

## ON AQUINAS'S THEOLOGICAL RELIABILISM

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**ABSTRACT:** In an essay titled *Aquinas on the Foundations of Knowledge*, Eleonore Stump rejects the idea that Aquinas's epistemology is foundationalist. I agree with Stump, and share in her conviction that the Angelic doctor developed instead what can be seen as a kind of theological reliabilism. In this article, I intend to take her position a step further. First, I would like to show that Thomistic reliabilism falls into a vicious circle if seen as based on a merely rational theism. Second, I am going to argue that for Aquinas such reliabilism depends instead on Christian faith, construed as the act of believing the revealed truth by virtue of the love relationship that God allows human beings to have with him.

### INTRODUCTION

In the last decades of the Twentieth Century, various thinkers from the so-called 'Reformed Epistemology'<sup>1</sup> developed an original and noteworthy epistemological perspective. Their objective was to counter various criticisms levelled at the rational consistency of theism and Christianity. In particular, Reformed epistemologists aimed at refuting foundationalism, which Alvin Plantinga in *Reason and Belief in God* considers 'the dominant way of thinking' in the epistemology of Western philosophical tradition.<sup>2</sup> According to foundationalism, knowledge consists of two types of statements: basic statements, which are immediately recognized as true, and other types of statements, which are inferred through reasoning from the basic statements. In Plantinga's discussion of foundationalism, 'any statement must be proved through demonstration or, alternatively, must be accepted basically if it is self-evident, evident to the senses or incorrigible'. The author of *Reason and Belief in*

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<sup>1</sup> The first expression of this perspective is often considered Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (eds.), *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God* (Notre Dame – London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983).

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

*God* concludes that this statement (‘any statement must be proved through demonstration or alternatively must be accepted basically if it is self-evident, evident to the senses or incorrigible’) is self-contradictory. In truth, the statement under consideration doesn’t meet the criteria in question—that is, it has never been proved, nor is it self-evident, evident to the senses or incorrigible.

Reformed epistemologists include Aquinas among the various foundationalists of the history of philosophy.<sup>3</sup> According to Plantinga, the Angelic doctor follows Aristotle, and

distinguishes what is self-evident, or known through itself (*per se nota*), from what is known through another (*per aliud nota*); the former are ‘principles’ and are apprehended by understanding, while the latter constitutes science ... we know the first but not the second *immediately*.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, Plantinga stresses that, according to Aquinas, the starting point of knowledge consists not only in self-evident propositions, but also in those statements that are ‘evident to the senses’. However, this is not relevant to my argument. Likewise, it is not important to point out (though it can be useful to mention) that this view of Aquinas’s epistemology is held also by no small number of Thomists.<sup>5</sup> For my purpose it matters that a foundationalist perspective has been ascribed to Aquinas.

Eleonore Stump has devoted an essay -- which is intellectually profound and historiographically accurate — to a discussion of *Aquinas on the Foundations of Knowledge*.<sup>6</sup> In it, the author takes into account Plantinga’s and Wolterstorff’s attribution of foundationalism to Aquinas. She decides neither to ‘refer to foundationalism as a whole or to some commonly discussed species of foundationalism’ nor to attempt ‘to determine precisely which species of foundationalism Aquinas is supposed to have held, a task that would require an exegesis of Plantinga and Wolterstorff as well as Aquinas’. She proposes to focus instead only on the theory of knowledge that those thinkers seem to attribute to Aquinas. This is an epistemological position characterized by internalism – the view

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<sup>3</sup> In doing so, they seem to reiterate a deep-rooted criticism that Protestant thinkers have historically leveled against Aquinas. For them, the Medieval thinker relied excessively on the strength of human reason. See Arvin Vos, *Aquinas, Calvin, and Reformed Protestant Thought* (Washington D.C.: Christian College Consortium, 1985), p. 125.

<sup>4</sup> Alvin Plantinga, ‘Reason and Belief in God’, p. 41.

