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INFIDELES ET PHILOSOPHI:
ASSENT, UNTRUTH, AND NATURAL KNOWLEDGE OF THE SIMPLE GOD

by

Jeffrey M. Walkey, B.S., M.T.S.

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School, Marquette University,
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

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ABSTRACT
INFIDELES ET PHILOSOPHI:
 ASSENT, UNTRUTH, AND NATURAL KNOWLEDGE OF THE SIMPLE GOD

Jeffrey M. Walkey, B.S., M.T.S.

Marquette University, 2019

Victor Preller’s “reformulation” of St. Thomas has impacted many contemporary theologians and philosophers, among them, George Lindbeck, Stanley Hauerwas, Bruce Marshall, D. Stephen Long, Fergus Kerr, to name only a few. According to Kerr, Preller is responsible for bringing to the fore St. Thomas’s denial that unbelievers can be truly said to believe “God exists.” In particular, Preller draws our attention to *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3.

Seemingly, in light of this passage, all non-believers have a defect in cognition with respect to the simple God. As such, they cannot be said to believe “God exists” at all (*totaliter*). According to Preller, it suggests that pre-Christian pagan philosophers not only failed to know the existence of God, but that they could not in principle have known apart from the graces of special revelation and faith. By virtue of the Aristotelian axiom used by St. Thomas, which states, “*to know simple things defectively is not to know them at all,*” they were not merely wrong about God, but entirely ignorant of him.

Given the impact of this interpretation, it is important that Preller has interpreted *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3 rightly. I argue, however, that he has not. Preller’s inattentiveness to the context, as well as the specific meaning of certain terms, contributes to a misunderstanding. If we properly identify the *infideles* and determine the *defectus cognitionis* at issue, we see that St. Thomas is not claiming that the philosophers (*philosophi*) qua pagan per se suffer from the relevant defect. This would contradict the numerous affirmations of pagan philosophical knowledge of God found elsewhere in the corpus. Not suffering from this defect, they are not qua pagan ignorant of the existence of God. The *philosophi* are neither on St. Thomas’s radar in *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3 nor necessarily (though potentially) guilty of the sort of defect in cognition that St. Thomas has in mind.

Ultimately, this passage does not mean what Preller and others have taken it to mean. Consequently, it does not ground any denial of the possibility of pre-Christian pagan philosophical knowledge of God.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>CT</i>	<i>Compendium theologiae</i>
<i>De potentia</i>	<i>Quaestiones disputatae de potentia</i>
<i>De veritate</i>	<i>Quaestiones disputatae de veritate</i>
<i>In 1 Cor</i>	<i>Super I Epistoam B. Pauli ad Corinthios lectura</i>
<i>In Hebraeos</i>	<i>Super Epistolam B. Pauli ad Hebraeos lectura</i>
<i>In Ioan</i>	<i>Super Evangelium S. Ioannis lectura</i>
<i>In Iob</i>	<i>Expositio super Iob ad litteram</i>
<i>In Post. Anal</i>	<i>Expositio Libri Posteriorum Analyticorum</i>
<i>In Rom</i>	<i>Super Epistolam B. Pauli ad Romanos lectura</i>
<i>Super Sent. Revised</i>	<i>Lectura romana in primum Sententiarum Petri Lombardi</i>
<i>ScG</i>	<i>Summa contra Gentiles</i>
<i>Super Sent</i>	<i>Scriptum super libros Sententiis</i>
<i>ST</i>	<i>Summa theologiae</i>
<i>Super Boet. de Trinite</i>	<i>Super Boetium de Trinite</i>

Full reference information can be found in the bibliography, including the English translations used in this dissertation.

INTRODUCTION

I. The Challenge of Victor Preller

In 1967, Victor Preller published his “reformulation” of St. Thomas’s account of God and religious language in his book *Divine Science and the Science of God*.¹ In it, Preller pushed back against many of the more traditional interpretations of St. Thomas regarding, for instance, the *quinque viae*² and the divine attributes.³ One of Preller’s more

¹ Victor Preller, *Divine Science and the Science of God: A Reformulation of Thomas Aquinas* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2005). The book was originally published by Princeton University Press, 1967.

² For sources by those who generally affirm the effectiveness of natural theology, see, for instance, Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *God: His Existence and His Nature: A Thomistic Solution of Certain Agnostic Antinomies*, vol. 1, trans. Dom Bede Rose (London: B. Herder Book Co., 1939); *Reality: A Synthesis of Thomistic Thought*, trans. Patrick Cummins (Lexington: Ex Fontibus Co., 2012); *The One God: A Commentary on the First Part of St. Thomas’s Theological Summa*, trans. Bede Rose (Lexington: Ex Fontibus Co., 2012); *De revelatione per ecclesiam catholicam proposita*, 2 volumes (Paris: Desclee et Socci, 1950); Jacques Maritain, *Approaches to God* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978); *The Degrees of Knowledge*, trans. Gerald Phelan (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011); E. L. Mascall, *He Who Is: A Study in Traditional Theism* (London: Archon Books, 1970), originally published in 1943; *Existence and Analogy: A Sequel to ‘He Who Is’*, (London: Archon Books, 1967), originally published in 1949; *The Openness of Being: Natural Theology Today* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971); Désiré Cardinal Mercier, *A Manual of Modern Scholastic Philosophy*, vol. 2, trans. T.L. Parker and S.A. Parker (London: Herder Book Company, 1933), originally published in 1917; Dom Mark Pontifex, *The Existence of God: A Thomist Essay* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co. 1947); Henri Renard, *The Philosophy of God* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1951); Gerard Smith, *Natural Theology: Metaphysics II* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1951); James F. Anderson, *Natural Theology: The Metaphysics of God* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1962); Thomas C. O’Brien, *Metaphysics and the Existence of God: A Reflection on the Question of God’s Existence in Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics* (Washington D. C.: The Thomist Press, 1960); Dennis Bonnette, *Aquinas’ Proofs for God’s Existence: St. Thomas Aquinas on: ‘The Per Accidens necessarily implies the Per Se’* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972); Fernand Van Steenberghe, *Le problème de L’existence de Dieu dans les écrits de S. Thomas D’Aquin* (Louvain: Éditions de L’Institute Supérieur de Philosophie, 1980); Ralph McInerny, *Characters in Search of Their Author: The Gifford Lectures Glasgow 1999-2000* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001); Praeambula Fidei: *Thomism and the God of the Philosophers* (Washington D. C.: The Catholic University of America, 2006); Thomas Joseph White, *Wisdom in the Face of Modernity: A Study in Thomistic Natural Theology* (Ave Maria: Sapientia Press, 2009); Ann Bonta Moreland, *Known by Nature: Thomas Aquinas on Natural Knowledge of God* (New York: Herder & Herder, 2010); Denis Turner, *Faith, Reason, and the Existence of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Rudi Te Velde, *Aquinas on God: The ‘Divine Science’ of the Summa Theologiae* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2006); Edward Feser, *Five Proofs of the Existence of God* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017); *The Last Superstition: A Refutation of the New Atheism* (South Bend: St. Augustine’s Press: 2010); *Aquinas: A Beginner’s Guide* (London: Oneworld, 2009); Gaven Kerr, *Aquinas’s Way to God: The Proof in De Ente et Essentia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical*

significant emphases, and the primary concern here, is his suggestion that rather than defending natural theology apart from the graces of special revelation and faith, St. Thomas denied its effectiveness, going so far as to deny that pre-Christian pagan philosophers can be said to know that God exists at all. He states, “The proposition, ‘God

Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000); Serge-Thomas Bonino, *Dieu, «Celui Qui Est»* (Paris: Parole et Silence, 2016). For sources by those who take a more cautious approach, see Étienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*, trans. A.H.C. Downes (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), originally published in 1936; *Thomist Realism and the Critique of Knowledge*, trans. Mark A. Wauck (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), originally published 1939; *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. L.K. Shook (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2002), originally published in 1956; *The Elements of Christian Philosophy* (New York: Mentor-Omega, 1960); Bernard Lonergan, “Natural Knowledge of God,” in *A Second Collection*, ed. William F.J. Ryan and Bernard J. Tyrrell (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974); *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), especially chapter 19; David B. Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2016). For some other scholars of this sort, like George Lindbeck, Stanley Hauerwas, Bruce Marshall, Eugene Rogers, Fergus Kerr, D. Stephen Long, et al., see below. For a fruitful and brief discussion of the history of demonstrations for the existence of God, see, for instance, Matthew Levering, *Proofs of God: Classical Arguments from Tertullian to Barth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016); also, Jarsolav Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Cultural: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

³ For sources by those who are generally optimistic about our natural capacities to know the divine attributes, see Garrigou-Lagrange, *God: His Existence and His Nature: A Thomistic Solution of Certain Agnostic Antinomies*, vol. 2, trans. Dom Bede Rose (London: B. Herder Book Co., 1939); *Reality: A Synthesis of Thomistic Thought; The One God; De revelatione per ecclesiam catholicam proposita*; Maritain; *The Degrees of Knowledge*; Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being*; Bonino, *Dieu, «Celui Qui Est»*. For sources by those who are more agnostic about our knowledge of divine attributes, see Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas; The Elements of Christian Philosophy*; A.D. Sertillanges, “Agnosticisme ou Anthropomorphisme,” in *Questions Philosophiques* (Paris : Librairie Bloud et Cie, 1908), 5-63; “Appendice I: Notes Explicatives,” in *Somme théologique, 1a, Questions 1-11* (Paris : Éditions du Cerf, 1958), 302-324; “Appendice I: Notes Explicatives,” in *Somme théologique, 1a, 12-17* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1926), 323-369; “Appendice II: Renseignements Techniques,” in *Somme théologique, 1a, 1-11* (Paris : Éditions du Cerf, 1958), 325-358; “Appendice II: Renseignements Techniques,” in *Somme théologique, 1a, 12-17* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1926), 371-407 ; *La Philosophie de Saint Thomas d’Aquin*, Tome 1 (Paris : Aubier, 1947); *Thomas Aquinas : Scholar, Poet, Mystic, Saint*, trans. Godfrey Anstruther (Manchester : Sophia Institute Press, 2011), originally published in 1933; Victor White, *God the Unknown and Other Essays* (London: Harvill Press, 1956); *Holy Teaching: The Idea of Theology according to St. Thomas Aquinas* (London: Blackfriars Publications, 1958); David B. Burrell, *Analogy and Philosophical Language* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2016). For a useful account of the philosophical and theological shifts of the 19th and early 20th centuries, specifically, within Thomism, see Gerald A. McCool, *Nineteenth-Century Scholasticism: The Search for a Unitary Method* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1999); *From Unity to Pluralism: The Internal Evolution of Thomism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002); *The Neo-Thomists* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2009). See, also, Victor B. Brezik (ed.), *One Hundred Years of Thomism: Aeterni Patris and Afterwards: A Symposium* (Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1981).

exists,'...takes on such utterly new significance for faith that St. Thomas is willing to say that the pagans...cannot be said to believe in God."⁴

This interpretation seems to present us with a difficulty. In numerous places, St. Thomas appears to explicitly grant the fact of pagan natural philosophical knowledge of the existence of God. Among such apparent affirmations, we can include the following:

God's existence, insofar as it is not self-evident to us, is demonstrable through effects known to us.⁵

There are some truths which the natural reason also is able to reach. Such are that God exists, that He is one, and the like. In fact, such truths about God have been proven demonstratively by the philosophers (*philosophi*), guided by the light of natural reason.⁶

What is per se known is not demonstrable, but the philosophers (*philosophi*) demonstrated that God exists.⁷

Whatever is the conclusion of a demonstration is not self-evident. But God's existence is demonstrated by the philosophers (*philosophis*) too.⁸

Another knowledge is that by which God is considered in himself yet nevertheless is known through his effects, insofar as someone proceeds from the knowledge of his effects to the knowledge of God himself. And this can be had through the inquiry of natural reason, although not immediately. And it was thus that the philosophers (*philosophi*) and other wise men arrived at knowledge of God, to the extent that it is possible to attain it.⁹

Accordingly, there are two kinds of science concerning the divine. One follows our way of knowing, which uses the principles of sensible things in order to make

⁴ Preller, *Divine Science*, 228. For his close reading of *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3, see *Divine Science*, 226-271, especially, 226-237, in which he gives a detailed account of the threefold distinction within the one act of faith, among *credere Deum*, *credere Deo*, and *credere in Deum*.

