

Why Aquinas was not a Mutakallim

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In his article “Why Maimonides was not a Mutakallim,”¹ W. Z. Harvey discusses the nature of *The Guide of the Perplexed* and confronts Leo Strauss’ interpretation of the *Guide* and the very foundation of his conception of Judaism. According to Harvey, “Strauss believed that Judaism and Philosophy are irreconcilable, and he believed that this was also Maimonides’ belief.”² Moreover, for Strauss “the *Guide* is an intelligent, or enlightened Kalam.”³ In his opinion, the *Guide* and the Kalam would belong to the same literary genre, apologetics, but their methods would be diverse: while the Kalam relies on imagination, the *Guide* would stick to the rules of the intellect, i.e., proper reasoning and correct argumentation. According to this hypothesis, Maimonides would have written a successful theological treatise that corrected the rational failures of certain Islamic Kalam authors, while sharing in their interest, the defense of faith.

Harvey proposes a different reading: the distinction between Philosophy and Kalam in Maimonides’ writings is not a historical one regarding authors and schools of thought, or regarding different answers to similar topics. It should rather be taken as conceptual, as a distinction between Philosophy and Sophistry. According to this interpretation, in order to determine whether someone is a philosopher or a mutakallim the following question should be asked: Is the argument based on the nature of what exists? If it is, then it is objective, scientific and therefore philosophical. If it is not, then we

1 W. Z. Harvey, “Why Maimonides Was Not a Mutakallim,” Joel L. Kraemer (ed.), *Perspectives on Maimonides – Philosophical and Historical Studies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, pp. 105-114.

2 Id., p. 106.

3 Id., p. 107.

have a sophist, a mutakallim, whose arguments are based on imagination, on non-existent things.⁴

This seems to be the case. Maimonides addresses the nature of the Kalam in the *Guide* I:71 and when criticizing the methodology of the Mutakallimun, he recalls Themistius' explanation about the hierarchy between reality and human knowledge to summarize his own position on the matter:

I shall say to you that the matter is as Themistius puts it: that which exists does not conform to the various opinions, but rather the correct opinions conform to that which exists.⁵

That is, our mind should not artificially bend the real thing to match our prior understanding of the subject as if it were the intellect that determines how reality should be. Rather, it is the human intellect that is by nature open to and determined by the real thing. It extracts its nature and characteristics, and – if we don't let other cognitive powers like the imagination interfere in the process – it produces an accurate mental notion and yields a correct knowledge of the thing.

According to Maimonides, while the presuppositions of the Kalam contradict the nature of existence and imply “an upsetting of the world and a change in the order established,”⁶ the author of the *Guide* would rather strive to acquire the correct opinions according to the nature of things. That is, while a mutakallim would, in Maimonides' interpretation of the Kalamic doctrines, twist the laws of rational argumentation in order to find pseudo-arguments to support his beliefs, Maimonides defends the role of reason and its validity to arrive at correct conclusions, also in matters that belong to the realm of faith.

However, it is not clear whether Maimonides managed to find that correct articulation between faith and reason, and this may be at the root of the controversy that arose around the *Guide*. Some of his early opponents accused him of speaking out “until faith has been drained out of man.”⁷

4 Id., p. 109-110.

5 M. Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963, I:71, p. 179.

6 Id., p. 181.

7 Cf. H. Brody, “Poems of Meshullam b. Solomon da Pierra,” in *Yedeot ha-Mahon le-Heker ha-Shira ha-Ivrit*, IV, 1938. Cf. p. 113, No. 48, v. 9.

In fact, Maimonides discusses the nature of reason and its boundaries, of Philosophy as a science, but nowhere in the *Guide* is there a parallel discussion about Theology as a science, or a detailed explanation about the nature of faith and reason and the way they are interwoven in the human quest for truth. He addresses topics proper to religion from a rational point of view but fails to address the question whether there can be a proper science, different from Philosophy but related to it in method, which deals with the matters of faith. He does not develop a Theology of his own in which faith and reason can go hand in hand with no fear of contradiction. It seems that, after seeing the frustrated efforts of the mutakallim to support their beliefs with truly rational arguments, he may have considered the attempt to match the conclusions of faith with those of reason doomed to fail.

But then, if there is only either Philosophy or Sophistry, what about human knowledge obtained through faith and Revelation? Should it all be reduced to whatever the human intelligence alone can attain? Moreover, the question arises: Can – or should – the Kalam – understood as the conceptual path suggested above – be considered a synonym of Theology? Leaving aside these early – and apparently failed – attempts at producing a reasoned explanation of religious beliefs, is it possible to have a true science that deals with issues that are proper to religious faith? Is Maimonides' conceptual dichotomy, Philosophy or Kalam, the only alternative? If it is, then the very notion of Theology as a science of God would be a contradiction in terms. We find here two different and irreconcilable ways of understanding Theology.

But understanding Philosophy as the science of reasoning is not the only possibility either. In the above mentioned article, Harvey recalls that he once asked S. Pines whether he considered Thomas Aquinas a philosopher or a theologian, in the kalamic sense. After a brief reflection, Pines replied that he considered Aquinas to be a theologian, “because there are no loose ends.”⁸ The question was about the “theology” of the mutakallimun, which was in fact an unlawful manipulation of data and cheated in the application of the rules of thinking, if we are to rely on Maimonides' description of it. Then, would Pines consider Aquinas really a mutakallim, someone who twisted the laws of thought in order to adequate reality to what he believed?

8 “Why Maimonides...,” p. 110, footnote 17.

That is a very serious accusation indeed to make against one of the greatest Aristotelian thinkers in the history of Christianity.⁹

No, apparently Pines was not accusing Aquinas of being manipulative of the rules of the intellect, since he gives another reason for considering him a theologian and not a philosopher: his thought has no loose ends. He seems to have no unanswered questions, everything fits into place. This is a puzzling answer, not so much because of his view of Theology as because of his understanding of Philosophy. It seems that Pines considered one of the essentials of Philosophy to be aporetic, fraught with unsolvable problems. If Aquinas had so many answers he could not be a true philosopher.

It seems from both Maimonides' critique of the *mutakallimun* and from Pines' critique of Aquinas that, in their opinion, there is no conciliation possible between reason and faith, between Philosophy and Theology, but for different reasons. For Maimonides, the *mutakallimun* are not philosophers because they twist the laws of reason to favor their own religious beliefs, thus betraying the principles of Philosophy. For Pines, Aquinas is not a philosopher because he seems to have a reasonable answer for every question. In the first case, Theology is questioned because it is practiced irrationally and understood as a synonym with irrationality. In the second, it is Philosophy that is questioned, because it is understood as unable to provide answers. In the first case, reason is twisted on purpose. In the second, it is useless.

My purpose in this article is to discuss this issue which is at the core of both Maimonides' critique of the *Kalam* and Pines' critique of Aquinas: To explore the very possibility of a science that, firmly grounded on the knowledge of the world and developed according to the principles of a reason fit to reach conclusions, may draw from the source of faith while at the same time avoiding the dangers of imagination. I will do so by examining what Thomas Aquinas understood to be the nature and task of Theology and its relation to the principles of Philosophy, and what he thought to be the relationship between faith and reason.

9 M. Borgo gives some examples of Aquinas' Aristotelianism since the very beginning of his Theological production. Cf. "La 'Métaphysique' d'Aristote dans le 'Commentaire' de Thomas d'Aquin au I livre de 'Sentences' de Pierre Lombard. Quelques exemples significatifs," *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques*, vol. 91, issue 4 (2007), pp. 651-692.

Aquinas' Major Rectifications to His *Commentary on the Sentences*

The first relevant source from a chronological point of view for determining Aquinas' thought on the nature of Theology is his *Commentary on the Four Books of the Sentences of Peter Lombard*, particularly the beginning of the commentary to the 1st Book.¹⁰

The Four Books of the Sentences, composed by a theologian and bishop of Paris who lived in the first half of the 12th Century, contained an explanation of the main subjects of Catholic Theology based on assertions extracted from Holy Scripture and from the works of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church. This work became the standard textbook at the medieval faculties of Theology in most of the universities from the beginning of the 13th Century until the 16th Century. Any advanced student who wanted to obtain the title of *Magister* in Theology had to comment on it, a task that lasted around two academic years. The *Commentary on the Sentences* would convey the author's major lines of theological thought, which would likely be developed in his future literary production.

Thomas Aquinas commented on the *Sentences* at the University of Paris between 1252 and 1256. Since it was his *opera prima* it was likely to experience many revisions and corrections, much like doctoral dissertations nowadays. In fact, there is abundant literature about the complex manuscript history of this text. Since the author composed it while teaching at the university and the students took notes, the text started circulating at an early stage of composition and seems to have experienced several late modifications. This has greatly complicated the task of the Leonine Commission, in charge of the critical edition of the complete works of Aquinas since the late 19th Century, which has so far failed to publish this particular work.

According to Adriano Oliva, the President of the Commission, the study of the manuscript history of this work shows that Aquinas carried out four major corrections in the Commentary to the 1st Book.¹¹ He inserted the

10 B. Mondin examined Aquinas' philosophical principles according to this first work in: *St. Thomas Aquinas' Philosophy in the "Commentary on the Sentences."* The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1975.

11 Cf. A. Oliva, *Les débuts de l'enseignement de Thomas d'Aquin et sa*

Quaestio de attributis (*In I Sent., d. 2, q. 1, a. 3*), which develops and clarifies certain matters regarding the divine attributes, and cancelled the end of the *Responsio* to the preceding article, which had become superfluous.¹² He also replaced *In I Sent., d. 27, q. 2, a. 2 Resp.* with a new text.¹³ Finally, he inserted a new article 3 in the Prologue to this work containing a very interesting explanation about the nature of Theology. This article will be the focus of this study. It should be noted that, due to its late insertion in the *Commentary* and its absence from several important manuscripts, this text did not make it into relevant and widely used editions, like the Parma edition from 1856.¹⁴

I intend to examine this text and will attempt to reconstruct Aquinas' position on the nature of Theology according to it by collating it with the relevant ones in later works.

Theology as the Queen of all Sciences

The Prologue to Aquinas' *Commentary on the 1st Book of the Sentences* introduces the teachings contained in the four Books as a whole. He refers in it to the topics of the teachings contained in the *Commentary* by calling them indistinctly "sacra doctrina" or "theologia," and addresses them as follows:

conception de la 'Sacra Doctrina,' Paris, 2006. This work is the bulk of his doctoral dissertation and contains the only critical edition – so far – of the Prologue of Aquinas' *Commentary on the Sentences*, which I will be using here.