<sup>5</sup> Referring to Locke’s foundationalist perspective, John Jenkins stated that the ideas expressed by Locke, especially in the fourth part of the *Essay on Human Understanding*, have widely shaped modern and contemporary views on faith and reason, including interpretations of Aquinas. Among them, he cites not only Plantinga’s, but also John Hick’s, Terence Penelhum’s and Louis Pojman’s. See John Jenkins, ‘Faith and Revelation’, in Brian Davies (ed.), *Philosophy of Religion. A Guide to the Subject* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2007), p. 226, footnote 21.

<sup>6</sup> Eleonore Stump, ‘Aquinas on the Foundations of Knowledge’, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* Suppl. Vol. 17 (1992): pp. 125-158 (hereafter AFK).

that knowledge is constituted largely or entirely by states that are internal to the knower -- and which points to the idea that

there is a small set of propositions which we can know with certainty to be true without inferring them from anything else that we know, and that our non-basic beliefs will also be known with certainty if we base them on that small set of certainly true propositions.<sup>7</sup>

Since Stump deals with a specific kind of foundationalism, she refers to it as 'Foundationalism', capitalizing the term --and so will I going forward. In order to show that this view is far from Aquinas's theory of knowledge, Stump performs a vast epistemological examination, focusing on various elements of Aquinas's thought: the notion of '*scientia*', the role played by induction and the process of resolution, the limits of Thomistic '*certitudo*', the externalist and reliabilist character of Aquinas's thought compared with the internalism typical of the Foundationalist view. Stump's conclusion is that Aquinas is not a Foundationalist, since his epistemology seems to be rather a form of theological externalism -- based on the idea that knowledge is largely or entirely constituted by states or processes dependent on God and external to the knower, or at any rate not internally accessible to him -- with reliabilistic elements in it. In sum, Stump's conviction is that for Aquinas our cognitive capacities are designed *by God* for the express purpose of enabling us to know everything, and for this reason our faculties are *reliable*.

I agree with Stump's perspective. As Stump, I am convinced that Aquinas is not a Foundationalist. Moreover, I am going to take Stump's position a step further. First, I am going to show that Aquinas's reliabilism falls into a vicious circle when seen as based on a theistic perspective autonomously reached by natural reason. Secondly, I am going to argue that such reliabilism depends on Christian faith, that is, on the act of believing the revealed truths by virtue of the love relationship that God allows men to have with him.

## 1 STUMP ON AQUINAS'S THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF KNOWLEDGE

Let us start from Stump's interpretation of Aquinas. Stump says that for Aquinas '*scientia*' is a process of reasoning that 'consists in demonstrative syllogism', whose first principles are indemonstrable, and 'are the cause of certitude in one's cognition of other propositions': 'any *scientia* takes its certitude from them.'<sup>8</sup> Stump focuses on these first principles, and points out that according to Aquinas these come in two sorts: principles that are *common* to every *scientia*, such as the law of non-

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<sup>7</sup> AFK, p. 131.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 132f.

contradiction, and principles that are *proper*, that is, peculiar to a given *scientia*. Stump remarks that ‘we cannot *really* deny common principles, in the sense that we believe the opposite of a common principle to be true’ although ‘we can deny common principles orally (‘*ore*’) and verbally (‘*secundum vocem*’), in accordance with a false opinion or imagination.’<sup>9</sup> In other words, ‘it is perfectly possible that what is in fact a common principle be rejected by someone as false.’<sup>10</sup> Then Stump remarks that, in Aquinas’ thought, *any scientia* requires not only common principles, but also proper principles, and points out that there are very many proper principles: their number isn’t much less than the number of conclusions, and they are established by means of induction. From this follows that proper principles, since they are achieved by induction, cannot be considered *incontrovertible*. Thus, inasmuch as it needs such principles, Aquinas’s ‘*scientia*’ cannot be included in the Foundationalist perspective, which requires indubitable propositions at the start of scientific reflection:

On Aquinas’s view, in one way or another, a person can be deceived as regards all the propositions which are supposed to ground knowledge for him, so that the propositions which are supposed to be known with certainty according to Foundationalism aren’t even guaranteed to be true on Aquinas’s account and therefore obviously can’t provide a guarantee of the certain truth of other, non-basic propositions derived from them.<sup>11</sup>