⁵ *ST* I, q. 2, a. 2, resp. All English translations of *ST* come from, with light modifications, *Summa Theologica*, 5 volumes, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Allen: Christian Classics, 1981).

⁶ *ScG* I, ch. 3, no. 2. All English translations of *ScG* come from, with light modifications, *Summa contra Gentiles* I-IV (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001).

⁷ Aquinas, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum Revised Text*, d. 3, q. 1, a. 1, sc. This text is from St. Thomas's late Roman commentary on the Sentences (ca. late 1260s), not his early commentary.

⁸ *Ibid.*, d. 3, q. 1, a. 2, sc. 2.

⁹ *Ibid.*, d. 17, q. 1, a. 1, resp.

the Godhead known. This is the way the philosophers (*philosophi*) handed down a science of the divine.¹⁰

[Preambles of faith] are the truths about God that are proved by natural reason, for example, that God exists, that he is one, and other truths of this about God or creatures proved in philosophy (*philosophia*) and presupposed by faith.¹¹

We believe that there is one God, a fact which is demonstrated by philosophers (*philosophis*).¹²

It is necessary to believe that God is one and incorporeal: which things philosophers (*philosophi*) prove by natural reason.¹³

The existence of God, that God is one, and even that God is incorporeal is said by St.

Thomas to be both “demonstrable” and “demonstrated” by the *philosophi*.¹⁴ It would

appear that St. Thomas is affirming not simply the mere possibility that such a

¹⁰ *Super Boetium de Trinitate*, q. 2, a. 1, resp. Cf. *Super Boet. de Trinitate*, q. 2, a. 3, resp: “[I]n order to demonstrate the preambles of faith, which we must necessarily know in [the act of] faith. Such are the truths about God that are proved by natural reason, for example, that God exists, that he is one, and other truths of this sort about God or creatures proved in philosophy and presupposed by faith.” All English translations of *Super Boet. de Trinitate* come from, with light modifications, *Faith, Reason, and Theology*, trans. Armand Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1987) and *The Division and Methods of the Sciences*, trans. Armand Maurer (Toronto Press: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1986).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, q. 2, a. 3, resp.

¹² *In Hebraeos*, ch. 11, lect., no. 560. Later in this section, St. Thomas has the opportunity to reject philosophical knowledge of this kind, but instead, simply notes, “To the objection [regarding the philosophers’ knowledge that God exists] based on demonstration, the answer is that nothing prohibits one thing being seen by one person and believed by another.” All English translations of *In Hebraeos* come from, with light modification, *Commentary of the Letter of Saint Paul to the Hebrews*, trans. F. R. Larcher (Lander: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012).

¹³ *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 4, sc.

¹⁴ Of course, there also the numerous places where St. Thomas specifically offers various arguments for the existence of God. For a discussion of these places, see Jules A. Baisnée, “St. Thomas Aquinas’s Proofs of the Existence of God Presented in Their Chronological Order,” in *Philosophical Studies in Honor of the Very Reverend Ignatius Smith, O. P.* (Westminster: The Newman Press, 1952), 29-64. There Baisnée provides a list of the various places where St. Thomas uses different arguments. He specifically notes the frequency of each of the various arguments appear: *ex ordine mundi* (ten times), *ex motu* (seven times), *ex gradibus perfectionis* (five times), *ex contingencia rerum* (four times), *ex rerum pluralitate* (three times), *ex participatione* (two times), *ex ordinatis causis efficientibus* (two times), *ex compositione et existentiae in rebus* (one time), *ex rerum imperfectione et potentialitate* (one time), *ex infinita veritate* (one time), and *ex bonita* (one time).

demonstration is in principle possible, but that such a demonstration has in fact been given by the *philosophi*.¹⁵

In support of his denial that St. Thomas affirms the possibility of pre-Christian pagan philosophical knowledge of the one true God, Preller directs us to the *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3. It reads:

Unbelievers cannot be said *to believe in a God* as we understand it in relation to the act of faith. For they do not believe that God exists under the conditions that faith determines; hence they do not truly believe in a God, since as the Philosopher observes (*Metaph.* ix, text. 22) *to know simple things defectively is not to know them at all*.

This particular passage seems to function, for Preller (and others), as a, if not the, smoking gun showing that St. Thomas did not hold that pre-Christian pagan philosophers, such as Plato or Aristotle, could be said to know God exists. The impact of this reading of St. Thomas is far reaching. It is present—explicitly and implicitly—in the writings of George Lindbeck,¹⁶ Stanley Hauerwas,¹⁷ Bruce Marshall,¹⁸ Eugene Rogers,¹⁹ and D. Stephen Long,²⁰ among others.

¹⁵ For the debate about the more specific claim regarding the possibility of demonstrating the doctrine of Creation by means of natural human reason, see Mark F. Johnson, “Did St. Thomas Attribute a Doctrine of Creation to Aristotle,” in *The New Scholasticism* 63 (1989); “Aquinas’s Changing Evaluation of Plato on Creation,” in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 66 no. 1 (1992); Lawrence Dewan, “Thomas Aquinas, Creation, and Two Historians,” in *Laval théologique et philosophique* 50 no. 2 (1994); John F. Wippel, “Aquinas on Creation and Preambles of Faith,” in *The Thomist* 78 (2014); “Thomas Aquinas on the Possibility of Eternal Creation,” in *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas* (Washington: CUA Press, 1984); Étienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* (Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame, 2012), 438-441 n. 4; Anton Pegis, “A Note on St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, I, 44, 1-2,” *Medieval Studies* (1946), 159-168; *St. Thomas and the Greeks* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1939); Robert Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason: Foundation of Christian Theology* (Washington D. C.: The Catholic University of America, 1995).

¹⁶ George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984), 48; see, also, 70 n3, in which Lindbeck cites *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3.

¹⁷ Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2001); “Connections Created and Contingent: Aquinas, Preller, Wittgenstein, and Hopkins,” in *Grammar and Grace: Reformulations of Aquinas and Wittgenstein*, eds. Jeffrey Stout and Robert MacSwain (London: SCM Press, 2004), 76.

¹⁸ Bruce Marshall, “Aquinas as Postliberal Theologian,” in *The Thomist* 53 (1989), 353-402; “Thomas, Thomisms, and Truth” in *The Thomist* 56 (1992), 499-524; “Faith and Reason Reconsidered: Aquinas and Luther on Deciding What is True,” in *The Thomist* 63 (1999), 1-48; “*Quod Scit Una Uetula*: Aquinas on

One might get the impression, given the list of scholars above, that the acceptance and appropriation of the interpretation endorsed by Preller here is a largely Protestant or Barthian phenomenon.²¹ Yet, this interpretation is utilized—with and without reference to Preller—by Roman Catholic Thomists as well.²² Fergus Kerr states, “[T]he interesting point for us...is that Thomas clearly thinks that the proposition ‘God exists’, held as true by a non-Christian, on the basis of theistic proofs, does not mean the same as the proposition ‘God exists’ held by a believer.”²³ With respect to *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3 and Preller’s influence, Kerr observes, “Victor Preller brought this remark to the fore.”²⁴ More recently, John P. O’Callaghan marshalled a similar interpretation in order to show that the existence of *the* God of faith cannot be philosophically demonstrated, but only *a* god.²⁵ The claim by these and other scholars is quite strong. In his critique of Marshall’s

the Nature of Theology,” in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Rik Van Nieuwenhove and Joseph P. Wawrykow (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 1-35.

¹⁹ See Eugene Rogers, *Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth: Sacred Doctrine and the Natural Knowledge of God* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995).

²⁰ D. Stephen Long, *Speaking of God: Theology, Language, and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009).

²¹ Marshall has since become Roman Catholic.

²² David B. Burrell is another Catholic Thomist who follows Preller, at least in part, on these issues. See his *Analogy and Philosophical Language* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2016). Cf. *Aquinas: God and Action* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2016). See also, T. Adam Van Wart, *Neither Nature nor Grace: Garrigou-Lagrange, Barth, and Aquinas on the Epistemic Use of God’s Effects* (Washington D. C.: The Catholic University of America, forthcoming).

²³ Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (London: Blackwell, 2008), 67. On the same page, while discussing Preller and St. Thomas, he notes, “Pagans, or methodologically atheist philosophers, may believe on rational grounds that ‘God exists’; but this would not be believing truly that ‘God exists’, since they do not hold this belief *sub his conditionibus quae fides determinat*,” and, “[Thomas’s] point is...that even the proposition ‘God exists’ means something radically different when held on the basis of philosophy and ‘under the conditions that faith determines.’”

²⁴ Kerr, *After Aquinas*, 67.

²⁵ Without any reference to Preller, he makes use of the same kind of reading of *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3. See O’Callaghan, “Can We Prove the Existence of God? A Problem About Names,” presented on 19 July 2014, at *A Dominican Colloquium: What Has Athens to Do with Jerusalem? Dialogue between Philosophy and Theology in the 21st Century*, 16-20 July 2014. O’Callaghan drew attention to the distinction between common and proper names and especially how the name “God” functions as a common name, while at other points it is a proper name. Ultimately, the pagan philosopher can be said to have proven the existence of “a god” (common name) but not “the God” (proper name) of Christian faith. O’Callaghan’s paper has since been published as “Can We Demonstrate That ‘God Exists?’” in *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition, vol. 14, no. 2 (2016), 619-44. For Michael Sherwin’s response to O’Callaghan, see “Painted Ladies and the

use of the relevant text, Frederick Crosson rightly observed, “It’s not just that [the philosopher, e.g., Aristotle] in fact failed to [know God to exist], but that he couldn’t have done so.”²⁶ Apart from faith, one does not and cannot know God exists; insofar as one assents, apart from faith, to the proposition “God exists,” as Preller and others have argued it means something “radically different”²⁷ from what Christians intend.

Given the work that *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3 does for those who, like Preller, Marshall, Kerr, et al., argue that St. Thomas denies that the pagan philosophers believed that God exists, it is crucial to have interpreted St. Thomas rightly here. But have they done so? In the relevant literature, there have been direct and indirect responses to the positions offered by Preller and others. These responses, however, have mostly focused on highlighting those aspects of Thomas’s corpus that, in contrast to the interpretation of Preller, et al., appear to clearly affirm the possibility or attainment of knowledge of the one true God by means of natural reason, apart from the graces of special revelation and faith. Most notably, Thomas Joseph White’s *Wisdom in the Face of Modernity: A Study in Thomistic Natural Theology*²⁸ articulates a contemporary account of natural theology and the *analogia entis* in response to more recent philosophical and theological critiques (for example, Kant’s and Heidegger’s charge of onto-theology and Barth’s charge of idolatry and hubris). White also presents certain intra-Thomist debates about the

Witch Endor: Response to John O’Callaghan’s ‘Can We Demonstrate that God Exists?’” in *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition, vol. 14, no. 2 (2016), 645-652. For O’Callaghan’s reply, see “Epilogue: Reply to Michael S. Sherwin’s Response, ‘Painted Ladies and the Witch of Endor’” in *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition, vol. 14, no. 2 (2016), 653-658.

²⁶ Frederick J. Crosson, “Reconsidering Aquinas as Postliberal Theologian,” *The Thomist* 56 (1992), 481-498. Crosson is responding to the interpretation of Aquinas offered by Bruce Marshall. For another response to Marshall, see Louis Roy, “Bruce Marshall’s Reading of Aquinas,” *The Thomist* 56 (1992), 473-480.