- 12 For more on this text, cf. my *Aquinas and Maimonides on the Possibility of the Knowledge of God – An examination of the Quaestio de attributis*. (Amsterdam, Studies in Jewish Thought, 11). Dordrecht: Springer, 2006.
- 13 The text is devoted to the attribution of the name "Word" (*Verbum*) to the 2nd Person of the Holy Trinity.
- 14 Parma was the edition used for the compilation of the *Index Thomisticus*, and therefore the text is missing from this excellent instrument as well. The Vivès edition, however, was based on manuscripts that included the piece and does have it. Mandonnet's edition also includes the text. Cf. *S. Thomae Aquinatis Scriptum super libros Sententiarum magistri Petri Lombardi episcopi Parisiensis*, I. P. Mandonnet (ed.). Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1929.

In order to the evidence of the sacred doctrine presented in this book, five questions are asked. First, about its necessity. Second, given its necessity, whether it is one or more. Third, if one, whether it is practical or speculative, and if speculative, whether it is wisdom, science, or understanding. Fourth, about its subject. Fifth, about the method.¹⁵

The *Solutio* to the first article, about the necessity of the “sacra doctrina,” addresses the position of Theology in relation to Philosophy and to the final end of human beings:

All who understood correctly place the end of human life in the contemplation of God. The contemplation of God is twofold: one through creatures, which is imperfect for the reason already stated, in which the Philosopher puts contemplative happiness, which is the happiness of the way, and all philosophical knowledge, which results from [apprehending] the creatures’ notions, aims at it. Another is the contemplation of God by which He is directly seen in His essence. This [contemplation] is perfect, will be in Heaven and is possible to man according to the assumption of faith.¹⁶

Aristotle considered the purpose of Philosophy to be the quest for the ultimate truths, and for the Philosopher the contemplation of these truths was the greatest source of human happiness. Since according to reason there must be an ultimate and necessary cause of all that exists, because neither limited beings nor the multiplicity of them can explain their own

15 *Super I Sent., prol., Prologi questiones, p. 310, ll. 1-5*. The page and line numbers refer to A. Oliva’s critical edition. For an examination of the terms ‘sacra pagina’ and ‘sacra doctrina’ cf. C. Dumont, “Enseignement de la Théologie et méthode scientifique,” *Gregorianum*, vol. 71, issue 3 (1999), pp. 441-463.

16 *Ibid., a. 1, sol., p. 312, ll. 31-38*: Omnes qui recte senserunt posuerunt finem humane vite Dei contemplationem. Contemplatio autem Dei est duplex. Una per creaturas, que est imperfecta ratione iam dicta, in qua contemplatione Philosophus felicitatem contemplativam posuit, que tamen felicitas est vie, et ad hanc ordinatur tota cognitio philosophica que ex rationibus creaturarum procedit. Est alia contemplatio Dei, qua videtur immediate per suam essentiam, et hec perfecta est, que erit in patria et est homini possibilis secundum fidei suppositionem.

existence, Aristotle included the study of that final cause among the subjects of philosophical study.¹⁷

Aquinas understands that the Philosopher's First Cause or First Mover of the Universe is the same Supreme Being that the Bible calls God and praises as the Creator of all that exists.¹⁸ He concludes that philosophical knowledge of the physical world necessarily points to its Creator, who is attainable to reason from the knowledge of its creatures, because they are apprehended as his effects.¹⁹ But Aquinas also goes beyond the possibility of a philosophical knowledge of the world and asserts that, according to what he knows from faith, human beings would be able to contemplate that same God in Heaven directly and in his essence, and not just indirectly through his effects, the created beings. That perfect knowledge of the First Cause of all would be the fulfillment of man's aspiration to the intellectual happiness that philosophers search for and can attain only imperfectly in this life.²⁰

However, according to Aquinas, direct knowledge of the divine essence is something beyond man's natural capacities both in this life and in the afterlife, and therefore only God can grant such contemplation:

It is appropriate that the things that are for the end be proportionate to it, since man is led to that contemplation in this life through a knowledge that is not acquired from creatures, but immediately inspired by the divine light. And that is what Theology is about.²¹

17 On the Aristotelian origin of Theology as a science, cf. W. J. Hankey, "Theology as System and as a Science: Proclus and Thomas Aquinas," *Dionysius*, vol. 6 (1982), pp. 83-93. Also: C. Lafleur, J. Carrier, "Dieu, la théologie et la métaphysique au milieu du XIII siècle selon des textes épistémologiques aristotéliens et thomasiens," *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques*, vol. 89 (2005), pp. 261-294.

18 Cf. R. M. McNerny, *'Preambula fidei': Thomism and the God of the Philosophers*. Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006.

19 Cf. L. J. Elders, "Faith and Reason: The Synthesis of St. Thomas Aquinas," in *Laudemus Viros Gloriosos: Essays in Honor of Armand Augustine Maurer C.S.B.*: South Bend, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 2007, pp. 109-131.

20 On man's final end, natural desire and vision of God cf. M. Gervais, "Nature et grâce chez Saint Thomas d'Aquin," (2) *Laval Théologique et Philosophique*, vol. 31 (1975), pp. 293-321.

21 *Super I Sent., prol., Prologi questiones, p. 313, ll. 38-41*: Unde oportet ut ea que sunt ad finem proportionentur fini, quatenus homo manuducatur ad illam

Intellectual contemplation in this life of the things related to the final end of man in the afterlife is such an exalted knowledge that, like the attainment of the end itself, requires a divine intervention. In a supernatural way that is analogous to that through which God grants man a direct contemplation of himself in Heaven, he grants in this life a divine light by which it is possible to grasp something of God's nature, of what awaits man in Heaven, and of the way to reach it. According to Aquinas, Theology would be the study of all these matters with the aid of that divine light called faith.²²

From here he reaches two conclusions: one is that Theology rules over all the other sciences, being the highest of all; and the other, that Theology is entitled to reach out to all the other sciences for aid and is served by them, in order to fully cover its subject matter.²³ Since Philosophy's purpose is lower and its end is ordered to that of Theology, the Queen of sciences can use all the data attained through philosophical arguments to fulfill its own higher purpose.²⁴

Theology as a Science Subordinate to God's

Aquinas' conclusions about the relation between Theology and the sciences so far, however, do not prove Theology to be a true science. In fact, he sees a noteworthy difference between the sciences and the theological endeavor and in the 3rd article of the Prologue he addresses the following objection:

Any science proceeds from self-evident principles that are manifest to

contemplationem in statu vie per cognitionem non a creaturis sumptam, set immediate ex divino lumine inspiratam. Et hec est doctrina theologie.

22 Cf. R. Garrigou-Lagrange, *Le sens du mystère et le clair-obscur intellectuel: nature et surnaturel*. Paris: Bibliothèque Française de Philosophie, 3 sér., 1934.

23 *Super I Sent., prol., Prologi questiones, p. 313, ll. 42-44*: Ex hoc possumus duas habere conclusiones: una est quod ista scientia imperat omnibus tamquam principalis. Alia est quod ipsa utitur in obsequium sui omnibus aliis scientiis (...).

24 *Ibid., ll. 47-49*: Ita cum finis totius philosophie sit infra finem theologie et ordinatus ad ipsum, theologia debet omnibus aliis scientiis imperare et uti hiis que in eis traduntur.

anyone. But this science proceeds from things to be believed that are not given to all. Therefore it is not a science.²⁵

This argument contains two reasons against considering Theology a science, condensed in a very brief sentence. The first reason states that all sciences are built on self-evident principles, whereas Theology is built on the principles of faith, which are not self-evident; the second argues that the light of faith on which Theology is built is not given to all, whereas any intellect can grasp scientific principles.

Oliva's critical edition of the text is very interesting because it offers the earlier response to this objection, and a new response to it that was added later on to some of the early manuscripts, thus showing the evolution of Aquinas' thought and the genesis of his position on the matter.

The original answer to the objection reads as follows:

To the other [objection] it must be said that this doctrine's first principles are the articles of faith which, infused by the light of faith, are as self-evident to those who have faith as the principles naturally implanted in us by the light of the agent intellect. It is not surprising if they are not evident to the infidels, because they don't have the light of faith, since the principles naturally implanted in us would not be evident without the light of the agent intellect either.²⁶

Aquinas goes on to say that these principles of faith on which Theology is based do not contradict the principles of the intellect that are common to all, and that they cannot be proved but only defended from those opposing them.²⁷

25 *Ibid.*, a. 3, p. 319, ll. 16-18: Preterea. Omnis scientia procedit ex principiis per se notis que cuilibet sunt manifesta. Hec autem scientia procedit ex credibilibus que non ab omnibus conceduntur. Ergo non est scientia.

26 *Ibid.*, ll. 59-63: Ad alium dicendum quod ista doctrina habet pro principiis primis articulos fidei, qui per lumen fidei infusum per se noti sunt habenti fidem, sicut et principia naturaliter nobis insita per lumen intellectus agentis. Nec est mirum si infidelibus nota non sunt, qui lumen fidei non habent, quia nec etiam principia naturaliter insita nota essent sine lumine intellectus agentis.

27 *Ibid.*, ll. 63-66: Et ex istis principiis, non respuens communia principia, procedit ista scientia; nec habet viam ad ea probanda, set solum ad defendendum a contradicentibus, sicut nec aliquis artifex potest probare sua principia.

It is easy to see why Aquinas was not satisfied with his own explanation. This is a somewhat rushed and incomplete answer. In it, Thomas elaborates on the peculiar nature of Theology and draws an interesting parallel between the light of the agent intellect, which infuses the first principles of knowledge that are common to everyone and allow for correct reasoning and natural apprehension, and the light of faith, which would allow for the faithful to have an evidence of the contents of the faith that non-believers do not share and cannot experience without that infused light. However, this answer does not address the core argument of that very relevant objection which, as noted above, was two-fold and argued that whereas the natural sciences have self-evident principles that are attainable by anyone, Theology's principles are based on faith and not everybody possesses them. In fact, Aquinas' answer seems to reinforce the objector's point.

Moreover, his answer is objectionable in that he argues that the principles of faith are self-evident to the faithful and therefore could be considered as principles of a science even if restricted to that group, because this assertion is not coherent with his own doctrine on the nature of faith, which is the knowledge of things unseen. If the believer must accept on faith things that he does not see, the articles of the faith cannot be self-evident to him!²⁸ That is why he had to rethink the answer and produce a new text.