On the one hand, it is possible for common principles not to be recognized as such. On the other hand, proper principles are even less adequate to lend certainty to the starting point of scientific knowledge. Stump adds that, in Aquinas’s thought, the idea that science must be founded on incontrovertible starting points from which it would be possible to derive equally incontrovertible propositions (through an equally incontrovertible reasoning) is absent. This can be thought of as the typically modern position assumed by Descartes, rather than Aquinas’s.<sup>12</sup>

Aquinas adopts a double-reasoning process consisting in resolution (‘*resolutio*’, analysis, judgment) and composition (‘*compositio*’, synthesis, discovery). Resolution is the ascending process, which goes from what is less to what is more universal. Composition is the opposite process in that it goes from what is more to what is less

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 139. Let me make just a brief reference to the distinction between the concepts of *assent* (*assensus*) and *consideration* (*consideratio*) that Aquinas examines with reference to both science and faith (see *Summa Theologiae* [hereafter ST] II-II, q. 2, a. 9, ad 2). In the case of science, Aquinas claims that if the assent is not a matter of free-will (before the evidence, one cannot withhold assent), the same cannot be held with respect to *consideration*: this *is* a matter of free-will, because one *can decide* whether or not to reflect on something that is already known, and this can result in either an increase or a decrease in her knowledge.

<sup>11</sup> AFK, pp. 143f.

<sup>12</sup> See AFK, p. 154.

universal.<sup>13</sup> These two processes are not symmetrical. On the one hand, resolution precedes composition, on the other, the two ways refer to each other. Likewise, on the one hand, Aquinas affirms clearly that ‘the universals from which demonstration proceeds are made known to us only through induction,’<sup>14</sup> and that ‘things which transcend the physical order are discovered by the process of analysis.’<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, he says that

reasoning is related to understanding as time to eternity and as a circle to its center. For it is distinctive of reason to disperse itself in the consideration of many things, and then to gather one simple truth from them ... Conversely, intellect first contemplates a truth one and undivided and in that truth comprehends a whole multitude, as God, by knowing his essence, knows all things.<sup>16</sup>

A particularly appropriate comment has been made by Eileen Sweeney on this sort of circular path of reasoning. Such reasoning

is for Aquinas the human imitation of the *intellectus* of God and the angels, who comprehend immediately and intuitively a multiplicity in unity and a unity in multiplicity. Ultimately and in all senses the need for resolution and composition, the movements describing and circumscribing the dialectical structure of our reasoning, is a mark of the *imperfection* of our imitation of the divine *intellectus*, of human reason as sequential rather than synoptic, as discursive rather than intuitive, in short, as incomplete yet directed from and toward principles.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> ‘Human reasoning, by way of inquiry and discovery, advances from certain things simply understood--namely, the first principles; and, again, by way of judgment returns by analysis to first principles, in the light of which it examines what it has found.’ (ST, I, q. 79, a. 8, henceforth, if not otherwise indicated, tr. *The ‘Summa Theologica’ of St. Thomas Aquinas*, literally translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, second and revised edition [London: Oates and Washbourne, 1920]).

<sup>14</sup> ‘Universalialia, ex quibus demonstratio procedit, non fiunt nobis nota, nisi per inductionem’ (Aquinas, *Expositio libri Posteriorum Analyticorum*, I, lectio 30, tr. F. R. Larcher, Albany, N.Y.: Magi Books, 1970).

<sup>15</sup> ‘Haec enim transphysica inveniuntur in via resolutionis’ (Aquinas, *In duodecim libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis expositio*, proemium, tr. J. P. Rowan [Chicago: Henry Regnery Publishers, 1961]).

<sup>16</sup> ‘Similiter se habent ratio ad intelligentiam et tempus ad aeternitatem et circulus ad centrum. Est enim rationis proprium circa multa diffundi et ex eis unam simplicem cognitionem colligere ... Intellectus autem e converso per prius unam et simplicem veritatem considerat et in illa totius multitudinis cognitionem capit, sicut Deus intelligendo suam essentiam omnia cognoscit’ (Aquinas, *Super Boethium de Trinitate*, q. 6, a. 1, sol. c; tr. A. Maurer [Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1953]).