²⁷ Preller, *Divine Science*, 226.

²⁸ Thomas Joseph White, *Wisdom in the Face of Modernity: A Study in Thomistic Natural Theology* (Ave Maria: Sapientia Press, 2009). See, also, *Nova et Vetera*, vol. 10, no. 2 (2012) for an exchange between White and three responders to his book: David B. Burrell, Nicholas J. Healy, and D. C. Schindler.

Thomistic account of analogy. Anna Bonta Moreland's *Known by Nature: Thomas Aquinas on Natural Knowledge of God*²⁹ responds directly to the interpretations of Lindbeck, Marshall, and Rogers. She highlights St. Thomas's use of terms in order to show that while natural reason (or supernatural reason, for that matter) cannot be said to comprehend (*comprehendere*) God, the natural capacities of human reason can attain to (*atingere*) God. While White's book is only indirectly related to the interpretations of St. Thomas with which I am primarily concerned, Moreland's text directly addresses this interpretation more broadly, as represented by postliberal theologians following Lindbeck, who is influenced by Preller.

No one has offered a substantive response to the interpretation of the few passages upon which this re-reading of St. Thomas on this point heavily depends. More specifically, there has been little critical analysis of the passages to which they turn to bring the Angelic Doctor to their corner. Preeminent among these is *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3.³⁰ The critiques offered by Louis Roy and Frederick Crosson have been largely concerned with the overall project of reading St. Thomas as a postliberal. They offer insightful and I think largely correct analyses of the passage, but only briefly. Given the continued influence of the interpretation of this passage offered by Preller, et al., however, more work needs to be done. More thorough answers to questions remain: Who are the infidels? Anyone who lacks faith? What are the conditions determined by faith? What is the simple thing to which Aristotle is referring in *Metaphysics IX*? God? Any separate substance? What is the character of the *defectus cognitionis*? The absence of the

²⁹ Anna Bonta Moreland, *Known by Nature: Thomas Aquinas on Natural Knowledge of God* (New York: Herder & Herder, 2010).

³⁰ Among the other relevant texts, one might include, for example, Aquinas's *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, chapter 17, lecture 6; *Summa Contra Gentiles III*, 118; *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans*, chapter 1, lecture 6; *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Hebrews*, chapter 11, lecture 1.

formal object? Is it significant that Christian faith is an act of *credere*, as opposed to *scire*? How so? Because of a lack of clarity and because of the prevalence of this reading of St. Thomas, we need a thorough analysis of this passage and its systematic implications.

II. The Present Work

This work is intended as a contribution to Catholic systematic theology and to the Thomistic tradition specifically. It will draw heavily on the work of St. Thomas himself. My approach to the texts of St. Thomas will seek to provide a largely synthetic exposition of his work, while also, when necessary, attending to real or apparent developments in his thought. Thus, my approach to St. Thomas will be both synchronic and diachronic. Because the dating of this or that text of St. Thomas is beyond the scope of this work, I will defer to others who give such an account, most often Jean-Pierre Torrell's more recent work.³¹

Further, my approach to the text of St. Thomas is not simply exegetical. I do not simply seek to answer the exegetical question "What did Thomas say?," although this matters, but I will seek to engage contemporary systematic concerns. I shall do so from within a tradition that is informed by St. Thomas but not reducible to him. This approach will include fuller and more nuanced explanations of St. Thomas's text within the larger context of his corpus. A retrieval and re-engagement with St. Thomas of this kind and on

³¹ In particular, Torrell's *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Vol. 1: The Person and His Work*, trans. Robert Powell (Washington DC: CUA Press, 2005). See also, James A. Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas D'Aquino: His Life, Thought and Work* (New York: Doubleday, 1974); Angelus Walz, *Saint Thomas Aquinas: A Biographical Study*, trans. Sebastian Bullough (Westminster: The Newman Press, 1951); Martin Grabmann, *Thomas Aquinas: His Personality and Thought*, trans. Virgil Michel (Whitefish: Kessinger, 2010).

this topic, in light of contemporary concerns, has great promise because St. Thomas's thought and example can and does still bear fruit in contemporary Catholic systematic theology, even where other more recent theologies have struggled or failed.

Although this work considers broadly the relationship between faith and reason, nature and grace, and specifically the notion and utility of natural knowledge of God, my entrance into the discussion is narrow. In order to articulate a Thomistic understanding of the possibility of natural knowledge and ignorance of the one true God of Jesus Christ, this work focuses on the key disputed text from the *Summa theologiae*, namely, II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3. My attention is largely the interpretation of St. Thomas offered by Preller. While other interpreters are important as well, they will only be considered insofar as their contributions further the discussion and consideration what Preller and St. Thomas have to say on the topic.

To this end, in Chapter One, I shall consider Preller's argument for St. Thomas's denial that pre-Christian pagan philosophers could know the existence of the one true God of Christianity. Because my focus is Preller's exegesis of *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3 as the exegetical smoking gun for his interpretation, my exposition of his broader thought will be brief. I shall consider other aspects, but only insofar as they direct our attention to his interpretation of the relevant passage. We shall see that, for Preller, the *quinque viae* fail and are intended to fail. Each demonstration fails, either because it is invalid or because the being to which it concludes is not the God of Christianity. Ultimately, for Preller, it is only in living faith that the mind can successfully and significantly refer and justifiably infer the existence of the meta-empirical God of Christianity.

In Chapter Two, I shall begin a thorough exegesis of *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3. The primary concern here will be to determine St. Thomas's specific meaning of *credere*, in distinction from *scire* and *opinari*, especially the act of Christian *credere*. St. Thomas goes to great lengths in all of his treatments of faith to distinguish *credere* from other acts of assent. It is crucial for us to recognize this and its significance for determining what he is trying to accomplish in the treatise on faith in the *Secunda Secundae*. It is important to unpack this understanding of faith in order to determine how Christian *credere* succeeds or fails, and on its own terms as an act of *credere*. Further, I shall identify the conditions that faith determines (*his conditionibus quas fides determinat*), from which unbelievers suffer. This discussion will include a consideration of the rules of faith, the material and formal objects of faith, and the possibility of assenting to one but not all articles of faith. This positive account of what counts as belief and who counts as a believer will put us in good stead for determining what counts as unbelief and who might count as an unbeliever in the proper sense. In this context, we shall have an interpretive choice to make regarding whether unbelief is the pure negation of faith or opposition to faith, or both.

In Chapter Three, I shall begin a consideration of who might count as the *infideles* of *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3. Here, the primary concern is to consider kinds of unbelief. Here, I shall make my interpretive choice in favor of maintaining that unbelief in the proper sense in the context of the treatise on faith is not merely the absence of faith (pure negation) but the sin of unbelief (opposition). Further, I shall consider various candidates for the unbelievers, including those simply in material error, the demons, Jews, Muslims, schismatics, heretics, apostates, as well as the *philosophi* who are said by St. Thomas to have demonstrably proven the existence of God. These considerations are complicated,

not always allowing a clear indication of whether one suffers from unbelief, strictly speaking, or merely lacks good formation in the faith. In the end, we shall see that the philosophers are unlikely candidates for unbelievers. This is for good reasons, among them, that insofar as they assent to the truth “God exists” by demonstration their act of assent is not an act of *credere* but an act of *scire*. As such, the success or failure of philosophical assent must be judged on its own terms.

In Chapter Four, having considered the identity of the *infideles*, I shall consider the further difficulty of determining the *defectus cognitionis* from which unbelievers in the proper sense suffer. Here, St. Thomas is utilizing an Aristotelian axiom drawn from the *Metaphysics*: “to know simple things defectively is not to know them at all.”³² The defect is such that the unbeliever betrays complete ignorance of a simple thing, in this case, God. In order to determine how best to interpret this axiom, it is important to consider the context from which it is drawn. To that end, we shall consider St. Thomas’s commentary on the relevant sections of the *Metaphysics* in order to more clearly decipher what he has in mind in *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3. Because truth follows being, according to St. Thomas, it is important to consider the different accounts of being upon which truth follows, both composite and simple. We shall see that, in the case of simple things, to think or speak something untrue of that thing is to betray complete ignorance of what one thinks one is thinking or speaking about.

In the end, we shall see that what St. Thomas has in mind with respect to unbelievers and their defect in cognition is not what Preller and others have in mind. *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3 does not present us with a denial of pre-Christian pagan philosophical knowledge of the one true God. St. Thomas, then, is not being inconsistent when he

³² “*in simplicibus defectus cognitionis est solum in non attingendo totaliter.*”

affirms in other places that the philosophers (*philosophi*) have demonstrably proven the existence of God. He does not affirm it only to deny it later. Rather, what St. Thomas denies in the *Secunda Secundae* is not the same thing that he affirms elsewhere. Ultimately, he does not deny that pre-Christian pagan philosophers assent to the truth “God exists” in *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3. The apparent tension that Preller and others perceive between this passage and the affirmations found elsewhere is not present if one interprets *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3 properly. The act of assent of the philosopher is not an act of *credere* but an act of *scire*, and its success or failure must be judged on its own terms. On its own terms this act of assent can and does fail, not because the philosopher is pagan, but because they do not in fact know what they think themselves to be thinking or speaking about.

This argument should not only caution us about denying the possibility of pre-Christian pagan philosophical knowledge of the existence of the one true God of Jesus Christ, but it shows that *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3 cannot be used to ground that denial. The argument should also caution us about accepting other aspects of Preller’s “reformulation” of St. Thomas, including his account of language, the analogy of being, and success or failure of the *quinque viae*.

CHAPTER ONE

Victor Preller's Reformulated St. Thomas: The Denial of Natural Knowledge of God

A prominent concern for Victor Preller's account¹ of St. Thomas's thought is the role of conceptual and linguistic systems, which have certain syntactical rules and axioms, within which and by which we experience and refer to the world. These systems provide intelligibility and justification for our inferences about and knowledge of the world. Preller's emphasis on the distinction between *scientia divina* and *scientia dei*, as well as his account of successful and significant reference are key. These considerations greatly impact how he interprets the end and success of the *quinque viae*. Ultimately, Preller maintains that it is only in faith that the mind can truly conform to the mind of God such that knowledge of the existence of God might obtain. Apart from faith, and faith formed by charity, the mind cannot truly believe "God exists."

Preller has much to say that is worth discussing at length. Because our primary concern is his interpretation and reliance upon *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3 our considerations of other aspects of his reformulation of St. Thomas must be brief. To that end, our discussion in this chapter will be eightfold. I shall present Preller's account of the key distinction between (1) *scientia divina* and (2) *scientia dei*. (3) I shall discuss Preller's account of St. Thomas's use and function of philosophy in theology. (4) I shall discuss

¹ For some reviews of Preller, see James F. Ross, in *Religious Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2 (Dec. 1969), 261-266; Thomas F. O'Meara, in *Theological Studies*, vol. 30, 2 (1969), 336-337; E.L. Mascall, in *Theology*, vol. 71, 580 (1968), 467-468; David Burrell, "Religious Life and Understanding," *Review of Metaphysics* 22, no. 4 (1969), 676-699; Donald Evans, "Preller's Analogy of 'Being'," in *The New Scholasticism*, vol. 45 (Winter 1971), 1-37; See also the essays in *Grammar and Grace: Reformulations of Aquinas and Wittgenstein*, eds. Jeffrey Stout and Robert MacSwain (London: SCM Press, 2004).

Preller's "problem of reference" in our language with respect to a meta-empirical entity.

(5) I shall discuss the kinds of demonstrations, the role of nominal definitions, and the problem of referential opacity as applied by Preller to philosophical demonstrations for the existence of God. (6) I shall consider Preller's account of analogy and in particular his discussion of existence-language with respect to God. (7) I shall discuss Preller's interpretation of the *quinque viae*, their ultimate failure, and his articulation of St. Thomas's *Ur*-argument for God based on the natural desire for beatitude. Lastly (8) I shall consider Preller's interpretation of *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3, its apparent denial of philosophical knowledge of God, and the role of faith as the only means by which one's mind might conform to the mind of God such that one can be said to truly believe that "God exists."