Aquinas' new answer to the objection addresses it from another perspective. As M.-D. Chenu and Oliva have shown, this text was inserted originally as an alternative answer to it and the manuscript tradition does not clarify whether he meant for it to replace the original one or not.²⁹ On

28 *In III Sent., d. 24, q. 1, a. 2, resp., in fine*: Patet quod fides non potest esse de visis: quia forma illa intelligibilis quae principaliter est objectum fidei, idest Deus, formationem intellectus nostri subterfugit, et non est ei pervius in statu viae, ut dicit Augustinus. Nec iterum ea quae sunt fidei, ad principia visa reducere possumus demonstrando.

29 Cf. M.-D. Chenu, *La théologie comme science au XIIIe siècle*. Paris: Bibliothèque Thomiste 33, 1957, pp. 76-77. Whereas Chenu dates the composition of this second answer in Aquinas' sojourn in Rome, a decade after the composition of his Commentary on the *Sentences*, and considers it contemporary with the redaction of the *Quaestio de attributis* (also inserted in the 1st Book), Oliva considers this insertion contemporary at the latest with the redaction of *In III Sent.*, since the doctrine contained in this part of the Commentary is already similar to that of the second text. Cf. "Les débuts..."

this occasion he examines the nature and types of sciences as Aristotle describes them in the first Book of the *Posterior Analytics*:

Or else it should be said that, regarding the sciences, two [things] must be considered: First certainty, because not just any knowledge but only the one that gives certitude is called science. And second, that science is the goal of any discipline. In fact, all things pertaining to science are geared toward knowing.³⁰

The previous text focused on evidence as an essential trait of scientific knowledge. The new one nuances that statement and clarifies that the evidence of data acquired through the senses and the self-evidence of the first principles are just the departure point of certain sciences. What really defines all sciences is their purpose, the acquisition of certainty in the conclusions.

From these two [things], science has two [characteristics]: from the first it has that it is of the necessary, since from the contingent things certainty cannot be caused. From the second [it has] that it is of certain principles.³¹

Aquinas realized that he needed to make a distinction between evidence and certitude. We can have evidence of contingent matters, but that doesn't necessarily lead to scientific knowledge. What it does is to start from something necessary, from universal facts. Evidence can be a departure point for knowledge. In fact, it is prior to knowledge itself since it is a given, an objective trait of the thing that is apprehended. But what characterizes sciences is that they should lead to certitude, which is acquired as a result of reasoning. It is a product of an internal reflection, the final stage of the knower after he has been convinced of the correctness of the intellectual process and of the conclusions drawn. Whereas evidence is in a way

p. 143. In my opinion the arguments that Oliva provides for this *terminus ad quem* are insufficient.

30 *In I Sent., prol., a. 3, p. 323, ll. 67-70*: Vel dicendum quod in scientia duo est considerare, scilicet certitudinem, quia non quilibet cognitio sed certitudinalis tantum dicitur scientia. Item quod ipsa est terminus discipline: omnia enim que sunt in scientia ordinantur ad scire.

31 *Ibid., ll. 70-72*: Ex hiis autem duobus habet scientia duo. Ex primo habet quod est ex necessariis: ex contingentibus enim non potest causari certitudo. Ex secundo quod est ex aliquibus principiis.

something external to the knower because it accompanies certain knowable matters, certitude is a subjective trait that accompanies the conclusions of any true scientific knowledge.

But there is more to the Aristotelian division of the sciences from the *Posterior Analytics*. The second trait of all sciences is the fact that they are all based on certain principles. This allows Aquinas to apply the Aristotelian theory of the subordination of the sciences to the most peculiar one, Theology:

But this happens diversely in the diverse sciences, because the higher sciences stem from principles that are self-evident, such as Geometry and the like that have self-evident principles, as “if equal [quantities] are subtracted from equal ones, etc.” But regarding inferior sciences, which are subordinate to the superior ones, they are not from self-evident principles, but rather assume conclusions that are demonstrated in the superior sciences whose principles they use, which in fact are not self-evident principles but are demonstrated in the superior sciences through self-evident principles.³²

Superior sciences have self-evident principles, whereas the inferior ones borrow conclusions drawn from these principles in order to achieve their goal. The inferior or subordinate science doesn't deal with or demonstrate the principles it uses, but rather takes them from the higher science to which it is subject.³³ The demonstration of these conclusions belongs to the superior science which, in turn, draws them from its self-evident principles. Thomas goes on to illustrate his point by comparing the science of Perspective with that of Geometry. The former is subordinate to the latter since both deal with lines, but while Perspective considers lines as visual objects, Geometry is capable of defining what is a line and deals with lines as such.³⁴

32 *Ibid.*, ll. 72-78: Sed hoc est diversimode in diversis, quia superiores scientie sunt ex principiis per se notis, sicut geometria et huiusmodi habentia principia per se nota, ut 'si ab equalibus equalia demas' etc. Inferiores autem scientie, que superioribus subalternantur, non sunt ex principiis per se notis, sed supponunt conclusiones probatas in superioribus scientiis et eis utuntur pro principiis, que in veritate non sunt principia per se nota, sed in superioribus scientiis per principia per se nota probantur.

33 For more on Aquinas' doctrine of the theory of the subordination of the sciences, cf. M.-D. Chenu, *La théologie comme science...*, pp. 71-85.

34 Cf. Aristotle, *Post. Anal.*, lib. I, ch. 2, 72a. In his Commentary to this work,

After the above clarification, Aquinas adds yet another two-fold way of considering the hierarchy or subordination of sciences. According to it, two sciences may be regarded as superior and inferior either from the point of view of the subject, or from that of the mode of knowledge:

A science can be superior to another in two ways: it could be on the basis of its subject matter, like Geometry, which being about magnitude, is superior to Perspective, which is about visual magnitude; or on the basis of the way of knowing, and this is the case of Theology, which is inferior to the Science that is found in God. We know imperfectly what He knows with the utmost perfection. Like a subordinate science presupposes some things taken from the superior one and proceeds from them as from principles, thus Theology presupposes the articles of faith that are infallibly proved in the Science of God and believes them, and proceeds through them in order to demonstrate further the things that follow from the articles. Therefore, Theology is a science subordinate so to speak to the divine Science, from which it receives its principles.³⁵

The subject matter of both Theology and the Science of God is God himself, his inner nature and his actions in the world. But there is a huge distance

Thomas uses the same example of Geometry but in this case as the inferior science that assumes from a higher one, Physics, that there is a line between any two given points: “Est et alius modus quo propositiones suppositiones dicuntur. Sunt enim quaedam propositiones quod in illa scientia supponantur, licet probentur per principia alterius scientiae. Sicut a puncto ad punctum rectam lineam ducere, supponit geometra et probat naturalis, ostendens quod inter quaelibet duo puncta sit linea media.” Cf. *Expositio in libros Posteriorum Analyticorum, lib. 1, lect. 5, n. 7*. If we were to unify both examples, the hierarchy of these sciences would be, from higher to lower: Physics, Geometry, Perspective.

35 *In I Sent., prol., a. 3, p. 324, ll. 81-90*: Potest autem aliqua scientia esse superior alia dupliciter: vel ratione subiecti, ut geometria que est de magnitudine superior est ad perspectivam que est de magnitudine visuali; vel ratione modi cognoscendi, et sic theologia est inferior scientia que in Deo est. Nos enim imperfecte cognoscimus illud quod ipse perfectissime cognoscit. Et sicut scientia subalternata a superiori supponit aliqua et per illa tamquam per scientia Dei supponit et eis credit, et per istud procedit ad probandum ulterius illa que ex articulis sequuntur. Est ergo theologia scientia quasi subalternata divine scientie a qua accipit principia sua.

– in fact, an infinite one – between the perfection of God’s knowledge and the imperfect way in which creatures can grasp those matters. Among other limitations, man must rely on faith for the most essential elements that lie at the foundation of his knowledge of God. But starting from them, he can advance in that knowledge and reach scientific conclusions. Both the departure point – the articles of the faith – and the conclusions are endowed with certainty, and that is what makes of Theology a science, one subject to that of God who guarantees its truthfulness, and from which it borrows its principles.

In his book, Oliva relies on the intriguing opening words of the second redaction of the answer to the objection examined above – *Or else* – to argue that Aquinas added this later text after thinking the matter over more thoroughly, but was still hesitant about whether he preferred the first or the second one.³⁶ However, it seems to me that Aquinas wanted both texts to become one, after certain corrections to the first, but didn’t have the time to polish the text probably due to the academic workload and other tasks he undertook during that period. In fact, both the first and the second answers to the objection contain elements that will later become part of his teaching on the role of faith and reason for a comprehensive human knowledge about God in the Commentary on Boetius’ *De Trinitate*, particularly q. 2, a. 2 and 3, in his Commentary on the 3rd Book of the *Sentences*, d. 23 and 24, in the *Quaestio disputata De Veritate* n. 14, and in the *Summa Theologiae* I^a, q. 1, a. 8.

Where Reason and Faith Meet

The text examined above leads to the conclusion that the believer’s knowledge of the contents of faith is in continuity so to speak with the knowledge of God who perfectly knows all these matters. In fact, the subordinate science is considered lesser not regarding the quality of the principles but regarding the conclusions, which are truly scientific but are based on principles that are not evident to the theologian. This science requires a constant exchange between reason and faith, each one of them in its proper role and according to its own nature.

36 *Les débuts...*, p. 143.

Theology uses the authorities of the philosophers wherever they could know the truth through natural reason. But – Aquinas clarifies – this discipline uses these authorities as external and probable arguments, whereas the authorities of Holy Scripture are used properly and as something necessary. The renowned teachers of the Church are considered authorities and taken as most probable.³⁷ In any case, he distances himself from a position of mere fideism that would blindly accept anything even if it were contrary to reason. He asserts that in the things that pertain to faith, reason goes ahead of faith and not conversely, “because we only want to believe in things that our reason can grasp.”³⁸

Thomas understands reason and faith as two channels of knowledge, the first of natural origin, proper to human nature, and the second of supernatural origin, given freely by the One who also created human nature. Whereas the inception of natural knowledge is the apprehension of creatures perceived by the senses, the beginning of the knowledge of higher things is the knowledge of the first truth infused by faith. A diverse order issues from this: Philosophers, who follow natural knowledge, proceed from the science about creatures to the divine science, i.e., metaphysics, whereas theologians proceed conversely so that the consideration of the Creator goes ahead of that of the creatures.³⁹

Now the knowledge of the divine can be considered in two ways: one way regarding us, for whom things are known only through creatures, from which we attain knowledge through the senses. Another way is regarding the thing’s nature, since they are most knowable in themselves, and even though we cannot know them in themselves they are thus known by God and the blessed in Heaven.⁴⁰ According to this there can be two types of science of the divine matters: one according to our way, which grasps the principles of the sensible things in order to illuminate the knowledge of the divine. That is how the philosophers obtained science about the divine and called it First Philosophy. Another type is according to the nature of the divine things themselves, by understanding them as they are, something

37 Cf. *S. Theol.* I, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2.

38 Cf. *Super De Trinitate*, q. 2, a. 1, Responsio.

39 *Ibid.*, pr. 1.