<sup>17</sup> Eileen C. Sweeney, ‘Three Notions of “Resolutio” and the Structure of Reasoning in Aquinas’, *The Thomist* 58 (1994): pp. 197-243, at p. 243.

This comment highlights the limits that Aquinas ascribes to human nature and to its capabilities. This Thomistic view is very different from the idea according to which science is built on the basis of certain and incontrovertible premises, which should be enough, at least in principle, to infer equally certain and incontrovertible conclusions. Stump then notes that the Thomistic notion of *'certitudo'* is not as strong as the equivalent modern notion of certainty. She says that, although Aquinas uses the word *'certitudo'* apropos of *'scientia'*, he is well aware of the fallibility of that same *'scientia'*. According to Aquinas, 'in order not to fall into mistakes in demonstration, one must be aware of the fact that often a universal seems to be demonstrated but in fact is not.'<sup>18</sup> In sum, one cannot attribute to Aquinas the attitude according to which it is possible not only to identify with certainty the starting points of knowledge, but also to derive from them a system of knowledge, which might or might not be complete, but is at any rate secure and stable.

Stump notes also that Aquinas puts forward an 'astonishing optimism as regards sense perception', that is 'echoed by his view of the intellect.'<sup>19</sup> She opportunely quotes several passages from Aquinas, of which I report here only two, the former concerning sense perception, the latter concerning intellect:

Sense, then, has no false knowledge about its proper objects, except accidentally and rarely, and then, because of the unsound organ it does not receive the sensible form rightly.<sup>20</sup>

As the sense is directly informed by the likeness of its proper object, so is the intellect by the likeness of the essence of a thing. Hence the intellect is not deceived about the essence of a thing, as neither the sense about its proper object.<sup>21</sup>

At first sight, such epistemological optimism does not seem to be compatible with the awareness of the fallibility mentioned above. However, Stump offers an adequate explanation. In order to identify the nature of Aquinas's theory of knowledge, she proceeds to sketch a kind of theological anthropology, which looks at man as a creature of God, endowed by the Creator with certain cognitive abilities. In Stump's

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<sup>18</sup> 'Quod non accidat in demonstratione peccatum, oportet non latere quod multoties videtur demonstrari universale, non autem demonstratur' (Aquinas, *Expositio libri Posteriorum Analyticorum*, I, lectio 12, quoted by Stump, AFK, at p. 143).

<sup>19</sup> AFK, p. 146.

<sup>20</sup> 'Et circa propria sensibilia sensus non habet falsam cognitionem, nisi per accidens, et ut in paucioribus, ex eo scilicet quod, propter indispositionem organi, non convenienter recipit formam sensibilem' (ST, I, q. 17, a. 2, quoted by Stump at p. 146).

<sup>21</sup> 'Sicut autem sensus informatur directe similitudine propriorum sensibilibus, ita intellectus informatur similitudine quidditatis rei. Unde circa quod quid est intellectus non decipitur, sicut neque sensus circa sensibilia propria' (ST, I, q. 17, a. 3, quoted by Stump at p. 147).

interpretation of Aquinas, the effectiveness of knowledge depends on a correct relationship between the creature and the Creator:

On Aquinas's view, our cognitive capacities are designed by God for the express purpose of enabling us to be cognizers of the truth, as God himself is. In particular, *when we use sense and intellect as God designed them to be used* in the environment suited to them, that is, in the world for which God designed human beings, then those faculties are absolutely reliable.<sup>22</sup>

Because God has designed our cognitive capacities in such a way as to make us cognizers of the truth, *it is only in our post-fall condition that error, deception, mistake, or even false opinion is a possibility at all ...* in light of these views of his, *it seems reasonable to take his theory of knowledge as a species of externalism, with reliabilist elements.*<sup>23</sup>

In the view proposed by Stump, Aquinas's epistemological optimism is due to a form of reliabilism ('a species of externalism, with reliabilist elements') that sharply contrasts with the Foundationalist criterion (which holds instead a kind of internalism). Moreover, Thomistic epistemology is to be thought of as theologically grounded: our cognitive capacities are reliable because they were designed by God to enable us to know. Such reliabilism founded on theism explains how Aquinas can be at the same time fallibilist and optimist. Aquinas's theism implies that man is a creature of God immersed in the post-fall condition, while God is the omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good creator of all things. Consequently, on the one hand one cannot be absolutely sure that the principles of science are incontrovertibly true and that the processes of demonstration are consistent, even if one seems certain of that. On the other hand, one can be greatly optimistic thanks to the conviction that, if our cognitive faculties have been given us by God in order to let us achieve the truth, then 'when we use sense and intellect as God designed them to be used in the environment suited to them', our cognitive capacities will turn out to be *reliable*.