I. *Scientia Divina*: Philosophical Knowledge and Its Limitations

According to Preller, *scientia divina*, or divine science, represents "a body of propositions resulting from philosophical reflection on the 'cognitions of God' available to man on the basis of the natural powers of reason alone."² What is here called divine science is also variously named in the history of philosophy as "first philosophy," "metaphysics," "natural theology," or "philosophical theology."³ Preller emphasizes,

² Preller, 3.

³ While it is clear that "first philosophy" and "metaphysics" are more or less co-extensive with *scientia divina* for medieval thinkers like St. Thomas, it is less clear whether "natural theology" or "philosophical theology," as these terms are used in early modern and contemporary discourse are, co-extensive with either medieval "first philosophy" or medieval "metaphysics." There is much overlap, but I would hesitate to identify what St. Thomas names *scientia divina* with the later Enlightenment or Post-Enlightenment accounts of "natural theology" or "philosophical theology." St. Thomas is more guarded or minimalistic in his claims for metaphysics than are contemporary Western analytic natural theology or philosophical theology. See, for example, Norman Kretzmann, *The Metaphysics of Theism: Aquinas's Natural Theology*

however, and I think rightly, “God is *not* the subject of philosophical theology, although philosophical theology terminates in an indirect and opaque reference to him as the extrinsic principle of the connatural subject of the science—contingent or physical being.”⁴ The subject matter of philosophical theology or metaphysics is *ens qua ens* (being as such) and not God. Its propositions primarily concern the things in the being of the world.

According to Preller, because *scientia divina* pertains to the propositions of our natural language, its conclusions are drawn according to the syntactical rules and axioms by which we infer and through which we experience the world. Therefore, the propositions of *scientia divina*, which are the propositions of philosophical reflection, must be justified by use of the syntactical rules and axioms associated with our natural language.

Insofar as the propositions of philosophy pertain to a subject matter that is not God, then the propositions of philosophy are insufficient. In order to think or speak of the God who is beyond the purview of philosophy and its propositions we require something else. This science is *scientia dei*.⁵

in Summa Contra Gentiles I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), and Kretzmann, *The Metaphysics of Creation: Aquinas’s Natural Theology in Summa Contra Gentiles II* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002).

⁴ Preller, 227, original emphasis. Elsewhere, Preller qualifies his denial that God is the subject of *scientia divina*, in an ambiguous way. He states, “Abstractly speaking, God may be said to be proper matter for the investigation of metaphysics, since God is ‘being itself’ and metaphysics *intends* to consider all ‘being’ insofar as it is; metaphysics, however, does not *actually succeed* in considering God in himself, but takes cognizance of him only by referring the world to its unknown and final context of existence and intelligibility” (228). If he means that God—as “being itself”—is identical with *ens qua ens* or *ens commune*, then he does not grasp what metaphysics is for St. Thomas. If, however, he simply means that God—as “Being Itself” or *ipsum esse subsistens*—is related to *ens qua ens* or *ens commune* as its source, then he is correct; but in that case, God would not be the subject of metaphysics as he indicates in this quote.

⁵ Regarding the relationship between *scientia divina* and *scientia dei*, which is the science of faith, Preller observes, “Faith, it would appear, is but a convenient antidote for the limitations of human reason” (226).

II. *Scientia Dei*: Revelation and the Conformation of the Mind to God

Unlike *scientia divina*, *scientia dei* does have God as its subject. As Preller states, “The propositions which express [*scientia dei*] result from a theological reflection on the ‘cognitions of God’ available to man on the basis of revelation (*sacra doctrina*).”⁶ Being beyond the subject matter of philosophy and the propositions derived therefrom, the truths of *scientia dei* are not sought and found in philosophy. Rather, they are received as God’s self-revelation. Preller notes, “*Scientia dei*...is primarily and radically God’s own eternal act of knowing, both as possessed immanently by God, and as directly and intrinsically participated in by [for instance] the *beati* through the *visio dei*.”⁷

This “eternal act of knowing” in God is God’s own intrinsic and eternal Word. This eternal Word is “the only perfect and intelligible expression of God’s science.”⁸ To attain to God’s knowledge of himself, one must receive some communication from God, namely, revelation. Revelation is God’s temporal expression of himself to the world. According to Preller, we call this self-revelation of God *scientia dei* by analogy.⁹ He states,

All revelation...and thus all *sacra doctrina*, is an extension of the eternal procession of the Word; it is, in theological terminology, the temporal *mission* of the eternal Person. The central historical locus of the temporal mission of the

⁶ Preller, 3.

⁷ Ibid., 233. On the same page, Preller also remarks, “The formal principle of the knowledge of the *beati* is the very form of God’s own self-knowledge. In human and analogical terms, we might say that the *beati* possess an adequate intention of the very nature of God. Far from being able to state how this is possible, Aquinas postulates a new mode or power of knowing, the *lumen gloriae*, which enables the *beati* to internalize that which man *in via* can in no way conceptualize—the ‘whatness’ or form of God. Since only the *beati* possess the Science of God in intelligible form, it must be viewed as a radically eschatological concept.” In the next section, I shall say more about the so-called “problem of reference” and how this affects the possibility of conceptualizing and understanding the language of “God.”

⁸ Ibid., 234.

⁹ Below I shall discuss at some length the analogous relationship between God’s intrinsic Word and God’s extrinsic word.

Word of God is the sacred humanity of Christ. Therefore, the prime locus of ‘speech about God’ is *sacra scriptura*, the primary subject of which is Christ. Scripture is itself a created analogue of God’s act of self-knowledge as expressed in his Word or inner speech. Conformation of the mind to the intention of sacred scripture effects the conformation of the soul to the Second Person of the Trinity.¹⁰

The subject of scripture, then, is the temporal and extrinsic mission of the Son in Jesus Christ, which expresses his eternal and intrinsic procession. The subject of *sacra doctrina*, which derives from *sacra scriptura* are the teachings about God in Christ expressed in the creeds, dogmas, and theological speculations of the Church. With scripture, these are created analogues to God’s own eternal act of knowing himself.

We see, then, that *scientia divina* and *scientia dei* both speak of God. The former uses ordinary language and philosophical inquiry, at best, to speak of and infer indirectly the existence of some first principle of the world. The latter uses God’s language communicated analogously in *sacra scriptura* and *sacra doctrina* to speak of the Triune Lord revealed in the temporal Word who is Jesus Christ. The kind of knowledge and speech in each is quite different. Preller observes, “Philosophy and Sacred Doctrine may both be said to discover, in some general sense of the word, *cognitions* of God; but the nature of the ‘cognitions’ discovered by philosophy is radically different from the nature of ‘cognitions’ of faith.”¹¹ Because the formal aspect under which each science considers its object is radically different, each proceeds by a “different light.”¹² Preller remarks

¹⁰ Preller, 232-233, original emphasis; Cf. *ibid.*, 234. Preller suggests that, for St. Thomas, “[a]ny speech which is ordered by faith to God can be included under the designation of ‘Sacred Doctrine.’ Normally, Aquinas uses the expression *sacra doctrina* interchangeably with *sacra scriptura*—and that is clearly its primary use; he also applies it, however, to the Apostle’s Creed, the ordinary teachings of the Church, and the speculations of the theologian. As in all analogical sets, there is a distinct order among the analogates. The prime and radical locus of *sacra doctrina* is the Word of God” (232).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 226, original emphasis.

¹² *Ibid.*, 227.

that, unlike *scientia divina, sacra doctrina* (rooted in *sacra scriptura*) considers everything “under the formality of revealed truth.”¹³

Preller notes that philosophers commonly neglect this distinction and its importance for interpreting St. Thomas’s account of natural knowledge of God in the *Summa theologiae*. Preller states, “The vast majority of contemporary philosophers, both Thomists and analysts, treat St. Thomas as though he intended to be a philosophical theologian in his own right.”¹⁴ Many contemporary thinkers approach St. Thomas as though his primary concern is not *scientia dei* but *scientia divina*. Consequently, these thinkers misunderstand what St. Thomas is actually trying to accomplish in the proofs.

Preller suggests,

Such a procedure is misleading: (1) It implies that Aquinas was at times motivated by a purely philosophical intention. (2) It implies that the philosophical positions and arguments utilized within the theological treatises of Aquinas are his own positions and arguments, or ones with which he must necessarily agree. (3) It implies that philosophical statements remain unchanged in their essential nature when they are integrated into a theological framework. All of those claims are false.¹⁵

The first of these mistakes seems rather obvious. St. Thomas is a *doctor catholicae veritatis*, and as such he is most concerned with the intelligibility, communication, and defense of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.¹⁶ The second is less obvious, but is at least plausible. It suggests that we need not suppose that St. Thomas considered all the

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 22. Examples of this tendency to treat St. Thomas as a philosopher, especially in the *quinque viae*, abound in the literature of the philosopher of religion. Most anthologies include texts from the “proofs,” without regard for the theological context. Preller is not the only thinker who questions this practice. That St. Thomas is a theologian doing theology and not philosophy is maintained by many scholars. See, for example, Kerr, *After Aquinas*, 58, 64. In varying ways, suspicion of philosophical interpretations of the *quinque viae* appear in Eugene Rogers, Bruce Marshall, D. Stephen Long, Stanley Hauerwas, John Milbank, among others.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Preller maintains, “Aquinas’ sole intention in writing such works as the *Summa Theologiae* is the articulation of theological truth” (22).

philosophical arguments he utilizes in *sacra doctrina* to be sound. The third allegation is not particularly convincing. Yet, in light of Preller’s emphasis on the radically different “cognitions of God” that we have in *scientia divina* and *scientia dei*, which are rooted in two distinct conceptual and syntactical systems, one begins to see how the language of philosophy might be said to acquire a new intelligibility when utilized in propositions of faith. For Preller, “[W]hen philosophy is used in the light of theology ‘water is turned into wine’—philosophy *becomes* theology.”¹⁷

III. The Function of Philosophy in Theology

Having unpacked Preller’s account of the distinction between *scientia divina* and *scientia dei*, and the knowledge that might derive from it, we can now turn our attention to St. Thomas’s use of philosophy in theology. It would be difficult to deny that philosophical language and attention to philosophers themselves have a role within *sacra doctrina*. He frequently draws on philosophers, especially, “the Philosopher,” namely,

¹⁷ Preller, 25, original emphasis. Here, Preller is referring to St. Thomas’s discussion in *Super Boethium de Trinitate*, q. 2, a. 3, ad 5. Preller also states, “[W]hen philosophy appears in the theological treatises it has been so integrated into a theological structure as to lose its independent philosophical character. Philosophy, when read with the eyes of faith, becomes something more than philosophy and thus ceases essentially *to be* philosophy” (26-27; see also 33). This statement softens the charge. Philosophy becomes “more than” it was once it is integrated into theology. That is slightly different claim. No matter, ultimately, Preller believes that it is a hermeneutical error to approach the writings of St. Thomas as though he were a philosopher. Doing so risks overlooking the true function of philosophical argumentation within his theological work, particularly the true function of the *quinque viae* in the context of the *Summa theologiae*. This error further risks ascribing to the natural intellectual capacities of human beings and our natural language a reach that, according to Preller’s interpretation of St. Thomas, is not there. He declares, “In ignoring this fundamental claim of Christian theology, the traditional interpreters of Aquinas have attempted to utilize his ‘philosophical theology’ as a conceptual conveyance to carry man ‘part of the way’ toward God. The ‘philosophical theology’ of Aquinas, however, takes us nowhere; it leaves us where we began, facing a world of partial intelligibility and radical absurdity” (29). The arguments and language of philosophy do not and cannot of themselves contribute to our understanding of God. Left to themselves, the arguments and language of philosophy are not capable of moving us from our conceptual system with its syntactical rules and axioms to God’s conceptual system with its syntactical rules and axioms. Left to itself, *scientia divina* is incapable of attaining to *scientia dei*, and only *scientia dei*, via *sacra scriptura*, conforms the mind to God.

