As we saw, this poses not a little problem for Aquinas, as the content of PRTs is always some kind of personal knowledge of God, truths epistemically inaccessible if God were not to reveal them. PRTs would otherwise not serve the purpose of directing our intellect and will to God as He is in Himself. But it seems as if *every* PRT, insofar as it is about an object necessarily beyond our natural comprehension, would itself be unable to be understood. As we noted earlier, understanding is the cognitive state that precedes and grounds all reasoning. Aquinas accepts that one cannot learn new truths without having some understanding which makes the reasoning possible. At the very least, we need to know the meaning of the terms used if we are to learn the meaning of a proposition we have never encountered before, and the meaning of the subject, predicate, and middle term in order to learn a conclusion from a proposed demonstration.[[53]](#footnote-53) That seems fairly intuitive in ordinary cases. For Aquinas, there is at least a minimum understanding of PRT propositions, as all the concepts we use to refer to God are derived from our ordinary knowledge of the world.[[54]](#footnote-54) Aquinas’ theory of ‘analogous’ predication of the divine names is employed to make sense of how PRTs can be understood. In what follows, I will only present what is necessary of this theory in order to indicate how Aquinas thinks understanding of revealed propositions is possible.

For Aquinas, our knowledge of God is premised on our ability to understand His causal relation to the universe – this is the knowledge derived in ‘natural theology’. We can understand God as the unique ‘First Cause’ of all things, and as consequently being of a certain nature: immaterial, all powerful, intelligent, ontologically simple, etc. (the derivation of these properties is complicated, but Aquinas thinks we can derive them[[55]](#footnote-55)). These descriptions are not merely metaphorical, or merely negative, but true, although deficient, descriptions of God: “every creature represents Him and is like Him, insofar as it has some perfection; yet it does not represent Him as something of the same species or genus, but as an excelling principle, of whose form the effect is not adequate, but of which some similarity follows….”[[56]](#footnote-56) So while God cannot be understood in His essential nature in this life, He is “known by us from creatures, according as He is their principle….”[[57]](#footnote-57) In other words, we have inferentially-derived knowledge of how God relates to the universe and, on this basis, can infer that God must have certain abilities or properties. It is, as it were, indirect essential knowledge of what God must be.

Aquinas makes a distinction that, in some cases, what is signified directly by our concept (*res significata*) can be literally true of God because the meaning of certain terms is not such as to be inherently only finite or limited. ‘Being’ is a chief example, as Aquinas thinks we can say God exists non-metaphorically in large part because the term ‘being’ signifies no definite kind of thing.[[58]](#footnote-58) Aquinas concedes that our use of terms, even in these cases, will nevertheless be inadequate to understand God insofar as the way in which we conceive these terms (*modus significandi*)is such that *how* we understand these concepts is always limited. So, on one hand, these terms will be literally or properly true of God, more so than of creatures. But, on the other, we will never understand *how* they are true of Him, because we do not understand the thing signified in the way it would be exemplified by God (e.g., how God exists or is wise). Consequently, while our knowledge of God is indirect in this life, some indirectly derived terms (like ‘being’) can be used to form propositions which are not only metaphorically but literally true descriptions of God’s essence. [[59]](#footnote-59) Thus we do not have essential understanding of God, meaning direct epistemic access to His essence, but we do have indirect understanding of God in terms of His effects or actions. We might compare this to understanding my neighbor, whom I never see, by observing the results of his daily habits; I note that his garden appears well-taken care of, and that his car always disappears at 8am and reappears in his driveway at 5pm. I can come to infer he is a conscientious, punctual individual. In all these ways, my understanding is not directly from perceiving him, and rather perceiving only his actions. Nevertheless, the object of my understanding is my neighbor.

In the case of God, we are not dealing with a human neighbor, whose behavior gives me clues about his mental state because I can extrapolate from what I know about human beings. I have no such experience of divine beings from which to guess what it is like for God to create, or think, and so forth. Human understanding of the terms we apply to God will always be inherently finite to some extent because of our cognitive limitations; we have no experience of God and only arrive at knowledge of Him by reasoning from His effects. But this does not limit our knowledge of God, Aquinas thinks, because we can transcend the ordinary senses of the terms we use.[[60]](#footnote-60) Our natural knowledge that God is the cause of all being in the universe also involves recognition that He is utterly distinct from entities in the universe. This recognition of God’s uniqueness is what makes possible the recognition of the deficiency in our ordinary language and concepts, and hence permits us to make true statements about Him.[[61]](#footnote-61) We understand that God is not something of which we have experience and that our terms are derived from finite things, and we can adjust our language correspondingly (this is what Aquinas calls ‘analogical’ predication[[62]](#footnote-62)).