## 2 WHICH KIND OF THEISM IS AQUINAS'S THEOLOGICAL RELIABILISM BASED ON?

Is the Thomistic perspective outlined above due to reason or to faith? It is known that for Aquinas the existence of God seen as the omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good creator of all things can be attained in two ways – philosophical demonstration and Christian faith:

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<sup>22</sup> AFK, p. 147 (my emphasis).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 148 (my emphasis).

Even as regards those truths about God which human reason could have discovered, it was necessary that man should be taught by a divine revelation; because the truth about God such as reason could discover, would only be known by a few, and that after a long time, and with the admixture of many errors ... It was therefore necessary that besides philosophical science built up by reason, there should be a sacred science learned through revelation.<sup>24</sup>

Likewise, the reliabilist conviction that God -- since he is the almighty and perfectly good creator -- endows human beings with reliable cognitive faculties can be based either on faith or on our rational faculties. In the latter case, however, such a reliabilism *falls into a vicious circle*. If the reliability of our cognitive faculties depends on what we know of God, this knowledge cannot, at the same time, depend on the reliability of our cognitive faculties. A certain knowledge (in this case, the knowledge of God) cannot be taken as both the premise and conclusion of the same discourse. Therefore, in order to support the Thomistic reliabilism in question, one needs rather to focus on Aquinas's *Christian faith*, and to ascertain if and how such faith can function as a basis for the above-mentioned reliabilism.

In the passages quoted above, Stump says that 'because God has designed our cognitive capacities in such a way as to make us cognizers of the truth, it is only in our post-fall condition that error, deception, mistake, or even false opinion is a possibility at all'. The idea that sin and the rejection of the relationship with God constitute the real obstacle to knowing belongs to the entire Christian tradition, and Stump rightly refers to it. However, it is not clear if what she refers to is indeed Christian faith. What she openly affirms leads rather to suppose that the theism taken by her as the basis of Thomistic reliabilism is assumed as purely *rational*. Stump says that 'it is plausible ... that a theory of knowledge at least similar to Aquinas's can form part of a non-theistic worldview;' <sup>25</sup> moreover, she never mentions the Christian faith, and only on the last page of her essay does she label 'theological' the externalism at issue. But if Stump's reliabilism is really due to a purely rational theism, her position, as I have already shown, ends up by falling into a vicious circle.

Whatever Stump's position may be, I consider it necessary to take into account Aquinas's faith and see if it really works as the basis for the Angelic doctor's reliabilism. To be more precise, I intend to ascertain whether Aquinas's theism on

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<sup>24</sup> 'Ad ea etiam quae de Deo ratione humana investigari possunt, necessarium fuit hominem instrui revelatione divina. Quia veritas de Deo, per rationem investigata, a paucis, et per longum tempus, et cum admixtione multorum errorum, homini proveniret... Necessarium igitur fuit, praeter philosophicas disciplinas, quae per rationem investigantur, sacram doctrinam per revelationem haberi' (ST, I, q. 1, a. 1, ). That is what Aquinas teaches throughout his works, as Ralph McInerny emphasized: 'Early, middle and late in his writings, St. Thomas speaks of a twofold knowledge of God, one that was achieved by pagan philosophers and which is based on knowledge of material things, another that results from God's revealing Himself to men' (Ralph McInerny, 'On Behalf of Natural Theology', *Proceedings of The American Catholic Philosophical Association*, 54 [1980], p. 64).

<sup>25</sup> AFK, p. 150.



which such reliabilism depends stems from faith, i.e., the belief in Christian revelation made possible by the love relationship that God allows human beings to have with him.