Aristotle. Much of his discussion of the world seems to proceed by philosophical argumentation. St. Thomas's accounts of separate substances, human beings, and the virtues, for instance, are clearly indebted to Aristotelian analysis. According to Preller, however, to assume that what appears philosophical is true philosophy could be misleading.

For Preller, the amount and manner of St. Thomas's use of philosophical arguments in the *Summa theologiae* has to do with St. Thomas's view of authority.¹⁸ St. Thomas is very willing to put a philosophical argument to good use, especially when the authority in whom that argument originates or with whom it is often associated is an accepted figure in the tradition. Preller observes,

When philosophy occurs in Aquinas' theological treatises, it occurs on the authority of some one other than Aquinas. Nevertheless, it is true that Aquinas does not *normally* quote a philosophical argument unless he takes it to be philosophically in order. Thus, he quotes most extensively from 'The Philosopher' because he believes that Aristotle has the highest authority in philosophy.¹⁹

Does this mean that St. Thomas is doing philosophy? Preller thinks not. He makes three observations. (a) When utilizing philosophical arguments, St. Thomas does not intend the arguments as his own.²⁰ Therefore, (b) St. Thomas is merely "quoting" philosophical arguments, rather than arguing.²¹ And (c) the criterion by which St. Thomas seems to

¹⁸ The emphasis on St. Thomas's use of quotations and certain modes of discourse, rather than argumentation, is not unique to Preller. See, for instance, Mark D. Jordan, *Ordering Wisdom: The Hierarchy of Philosophical Discourses in Aquinas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986); *Rewritten Theology: Aquinas after His Readers* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).

¹⁹ Preller, 24, original emphasis. Note here that Preller grants, at least in principle, that St. Thomas would "normally" affirm an argument insofar as it is "philosophically in order."

²⁰ We see this from the statement quoted above.

²¹ I am not alone in recognizing Preller's tendency to describe what St. Thomas does as "quoting" rather than arguing. See Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, *Thomas Aquinas: Faith, Reason, and Following Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 94. Preller notes how "Aquinas quotes...the 'five ways'" (23), how philosophy is "quoted in theology" (33), and how "The 'five ways' are arguments quoted on philosophical authority" (25). Cf. 24, 29, 107, 115, 122, 155.

judge relevant philosophical arguments is the authority of that philosopher or argument at issue.

Philosophy, of itself, cannot directly speak of God. It does not provide a means by which the human mind is conformed to God's knowledge of himself. Only *scientia dei* perfectly expresses this knowledge, and we encounter the created analogue of this knowledge only in or through *sacra scriptura* and *sacra doctrina*.²² Only God's language or conceptual system with its syntactical rules and axioms can attain to knowledge of God. When St. Thomas uses philosophical language, namely, the language of *scientia divina*, within the context of *sacra doctrina*, he is not arguing by the light of natural reason. Rather, according to Preller, philosophical argumentation for St. Thomas within theology remains always external and probable, quoted not argued, and based on the authority of its source and himself. In theology, then, the meaning of the terms of philosophica language has become radically different. What the theologian means is not what the natural theologian or philosophy means.

IV. The Problem of Reference

Preller observes that for either *scientia divina* or *scientia dei* to be about God, it must be possible to refer to God. To think or speak about God, it must be possible, according to Preller, to have God "in the mind." He states, "Either science is possible

²² The truths revealed and communicated in *sacra scriptura* and *sacra doctrina* are of themselves universally accessible. For much of Christian history, most people have been illiterate. Consequently, the truths of Christ had to be mediated in ways other than written language. Thank you to Joseph Mueller for making this observation, and my need for more precision.

precisely as *divina* or *dei* if and only if it is possible to refer to God and to specify in what way the ‘sciences’ of theology are *about* him.”²³ Similarly, he maintains,

Human language is intentional—it is *about* things—because it is the expression of thoughts which are themselves intentional or about things. Successful reference depends upon a meaningful intentional or conceptual context. ‘God,’ however, is a name which can never occur within a conceptual context which is meaningful to us. It is the name of that of which I can have no meaningful intention.²⁴

This situation is what Preller calls the “problem of reference” with respect to God. To intend or to refer to God, it must be in principle possible for one to have an intelligible concept of God “in the mind.” God, however, is precisely that which is unintelligible in our natural conceptual systems and consequently cannot be intended.²⁵

Preller recognizes, however, that the significant reference to God is crucial for religion. He observes, “The problem of reference goes to the heart of any religious action whatever.”²⁶ In the case of Christianity, our religious language and praxis is thought to intend a being or reality that transcends the world of experience. As such, Preller often describes God as a “meta-empirical entity.”²⁷ As a meta-empirical entity, however, God becomes for us one to whom significant reference is a problem.²⁸

The reasons for the difficulty are twofold. First, we do not and cannot in this life know what God is (*quid sit*). Preller notes, “There can be no conceptually significant intention of what God is, how he exists, or how he is related to things of which we can have meaningful intentions. It is not clear that we can have ‘God’ in mind when we say

²³ Preller, 4.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 183, original emphasis.

²⁵ Preller maintains, “In this life God is radically *unintelligible*” (28).

²⁶ Preller, 5.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 179. Cf. 182, 184, esp. 215, 217, 219, 254, 269.

²⁸ Preller remarks, “‘Referring to God’ is a *most* peculiar thing to intend—in the first instance it seems impossible” (4, original emphasis).

‘God’—it is not therefore clear *what* we have in mind.”²⁹ Because we cannot know what God is (*quid sit*) we cannot have an intention of God, which is to say that we cannot have God in the mind.³⁰ It would seem, then, that we do not have the ability to successfully refer to God.

The second reason for the difficulty in referring to a meta-empirical God is the lack of commonality between God and the world. Preller observes, “The name ‘God,’ however is unique: God, says Aquinas, falls into *no general class*. God cannot be located *within* logical space in terms of which we make significant references.”³¹ Preller concludes, “So long as the question ‘What is God *like*?’ elicits the response, ‘He is not like anything,’ or, ‘He is like nothing,’ the problem of intending a reference to him appears insoluble.”³² The name “God” and the object to which we are trying to make significant reference is such that there is no class within which we might place him, and there is nothing that God is like. Therefore, we cannot make a significant reference to this God.

V. Demonstrations, Nominal Definitions, and Referential Opacity

Because the problem of reference keeps us from making a significant reference to God, the very possibility of demonstrating the existence of God becomes problematic.

This possibility is complicated further by the use of a nominal definition in an attempted

²⁹ Preller, 10, original emphasis. Preller also observes, “What God is can never be defined or rendered intelligible in any affirmative judgment utilizing *rationes* definable by the rules of our [human and natural] syntactically significant and referentially interpreted conceptual system” (91).

³⁰ For similar accounts, see Sertillanges, Victor White, and Gilson.

³¹ Preller, 10, original emphasis.

³² *Ibid.*, 15, original emphasis. Cf. *ibid.*, 19: “[T]he world of sense-experience is the ‘anchor’ of our ‘sense of the real’...Can we intelligibly relate ‘God’ to ‘chair,’ ‘person,’ ‘electron,’ or to the conceptual frameworks in which such intentions occur?”

demonstration for the existence of God. Of course, St. Thomas does in fact use nominal definitions in the *quinque viae*. In this subsection, I shall discuss Preller's account of the function and meaning of nominal definitions in proofs for the existence of God, as well as Preller's appropriation of W. V. O. Quine's analysis of referential transparency and opacity. We shall see that, for Preller, even if we grant the success of philosophical demonstrations for the existence of a first principle, they do not transparently make a successful reference to the one true God of our Lord Jesus Christ.

A. *Demonstrations and Nominal Definitions*

Preller observes that, for St. Thomas, there are two kinds of demonstrations for the existence of something. On the one hand, we might construct a *propter quid* argument through which we can show why some effect exists by virtue of knowing the essence of its cause. Because we have no knowledge of what God is (*quid sit*) we cannot offer a *propter quid* demonstration.³³ On the other hand, we might construct a *quia* argument through which the existence of the cause is demonstrated from the existence of its effects. It is only this latter kind of demonstration that could in principle provide a means of demonstrating the exist of God.

Because we do not have definitional knowledge of what God is (*quid sit*) or a “real definition” of God, and consequently cannot construct a *propter quid* demonstration, one must utilize a nominal or “working definition” in order to construct a *quia* demonstration.³⁴ But what is a nominal definition? According to Preller, in a nominal definition the subjective understanding of a notion (*id a quo*) does not refer to

³³ Famously, this is St. Thomas's reason for rejecting so-called ontological arguments for the existence of God. See *ST I*, q. 2, a. 1, arg. and ad 2.

³⁴ Preller, 139.

the object (*id ad quod*) whose existence one is attempting to prove. Rather, in a nominal definition, one substitutes an intention or *ratio* of an effect in place of the intention or *ratio* of the cause. The subjective *id a quo* and the objective *id ad quod*, then, “differ formally.”³⁵

There are two kinds of nominal definition in St. Thomas: (a) one based on an accident of the cause and (b) another based on a relation between effect and cause.³⁶ Nominal definitions based on some accident that inheres in the cause must be rejected because God has no accidents upon which the definition could be based. Consequently, only a relation of effect to cause can in principle be the basis of a nominal definition for God. In the case of the *quinque viae*, then, St. Thomas uses a nominal definition based on the relation of effect to cause.

Preller notes that while some nominal definitions based on relations can be very informative, others might not be informative at all. He observes, “All nominal definitions based on relation are subject to some degree of referential opacity.”³⁷ Even if one were to grant the success of a *quia* demonstration for the existence of God, which succeeds by virtue of a nominal definition of God based on the relation of God’s created effects to their creating cause, it is still not clear that the proofs successfully conclude to the one true God of our Lord Jesus Christ. Whether the proposition “God exists” makes a successful reference to the one true God, according to Preller, remains opaque.

³⁵ Ibid., 138.

³⁶ Ibid., 140.

³⁷ Ibid.

B. *Preller's Appropriation of Quine: Referential Opacity and "God"*

Drawing on W. V. O. Quine's analysis of referential transparency and opacity,³⁸ Preller brings referential transparency and opacity to bear on the question of successful reference in natural theology. He begins, "In its clearest form, referential opacity is a characteristic of statements in which an expression that *could* be used to refer is used in such way that it fails to make a reference."³⁹ Preller supposes the statement (1) "Cleopatra was killed by an asp" was written in the book.⁴⁰ In this instance, the name "Cleopatra" is not referential. The person of history named "Cleopatra" is not the object of reference, but the quote "Cleopatra was killed by an asp," which was written in a book.⁴¹ To show that "Cleopatra" is not referential in (1), we can substitute a co-designative term, or in this context, what Preller is calling a "synonymous referring expression,"⁴² for "Cleopatra" in (1). Preller substitutes "The Egyptian queen beloved of Antony" for "Cleopatra" in (1). In this case, then, we have (2) "The Egyptian queen beloved of Antony was killed by an asp" was written in the book. This is in fact false, given (1). (2), then, is not the same proposition as (1). Therefore, "Cleopatra" in (1) fails to make a successful reference and is referentially opaque with respect to the person of history, as well as with respect "the Egyptian queen beloved of Antony."

Like Quine, in these discussions, Preller emphasizes the importance of propositional attitudes. He considers the statement (3) He believes that Cleopatra was

³⁸ See W. V. O. Quine, *Word and Object* (Mansfield Centre: Martino, 2013), esp. 141-156. Also, see Quine's analysis of referential opacity and modality in "Reference and Modality," in *From a Logical Point of View: Nine Logico-Philosophical Essays*, 2nd ed., rev. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999 [originally published in 1961]), 142-159.