For example, Aquinas thinks we recognize we would have to refer to God by both abstract (e.g., “Truth”) and concrete terms (e.g., a concrete entity) because we can infer that God is both Truth itself and a concrete entity. As human language does not naturally have any term that could indicate both together, Aquinas thinks, we use both terms together to try to remedy the deficiencies in our language (e.g., Truth Himself subsisting as a concrete entity).[[63]](#footnote-63) It is when we recognize the deficiency and form a proposition by an act of judgment that we can predicate our names of God truly and properly.[[64]](#footnote-64) We might compare this to how we describe fundamental forces or particles in physics, of which we have no direct experience. We can come up with descriptions of what such things are or what they are like, as in illustrating what an electron is in a physics textbooks using dots or small spherical objects, although we recognize the deficiency of our depictions. Similarly, we can use language in new ways to describe objects of which we have no sense experience, or even those of which we might never be able to encounter (e.g., ‘dark matter’). We can understand what the individual terms mean in a proposition about God, and the proposition as a whole has sense, but it is not clear to us *how* the proposition is true of God, which is to say we have no experience of what these exemplary properties would be (e.g., what it is like for something to be Truth Himself). It is meaningful, Aquinas thinks, to affirm *that* God is wise and good, and that God is ontologically simple so that God’s goodness and wisdom are identical with what God is. But, while there is no contradiction in the concept of ontological simplicity, we have no experience from which to understand *how* He would exist as ontologically simple. There are epistemic limits to our knowledge of God, but it is our ability to recognize our epistemic limits that allows us to speak truly of Him. We can know that we do not know Him as He is.[[65]](#footnote-65)

Revealed names for God are equally constrained by these epistemic limits on our finite cognitive capacities. Aquinas notes that the terms used in revealed propositions still remain human terms; the Trinitarian terms ‘Father’ and ‘Son’ are derived from familial relations, for example.[[66]](#footnote-66) But revealed propositions are unique in a different facet. The acts of judgment by which these propositions were formed were not *human* acts of judgment. Instead, revealed propositions depend for their truth on the judgments which God made in selecting and combining our human terms to describe Himself. Jacques Maritain called this ‘superanalogy,’ as opposed to the ordinary ‘analogical’ way we speak of God. Instead of being expressions of judgments derived from our natural knowledge of God (reasoning from His effects), PRTs are expressions of God’s own judgments about Himself.[[67]](#footnote-67) In this case, however, God knows human language and our cognitive capacities perfectly. Consequently, when God forms propositions about Himself, while formed in human language and concepts, PRTs move us beyond merely human knowledge. The truths expressed in PRTs are divine truths and move us beyond the ordinary senses of the terms used in PRTs. For example, ‘Father’ and ‘Son’ are used not to describe God as a physical begetter of children, but rather to describe God as engaging in ‘intellectual generation,’ which is something more akin to how a human mind ‘conceives’ a concept or idea.[[68]](#footnote-68) While it might seem as if the content of PRTs would remain beyond our grasp in their full signification – how they apply to God – we do seem to be able to understand something about them. We can understand the terms and analogies God uses in Scripture and can thereby come to understand meaningful truths about Him.[[69]](#footnote-69) The problem in understanding PRTs is instead that they are ‘too meaningful’; it is impossible for us to understand fully what it is like for them to be true of God.

If this is true, there is a distinct suspension of understanding which can occur in regard to the content of testimony, parallel to the way the hearer can have justified belief in testimony despite not knowing the testifier’s justifications for their assertion. In the case of the content of testimony, the hearer understands some basic meaning of the terms used by the testifier and that those propositions are proposed meaningfully by an expert, but does not know the full implication of the truths that are transmitted – she does not yet have ‘objectual understanding’ of the referents or terms used. We can compare this to how we learn the technical sense or use of a word. ‘Justification’, for example, ordinarily means ‘the act of showing something to be right or reasonable.’ Because we know the ordinary meaning, we recognize the term is being used in some non-standard way when we read an epistemology textbook. We can come to understand the technical sense of the term when it is employed in epistemology by attending to the ways the term is used by philosophers. Perhaps we take an epistemology class where the term is defined in a particular way, even though we do not understand how that definition applies or how it is typically used, but we take it on trust and accept from the teacher that this is the sense of the term in epistemology.