### 3 REVEALED THEISM AS FOUNDATION OF AQUINAS'S RELIABILISM

Before delving into the concept of revealed theism and its relationship with rational theism in Aquinas's thought, I shall take into account the Angelic doctor's treatment of the relation between faith and reason. Let us start by looking at the Thomistic *difference* between the certainty achieved by reason and the one offered by faith:

Certainty can mean two things. The first is firmness of adherence, and with reference to this, faith is more certain than any understanding [of principles] and scientific knowledge. For the first truth, which causes the assent of faith, is a more powerful cause than the light of reason, which causes the assent of understanding or scientific knowledge. The second is the evidence of that to which assent is given. Here, faith does not have certainty, but scientific knowledge and understanding do.<sup>26</sup>

The Angelic doctor is referring to two *different* kinds of certainty: the 'firmness of adherence' and the 'evidence'. Unlike faith, intellect and science are able to attain the *evidence*, while faith provides more *firmness of adherence*. Aquinas therefore shows that he is aware of the different needs that characterize reason and faith, and of the way to meet them. The evidence is to be searched for by reason, while the firmness of adherence is granted by God.<sup>27</sup>

However, such awareness of the difference between faith and reason doesn't prevent Aquinas from comparing one to the other and saying that the former is more certain than the latter. In the passage quoted above, he claims that 'faith is more certain than any understanding [of principles] and scientific knowledge', i.e., any kind of rational knowledge.<sup>28</sup> Elsewhere he affirms that faith and firmness of

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<sup>26</sup> 'Certitudo duo potest importare: scilicet firmitatem adhaesionis; et quantum ad hoc fides est certior etiam omni intellectu et scientia, quia prima veritas, quae causat fidei assensum, est fortior causa quam lumen rationis, quae causat assensum intellectus vel scientiae. Importat etiam evidentiam eius cui assentitur; et sic fides non habet certitudinem, sed scientia et intellectus' (Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 1, ad 7, tr. J.V. McGlynn [Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1953]).

<sup>27</sup> 'Since man, by assenting to matters of faith, is raised above his nature, this must needs accrue to him from some supernatural principle moving him inwardly; and this is God' (ST, II-II, q. 6, a. 1).

<sup>28</sup> John Jenkins, while commenting on this passage, says that according to Aquinas 'the faithful hold the articles of faith with greater conviction than the principle of non-contradiction' (John Jenkins, *Knowledge and Faith in Thomas Aquinas* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997], pp. 167f.).

adherence on the one hand, and reason and evidence on the other hand, must be considered from two different points of view:

We must note that certitude can be looked at in two ways. First, on the part of its cause, and thus a thing which has a more certain cause, is itself more certain. On this way faith is more certain than those three virtues [intellect, science, and wisdom], because it is founded on the Divine truth, whereas the aforesaid three virtues are based on human reason. Secondly, certitude may be considered on the part of the subject, and thus the more a man's intellect lays hold of a thing, the more certain it is. On this way, faith is less certain, because matters of faith are above the human intellect, whereas the objects of the aforesaid three virtues are not.<sup>29</sup>

Reason is more certain from the point of view of the subject of faith, and less certain from the point of view of the cause. Aquinas says also that the point of view of the cause plays a more decisive role:

Since, however, a thing is judged simply with regard to its cause, but relatively, with respect to a disposition on the part of the subject, it follows that faith is more certain simply, while the others are more certain relatively, i.e. for us.<sup>30</sup>

The conclusion is that, since from the point of view of the cause faith is more certain than reason, faith turns out to be 'more certain simply'. But why does Aquinas state that from this point of view faith is more certain than reason? The answer is obvious: the cause of faith is God, while the cause of reason is man, and of course God's dignity must be considered higher than man's. However, Aquinas holds that God is the cause of faith because he is a believer. Thus, on the one hand Aquinas clearly distinguishes faith from reason and recognizes that, from the subject's perspective, human reason is more certain, since from this point of view, only reason is able to attain certainty. On the other, as a Christian believer, he maintains that faith is more certain than reason.