40 Cf. *Super De Trinitate*, pars 1 q. 2 a. 2 co. 1.

which is impossible for us to achieve in a perfect way *in statu viae* (as we live this earthly life).⁴¹

God knows Himself and the created beings in themselves, i.e., in a simple intuition and not through reasoning. We, instead, reach from the knowledge of the first truths to which we adhere by faith the knowledge of divine matters according to our own way, reasoning from the principles towards the conclusions. The things that we know by faith are for us like the principles in this science, and the rest are like the conclusions. Even in human sciences some principles are used that are not known to everyone, but must be presupposed and are originated in higher sciences, as it is the case of subalternated sciences, which take for granted and believe some things from superior sciences that are only evident in these superior sciences. Thus the articles of faith, which are the principles of the science for the knowledge of God, are self-evident in the science that God has of Himself, but are presupposed in our science and we must believe the things indicated by his messengers, like the doctor believes the physicist when the latter says that there are four elements.⁴² Therefore, this science is higher than the so called divine science that philosophers developed, because it proceeds from higher principles.⁴³ It is not the conclusions that make the

41 *Ibid.*, co. 2: Et secundum hoc de divinis duplex scientia habetur. Una secundum modum nostrum, qui sensibilium principia accipit ad notificandum divina, et sic de divinis philosophi scientiam tradiderunt, philosophiam primam scientiam divinam dicentes. Alia secundum modum ipsorum divinorum, ut ipsa divina secundum se ipsa capiantur, quae quidem perfecte in statu viae nobis est impossibilis, sed fit nobis in statu viae quaedam illius cognitionis participatio et assimilatio ad cognitionem divinam, in quantum per fidem nobis infusam inhaeremus ipsi primae veritati propter se ipsam.

42 *Ibid.*, ad 5: Ad quintum dicendum quod etiam in scientiis humanitas traditis sunt quaedam principia in quibusdam earum quae non sunt omnibus nota, sed oportet ea supponere a superioribus scientiis, sicut in scientiis subalternatis supponuntur et creduntur aliqua a scientiis superioribus, et illa non sunt per se nota nisi superioribus scientibus. Et hoc modo se habent articuli fidei, qui sunt principia huius scientiae, ad cognitionem divinam, quia ea quae sunt per se nota in scientia, quam Deus habet de se ipso, supponuntur in scientia nostra et creduntur ei nobis haec indicanti per suos nuntios, sicut medicus credit physico quattuor esse elementa.

43 *Ibid.*, co. 3: Et sicut Deus ex hoc, quod cognoscit se, cognoscit alia modo suo, id est simplici intuitu, non discurrendo, ita nos ex his, quae per fidem

principles of faith appear certain, but the certitude of the principles of faith that leads us to the conclusions.⁴⁴

Another objection arises: How is it possible for a limited intellect to attain knowledge of an infinite being? How does Aquinas explain the possibility of knowing God from creatures? He answers that when causes are known through their effects, the knowledge of the effect stands in place of the knowledge of the cause's essence, which is something needed in sciences that deal with things that are knowable in themselves. But in the case of the knowledge of God – he concedes – we cannot know his essence from the effects. In this case, we can know only what God is not, and in the divine science this knowledge must take the place of the knowledge of God's essence.⁴⁵

Elaborating on the articulation between the natural and the supernatural, Aquinas stresses once and again that the gift of grace adds to nature in a way that does not remove it but improves it. The light of faith, which is granted to us for free, does not destroy the natural light of reason. Even if the natural light of human knowledge is not enough to manifest those matters that are upheld by faith, it is impossible that those things that are given to us by the divine be contrary to those that are given to us by nature. Since both spheres are from God, if one of them were to be false,

capimus primae veritati adhaerendo, venimus in cognitionem aliorum secundum modum nostrum discurrendo de principiis ad conclusiones, ut sic ipsa, quae fide tenemus, sint nobis quasi principia in hac scientia et alia sint quasi conclusiones. Ex quo patet quod haec scientia est altior illa scientia divina, quam philosophi tradiderunt, cum ex altioribus procedat principia.

44 *Ibid.*, ad 6: Ad sextum dicendum quod apparentia scientiae procedit ex apparentia principiorum; quoniam scientia non facit apparere principia, sed ex hoc, quod apparent principia, facit apparere conclusiones. Et per hunc modum scientia, de qua loquimur, non facit apparere ea de quibus est fides, sed ex eis facit apparere alia per modum quo de primis certitudo habetur.

45 *Ibid.*, ad 2: Ad secundum dicendum quod, sicut supra dictum est, quando causae cognoscuntur per suos effectus, effectus cognitio supplet locum cognitionis quiditatis causae, quae requiritur in illis scientiis quae sunt de rebus quae per se ipsas cognosci possunt; et sic non oportet ad hoc quod de divinis scientiam habeamus, quod praesciatur de eo quid est. Vel potest dici quod hoc ipsum quod scimus de eo quid non est supplet locum in scientia divina cognitionis quid est; quia sicut per quid est distinguitur res ab aliis, ita per hoc quod scitur quid non est.

God would be the author of falsehood, which is impossible. But since it is possible to find some imitation of the perfect in the imperfect, we can find certain similarities of those things given to us by faith in the things known by natural reason.⁴⁶

In Aquinas' view, the *sacra doctrina* – Theology – is founded on the light of faith whereas Philosophy is founded on the light of natural reason, it being impossible for those things pertaining to Philosophy to be contrary to those of faith. Whenever something is found in the assertions of the philosophers to be contrary to faith, that is not philosophical knowledge, but an abuse of Philosophy due to a defect of reason. In that case, Aquinas is convinced that it is possible to prove that, according to the principles of Philosophy, such assertion is not viable or at least not necessary. Even if the matters of faith cannot be demonstrated to be true and their opposite cannot be demonstrated to be false either, objections to its principles can be shown to be not necessary.⁴⁷

Summarizing, we can use philosophical principles in Theology in three

46 *Super De Trinitate*, pars 1 q. 2 a. 3 co. 1 Responsio: Dicendum quod dona gratiarum hoc modo naturae adduntur quod eam non tollunt, sed magis perficiunt; unde et lumen fidei, quod nobis gratis infunditur, non destruit lumen naturalis rationis divinitus nobis inditum. Et quamvis lumen naturale mentis humanae sit insufficiens ad manifestationem eorum quae manifestantur per fidem, tamen impossibile est quod ea, quae per fidem traduntur nobis divinitus, sint contraria his quae sunt per naturam nobis indita. Oporteret enim alterum esse falsum; et cum utrumque sit nobis a Deo, Deus nobis esset auctor falsitatis, quod est impossibile. Sed magis cum in imperfectis inveniatur aliqua imitatio perfectorum, in ipsis, quae per naturalem rationem cognoscuntur, sunt quaedam similitudines eorum quae per fidem sunt tradita.

47 *Ibid.*, co. 2: Sicut autem sacra doctrina fundatur supra lumen fidei, ita philosophia fundatur supra lumen naturale rationis; unde impossibile est quod ea, quae sunt philosophiae, sint contraria his quae sunt fidei, sed deficiunt ab eis. Continent tamen aliquas eorum similitudines et quaedam ad ea praeambula, sicut natura praeambula est ad gratiam. Si quid autem in dictis philosophorum invenitur contrarium fidei, hoc non est philosophia, sed magis philosophiae abusus ex defectu rationis. Et ideo possibile est ex principiis philosophiae huiusmodi errorem refellere vel ostendendo omnino esse impossibile vel ostendendo non esse necessarium. Sicut enim ea quae sunt fidei non possunt demonstrative probari, ita quaedam contraria eis non possunt demonstrative ostendi esse falsa, sed potest ostendi ea non esse necessaria.

ways: first, we can demonstrate things that are preambles of faith, which are necessary for faith to know, like all the things that can be demonstrated about God with natural reason, such as God's being, God being One and the like. All those things are proved by Philosophy and presupposed by faith. Second, to illustrate with analogies those things pertaining to faith. Third, to oppose those who speak against faith by demonstrating that their assertions are either false or not necessary.⁴⁸

Faith as Knowledge by Assent

In the text from the 1st Book of the *Sentences* examined above, Aquinas also refers briefly to the nature of the faith that has its origin in God. He notes that the believer gives a more firm assent to the articles of faith even than to the first principles of reason.⁴⁹ As for the objection that stated that knowledge by faith is weaker than natural knowledge, he distinguishes between the faith that is divinely infused and what is commonly called faith but is in fact a natural trust, a belief grounded in the reliability of the data available, a natural faith that is truly just an opinion strengthened with rational arguments.⁵⁰ The faith that is relevant for theological science is of the first type, which for the believer is indeed more reliable even than natural knowledge alone.