This ‘teleological suspension’ of understanding happens in our reliance upon experts; we suspend first-hand objectual understanding and accept that the expert understands better than we. It is this suspension that facilitates, these cases, coming to first-hand understanding. In our given case, if we accept the teacher’s say-so as to the meaning of the term, we can come to understand for ourselves how the term is typically employed in epistemological contexts and what it means in a first-hand way. [[70]](#footnote-70) To apply this to the religious case, the terms used in PRTs are derived from human concepts. We can understand them as referring to God’s essential being because we can trust that God understood why He used the terms He did in Scripture, even if we lack objectual understanding of how they apply. Aquinas thinks it is precisely this kind of suspension of understanding that necessarily occurs in faith: “…when someone is taught by a teacher, it is required that the conceptions of principles are received from the teacher not as intelligible in themselves, but in the mode of credulity [i.e., as testimonial knowledge], as being above one’s own capacity [to understand]….”[[71]](#footnote-71) The view that Aquinas proposes is that PRTs are understood not in themselves but “in general, as being under the common aspect of being credible… [because a believer] would not believe unless he believed [PRTs] to be credible….”[[72]](#footnote-72) The idea is that one perceives PRTs as valuable testimonial truths which are themselves meaningful, if not yet fully comprehensible by our limited cognitive capacities.Consequently, in accepting these propositions in God’s testimony, we come to know (by means of testimony) how God understands Himself, even if we cannot hope to have the same level of comprehensive understanding He has.

Our ability to grow into first-hand understanding of the PRTs is premised on the fact that we accept epistemic dependence upon God’s testimony. Such epistemic dependence is quite normal, as we depend upon teachers and experts in many situations in order to acquire epistemic goods.[[73]](#footnote-73) The epistemic dependence of faith, for Aquinas, similarly exists in order for the believer to acquire epistemic goods, among which are understanding of PRTs. In this life, scientific study of theology or mystical knowledge of God through the cognitive Gifts of the Holy Spirit are routes by which one can come to some indirect objectual understanding of PRTs.[[74]](#footnote-74) The mystic knowledge of God, for example, brings the believer to understand God “as above all understanding” and so to rely more fully on God’s grace. [[75]](#footnote-75) But, ultimately, faith’s reliance upon God will find its consummation in a full understanding of PRTs in the ‘Beatific Vision’ (a direct understanding of God’s essence in heaven). Faith is therefore “the beginning of eternal life in us” because it is a virtue of receiving God’s testimony so as to trust His testimony about Himself, even though we do not understand it here on earth, so as to understand Him perfectly in heaven.[[76]](#footnote-76)

1. Conclusion

Thomas Aquinas’ analysis of faith highlights some ways in which understanding plays a critical role in testimonial knowledge. Every receiver will need to trust that the testifier has knowledge, justification for their beliefs, and so the receiver will in any standard case of testimonial trust lack understanding of those justifications themselves. One accepts testimonial knowledge because of some further good to be gained, whether practically or epistemically, by trusting the testifier. In epistemic dependence on experts, a further lack of understanding is acceptable within certain bounds. We can suspend understanding of the justification that a testifier possesses if we understand that they are trustworthy (competent and sincere in asserting *p*) and we can suspend understanding of the content of testimony if we understand the basic meaning of the terms used and that the testifier is using these terms meaningfully to convey expert testimony. These ‘teleological suspensions’ of understanding are epistemically valuable in the case of testimonial knowledge, as much of the testimonial knowledge we acquire in learning from teachers or experts occurs on just such a suspension. In that way, testimonial knowledge both requires some understanding and, as Greco points out, typically occurs without understanding.[[77]](#footnote-77) We could not come to understand from experts if we did not depend on their understanding in this way.