³⁹ Preller, 141, original emphasis.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ If the statement at issue were the statement (*x*) Cleopatra was killed by an asp, and not a quote written in a book, then we would say that "Cleopatra" is referential, referring to the person of history.

⁴² Preller, 141.

killed by an asp, and the report of a propositional attitude (4) He believes that ‘Cleopatra was killed by an asp’ is true. On the one hand, (3) seems to be about his belief concerning Cleopatra, the person of history, and not about a proposition. On the other hand, (4) seems to be about his belief concerning the truth-value of the proposition “Cleopatra was killed by an asp.” If we substitute a co-designative term for “Cleopatra” in (4), *salva veritate*, then we can say that “Cleopatra” is referentially transparent with respect to the substituted co-designative term. If, however, we substitute a co-designative term for “Cleopatra” in (4) without saving the truth of the statement, then we must say that “Cleopatra” is at best referentially opaque with respect to the substituted co-designative term. When one substitutes, for instance, “The Egyptian queen beloved of Antony” for “Cleopatra” in (4), we get (5) He believes that ‘The Egyptian queen beloved of Antony was killed by an asp’ is true. Also, suppose that (6) He believes that Cleopatra is not the Egyptian queen beloved of Antony. If (6) is true, then (5) is false.⁴³ If (5) is false, then the substitution in (4), giving us (5), shows that “Cleopatra” in (4) is referentially opaque with respect to the Egyptian queen beloved of Antony. Preller shows, then, like Quine, how otherwise referential terms within the context of propositional attitudes are vulnerable to failing to make successful reference because of referential opacity.

Unlike Quine, Preller places special emphasis on the subjective aspect of reference, namely, what he calls the *id a quo*.⁴⁴ Here he has in mind the speaker’s understanding of a term or the “notion” one has “in the mind.” Consider the statement (1) He believes that Cleopatra was killed by an asp. When one substitutes “the Egyptian

⁴³ For the sake of argument and clarity, we must suppose also that our believer does not believe that the Egyptian queen beloved of Antony was killed by an asp. If the believer denied that the Egyptian queen beloved of Antony is not Cleopatra, but affirmed that the Egyptian queen beloved of Antony was in fact killed by an asp, then the truth of (6) would not falsify (5).

⁴⁴ Preller, 141.

queen beloved of Antony” for “Cleopatra” in (1), we get (2) He believes that the Egyptian queen beloved of Antony was killed by an asp. At this point, we do not know whether “Cleopatra” makes a successful and transparent reference with respect to “the Egyptian beloved of Antony.” It is not clear what notion the speaker has of Cleopatra. If the speaker understands or intends by “Cleopatra” the Egyptian queen of history who was also beloved of Antony, then it would seem that we have a reference-term that is notionally transparent.⁴⁵ If, on the other hand, the speaker understands or intends by “Cleopatra” someone other than the Egyptian queen of history beloved of Antony, then the reference is notionally opaque. As Preller notes, “If the latter, then ‘Cleopatra’ is being used in such a way that it is, for the speaker, *notionally opaque* with regard to the uniquely defining *ratio* by means of which its normal referent is designated; the speaker does not have a proper notion of Cleopatra.”⁴⁶

In the context of natural theology or *scientia divina*, Preller considers whether the (potentially referential) term “God” or some co-designative term might make a successful and transparent reference. Consider the statement (1) Philosopher Brown believes that God exists. Further, consider that the *id a quo* or notion of “God” for Brown is “A being capable of rendering our experience of reality transparently intelligible.”⁴⁷ In this case, Preller notes, “Should a Barthian theologian indignantly ask, ‘Does Philosopher Brown

⁴⁵ Here what Preller means by “notionally transparent” is functionally what Quine means by “referentially transparent.”

⁴⁶ Preller, 141. One might raise the question of what constitutes a “uniquely defining *ratio* by means of which its normal referent is designated” could mean. It is certainly not obvious to me that “the Egyptian queen beloved of Antony” is of such importance that it must be part of a “uniquely defining *ratio*” for the person of history named “Cleopatra.” It is entirely plausible that one can know and refer to the person of history named “Cleopatra” without knowing or intending any number of accidental features of that person. For discussion of error and reference with respect to composite things, composed of substance and accidents, see Chapter Four below.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 143.

then believe that the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ exists?,' we should not know immediately how to reply."⁴⁸ There are, according to Preller, two responses:

Yes! As for that being capable of rendering our experience of reality transparently intelligible [whom we know *in fact* to be the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ], Brown believes that he exists.

Or,

No! Brown believes that 'A being capable of rendering our experience of reality transparently intelligible exists' is true: but he does not believe that 'The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ exists' is true.⁴⁹

Preller notes, "In most properly *theological contexts*...the *modus significandi* of 'God' is of such overriding importance that it would be much less misleading to reply (in terms of referential opacity)" that Brown does not believe that the one true God exists.⁵⁰

Let us analyze the claim of referential opacity a bit further. Like Quine, Preller finds it useful to change statements like (1) into statements like (2) Philosopher Brown believes that "God exists" is true. By virtue of the substitutivity of identity, then, we can show whether Brown's "God" is referentially transparent with respect to "The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." When we make the substitution (2) becomes (3) Philosopher Brown believes that "The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ exists" is true. If we also grant that (4) Philosopher Brown does not know that the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is God, then, (3) would clearly be false.⁵¹ As such, "God" in (2) fails to make a successful reference and is referentially opaque with respect to "The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Like the example above (see footnote 69), it would seem that, for the sake of argument and clarity, we must suppose also that Brown does not believe that the God whose existence he has demonstrated is the God who is the Father of Jesus Christ. He may have no belief about the latter at all.

Preller recognizes, however, that it would seem that St. Thomas disagrees with this analysis. After all, St. Thomas affirms that Aristotle has demonstrated the existence of God. Preller states, “Since Aquinas grants that Aristotle proved the existence of God, it would seem to follow that Aquinas ought to grant that Aristotle believed that God exists.”⁵² Preller continues, however, “In certain contexts, [St. Thomas] does just that [i.e., grants natural philosophical knowledge of God], while in other contexts he denies that *any* pagan can be said to believe that God exists.”⁵³ Preller offers two responses:

Yes! As for the being that is the ultimate source of dynamism of the world [and that we know to be the God referred to by the revealed articles of faith], Aristotle believed that it exists.⁵⁴

Or,

No! Aristotle believed that ‘An ultimate source of the dynamism of the world exists’ is true: but he did not believe that ‘The God referred to by the revealed articles of faith exists’ is true.⁵⁵

As with Philosopher Brown, Preller notes, given “the controlling role of revealed *rationes* in the properly *theological* use of ‘God,’ we ought rather to reply in terms of referential opacity” that Aristotle did not believe that the one true God exists.⁵⁶

VI. Analogy and Existence-Language

In spite of the problems of reference and referential opacity, Preller does consider another means by which the proposition “God exists” might be said to make a successful,

⁵² Preller, 143.

⁵³ Ibid. The claim that St. Thomas “denies that *any* pagan can be said to believe that God exists” appears to be a gesture toward *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 144-145.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 145.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

though not necessarily significant and intelligible, reference to the meta-empirical God. He considers the possibility that a theory of analogy might overcome the problems of reference and referential opacity.

As he does elsewhere, in his discussion of the theory of analogy, and for the sake of argument, Preller grants the possibility of proving the existence of God. He notes that he is concerned with “the kind of reference to God that results from the assumption that [St. Thomas’s argument for God] is valid.”⁵⁷ Yet, even if we grant the success of the proofs, we are left with the kind of reference that remains unintelligible within our conceptual system. As a “meta-empirical referent,”⁵⁸ God is not such that we might have access to God’s conceptual system with its syntactical rules and axioms that would allow us to justifiably infer his existence and make significant reference to him. What Preller offers us in his account of analogy, then, is a meta-linguistic account of the relation between, on the one hand, our words and expressions and, on the other hand, words and expressions of the intrinsic and eternal *scientia dei*.⁵⁹

A. A Theory of Analogy

Preller recognizes three senses of analogy in St. Thomas’s work: (a) the analogy of proper proportionality, (b) the analogy of intrinsic attribution, and (c) the analogy of extrinsic attribution.⁶⁰ He notes that in its broadest terms, analogy of proper

⁵⁷ Ibid., 164.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 165.

⁵⁹ By a “meta-linguistic,” Preller intends to offer an analysis of what “must be formally true of any...conceptual system,” any language as such (168).

⁶⁰ For helpful discussions of analogy, see, for instance, George P. Klubertanz, *St. Thomas Aquinas on Analogy: A Textual Analysis and Systematic Synthesis* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2009); Hampus Lyttkens, *The Analogy between God and the World: An Investigation of Its Background and Interpretation of Its Use by Thomas of Aquino* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells Boktryckeri AB, 1952); Battista Mondin, *The Principle of Analogy in Protestant and Catholic Theology* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1963); Cajetan, Tommaso Vio, *The Analogy of Names, and the Concept of Being*, trans. Edward A. Bushinski (Eugene:

proportionality assigns “a role [to a word] syntactically isomorphic with the role played by an analogous word in *another* conceptual framework.”⁶¹ Such analogy takes the form A:B :: C:D. More specifically, for Preller, it takes the form Word-Expression X₁ plays the role R in Language L₁ :: Word-Expression X₂ plays the role R in Language L₂. The meta-linguistic analysis of languages L₁ and L₂ indicates that word-expressions X₁ and X₂ play syntactically similar or identical roles within their respective conceptual systems. The similarity is the role played by each word within its language; the dissimilarity is the word and its intelligibility in terms of its own language. Preller states, “In effect we are saying that, in a meta-linguistic account of God’s language, there would occur

Wipf and Stock, 2009); Ralph McInerny, *Aquinas and Analogy* (Washington D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996); *Studies in Analogy* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968); *The Logic of Analogy: An Interpretation of St. Thomas* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961); “Metaphor and Analogy,” in *Inquiries into Medieval Philosophy: A Collection in Honor of Francis P. Clarke*, ed. James F. Ross (Westport: Greenwood Publishing, 1971), 75-96; *Being and Predication: Thomistic Interpretations* (Washington D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2018); Lawrence Dewan, “St. Thomas and Analogy: The Logician and the Metaphysician,” in *Form and Being: Studies in Thomistic Metaphysics* (Washington D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 81-95; Burrell, *Analogy and Philosophical Language*; “From Analogy of ‘Being’ to the Analogy of Being,” in *Recovering Nature: Essays in Natural Philosophy, Ethics, and Metaphysics in Honor of Ralph McInerny*, ed. John P. O’Callaghan and Thomas S. Hibbs (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 253-266; “Analogy, Creation, and Theological Language,” in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Rik Van Nieuwenhove and Joseph Wawrykow (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 77-98; James F. Anderson, *Reflections on the Analogy of Being* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967); *The Bond of Being: An Essay on Analogy and Existence* (New York: Greenwood, 1969); Bernard Montagnes, *The Doctrine of the Analogy of Being according to Thomas Aquinas*, trans. E. M. Macierowski (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2008); James F. Ross, “Analogy as A Rule of Meaning for Religious Language,” in *Inquiries into Medieval Philosophy: A Collection in Honor of Francis P. Clarke*, ed. James F. Ross (Westport: Greenwood Publishing, 1971), 35-74; I. M. Bochenski, “On Analogy,” in *Inquiries into Medieval Philosophy: A Collection in Honor of Francis P. Clarke*, ed. James F. Ross (Westport: Greenwood Publishing, 1971), 99-122; W. Norris Clarke, *Explorations in Metaphysics: Being, God, Person* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994); Gregory P. Rocca, *Speaking the Incomprehensible God* (Washington D. C.: The Catholic University of America, 2004); Philip A. Rolnick, *Analogical Possibilities: How Words Refer to God* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993); E. Jennifer Ashworth, *Les theories de l’analogie du XIIIe au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Vrin, 2008); “Signification and Modes of Signifying in Thirteenth-Century Logic: A Preface to Aquinas on Analogy,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 1 (1991), 39-67; “Analogy and Equivocation in Thirteenth-Century Logic: Aquinas in Context,” *Medieval Studies* 54 (1992), 94-135; Joshua P. Hochschild, *The Semantics of Analogy: Rereading Cajetan’s De Nominum Analogia* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010); Steven A. Long, *Analogia Entis: On the Analogy of Being, Metaphysics, and the Act of Faith* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011); Reinhard Hütter, “‘The Wisdom of Analogy Defended’—From Effect to Cause, from Creation to God,” in *Dust Bound for Heaven: Explorations in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2012), 349-386.