He elaborates on the nature of faith in his Commentary on *De Trinitate*,

- 48 *Ibid.*, co. 3: Sic ergo in sacra doctrina philosophia possumus tripliciter uti. Primo ad demonstrandum ea quae sunt praeambula fidei, quae necesse est in fide scire, ut ea quae naturalibus rationibus de Deo probantur, ut Deum esse, Deum esse unum et alia huiusmodi vel de Deo vel de creaturis in philosophia probata, quae fides supponit. Secundo ad notificandum per aliquas similitudines ea quae sunt fidei, sicut Augustinus in libro de Trinitate utitur multis similitudinibus ex doctrinis philosophicis sumptis ad manifestandum Trinitatem. Tertio ad resistendum his quae contra fidem dicuntur sive ostendendo ea esse falsa sive ostendendo ea non esse necessaria.
- 49 *In 1 Sent., Prol., a. 3, p. 325, ll. 98-100*: Et quod obicitur quod non est certissimus, dicimus quod falsum est: magis enim fidelis et firmius assentit hiis que sunt fidei quam etiam primis principiis rationis.
- 50 *Ibid., ll. 100-102*: Et quod dicitur quod fides est infra scientiam, non loquitur de fide infusa, sed de fide que est opinio fortificata rationibus.

clarifying that faith has something in common with opinion and also with science and intellect. It has the certain assent in common with science and with intellect, and in that it is dissimilar to opinion and doubt. But it is dissimilar to science and intellect and similar to opinion in that it deals with matters that are not evident to the intellect. This could happen due to a defect of the knowable thing itself, as it happens with things that are far away from our senses, or to a defect of our intellect.⁵¹ Examples of the latter are the divine and necessary things, which are the most knowable in themselves, as we saw earlier. We are not the most suitable to know these matters because we must go from the less knowable and minor things according to nature to those by nature most knowable and prior, and therefore we must rely on faith for the knowledge of these higher things. We see this in the order of sciences because metaphysics, which is the science of the highest causes, is the last one that man reaches, and he must take for granted in the preambles of the lesser sciences things that are fully known in metaphysics. Therefore, any science has suppositions that the student must believe. Since the end of human life is eternal happiness, which consists of the full knowledge of divine things, it is necessary for such human beings to have faith in these things that we expect to know in the final stage of human perfection.⁵²

51 *Super De Trinitate*, pars 2 q. 3 a. 1 co. 1, Responso: Dicendum quod fides habet aliquid commune cum opinione et aliquid cum scientia et intellectu, ratione cuius ponitur media inter scientiam et opinionem ab Hugone de sancto Victore. Cum scientia siquidem et intellectu commune habet certum et fixum assensum, in quo ab opinione differt, quae accipit alterum contrariorum cum formidine alterius, et a dubitatione quae fluctuat inter duo contraria. Sed cum opinione commune habet quod est de rebus quae non sunt intellectui pervia, in quo differt a scientia et intellectu. Quod autem aliquid non sit patens humanae cognitioni, potest ex duobus contingere, ut dicitur in II metaphysicae, scilicet ex defectu ipsarum rerum cognoscibilium et ex defectu intellectus nostri. Ex defectu quidem rerum, sicut in rebus singularibus et contingentibus quae a nostris sensibus sunt remotae, sicut sunt facta hominum et dicta et cogitata, quae quidem talia sunt, ut uni homini possint esse nota et alii incognita. Et quia in convictu hominum oportet quod unus utatur altero sicut se ipso in his, in quibus sibi non sufficit, ideo oportet ut stet illis quae alius scit et sunt sibi ignota, sicut his quae ipse cognoscit.

52 *Ibid.*, co. 2: Ex defectu vero nostro sunt non apparentia res divinae et necessariae, quae sunt secundum naturam maxime notae. Unde ad harum

In his Commentary to the 3rd Book of the *Sentences* Aquinas approaches again the nature of faith in general and of the one that is needed for theological science in particular by examining the nature of the intellect. He distinguishes three ways of considering it: (1) In itself (*secundum se*), intellect is determined by the presence of the thing apprehended. And this happens with all things made known by the light of the agent intellect, like the first principles and anything that is directly known to the senses. This type of knowledge is called vision, by analogy with the physical sense of sight, due to its immediate nature.⁵³ (2) In relation to reason (*secundum ordinem ad rationem*), the intellect draws conclusions from self-evident principles and acquires certainty from them, and this is the assent of science.⁵⁴ (3) The human intellect can be considered also in relation to the will (*in ordine ad voluntatem*), which moves all the powers of the soul to perform their actions. This same will can move the intellect to assent to things when the intellect cannot see them because they are not self-evident

inspectionem non sumus statim a principio idonei, cum oporteat nos ex minus notis et posterioribus secundum naturam in magis nota et priora naturaliter pervenire. Sed quia ex vi illorum, quae ultimo cognoscimus, sunt nota illa quae primo cognoscimus, oportet etiam a principio aliquam nos habere notitiam de illis quae sunt per se magis nota; quod fieri non potest nisi credendo. Et etiam hoc patet in ordine scientiarum, quia scientia quae est de causis altissimis, scilicet metaphysica, ultimo occurrit homini ad cognoscendum, et tamen in scientiis praeambulis oportet quod supponantur quaedam quae in illa plenius innotescunt; unde quaelibet scientia habet suppositiones, quibus oportet addiscentem credere. Cum ergo finis humanae vitae sit beatitudo, quae consistit in plena cognitione divinorum, necessarium est ad humanam vitam in beatitudinem dirigendam statim a principio habere fidem divinorum, quae plene cognoscenda expectantur in ultima perfectione humana.

53 *In III Sent., d. 23, q. 2, a. 2, qc. 1, resp.*: Potest enim intellectus noster considerari uno modo secundum se; et sic determinatur ex praesentia intelligibilis, sicut materia determinatur ex praesentia formae: et hoc quidem contingit in his quae statim lumine intellectus agentis intelligibilia fiunt, sicut sunt prima principia, quorum est intellectus: et similiter determinatur iudicium sensitivae partis ex hoc quod sensibile subjacet sensibus, quorum principalior et certior est visus; et ideo praedicta cognitio intellectus vocatur visio.

54 *Ibid.*: Alio modo potest considerari intellectus noster secundum ordinem ad rationem, quae ad intellectum terminatur, dum resolvendo conclusiones in principia per se nota, earum certitudinem efficit: et hoc est assensus scientiae.

to it, and when it cannot resolve them into things that are self-evident. The will does so because it considers it good to adhere to these things for some reason.⁵⁵ And this happens when the reason apprehended is not enough to make the intellect reach a conclusion due to the intellect's weakness, because it does not see by itself why the will judges that it should assent to it, nor is capable of resolving it back to self-evident principles. And this assent – Aquinas concludes – is properly called “to believe.”⁵⁶

In other words, when the intellect is too weak to reach a conclusion about something, the will is capable of forcing it to assent to it if it detects goodness and convenience in that acceptance. And this intervention of the will is essential in matters of faith, because the intellect has no evidence of faith's first principles nor is it capable of adopting a position on the matter by itself. Faith – he will add later on – entails assent simultaneously with intellectual apprehension, whereas scientific knowledge first considers the matter and only at the end assents to the conclusions if they seem convincing to the intellect.⁵⁷ The reason why the will is inclined towards assenting to things it cannot see is that it is God who says them, similarly to someone who believes in things he does not see because he believes in the

55 Cf. J. A. Barad, *Consent: The Means to an Active Faith According to St. Thomas Aquinas* (American University Studies Series V. Philosophy), New York: P. Lang, 1992.

56 *In III Sent., d. 23, q. 2, a. 2, qc. 1, resp.*: Tertio modo consideratur intellectus in ordine ad voluntatem; quae quidem omnes vires animae ad actus suos movet: et haec quidem voluntas determinat intellectum ad aliquid quod neque per seipsum videtur, neque ad ea quae per se videntur, resolvi posse determinat, ex hoc quod dignum reputat illi esse adhaerendum propter aliquam rationem, qua bonum videtur ei illi rei adhaerere; quamvis illa ratio ad intellectum terminandum non sufficiat propter imbecillitatem intellectus, qui non videt per se hoc cui assentiendum ratio iudicat; neque ipsum ad principia per se nota resolvere valet: et hoc assentire proprie vocatur credere.

57 *Ibid., in fine*: Sciens autem et assensum et cogitationem habet; sed non cogitationem cum assensu, sed cogitationem ante assensum: quia ratio ad intellectum resolvendo perducit, ut dictum est. Credens autem habet assensum simul et cogitationem; quia intellectus ad principia per se nota non perducitur: unde, quantum est in se, adhuc habet motum ad diversa, sed ab extrinseco determinatur ad unum, scilicet ex voluntate. Cf. *De veritate q. 14, a. 1, resp.*

testimony of a good man who is trustworthy and who can see them.⁵⁸ In this case, the will loves the goodness it perceives in the source and guarantor of that knowledge. In fact, it is the love of God that compels the will to assent to truths revealed that are above human understanding.⁵⁹ Whereas the certitude that there is in science and understanding originates in the evidence of the things that are considered to be certain, the certitude of faith comes from the strong adherence to the one who is believed.⁶⁰

It is clear that Aquinas is talking about faith in two senses. The articles of faith are the intellectual contents, everything the believer knows about God, his nature and his works, including the ways divine Wisdom has devised for man to attain his final destination. But faith is also the divine light that God infuses directly, by grace, in the believer's intellect so that he can attain such knowledge and give his assent to it. That light would illuminate the intellect supernaturally in analogy to the way the agent intellect illuminates it naturally so that it can know the created world and advance in that knowledge through scientific and philosophical reasoning.⁶¹

But he insists that knowledge by faith cannot be considered vision. Only the natural knowledge by the light of the agent intellect, the supernatural knowledge of God in the afterlife and that of the prophets in this life can be equated to seeing:

58 Cf. on this issue R. W. Nutt, "The Proof of Things Not Seen: Thomas Aquinas on the Role of Reason in the Act of Faith," *Josephinum Journal of Theology*, vol. 15, issue 2 (2008).

59 *In III Sent., d. 23, q. 2, a. 2, qc. 2, resp.*: Ex hoc enim quod intellectus terminatur ad unum, actus fidei est credere Deum, quia objectum fidei est Deus secundum quod in se consideratur, vel aliquid circa ipsum, vel ab ipso. Ex hoc vero quod intellectus determinatur a voluntate, secundum hoc actus fidei est credere in Deum, idest amando in eum tendere: est enim voluntatis amare. Secundum autem quod ratio voluntatem inclinatur ad actus fidei, est credere Deo: ratio enim qua voluntas inclinatur ad assentiendum his quae non videt, est quia Deus ea dicit: sicut homo in his quae non videt, credit testimonio alicuius boni viri qui videt ea quae ipse non videt.

60 *Ibid., qc. 3, resp.*: Certitudo quae est in scientia et intellectu, est ex ipsa evidentia eorum quae certa esse dicuntur; certitudo autem fidei est ex firma adhaesione ad id quod creditur.

61 *Ibid., a. 1, ad 4*: In quantum lumen infusum, quod est habitus fidei, manifestat articulos, sicut lumen intellectus agentis manifestat principia naturaliter nota.