What I have just argued applies to Aquinas's reflection on theism as well. As we shall see, Aquinas (1) points out the difference between theism granted by faith

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<sup>29</sup> 'Certitudo potest considerari dupliciter. Uno modo, ex causa certitudinis, et sic dicitur esse certius illud quod habet certiores causas. Et hoc modo fides est certior tribus praedictis, quia fides innititur veritati divinae, tria autem praedicta innituntur rationi humanae. Alio modo potest considerari certitudo ex parte subiecti, et sic dicitur esse certius quod plenius consequitur intellectus hominis. Et per hunc modum, quia ea quae sunt fidei sunt supra intellectum hominis, non autem ea quae subsunt tribus praedictis, ideo ex hac parte fides est minus certa' (ST, II-II, q. 4, a. 8).

<sup>30</sup> 'Sed quia unumquodque iudicatur simpliciter quidem secundum causam suam; secundum autem dispositionem quae est ex parte subiecti iudicatur secundum quid, inde est quod fides est simpliciter certior, sed alia sunt certiora secundum quid, scilicet quoad nos' (ST, II-II, q. 4, a. 8).

and theism achieved by reason, (2) highlights the autonomy and the dignity of the latter, (3) believes that the former constitutes the criterion on which to judge the latter.

To this effect, let us consider the passage in which Aquinas deals with the case where the conclusions of reasoning deny the truths of faith (this case includes theism, which can be asserted either by reason or faith). Here too Aquinas highlights the autonomy of reason and, consequently, of rational theism:

If, however, anything is found in the teachings of the philosophers contrary to faith, this error does not properly belong to philosophy, but is due to an abuse of philosophy owing to the insufficiency of reason. Therefore also it is possible from the principles of philosophy to refute an error of this kind, either by showing it to be altogether impossible, or not to be necessary.<sup>31</sup>

According to the Angelic doctor, the contrary of a truth can never be demonstrated, that is, reason cannot be wrong if it works according to its nature.<sup>32</sup> This is why, if it is mistaken, ‘this error does not properly belong to philosophy, but is due to an abuse of philosophy’. Consequently, it is necessary to investigate what the mistake consists of, and such a task, once again, pertains to reason: ‘it is possible from the principles of philosophy to refute an error of this kind, either by showing it to be altogether impossible, or not to be necessary’. Faith must not replace reason: the latter is expected to start searching again and continue inquiring ‘from the principles of philosophy’. The autonomy and dignity of reason highlighted above are therefore confirmed. Faith cannot replace reason because the evidence can be searched for only through intellectual activity.

At the same time, the passage in question clearly shows that the principles of faith work as criteria on which to judge whether or not the conclusions of reason can be accepted. Aquinas is explicit: in case of conflict between reason and faith, the last word belongs to faith. Moreover, the same position – even though the Angelic doctor doesn’t assert it explicitly – is valid in the case in which there is no such a conflict -- when the conclusions autonomously achieved by reason coincide with the principles of faith. In fact, as Stump has sufficiently argued, Aquinas claims that reason can be mistaken even when one is not aware of it.<sup>33</sup> Consequently, if the conclusions of reasoning coincide with the principles of faith, one should be sure about the material truth so attained not by virtue of the reasoning (that could be wrong) but thanks to its accordance with faith (which is infallible). Thus, theism achieved through reason can

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<sup>31</sup> ‘Si quid [...] 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’ (Aquinas, *Super Boethium De Trinitate*, q. 2, a. 3, tr. R. E. Brennan [New York: Herder and Herder, 1946]).

<sup>32</sup> See ST, I, q. 1, a. 8 (see below, footnote 35).