In fact, this account makes clear how such epistemic dependence in faith might be morally and epistemically mandatory. Whereas coming to accept some belief by sheer force of will is generally thought impossible, it does not seem as counter-intuitive to think that we can voluntarily choose not to believe a certain testifier. But Fricker has noted that there *are* such cases of mandatory epistemic dependence.[[78]](#footnote-78) Lack of trust can be blameworthy in those cases. It would be epistemically foolish, for instance, to reject the consensus of the scientific community and instead opt to believe in pseudo-science. If that is correct, a positive choice to reject trust in God’s testimony is as morally and epistemically blameworthy as the natural case, if not more so. This follows because rejecting God’s testimony is to reject the testimony of the expert knower *par excellence*, and so supremely epistemically irresponsible. While humans are not yet epistemically placed (as they will be in heaven) to understand God’s trustworthiness intuitively or directly,[[79]](#footnote-79) potential converts do perceive God to be trustworthy indirectly by the *lumen fidei.[[80]](#footnote-80)* When a potential convert is confronted with proposed testimony from God, this would epistemically and morally obligate the believer to accept God’s testimony. Aquinas notes that even if God did not confirm His message by miracles, we would still be obligated to believe if we immediately understood that God revealed some truth to us.[[81]](#footnote-81) It is then plausible why Aquinas thinks voluntary unbelief is the greatest of sins: it leads us to be completely disconnected from ultimate truth and to be unable to will any moral goods effectively.[[82]](#footnote-82) Suspension of understanding could be epistemically mandatory, then, in certain cases.

On this picture, Thomas Aquinas broadly agrees that the process of coming to believe God is an ‘inferential’ one: there is first a graced act of understanding (God illumining the intellect of the potential convert with the *lumen fidei*) by which the person understands PRTs are proposed to them by God and that He is trustworthy.[[83]](#footnote-83) This is followed by assent: our will moves our intellect to accept the testimony of God, utilizing this initial understanding as a ‘premise’ in a quasi-inferential type act. When the believer assents, God infuses a habitual disposition (faith) so that the believer continues to trust God and assent to PRTs. Faith would then be a virtue of cognitive dependence on God, by which the believer has dispositional possession of testimonial knowledge. Once a believer has received and accepted PRTs as God’s testimony to them, they possess knowledge of those PRTs dispositionally as long as they continue to trust God as to their truth, and the believer can employ their knowledge of PRTs to acquire further understanding or knowledge.[[84]](#footnote-84) In the case of the virtue of faith, trust in God is the only way to acquire salvific knowledge, and it is this that gives faith its value. It is only by trusting God’s testimony to us that we can stand outside of merely human knowledge and be deified through participating in God's self-knowing –to understand who God is.[[85]](#footnote-85) Faith seeks and is naturally oriented toward growth in understanding.

Consider the following: Paul arrives at Union Station and asks the first person he sees directions to the Sears Tower. But Paul’s helpful guide gives directions in Mandarin Chinese, a language Paul does not speak, and so Paul is unable to understand the directions and receives no testimonial knowledge. On the other hand, Joe receives directions he does not fully understand, even though in his native language. Joe’s guide instructs him