The way for the sense to see is inasmuch as the visible species in act by the light is formed in the sight. Thus by transferring the name of “vision” to the intellect, properly understood, we see when by the intellectual light the same intellectual form is produced in our intellect; whether that light be natural, like the one with which we understand the essence of man, or something else of the sort; or supernatural, like the one with which we will see God *in patria* [i.e., in Heaven]. Moreover, things said to be seen by the intellect are those complexes whose knowledge arises from the said vision, like we see through the natural light as conclusions the first principles that we know immediately; or through the supernatural light, such as the vision of prophecy.⁶²

Thomas has already stated the reason why human beings would be in need of such supernatural aid. The end to which man is ordered is supernatural, a direct contemplation of God in Heaven (commonly known as beatific vision) which cannot be achieved by the means that nature gives to human beings. Since that end is disproportionate with human nature, it is reasonable that God would grant a likewise disproportionate aid in the form of an added knowledge about both the end and the means to achieve it. Part of that aid would be the Revelation contained in Sacred Scripture, namely the divine interventions in History narrated in the Bible and the assent of faith to those events and to their interpretation. Hence the unique character of Theology, that being a science deals with contingent events as well. In a way they become necessary, in the sense that God deems them and their knowledge necessary for the salvation of human kind.

Besides, Aquinas notes that among the contents of faith there are some that can be reached by natural reason alone, whereas others can be attained

62 *Ibid.*, d. 24, q. 1, a. 2, qc. 1, resp.: Modus autem quo sensus videt, est in quantum species visibilis in actu per lumen formatur in visu; unde transferendo nomen visionis ad intellectum, proprie intelligendo, videmus quando per lumen intellectuale ipsa forma intellectualis fit in intellectu nostro; sive illud lumen sit naturale; sicut cum intelligimus quidditatem hominis, aut alicuius huiusmodi; sive sit supernaturale, sicut quo Deum in patria videbimus. Et ulterius videri per intellectum dicuntur illa complexa quorum cognitio ex praedicta visione consurgit; sicut per lumen naturale videmus principia prima quae cognoscimus statim, ut terminos; sive per lumen supernaturale, sicut est visio prophetiae.

only through the supernatural light that God grants to the believer:

There are certain things related to faith that are simply above human reason, of which faith is essentially about; others are above the human reason of some, but not above that of every man; and for these two [reasons] it was necessary to grant faith⁶³

This is so because these truths are essential for man to attain his ultimate end, eternal happiness, but he is free to choose that end or reject it. He can see the reasonability of some of these truths and can grasp them with the light of the natural intellect, if he strives to acquire them. He will have no choice but to accept other truths as they are revealed to him by the light of faith, since they are far above his understanding:

Because God has granted to man an end that is above human nature simply, which is the full participation in his happiness, it is convenient for whoever strives to attain that end, if he possesses free will, to know the end under which consideration he looks for those things that are [means] for that end. Therefore it is convenient for man to be able to have knowledge of something that is above his natural understanding, a knowledge that is granted to man through the grace of faith.⁶⁴

Aquinas notes that this is so because grace, that supernatural aid from God freely granted and freely accepted, does not oppose nature but counts on it as its natural substratum. Faith is divinely inspired but it needs to become rooted in the human intellect. It presupposes nature, and therefore it presupposes the intellect and perfects it, improving the capacity of the natural knowledge for the understanding of divine matters.

63 *Ibid.*, a. 3, qc. 1, resp.: In fide sunt quaedam quae sunt supra rationem humanam simpliciter, de quibus essentialiter est fides; et quaedam quae sunt supra rationem humanam alicuius, quamvis non supra rationem cuiuslibet hominis; et ad utraque necessarium fuit dari fidem.

64 *Ibid.*: Quia enim homini Deus providit finem qui est supra naturam hominis, scilicet plenam participationem suae beatitudinis; oportet autem eum qui in finem tendit, si libero arbitrio agat, cognoscere finem ex cuius consideratione dirigitur in his quae sunt ad finem; ideo oportuit ut homo alicuius rei cognitionem haberet quae naturalem cognitionem eius excedit: quae quidem cognitio homini datur per gratiam fidei.

In the same way that there is in the perfecting grace an affection that presupposes nature, because it perfects it, there is a natural knowledge that underlies faith, which faith presupposes and which reason can prove: such as that God exists, that God is one, incorporeal, intelligent, and so on. And faith inclines sufficiently to those things that reason cannot grasp, so that whoever cannot have a reason for this, may assent to them by faith.⁶⁵

And to support the fact from experience that not all can reach even the knowledge of these things essential to the final destination of human life that are attainable by reason alone, Thomas recalls what Maimonides writes in *The Guide of the Perplexed* ch. 34 (33 in the Latin translation that he used) about the “Five Causes that Prevent the Instruction of the Multitude”:

All this was necessary for the five reasons that Rabbi Moses says in Part I, chapter 33. First, the excellency of the matter in so far as it is above the senses, by which our life is nourished to the point that it is not easy to detach from the senses and imagination, this being necessary for the apprehension of the divine and spiritual things, as Boethius says. Second, because although the human intellect is naturally directed to the apprehension of divine matters, it cannot set itself in action. And since not everybody has a trained teacher at hand, God provides the light of faith that elevates the mind to these matters. Third, because the apprehension of divine matters by way of reason demands many preliminaries, since nearly all Philosophy is ordered to the knowledge of divine things, which only few individuals can know. This reason requires the existence of faith, so that all may have knowledge of divine matters. Fourth, because some are naturally weak, they still need a guide in life to lead them to the apprehension of divine matters. Fifth, because human beings busy themselves with the basics of life, a diligent consideration of divine things eludes them.⁶⁶

- 65 *Ibid.*: Sicut autem est in gratia perficiente affectum quod praesupponit naturam, quia eam perficit; ita et fidei substernitur naturalis cognitio, quam fides praesupponit, et ratio probare potest; sicut Deum esse, et Deum esse unum, incorporeum, intelligentem, et alia huiusmodi: et ad hoc etiam sufficienter fides inclinatur, ut qui rationem ad hoc habere non potest, fide eis assentiat.
- 66 *Ibid.*: Quod quidem necessarium fuit propter quinque, ut dicit Rabbi Moyses in Prima parte, capit. 33. Primo propter altitudinem materiae secundum elevationem a sensibus, quibus vita nostra connutritur; unde non est facile sensum et imaginationem deserere; quod tamen est necessarium in cognitione

I have examined Aquinas' reading of Maimonides' *Guide* in this point somewhere else.⁶⁷ Suffice it to say here that Maimonides' explanations are actually geared to argue that not everybody acquires a metaphysical knowledge of the world (knowledge that he also calls "divine science"). He stresses that human knowledge is progressive and needs time and effort to perfect itself and reach the most difficult matters, something that not everybody does for the reasons given.

Earlier on, Maimonides had highlighted the distance between the knowledge of the divine matters that is attainable in this life and the future knowledge that will be possible in the Days of the Messiah.⁶⁸ Thomas seems to have interpreted this suggestion to be parallel to his own understanding of the gap between what is attainable to reason alone and the knowledge of God expected in the afterlife. Therefore, he finds Maimonides' Five Causes very suitable to justify the need of supernatural faith for the attainment of truths that are above human grasp, which are needed for man to reach his ultimate end in the afterlife. He will return repeatedly to this Maimonidean text in the future, always in the context of the convenience of having the light of faith divinely inspired by God to lead the way to the full knowledge of God *in patria*.⁶⁹

divinorum et spiritualium, ut dicit Boetius. Secundo, quia quamvis intellectus hominis naturaliter ordinatus sit ad divina cognoscenda, non tamen potest in actum exire per seipsum. Et quia cuilibet non potest adesse doctor paratus, ideo Deus lumen fidei providit, quod mentem ad hujusmodi eleveat. Tertio, quia ad cognitionem divinorum per viam rationis multa praeexiguntur, cum fere tota philosophia ad cognitionem divinorum ordinetur: quae quidem non possunt nisi pauci cognoscere; et ideo oportuit fidem esse ut omnes aliquam cognitionem haberent de divinis. Quarto, quia quidam naturaliter sunt hebetes, et tamen cognitione divinorum indigent qua in vita dirigantur. Quinto, quia homines occupantur circa necessaria vitae, et retrahuntur a diligenti consideratione divinorum.

67 Cf. *Aquinas and Maimonides...* pp. 162-192. On the differences between both philosophers regarding the incorporation of Aristotelian philosophy into their respective religious framework, cf. J. A. Buijs, "Religion and Philosophy in Maimonides, Averroes, and Aquinas," *Medieval Encounters*, vol. 8, issue 2-3, pp. 160-183.

68 Cf. the *Guide*, I:30, pp. 64. Cf. *Aquinas and Maimonides...*, p. 151-160.

69 Cf. also *De Ver.*, q. 14, a. 10, and *Super Boetium de Trinitate*, q. 3, a. 1, co. 3.

The Seeds of Eternal Life

Thomas had already examined the above issues on the science of Theology and the role of faith for the knowledge of God in his *Quaestio disputata de veritate* n. 14. In it he also elaborates on the peculiar nature of the intellect.⁷⁰ The passive human intellect – he says – can be moved either by its proper object, the intelligible form, or by the will, which can move all the other powers of the soul according to the goodness it perceives in the object. When the intellect is not capable of assenting to a certain matter due to the lack of intellectual evidence of the object under consideration, it may assent to it following the assessment of the will that such assent is good and convenient for the whole person. And this is the disposition of the believer, who believes in God's words because of the goodness of the eternal life promised to the believer.⁷¹

This is so – he recalls, much like in the Prologue of the *Sentences* – because the ultimate end of human beings is twofold: one, proportionate to human nature, for which pursuit of natural powers is enough; namely the happiness of which the philosophers spoke, which comes from the intellectual contemplation of truth that we call wisdom, or from the practice of acts of prudence and of the other moral virtues. The other end is one that exceeds human nature and therefore human powers are not enough, neither to know it nor to desire it. That end is eternal life, which only divine liberality can explain. Of all the human powers and capacities, only the will is moved towards this goal by the goodness it perceives in it. And it is the will that directs the other powers, starting from the intellect, to assent to it and search for the means to attain it. But – Aquinas notes – nothing can be addressed towards an end if it is not proportionate to that end. And human nature is such, that even if it is not proportionate, it is open to that end since it is endowed with natural principles that are self-evident, which are like seeds of the contemplation of the ultimate truths, and with the principles of the natural law, which are the seeds of the moral virtues that foster the behavior that leads towards that ultimate end.

70 On Aquinas' arguments for the compatibility of faith and reason in the *Summa contra gentiles*, cf. K. J. Konyndyk, "Aquinas on Faith and Science," *Faith and Philosophy*, vol. 12, issue 1 (1995), pp. 3-21.