⁶¹ Preller, 168 n. 72, original emphasis.

expressions playing syntactical roles isomorphic with the roles played by certain expressions in a meta-linguistic account of *our* language.”⁶² In the analogy of proper proportionality, then, words or expressions within our language are such that they play roles that are syntactically isomorphic with the words or expressions within God’s language, namely, *scientia dei*.

Now, because intelligibility is, for Preller, a matter of understanding the conceptual system with its syntactical rules and axioms, we do not have an intelligible grasp of the syntactically isomorphic expressions of God’s language on the basis of having an intelligible grasp of the concepts and the syntactical rules and axioms of our own language. In fact, with respect to the analogical correlate of our expressions as they function within God’s language, we must deny any intelligibility. We simply do not know God’s conceptual system with its syntactical rules and axioms of intelligibility and inference. Part of the function of the analogy of proper proportionality, then, is the affirmation of syntactical isomorphism, but the denial of intelligibility on our part with respect to the *scientia dei*.

Preller also provides an account of the analogy of intrinsic attribution. Here, he is primarily concerned with words that are implicitly and intelligibly defined in terms of other words within the same conceptual system. Analogy of intrinsic attribution is, therefore, “intrasystematic” or “intralinguistic.”⁶³ For Preller, it takes the form Word-Expression X_1 is implicitly and intelligibly defined in terms of Word-Expression(s) $X_2 \dots X_n$, within the same system. Moreover, on the basis of the concepts and syntactical rules and axioms of the language, one can see or is justified in inferring Word-

⁶² Ibid., original emphasis.

⁶³ Ibid.

Expression(s) $X_2 \dots X_n$ in or from Word-Expression X_1 . Here, Preller draws our attention to the common example—from within our ordinary language—of “healthy” and “urine.”⁶⁴ The health of a subject or person is implicitly and intelligibly part of the definition of “healthy” as it is applied to urine: Word-Expression X_1 (“healthy urine”) is implicitly and intelligibly defined in terms of Word-Expression X_2 (“health of a person”). In this case, it is only on the basis of the health of the subject that one can call urine, which is merely a sign of the health in the subject, healthy. In the other direction, it is intelligible and justified to infer the health of a person from the health of urine: Word-Expression X_2 (“health of a person”) is intelligibly justified on the basis of the Word-Expression X_1 (“healthy urine”).

Consider an example from within God’s language. The goodness of God is implicitly and intelligibly part of or related to the definition of “goodness” as it is applied to creation: Word-Expression X_1 (“goodness of the world”) is implicitly and intelligibly defined in terms of Word-Expression X_2 (“goodness of God”). In this case, it is only on the basis of the goodness of God that one can call “good” the creation that is a sign of the goodness of God. According to Preller, in St. Thomas’s use of the analogy of intrinsic attribution “he is speaking hypothetically from God’s point of view.”⁶⁵ Moreover, Preller remarks, “[F]rom God’s point of view the world *really* expresses what he ‘has in mind’; it really is as he thinks it.”⁶⁶ God knows and names the forms of the world precisely as each is; the form in God’s intention or mind is the form exactly as it exists in the world.

⁶⁴ In discussions of analogy, and more specifically, which analogy obtains between creatures and the Creator, it is crucial to recognize that St. Thomas denies that the “health” analogy can be used of creatures and the Creator. See, for instance, *ScG* I, ch. 34 and *De potentia*, q. 7, a. 7. All English translations of *De potentia* come from, with light modifications, *On the Power of God*, trans. English Dominican Fathers (Lexington: Aeterna Press, 2015).

⁶⁵ Preller, 170.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 168, original emphasis.

This can only happen in God's language; only God has access to the conceptual system and syntactical rules and axioms of *scientia dei* in which the forms in the world might be fully expressed. Therefore, only God can see perfectly how Word-Expression X₁ ("goodness of the world") is implicitly and intelligibly defined in terms of Word-Expression X₂ ("goodness of God"). We do not, in our language, with its syntactical rules and axioms, have the ability to see how the goodness of creation is implicitly and intelligibly defined in terms of or in relation to God's goodness.

Preller also considers a third sense of analogy, namely, the analogy of extrinsic attribution. He observes, "From *our* point of view...the world as *we* think it can only be said to express the 'intentions' of God by the analogy of *extrinsic* attribution: the intelligible forms by which *we* know reality are not capable of expressing 'what God has in mind.'"⁶⁷ We are only able to conceive of the world and its forms in terms of our conceptual system with its syntactical rules and axioms. As such, these created forms are not identical to the intentions of the unlimited and infinite God. Consider the Word-Expression the "goodness of the world." According to the analogy of intrinsic attribution, Word-Expression X₁ ("goodness of the world") is implicitly and intelligibly defined in terms of Word-Expression X₂ ("goodness of God") within the same language, God's language. According to the analogy of extrinsic attribution, on the other hand, our Word-Expression X₁ in our language ("goodness of the world") is implicitly and intelligibly defined in terms of Word-Expression X₂ ("goodness of God") in *another* language. From our perspective, Word-Expression X₁ ("goodness of the world") is *not* implicitly and intelligibly defined in terms of *our* Word-Expression X₂ ("goodness of God"), within our language, with its syntactical rules and axioms. We do not and cannot see how our Word-

⁶⁷ Ibid., original emphasis.

Expression “goodness of the world” is implicitly and intelligibly defined in terms of our Word-Expression “goodness of God.” We simply affirm that our Word-Expression (“goodness of the world”) is syntactically isomorphic with God’s Word-Expression (“goodness of the world”), which is implicitly and intelligibly defined in terms of God’s Word-Expression (“goodness of God”) within his conceptual system and according to its syntactical rules and axioms. Preller observes elsewhere, “[W]e do not possess a common meta-language in terms of which to show precisely *how* the expressions play roles that are syntactically isomorphic—we merely claim that they do.”⁶⁸ The analogy of extrinsic attribution, then, combines both the analogy of proper proportionality and the analogy of intrinsic attribution. It affirms that our words and expression are syntactically isomorphic with their analogous correlates within God’s language, but it denies that there is any intelligibility of those words for us as they function in *scientia dei*. We can affirm the “goodness of the world” but not how this relates to the “goodness of God.”

B. The Use and Function of “Exists,” “Existence,” and “Being”

Let us now turn to the more specific question of how analogy relates to our use of existence-language. In particular, let us consider how one might use existence-language analogically of the meta-empirical God.

According to Preller, words like “exists,” “existence,” and “being,” which belong to what I will call existence-language, functions within all conceptual systems. It is important to emphasize that, for Preller, to say something “exists” is not to say something

⁶⁸ Ibid., 168 n. 72, original emphasis.

about the object; existence is not some part of a thing or out there in the thing.⁶⁹ As he argues,

The ‘existence’ of an object is not *what remains* when we abstract from all of the *other* qualities of the object. If we abstract entirely from *what* the object is, we do not have a concept of the *existence* of the object—we have no concept at all. ‘Existence’ is a transcendental term that can never be ‘pried loose’ from the particular contents of experience.⁷⁰

Similarly, he notes, “The concept of ‘being’ is not an element *in* a conceptual system.”⁷¹

Rather, for Preller, existence-language names our disposition to use our language to refer to the world and to judge the relationship between our intentions and the world as isomorphic.

According to Preller, “exists”—like “unity,” “truth,” and “goodness”—is a transcendental. For him, these transcendentals are terms that are functionally present in any conceptual system whatsoever.⁷² The universality has to do, not with some reality in the thing, but with, the “syntactically isomorphic” role that these terms play within each

⁶⁹ Preller remarks, “The move itself [to assert of a thing that it is] had no ‘existential force’—no reference to reality” (64). The role of assertion will be discussed in more detail below. In these discussions, for Preller, assertions take the form (‘__’). Preller’s claim here about our use of “exists” is similar to the common denial that “existence” is a first order predicate of an individual, which is the denial that existential claims add anything to our notion of a thing. For arguments of this kind, see David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); C. J. F. Williams, *What is Existence?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), as well as his *Being, Identity, and Truth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); cf. Quine, “On What There Is,” in *From a Logical Point of View*, 1-19. For a helpful discussion of these issues, see P. T. Geach, “What Actually Exists,” in *God and the Soul* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), 65-74; Barry Miller, *The Fullness of Being: A New Paradigm for Existence* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2002), 22-56; *A Most Unlikely God: A Philosophical Enquiry into the Nature of God* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), 15-26; and his *From Existence to God: A Contemporary Philosophical Argument* (London: Routledge, 1992). That existence is not a part of a thing is an odd claim from a Thomistic perspective. St. Thomas affirms explicitly and often that the act of existing (*esse*) is a co-constitutive principle of all created things. To say that something exists is to affirm that it has *esse*. This is what makes immaterial substances, for instance, composite and not simple. They are composed of act (*esse*) and potency (form). Everything, insofar as it is, has *esse*. Preller’s claim here is either infelicitous or confused.

⁷⁰ Preller, 159, original emphasis. Here, again, Preller seems confused about what *esse* is in St. Thomas. He appears to insufficiently distinguish between what something is (*quid sit*) and whether it is (*an sit*).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 65, original emphasis.

⁷² How do we know this without knowing the syntactical rules and axioms of other languages? We know such things about many languages, but what justifies the claim that all languages have such syntactically isomorphic functions?

language, including the *scientia dei*.⁷³ Therefore, our affirmation of the syntactically isomorphic character of transcendental terms, which is an affirmation of the analogy between diverse languages, is not to say anything about the intelligibility of those words.

We have access to the intelligibility of “exists” and of like words only as they function within our conceptual system, with its syntactical rules and axioms. The intelligibility of these terms within another system, however, is unknown to us. According to Preller, the syntactically isomorphic role of existence-language, which it has in every conceptual system, accords with the analogy of proper proportionality. To say that something “exists” or has “being” is simply to affirm that there is some syntactically isomorphic or analogous correlate of “exists” and “being” in some other language, while also to deny that we have access to the intelligibility and syntactical rules by and in which one is justified in using the terms.

Preller states, “‘Exists’ expresses a natural or dispositional judgment that there is a relation of isomorphism between the forms of the intellect and the real world.”⁷⁴ For Preller, then, existence-language first and foremost has to do with our disposition toward using our language both to refer to the world and to make the judgment of isomorphism between our intentions and the world. The universality of this natural disposition in rational beings is, for Preller, another aspect of the analogy of proper proportionality. He states, “[T]he concept [of ‘being’ in this sense] is essentially analogous by the ‘analogy of proper proportionality’—the concept of ‘being’ would be possessed by a rational being

⁷³ Preller, 165.