1. See, for example, the account given by Elizabeth Fricker, “Second-Hand Knowledge,” in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* Vol. LXXIII, No. 3 (Nov. 2006): 592-618; see also “Against Gullibility,” in *Knowing from Words,* eds. A. Chakrabarti & B. K. Matilal (Kluwer, 1994), 125-161. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. A note on my use of the term “testimonial knowledge” or “knowledge” in regard to faith: unless I explicitly specify otherwise, I will be using these terms in the broad, minimalist, ordinary sense of ‘knowledge’ (e.g., as testimony transmits ‘knowledge’ from speaker to hearer), not in the sense of Aristotelian *scientia*. I posit that this only entails assent with appropriate justification (e.g., testimonial) to true propositions, and so compatible with the virtue of faith. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones de Veritate* [QDV], q. 14, a. IX, resp. […quod scilicet excedit facultatem intellectus omnium hominum in statu viae existentium; sicut Deum esse trinum, et unum et huiusmodi. Et de his impossibile est ab aliquo homine scientiam haberi; sed quilibet fidelis assentit huiusmodi propter testimonium Dei, cui haec sunt praesto et cognita.] [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. E.g., those experiencing the Beatific Vision. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* [ST] I, q. 12, a. 13, ad. 1. […ei quasi ignoto coniungamur.] [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Michael Sherwin clarifies how practical action relies on different kinds of knowledge (some supplied by faith and others by hope) in *By Knowledge and Love* (Washington, DC: Catholic Univ. of America Press, 2011), esp. 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. C.f., ST I, q. 3, a. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. C.f., ST II-II, q. 23, a. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Sherwin, 151. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. C.f., ST II-II, q. 2, a. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. ST II-II, q. 4, a. 7, resp. […naturalis cognitio non potest attingere ad Deum secundum quod est obiectum beatitudinis, prout tendit in ipsum spes et caritas.] C.f., ST I, q. 1, a. 1, resp. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. ST I-II, q. 110, a. 4, resp. […enim per potentiam intellectivam homo participat cognitionem divinam per virtutem fidei; et secundum potentiam voluntatis amorem divinum, per virtutem caritatis…] [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Thomas Aquinas, *De Divinis Nominibus Dionysii,* c. 1, l. 2, n. 70; c. 7, l. 1, n. 705. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. ST II-II, q. 4, a. 1, resp. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. ST II-II, q. 5, a. 1, resp. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. ST I, q. 12, a. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. C.f., ST I, q. 12, a. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. ST I, q. 12, a. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. ST I, q. 12, a. 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. C.f., ST II-II, q. 2, a. 10, resp. […ita credere debet homo ea quae sunt fidei non propter rationem humanam, sed propter auctoritatem divinam.] [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. In what follows, I will chiefly rely on Fricker’s version of ‘local reductionism’ to clarify Aquinas’ theory of testimonial justification. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Fricker, “Second-Hand Knowledge,” 601. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. C.f., Fricker, “Against Gullibility,” 148-151. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Matthew Kent Siebert, “Aquinas on Testimonial Justification,” in *Review of Metaphysics* 69 (Mar. 2016):574-575. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. ST II-II, q. 5, a. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. It is of course an odd case: their trust relies on God always speaking the truth. While it might be that they accept some truth because God said it, it is an inferential process that leads to this trust in the truth of the statement, not a trust in God Himself as a testifier. It is thus deviant; not a case of testimonial knowledge. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. I am bracketing, then, any problem that might arise with how an individual preacher or book of Scripture is known to accurately relay the message; instead, I assume all these means are reliable transmission of the original message from God. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. QVD, q. 14, a. VIII, resp. [Unde neque hominis neque Angeli testimonio assentire infallibiliter in veritatem duceret, nisi in quantum in eis loquentis Dei testimonium consideratur.] [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. This is the role played by Aquinas’ ‘natural theology.’ He argues that we can have inferential knowledge of God’s existence, and also God being Truth itself. C.f., ST I, q. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Robert Audi, *Rational Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 224. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. John Greco gives such a picture of understanding in, “Episteme: Knowledge and Understanding,” in *Virtues and Their Vices,* ed. Kevin Timpe and Craig Boyd(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 285-302. See also Jonathan Kvanvig, “Knowledge, Understanding, and Reasons for Belief,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Reasons and Normativity,* ed. Daniel Starr (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. C.f., Thomas Aquinas, *In Libri Ethicorum,* n. 1149 […scientia est habitus demonstrativus, idest ex demonstratione causatus….]; n. 1179 […sic convenienter cognitio principiorum quae statim innotescunt cognito quod quid est circa terminos intellectus nominatur….] [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. ST II-II, q. 8, a. 1, ad. 2. […discursus rationis semper incipit ab intellectu et terminatur ad intellectum, ratiocinamur enim procedendo ex quibusdam intellectis, et tunc rationis discursus perficitur quando ad hoc pervenimus ut intelligamus illud quod prius erat ignotum. Quod ergo ratiocinamur ex aliquo praecedenti intellectu procedit.] C.f., ibid., resp. [Et hoc manifeste patet considerantibus differentiam intellectus et sensus, nam cognitio sensitiva occupatur circa qualitates sensibiles exteriores; cognitio autem intellectiva penetrat usque ad essentiam rei, obiectum enim intellectus est quod quid est….] [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. ST II-II, q. 1, a. 4, resp. [Uno modo, quia ad hoc movetur ab ipso obiecto, quod est vel per seipsum cognitum, sicut patet in principiis primis, quorum est intellectus; vel est per aliud cognitum, sicut patet de conclusionibus, quarum est scientia.] [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* [SCG] IIIb, c. 154, n. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Elizabeth Fricker, “Telling and Trusting,” in *Mind,* New Series, Vol. 104, No. 414 (Apr. 1995): 405. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Fricker, “Against Gullibility,” 154-155. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Fricker, “Second-Hand Knowledge,” 600. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Elizabeth Fricker notes scientists trust each other not because of knowledge of personal trustworthiness, but because of commitment to the norm of the profession, “Trusting Others in the Sciences,” in *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 33 (2002): 383. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Elizabeth Fricker, “Testimony and Epistemic Autonomy,” in *The Epistemology of Testimony,* ed. Jennifer Lackey and Ernest Sosa (Oxford University Press, 2006), 226. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Ibid., 236-237. This would follow from Fricker’s principle of ‘strong deference’ being applicable when one recognizes that another has ‘a superior expertise – an intrinsic epistemic power’ greater than my own. A child would at least need the capacity to recognize experts. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. The whole content of divine revelation is implied by Aquinas to be contained in Scripture, which is proposed in some form when preached appropriately; c.f., ST II-II, q. 1, a. 9, ad. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. ST II-II, q. 6, a. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Sherwin outlines both of these elements as they develop in Aquinas’ mature theology of faith; ibid., 144. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. ST II-II, q. 1, a. 4, ad 3. […lumen fidei facit videre ea quae creduntur.] [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. ST II-II, q. 1, a. 3, resp. [Unde nihil potest cadere sub fide nisi inquantum stat sub veritate prima. Sub qua nullum falsum stare potest, sicut nec non ens sub ente, nec malum sub bonitate.]. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Aquinas also says that a theological virtue has one and the same object and end, using this to argue that the object of faith is God as First Truth; ST II-II, q. 4, a. 1, resp. [fides, cum sit virtus theologica, sicut supra dictum est, habet idem pro obiecto et fine….] [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. QDV XIV, a. 8, ad. 2. [….quamvis divino testimonio sit de omnibus credendum, tamen divinum testimonium, sicut et cognitio, primo et principaliter est de seipso, et consequenter de aliis.] [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Audi notes how knowledge of the credibility of the testifier is required to justify my belief, and that it cannot be entirely part of the testimony itself; ibid., 229-230; c.f., Fricker, “Second-Hand Knowledge,” 611. While God is a unique case, my account here would not violate this requirement, as it is not the content of the PRT, but a separate object of knowledge, that grounds our knowledge of the credibility of the speaker. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. C.f., ST I, q. 12, a. 11; ST II-II, q. 1, a. 4 & 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. ST II-II, q. 8, a. 4, ad. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. QVD, q. 14, a. 1, ad. 5. [Ex lumine igitur simplici, quod est fides, causatur id quod perfectionis est, scilicet assentire; sed in quantum illud lumen non perfecte participatur….] [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. QVD, q. XI, a. 1, ad. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. ST I, q. 13, a. 1, ad. 2. [quia ex creaturis in Dei cognitionem venimus, et ex ipsis eum nominamus, nomina quae Deo attribuimus, hoc modo significant, secundum quod competit creaturis materialibus] [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Much of the first part of the ST is devoted to such a derivation, as is the more narrative SCG I. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. ST I, q. 13, a. 2, resp. […quaelibet creatura intantum eum repraesentat, et est ei similis, inquantum perfectionem aliquam habet, non tamen ita quod repraesentet eum sicut aliquid eiusdem speciei vel generis, sed sicut excellens principium, a cuius forma effectus deficiunt, cuius tamen aliqualem similitudinem effectus consequuntur….] [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. ST I, q. 13, a. 1, resp. […sed cognoscitur a nobis ex creaturis, secundum habitudinem principii, et per modum excellentiae et remotionis.] [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. ST I, q. 13, a. 11, resp. […hoc nomen ‘qui est’ nullum modum essendi determinat, sed se habet indeterminate ad omnes….] [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. ST I, q. 13, a. 3, resp. & ad. 1. C.f., Stump, “The Nature of a Simple God,” [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Gregory Rocca, *Speaking the Incomprehensible God* (Washington, DC: Catholic Univ. of America Press, 2004), 157. C.f., ST I, q. 13, a. 3, resp. & ad. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. ST I, q. 13, a. 5, resp. [Et sic, quidquid dicitur de Deo et creaturis, dicitur secundum quod est aliquis ordo creaturae ad Deum, ut ad principium et causam, in qua praeexistunt excellenter omnes rerum perfectiones.] [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. C.f., ST I, q. 13, a. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. ST I, q. 13, a. 1, ad 2. C.f., Eleonore Stump, “The Nature of a Simple God,” in *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 87 (2013): 33-42. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Rocca, 340-350. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. For a more extended treatment, see Brian Davies, “Aquinas on what God is not,” in *Thomas Aquinas,* ed. Brian Davies(Oxford University Press, 2002)*,* 227-236. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. ST I, q. 12, a. 12, ad. 1. […per revelationem gratiae in hac vita non cognoscamus de Deo quid est, et sic ei quasi ignoto coniungamur….] [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Jacques Maritain gives an extensive treatment of the ‘superanalogy’ of revealed terms in *Degrees of Knowledge*, 256-259. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. C.f., ST I, q. 27, a. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Rocca, 193-195. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Fricker gives a picture similar to this in our acquisition of language as children, but it is obviously applicable to any case of coming to understand new meanings or principles; “Testimony and Epistemic Autonomy,” 226-227. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. SCG IIIb, c. 152, n. 4. [Et similiter, cum aliquis a magistro docetur, oportet quod a principio conceptiones magistri recipiat non quasi eas per se intelligens, sed per modum credulitatis, quasi supra suam capacitatem existentes: in fine autem, quando iam edoctus fuerit, eas poterit intelligere. Sicut autem ex dictis patet, auxilio divinae gratiae dirigimur in ultimum finem. Ultimus autem finis est manifesta visio primae veritatis in seipsa: ut supra ostensum est. Oportet igitur quod, antequam ad istum finem veniatur, intellectus hominis Deo subdatur per modum credulitatis, divina gratia hoc faciente.] [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. ST II-II, q. 1, a. 4, ad 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. For a more extended critique of the ‘ideal of the autonomous knower’, see Fricker, “Testimony and Epistemic Autonomy,” 226-250. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. The three cognitive Gifts are Wisdom, Understanding, and Knowledge. For example, Gift of Understanding begins from the understanding of faith and proceeds supernaturally to a deeper understanding of the PRTs; ST II-II, q. 8, a. 1, ad. 2 […discursus rationis semper incipit ab intellectu et terminatur ad intellectum, ratiocinamur enim procedendo ex quibusdam intellectis, et tunc rationis discursus perficitur quando ad hoc pervenimus ut intelligamus illud quod prius erat ignotum. Quod ergo ratiocinamur ex aliquo praecedenti intellectu procedit. Donum autem gratiae non procedit ex lumine naturae, sed superadditur ei, quasi perficiens ipsum. Et ideo ista superadditio non dicitur ratio, sed magis intellectus, quia ita se habet lumen superadditum ad ea quae nobis supernaturaliter innotescunt sicut se habet lumen naturale ad ea quae primordialiter cognoscimus.] [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Thomas Aquinas, *Super librum De Causis exposito*, 6.175. […sed Dei quidditas est ipsum esse, unde est supra intellectum.] [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. ST II-II, q. 4, a. 1, resp. […fides est habitus mentis, qua inchoatur vita aeterna in nobis.] [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. John Greco, “Religious Knowledge in the Context of Conflicting Testimony,” in *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 83 (2009): 67-68, 71-72. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Ibid., 243. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. SCG IIIb, c. 159, n. 2. [Deus enim, quantum in se est, paratus est omnibus gratiam dare, vult enim omnes homines salvos fieri, et ad cognitionem veritatis venire, ut dicitur I ad Tim. 2-4: sed illi soli gratia privantur qui in seipsis gratiae impedimentum praestant; sicut, sole mundum illuminante, in culpam imputatur ei qui oculos claudit, si ex hoc aliquod malum sequatur, licet videre non possit nisi lumine solis praeveniatur.] [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. John Jenkins makes the case for such a reading of Aquinas’ *lumen fidei;* ibid., 161-210. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Quodlibetales* II, q. 4, a. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. ST II-II, q. 10, a. 3, resp. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. This act of understanding prior to faith is referred to by Aquinas in ST II-II, q. 8, a. 8, ad. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. In God’s case, this happens either in theological science, acquired through human study and intellectual effort, or through the Gifts of the Spirit, which cause further types of understanding, knowledge, and wisdom. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. *De Divinis Nominibus Dionysii*, VII-1, 50-57. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)