71 *De Ver., q. 14, a. 1, resp.*

That which starts with the knowledge of the world and of human nature through natural reason alone culminates in the perfect knowledge of God in the afterlife. The desire to know the world philosophically and acquire wisdom is the seed of that desire for the vision of God in Heaven. But given the disproportion between the two ends, man needs the infused divine light of faith, which becomes the seed of that vision.⁷² This light – he asserts – is more efficient than the natural light of reason.⁷³ And then he adds something that echoes strongly the text from the Prologue of *In I Sent.* on the subordination of sciences:

Besides, the testimony of God is more certain and more efficient than that of men, no matter how much this may be. But whoever proceeds by supposition from things said by a certain science manages to attain science, as it is clear in the subordinate sciences, which presuppose their principles from the superior sciences. Therefore all the more it is possible to have science of things related to faith, since they rely on divine testimony.⁷⁴

In this text Aquinas stresses again the peculiar nature of Theology as a subordinate science. All subordinate sciences trust the authority of whoever guarantees the credibility of the higher science and this trust justifies believing the principles that lie at the foundation of those sciences, Theology relies on the highest authority, that of God. Therefore, the believer accepts the articles of faith relying on divine authority, and that makes the assent given to them even stronger than that which can be given to the principles of any other science.

In the *Responsio*, he writes that the things that are the object of faith are beyond the human intellect, and therefore the intellect cannot assent to them as it does with that which is self-evident to the senses. He concludes that those things that are absent to the intellect are the proper objects of faith. They are believed in their absence, and seen when they are present. But –

72 *Ibid.*, a. 2, resp. Cf. *In I Sent.*, *Prol.*, a. 1, *Sol.*, ll. 31-38.

73 *Ibid.*, a. 9, arg. 2.

74 *Ibid.*, arg. 3: Praeterea, certius et efficacius est Dei testimonium quam hominis, quantumcumque scientis. Sed eum qui procedit ex suppositione dicti alicuius scientis contingit habere scientiam: sicut patet in scientiis subalternatis, quae sua principia supponunt a scientiis subalternantibus. Ergo multo fortius de his quae sunt fidei, habetur scientia, cum supponantur ex testimonio divino.

he explains – something can be believable in two ways: First, something is simply believable in the sense that it is beyond the intellectual faculty of all men as long as they live in this life (like God being one God and three divine Persons, etc.). Only God's testimony can be the source of this belief. Second, something is believable not simply, but in relation to something else, because it does not exceed the capacity of all men but only of some. This is so with the things that can be proved, like God being one or incorporeal, etc. It is not contradictory for some to have science of these things and for others to believe them, but the same person cannot have science and faith in them simultaneously.⁷⁵

The core or essence of credible things is unknown to us, but known to God and to the blessed in Heaven, who do not need to have faith in them because they see them as they are.⁷⁶ Even though this infused divine light is more efficient than natural light, the participation in it is imperfect in this life. Due to this imperfect participation, this light does not lead the believer immediately to the direct vision of the things believed. This will happen *in patria*, when that light will become a perfect participation in the light of God.⁷⁷

Finally, Aquinas repeats – always in line with the Prologue – that whoever has a subordinate science does not attain perfectly the essence of the things he knows, but only in the sense that his knowledge is a kind of continuation with the one who possesses the superior science. Therefore, the subordinate science is inferior not regarding the things known, but regarding the conclusions, because these need to presuppose certain principles. And

75 *Ibid., resp.*: Aliquid est credibile dupliciter. Uno modo simpliciter, 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. Aliquid vero est credibile non simpliciter, sed respectu alicuius; quod quidem non excedit facultatem omnium hominum, sed aliquorum tantum; sicut illa quae de Deo demonstrative sciri possunt, ut Deum esse unum aut incorporeum, et huiusmodi. Et de his nihil prohibet quin sint ab aliquibus scita, qui horum habent demonstrationes; et ab aliis credita, qui horum demonstrationes non perceperunt. Sed impossibile est quod sint ab eodem scita et credita.

76 *Ibid., ad 1.*

77 *Ibid., ad 2.*

that is how the believer can be said to have science of the conclusions that he draws from the articles of faith.⁷⁸

The foundation of Theology, which is a human science, would be the Science of God. The diversity between Theology and the Science of God is in the mode of knowing these things: in God, everything is self-evident and known perfectly. In the believer, the knowledge of these matters is an imperfect one owing to the fact that it is a subordinate science, but it is the greatest human science because it is subordinate only to God's own knowledge. Since the principles of this imperfect knowledge are found in the divine Science and their evidence is off-limits to the creature, they must be assented to by faith, which is also granted by God and freely accepted. The principles themselves are believed, but the human conclusions drawn from these principles are certain and therefore the Science achieves its purpose.⁷⁹

From these explanations we can see why Aquinas quickly corrected himself by writing a second answer to the objection in the Prologue of his *Commentary on the Sentences*. He had originally said that the principles on which Theology is based, the articles of faith, are self-evident to the believer. However, faith is required precisely to assent to matters that are not evident. They will be self-evident *in patria*, i.e., in Heaven, but as long as the theologian walks this earth he needs to believe those principles and then apply his intelligence and all the natural knowledge he can gather from other sciences in order to deepen his understanding of God and his ways. Therefore, his theological science is only the beginning – no matter how broad it becomes – and just a shadow, so to speak, of the knowledge he will have when he can see God directly and without intermediaries. Then the things he believed *in via* will become evident to him, and his knowledge much more accurate, wide and deep.

Theology as Apologetics?

At the beginning of this article I recalled Leo Strauss' assertion that the Kalam belonged to the genre of apologetics: all the Kalam arguments

78 *Ibid.*, ad 3.

79 *Ibid.*, a. 10, resp.

had one single purpose, the defense of Islamic beliefs against the arguments of the infidels. Is this the case too with Aquinas' theological teachings?

In the Prima Pars of the *Summa Theologiae*, q. 1, a. 8, he asks whether Theology should be argumentative. His answer is clear and mirrors what he had already written in the previous works examined: Other sciences do not give arguments to prove their own principles, but rather argue in order to demonstrate other things included in that science. In order to explain this he turns to the Aristotelian theory of the subalternation of sciences and points to the fact that the lower philosophical sciences neither prove their principles nor argue with those who deny them, but rather leave that task to the higher sciences. It is up to the highest one of all, metaphysics, to provide the arguments against those who refute its principles. If the opponent does not accept these arguments, then it is possible to solve the opposing ones with the aid of the metaphysic principles.

When applying the above to the science of Theology, he says that if for instance heretics – who are Christian but do not accept all the tenets of the faith that are acknowledged by the Catholic Church – accept the principles contained in Holy Scripture, it is possible to argue against them with the aid of that Revelation. In case they don't, there is no way to demonstrate with arguments of reason the articles of faith. The articles of faith are not like the conclusions in a science but like its principles, which should be defended from those who reject them and can be explained through certain analogies, but not proved by demonstration.⁸⁰ Any principle of a science is always the understanding of something which is first, but not always close to us, and even more so in the case of faith. As it is clear in the subalternated sciences, the goal of faith is that we may attain in the future the understanding of the things that we believe now, just like someone with

80 Super De Trinitate, pars 1 q. 2 a. 2 ad 4. Ad quartum dicendum quod in qualibet scientia sunt aliqua quasi principia et aliqua quasi conclusiones. Ratio ergo quae inducitur in scientiis praecedit assensum conclusionum, sed sequitur assensum principiorum, cum ex eis procedat. Articuli autem fidei in hac scientia non sunt quasi conclusiones, sed quasi principia quae etiam defenduntur ab impugnantibus, sicut philosophus in IV metaphysicae disputat contra negantes principia, et manifestantur per aliquas similitudines, sicut principia naturaliter nota per inductionem, non autem ratione demonstrativa probantur.

an inferior science reaches the superior one and then things that were before only believed become understood and fully known.⁸¹

But even if the principles of faith cannot be demonstrated, their knowledge enables the believer to look for ways to solve any reason against faith that the opponent may use because – Aquinas concludes – demonstrations that are produced against faith aren't true demonstrations but resolvable arguments.⁸² That is how Aristotle proceeds with the defense of philosophical arguments in Book IV of *Metaphysics* against his opponents.

Regarding the nature of these demonstrations some may argue that they are based on authority and are therefore the weakest among all. Aquinas points again to the difference between applying arguments of authority in a natural science and using them in the context of a supernatural one. Since the first principles of Theology are revealed, its arguments are of authority. But this does not weaken it because even though the reasons of authority based on human reason are the weakest, those based on divine revelation are the most efficient.⁸³ Human reason is used in Theology – asserts Aquinas – to reach conclusions derived from the contents that faith teaches, not to prove them, because if it did, faith would not be meritorious. In fact, if all the contents of the faith-given knowledge could be demonstrated, faith would not add anything to mere natural reason and would be completely superfluous. This point is relevant for the analysis of Maimonides' position, as we will see now.

81 *Ibid.*, ad 7. Ad septimum dicendum quod cuiuslibet scientiae principium est intellectus semper quidem primum, sed non semper proximum, immo aliquando est fides proximum principium scientiae. Sicut patet in scientiis subalternatis, quia earum conclusiones sicut ex proximo principio procedunt ex fide eorum quae supponuntur a superiori scientia, sed sicut a principio primo ab intellectu superioris scientis, qui de his creditis certitudinem per intellectum habet. Et similiter huius scientiae principium proximum est fides, sed primum est intellectus divinus, cui nos credimus, sed finis fidei est nobis, ut perveniamus ad intelligendum quae credimus, sicut si inferior sciens addiscat superioris scientis scientiam, et tunc fient et intellecta vel scita, quae prius erant tantummodo credita.

82 *S. Theol. I, p. I, a. 8, co.*

83 Cf. *De Ver. q. 14, a. 9, arg. 3.*

Why Aquinas was a Philosopher and a Theologian (And About What He Disagreed with Maimonides)

At the beginning of this study I distinguished between two conceptual types of Theology. One is understood as the twisting of the laws of thinking for the sake of upholding certain beliefs. In this case the underlying assumption is that the things beyond the natural grasp of reason that faith is about, must necessarily contradict reason. This seems to be how Maimonides reads the Mutakallimun's efforts to defend their beliefs. The other is Theology understood as faith reasoned.