<sup>33</sup> See above, footnote 18.

be affirmed with certainty only if materially coinciding with faith.<sup>34</sup> Needless to say, such a perspective is itself taken from faith. More precisely, it is a conviction that derives from the belief that only faith is based on infallible truth:

Since faith rests upon infallible truth, and since the contrary of a truth can never be demonstrated, it is clear that the arguments brought against faith cannot be demonstrations, but are difficulties that can be answered.<sup>35</sup>

In the passages quoted above, Aquinas makes at least two decisive points. First, he clarifies the difference between faith and reason. He explains that the latter is to be considered autonomous in its intellectual procedure and cannot be replaced by the former because the evidence can be searched for only by reason. This way, Aquinas supports the autonomy and the value of theism achieved by reason. Second, the autonomy in question can coexist with the primacy of faith, since the evidence reached by reason can convey certainty only if it coincides with the truths of faith. Thus, the acceptance of theism that comes from reason depends on the accord that such theism has with theism that comes from faith. As a consequence, Aquinas's reliabilism depends ultimately on the latter and not on the former. This conclusion is not surprising. Aquinas is a believer, this is why he maintains that, unlike reason which comes from man, faith is infallible since it is granted by God. For the Angelic doctor, faith is 'an act of the intellect assenting to the Divine truth at the command of the will moved by the grace of God.'<sup>36</sup> Faith consists not only in the work of intellect and will, but it is specifically granted by the intervention and the support gratuitously offered by God. This is the very core of Aquinas's faith: God is love, and he guides human beings to partake of him by generating in them the desire to increasingly love him and believe what he has revealed.<sup>37</sup> For Aquinas, 'the act of faith is perfected and

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<sup>34</sup> When Aquinas compares the knowledge of theism achieved through reason with theism that is accepted by way of revelation, he explicitly states that the certainty is greater in the latter case: 'It is necessary for man to accept by faith not only things which are above reason, but also those which can be known by reason: and this for three motives. ... The third reason is for the sake of certitude. For human reason is very deficient in things concerning God. A sign of this is that philosophers in their researches, by natural investigation, into human affairs, have fallen into many errors, and have disagreed among themselves. And consequently, in order that men might have knowledge of God, free of doubt and uncertainty, it was necessary for Divine matters to be delivered to them by way of faith, being told to them, as it were, by God Himself Who cannot lie' (ST, II-II, q. 2, a. 4).

<sup>35</sup> 'Cum enim fides infallibili veritati innitatur, impossibile autem sit de vero demonstrari contrarium, manifestum est probationes quae contra fidem inducuntur, non esse demonstrationes, sed solubilia argumenta' (ST, I, q. 1, a. 8).

<sup>36</sup> 'Actus intellectus assentientis veritati divinae ex imperio voluntatis a Deo motae per gratiam' (ST, II-II, q. 2, a. 9).

<sup>37</sup> It is a perspective that has been summarized also by Peter J. Riga: 'For St. Thomas faith is the assent to the true on the authority of the one who reveals this truth, and thus faith is formally an act of the intelligence. Yet, Thomas does recognize the large part which the will plays in the act of faith. Love renders the act of faith meritorious and, as it were, informs and gives life to faith and the adherence itself is a work of love so that the act of faith is an act intrinsically

formed by charity.’<sup>38</sup> Thanks to the love of God and the relation He allows human beings to have with him, the faithful (Aquinas included) are sure that their ‘faith rests upon infallible truth’.

In this essay, I accept Stump’s view that the epistemology developed by Aquinas doesn’t coincide with the type of foundationalism she takes into account, but it is rather a kind of reliabilism. I also share with Stump the conviction that such reliabilism is based on Aquinas’s theism. However, I thought it necessary to take the distance from a specific point she makes—namely, that Aquinas’s reliabilism depends on a merely rational theism. Since Aquinas says that there are two kinds of theism, one supported by reason and one granted by faith, I tried to consider not only the former but also the latter, and the relation between them. In the course of my analysis, I made two points. First, Aquinas clearly distinguishes faith from reason. He says that the latter is to be considered autonomous in the intellectual process and therefore cannot be replaced by the former, since the evidence can be sought for only by reason. Second, the evidence attained by reason is considered capable to convey certainty only if it coincides with the principles of faith. Thus, the acceptance of theism that comes from reason depends on the accord that such theism can achieve with faith. In conclusion, Aquinas’s theological reliabilism depends ultimately on revealed theism and not on rational theism.

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determined by affective elements’ (‘The Act of Faith in Augustine and Aquinas’, *The Thomist* 35 [1971], p. 168).

<sup>38</sup>

‘Per caritatem actus fidei perficitur et formatur’ (ST, II-II, q. 4, a. 3).