From the texts examined, it is obvious that Thomas was never a Mutakallim in the Maimonidean sense. His Theology takes reason seriously and presupposes it, as faith does, and he proceeds by the methods of philosophical reasoning to reach its conclusions. Theology as faith reasoned means in this context: (1) a science that takes the greatest advantage possible of all the achievements of human reason correctly exercised; a reason that strives to reach out to God and uses to that end all the sources of knowledge available to it, including Revelation and faith; (2) a science that, even if its departure point is data provided by faith, its conclusions can in no way contradict the conclusions of straight human reason, and vice versa, rational arguments contradicting the conclusions of Theology should not be found. Whenever there is a contradiction – he asserts – either it is only apparent or there has been a mistake in the process of drawing the conclusion, which can be tracked back to its origin and corrected. The objections can be solved and proved false, that is, wrongly stated according to the laws of the intellect.

This is one of the leading principles of Aquinas' theological endeavors, grounded in his conviction that both reason and faith have their source in the same God, who cannot contradict himself. According to him, both the light of the agent intellect and that of faith have their origin in the same Creator of the natural and the supernatural gifts. If reason and faith are both used correctly as two ways of knowledge – each one according to its own nature and seeking their proper objects – the conclusions reached by each one must be coherent or at least not contradictory whenever they refer to a matter common to both.

This is how Aquinas sees his own endeavors to achieve the greatest possible understanding of matters that, due to their nature, surpassed the

boundaries of natural knowledge, and this seems to be the reason for his particular interest in the writings of Aristotle. Even if he is interested in the writings of other non-Christian authors, among them many Arab and Jewish thinkers, Aquinas gives a preferential place to the philosophy of Aristotle in his writings because he attributes the latter's achievements to the correct use of reason with no prior knowledge of the truths upheld by the Christian faith and with the minimum possible mingling of faith-based elements in his works. In fact, he is one of the Christian theologians who have made greater use of the achievements of the philosophers who preceded him or were contemporary with him who did not share his faith. This shows his trust in the capacity of human natural reason to understand the world and to know God through such understanding.⁸⁴ If I may use Maimonides' terminology to qualify Aquinas, it could be said that he wasn't one of the Mutakallimun, but rather one of the Muta'allihun, a theologizing philosopher – according to Prof. Pines' translation – whom Maimonides held in much higher esteem.⁸⁵

But this stress in the rationality of faith should not be misleading, because Aquinas does not consider reason to be the highest power of the human soul. Looking at how he understands the relation between the powers of the soul when it comes to grasping the divine matters, we see that it is the will that leads the way. We have seen that he is not a voluntarist because the intellect plays an essential role and fulfills its task in examining all that can be examined and reaching as far as it naturally can. However, the will plays an essential role too, by moving the intellect to assent to things that are beyond the latter's natural capacity of apprehension, as if it were assenting to matters that are evident. That is why faith is knowledge by assent of things before which the intellect would otherwise remain undetermined. The will's advantage lies in that it reaches further than the intellect, since desire is potentially infinite (one can always love more), and it drags the intellect along a way that it would rather not go on its own.

84 J.I. Saranyana has shown that St. Thomas went ahead of his time in considering Philosophy as an independent science besides its traditional medieval role as *ancilla theologiae*. Cf. "Tomás de Aquino y la autonomía de la filosofía" in *La Intermediación de Filosofía y Teología*. A. L. González (Ed.), Cuadernos de Anuario Filosófico n. 241. Pamplona: Eunsa, 2011, pp. 37-50.

85 *Ibid.*, I:68, p. 163.

Maimonides, for his part, asserts that the bond between man and God is the intellect:⁸⁶

If, however, you have apprehended God and His acts in accordance with what is required by the intellect, you should afterwards engage in totally devoting yourself to Him, endeavor to come closer to Him, and strengthen the bond between you and Him – that is, the intellect.

For him, true worship of God can be engaged only after intellectual apprehension has been attained:

This is the worship of the heart. In my opinion it consists in setting thought to work on the first intelligible and in devoting oneself exclusively to this as far as this is within one's capacity.⁸⁷

True, shortly before asserting this he has said that love is proportionate to apprehension: the better the knowledge, the stronger the love. Aquinas would subscribe to that, but there is a seemingly tiny difference between each one's approach that sets them worlds apart. For Maimonides, love – the proper act of the will – follows apprehension *and just that*. The will does not lead the way, it only reaches as far as the intellect. And for Maimonides, “the intellects of human beings have a limit at which they stop.”⁸⁸ If the intellect stops, so does the will. Maimonides' intellectualism leads him through a different path than that of Aquinas; one perhaps less ambitious regarding the possibility of knowing God, who is infinitely beyond the human intellectual capacity but – according to Aquinas – within the reach of a loving will. In fact, this choice of the intellect as man's leading spiritual capacity may be at the roots of Maimonides' apparent intellectual agnosticism.

Was he a rationalist then? Theoretically, yes. He could be termed a rationalist due to his choice of reason as the supreme human power. But this assertion should be nuanced. A practical rationalist would have demanded that all the principles of thought, including those originating in faith, be demonstrated. However, we know that he accepted the principles of the Jewish faith because he wrote extensively about them, mainly in

86 *Ibid.*, III:51, pp. 620-621.

87 *Ibid.*, p. 621.

88 *Ibid.*, I:32, p. 70.

the *Mishneh Torah*. *The Guide of the Perplexed* was also an attempt to solve the apparent contradictions between the data of natural knowledge about God and the language of the Bible by respecting both.⁸⁹ I believe that Maimonides had the same interest as Thomas Aquinas in finding a way to conciliate faith and reason, but could not harmonize them due to his wanting notion about the nature of faith.

Contrary to Aquinas, for whom faith is a supernatural light infused by God in the intellect which inclines the will to assent to certain principles unattainable by reason but relevant for man's salvation, in Maimonides' view faith is at the end of the process and comes only as a consequence of fulfilling the commandments. This can be seen in the 3rd Part of *The Guide of the Perplexed*, where he asserts that God gave the precepts of the Law to put an end to idolatry,⁹⁰ and that their acceptance and fulfillment is in fact what leads to true faith.⁹¹

But if Maimonides places faith at the end of a process in which fulfilling the precepts of the Law is essential, we would have expected him to consider the precepts key to a life of true worship of God. Surprisingly, however, he attributes a very relative importance to the precepts in themselves, even from a cognitive point of view:

So did He in anticipation of what the soul is naturally incapable of receiving, prescribe the laws that we have mentioned so that the first intention should be achieved, namely, the apprehension of Him, may He be exalted, and the rejection of idolatry.⁹²

89 *Ibid.*, II:29, p. 348: "For the first purpose of this Treatise is to explain what can be explained of the *Account of the Beginning* and of the *Account of the Chariot*."

90 *Ibid.*, III:32, p. 527. Cf. also III:29, p. 517: "...the first intention of the Law as a whole is to put an end to idolatry, to wipe out its traces and all that is bound up with it, even its memory as well as all that leads to any of its works."

91 *Ibid.*, III:32, p. 528: "...so did this group of laws derive from a divine grace, so that they should be left with the kind of practices to which they were accustomed and so that consequently the belief, which constitutes the first intention, should be validated in them."

92 *Ibid.*, III:31, p. 524: "Every commandment from among these six hundred and thirteen commandments exists either with a view to communicating a correct opinion, or to putting an end to an unhealthy opinion, or to communicating

He doesn't distinguish between principles purely originated in divine revelation, such as the positive precepts of the Law given through Moses, which fall on the Jewish People – *kosher* laws, etc. – or those that were revealed but fall on all human kind and can be attained also through natural reason, such as the existence of God or the Ten Commandments. Why? Because the multiplicity and the variety of the precepts should not be misleading to the true believer. In his view, the contents of faith can be summarized in believing that God the Creator of all things rules the Universe, that only He must be served, loved and feared,⁹³ and that He is One.⁹⁴ In his opinion even actions addressed to the divine worship, like prayer and seeking divine help, are concessions to paganism because perfect worship is pure thought. The problem that a believer has with this position – and this might be at the roots of the Maimonidean controversy that arose with the *Guide* – is that belief in these matters does not require a divine revelation, these issues can be attained by natural reason alone. What would faith add to natural knowledge in this case?

I also noted at the beginning that from Pines' comments it was possible to distinguish between two conceptual types of Philosophy. One would be the science of reason applied to the knowledge of the world in its innermost dimension, the one that Aristotle developed and Aquinas followed, convinced of the ability of reason to delve into the nature of existent beings. The other would be the dissolution of this ability. When Pines said that Aquinas was a theologian and not a philosopher because in his teachings there are no loose ends he was actually casting a serious doubt on the very possibility of Philosophy, since he seemed to be skeptical about the intellect's capacity to find answers. In fact, Pines does not challenge Aquinas' answers but the very fact that he produces them. Interestingly enough, in the same study Harvey points out that Pines doubted whether Maimonides still believed in the possibility of knowing "the nature of existence" when he wrote the

a rule of justice, or to warding off an injustice, or to endowing men with a noble moral quality, or to warning them against an evil moral quality."

93 Cf. *Ibid.*, III:29, p. 518.

94 *Ibid.*, III:32, p. 530: "...the first intention consists only in your apprehending Me and not worshipping someone other than Me (...) so that the trace of idolatry be effaced and the fundamental principle of My unity be established."

Guide.⁹⁵ Pines' criticism of Aquinas may be a hint that he followed along the same lines in his own perception of Philosophy.

I chose to take Pines' stance as a conceptual rather than a historical one because actually there are unanswered questions in Thomas' works. As I mentioned before, he even adopts Maimonides' explanations about the existence of philosophical questions that have no answer and quotes them several times.⁹⁶ If I may be allowed to take the expression in a broader sense, it is worth noting the considerable "loose end" that means for Aquinas to have always in the background an afterlife of which so much is known and unknown at the same time. He is a theologian besides being a philosopher precisely because he has a great many loose ends and not due to his lack of them. They are a result of the openness of the human spirit to the supernatural, the tension towards an ultimate end that is unattainable by human strength alone, and of a radical dependence on divine grace. In the Christian tradition, these loose ends are called mysteries. If the unsolvable problems and the loose ends of the world have fascinated philosophers of all times, theologians are lost for words when it comes to attempting to speak about the mysteries of faith.

I asked Prof. Harvey once whether he agreed with Pines' remark about Aquinas. He answered that he considers Aquinas to be a philosopher because his teachings were the result of many years of confronting the problems, revising his positions, and searching for truth. My intent in this article has been to highlight precisely these revisions and corrections, which pervade Thomas' works and attest to his unceasing quest for truth since the very beginnings of his theological reflection.

95 "Why Maimonides..." p. 109, footnote 15.

96 Cf. "Aquinas and Maimonides..." pp. 211-218.