⁷⁴ Ibid. Preller adds, “[T]o have the concept of ‘existence’ or ‘being’ is to be naturally disposed to use one’s conceptual system to refer to the objects of experience” (Preller, 65, original emphasis).

whatever kind of conceptual system he might use to refer to whatever sort of experience he might have.”⁷⁵

Besides the syntactically isomorphic function of existence-language in distinct languages, Preller also discusses the kinds of inferences or “moves” that are made on the basis of the syntactical rules and axioms of particular languages. When we are justified by the syntactical rules and axioms of our system to assert (‘__’) something in reality, we are justified in our use of existence-language. Therefore, when we use ‘__’ in appropriate ways, “‘__’ means ‘exists.’”⁷⁶ Preller states, “The logic of ‘__’ does define the *logic* of ‘exists’ and predetermines the *kinds* of entities that *might* be said in our language to exist, *whatever* the nature of the contents of sensation. To put it another way, the lawful and significant use of the word ‘exists’ is governed by the syntactical rules of our conceptual system.”⁷⁷ In cases in which ‘__’—which is to say, “exists”—is justified by the syntactical rules and axioms of our system, “exists” is used, according to Preller, according to the analogy of attribution. He notes, “In [this] second sense of ‘being’ we find an ‘analogy of attribution’ in terms of which several interrelated uses of ‘__’ are implicitly co-defined by reference to a primary usage.”⁷⁸ Therefore, ‘__’ and “exists” are used analogically, in which case terms are implicitly and intelligibly defined in terms of other things within the same language.

Preller applies this whole analysis to statements of God’s existence, saying, “Thus, to say that God ‘exists’ is to say that there is some conceptual system (an ideal language) in terms of which a syntactical move isomorphic in usage with our

⁷⁵ Ibid., 68-69.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 64.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 69.

syntactically significant existential assertion (‘ ___ ’) could be used in conjunction with an entity radically unlike the entities which are existentially assertable in our language.”⁷⁹ Our conceptual system, however, is not that language. Our language is not such that ‘ ___ ’ and “exists” can be justifiably and intelligibly predicated of God. Preller maintains, “Unfortunately, we do not know what kind of intelligible form would adequately express [God’s] ‘essence’ or what syntactical rules govern ‘existence’ as predicated of him!”⁸⁰ We cannot, then, justifiably and intelligibly assert, within our conceptual system with its syntactical rules and axioms, “God exists.”

VII. The Five Ways: They Fail and St. Thomas Intended Them to Fail

In light of this account, it should surprise that, according to Preller, the arguments for the existence of God are intentionally unsuccessful for St. Thomas, presenting the reader with a kind of surd, a desire for total intelligibility that cannot be had.⁸¹ In fact, for Preller, the most powerful “proof” for the existence of God in St. Thomas is the “throw away” argument from our natural desire for the complete intelligibility of the world of our experience.⁸²

Preller thinks that the *quinque viae* fail, and he believes that St. Thomas knows and intends that failure. As Stanley Hauerwas observes, “[Preller] must show (and I think

⁷⁹ Ibid., 173.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Preller notes, “The ‘philosophical theology’ of Aquinas, however, takes us nowhere; it leaves us where we began, facing a world of partial intelligibility and radical absurdity” (29).

⁸² Preller states, “We intend the world as intelligible, but the world ultimately shatters our intention. Lying at the root of all our experience—the final context in which our intelligible judgments take place—there is a radical absurdity, a *merely* ‘given’ which remains as a surd when all possible intelligible judgments have been made, and which thus frustrates the ‘intellect’ in its search for total intelligibility” (158).

he does) not only that the five ways fail but that Aquinas knew they must fail.”⁸³ Whether or not the arguments are valid, the entity to which they are thought to conclude—with the exception of the *Ur*-argument from natural desire—is not and cannot be the one true God of our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us consider each.

A. The Argument from Motion and Efficient Causality

The first way (*ex motu*)—and by extension, the second way (*ex causalitate efficienti*)—is for Preller problematic.⁸⁴ Either the first and second ways are invalid, failing to prove their conclusion, or each fails because the one whose existence is demonstrated is not and cannot be identified with the meta-empirical God of Christianity.⁸⁵

First, consider the question of whether the first and second ways are arguments within the philosophy of nature, concerned with *ens mobile*, or whether they are arguments within metaphysics, concerned with *ens qua ens* or *ens commune*. Preller observes that motion, at least, as it is presented in the first way, is something that St. Thomas describes as most manifest. Moreover, he notes that St. Thomas utilizes the physical example of heat and fire in order to illustrate the kind of motion he has in mind. Fire, which is actually hot, makes what is potentially hot to be actually hot; it “moves”

⁸³ Stanley Hauerwas, “Connections Created and Contingent: Aquinas, Preller, Wittgenstein, and Hopkins,” in *Grammar and Grace: Reformulations of Aquinas and Wittgenstein*, ed. Jeffrey Stout and Robert MacSwain (London: SCM Press, 2004), 80.

⁸⁴ According to Preller, the first and second ways are nearly identical. “Motion” and “efficient causality” are two names for the same type of phenomena. Preller’s critique of the one is equally relevant to the other. His treatment of the first way is longer than his treatment of the second, but much of the discussion in both is the same. Preller observes, “Aquinas...recognizes no essential difference between an efficient cause and a ‘mover; both terms are used interchangeably, and in many places Aquinas defines ‘efficient cause’ simply as ‘a cause of motion or rest’” (124). To the extent that the first way is invalid, according to Preller, so too must the second way be invalid. Preller also maintains, “The irrelevance of the second way to Aquinas’s doctrine of God can be deduced in large part from what...[is] said of efficiency in the [first way]” (124).

⁸⁵ Preller states, “The first way, as it stands, is difficult to interpret. On no *interpretation* (as opposed to a total reconstruction) can it be viewed as a valid demonstration of God’s existence in Aquinas’ own terms” (109, original emphasis).

what was once only potentially hot to become actually hot. In light of the physical nature of the example, according to Preller, the choice to interpret the first way—and by extension, the second—as though it is intended to provide a metaphysical argument is to overlook St. Thomas’s analysis, namely, an empirically observable phenomenon: physical motion.⁸⁶ The first and second ways, according to Preller, are intended as physical arguments about motion or *ens mobile*. It is a distortion and misinterpretation, then, to read them as metaphysical.

Second, consider the question of temporality. According to Preller, efficient causality, about which the first and second ways are concerned, entails a temporal relationship between the cause and the effect.⁸⁷ In support of this claim, Preller quotes the *Summa theologiae* I, q. 46, a. 2, ad 1, which reads, “The efficient cause, which acts by motion, of necessity *precedes its effect in time*.”⁸⁸ Efficient causality as we know it entails temporality. For Preller, no sense can be made of the application of “motion” to the relationship between a transcendent non-temporal cause and a physical temporal effect.⁸⁹ Ultimately, the “God” to which the first and second ways conclude is necessarily a first mover in a temporal series of efficient causes, a temporal “god” who is not and cannot be identified with the one true God of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Third, consider the related issue of the kind of causal series about which St. Thomas is speaking in the first two ways. Is the causal series at issue an essentially-

⁸⁶ Preller remarks, “One thing...is clear: in the new ‘metaphysical’ sense of ‘movement,’ the ‘movement of *A*’ is no longer an empirically observable fact which, in the language of the first way, ‘is certain and evident to our senses’” (115, original emphasis).

⁸⁷ See Preller, 116.

⁸⁸ Taken from Preller, 114, original emphasis.

⁸⁹ Preller argues, “The first mover cannot be eternally in act and yet initiate motion in that which was not previously moved. Aquinas is equivocating on the word ‘move.’ There is no sense of the word ‘move’ which can be used *both* to describe the way in which (a) an object in the world is moved by another object in the world, and (b) the postulated first mobile might be moved by a nontemporal first mover” (119, original emphasis).

ordered causal series or an accidentally-ordered causal series?⁹⁰ Preller argues that, for St. Thomas, the relevant kind of causal series is an accidentally ordered series. Now, if this is true, then question of the possibility of an infinite regress of causes is more specifically the question of the possibility of an infinite regress of accidentally-ordered causes. Preller observes that, for St. Thomas, an infinite regress of accidentally-ordered causes or movers is conceivable, which implies that the eternity of the world is not an impossibility.⁹¹ An accidentally-ordered causal series does not require a first member to account for the motion or efficient causality we see here and now.

Preller notes a common response. He notes, “The usual countermove...is to claim that Aquinas is speaking in the first [and second ways] of ‘essentially subordinated movers’ and not of ‘accidentally subordinated movers.’”⁹² The common account of an essentially ordered causal series is that of the motion of a staff moving a stone. The suggestion is that the movement of the stone insofar as it remains in motion is caused at each moment by the movement of, in this case, a staff, which itself is at each moment dependent upon the movement of the hand. Because the motions of the stone, the staff, and the hand are in this illustration simultaneous, if one were to remove the motion of the

⁹⁰ For a helpful discussion of the importance of the real distinction between *esse* and essence, on the one hand, and the *quinque viae*, see Gaven Kerr, *Aquinas's Way to God*.

⁹¹ It is well-known that in his later work, St. Thomas is happy to grant the conceivability of an eternal world. He does deny, however, that this might be proven demonstrably by philosophy. See his *De aeternitate mundi contra murmurantes*, English translation in *On the Eternity of the World*, trans. Cyril Vollert (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2010); *ScG* II, cc. 31-38; *De potentia Dei*, q. 3, a. 17; *ST* I, q. 49, aa. 1-2; *CT*. I, cc. 98-99. All English translations of *CT* come from, with light modifications, *Compendium of Theology*, trans. Richard J. Regan (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2009).

⁹² Preller, 110. He continues on the same page, “By ‘essentially subordinated movers’...is meant a series of subordinated efficient causes which operate co-temporaneously with their effects—their present and actual causal operation is essential to the present and actual motion to be explained. Thus, the infinite regress generated by the first way is an infinite regress *in the present* of currently operative subordinating causes of motion” (110, original emphasis). Garrigou-Lagrange argues that the relevant causal series is essential and that as such it does require a first mover present here and now because an infinite regress of essentially subordinated movers is impossible. See his *Reality: A Synthesis of Thomistic Thought*, trans. Patrick Cummins (Lexington: Ex Fontibus Co., 2012), 62, 63.

hand, the motion of both the staff and consequently, the stone would cease. The motion of the hand, then, is essential to the motion of both the staff and the stone. In this way, such a situation is an instance of an essentially ordered causal series, in which what is posterior in the series is essentially dependent for its motion upon the simultaneity of that which is prior (non-temporally), and ultimately, that which is first. The first mover, in this case, the hand (or agent), must be present here and now in order that the motion of the secondary movers might be in act here and now.

According to Preller, this countermove of appealing to an essentially ordered series of causes overlooks a key aspect of the world for St. Thomas. The world is not a world of pure passivity. The world is not composed only of passive objects, like a staff and stone, about which we must ask what accounts for its movement from potency to act with respect to motion.⁹³ Rather, St. Thomas's world is full of beings in which we find active potencies, which is to say "*real* agency."⁹⁴ Preller observes, "We know that a *finite* series of *passive* objects will not move without an extrinsic mover. The question is, however, whether or not *the world* is such a finite series of passive movers."⁹⁵ He notes, "For Aquinas, the motion of the world cannot be understood in terms of pure passivity."⁹⁶ Preller grants, then, that a world of pure passivity with respect to motion would require some entity or entities to account for the movement of objects from potency to act with respect to motion, but, for St. Thomas, our world is not so. The world is full of beings

⁹³ Preller's claim here is false. All created things are purely passive in at least one respect, namely, with respect to *esse*. No created reality is of itself being. This is the real distinction for St. Thomas. Everything must receive being because each is not essentially being. Again, this is what, for St. Thomas, makes created beings composite and not simple. Each created thing must receive *esse* and insofar as it remains existent continue to receive *esse*. In short, every created thing is purely passive with respect to being, even though not in other respects. See the Conclusion for a brief discussion of this lacuna in Preller's interpretation.

⁹⁴ Preller, 112, original emphasis.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, original emphasis.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 112.

that account for their own activity or dynamic agency by virtue of what each is essentially.⁹⁷ There are innumerable plants and animals that are the source of their own motion, beings that are not dependent in every moment of movement upon some other being that is actualizing an otherwise un-actualizable potency.

If our world is not a world of pure passivity, but a world in which individual beings or agents account for their motion by virtue of the kind of being each is, then there is no need to postulate the simultaneous agency of some other entity or entities to account for the motion or efficient causality we see in the world here and now. If we need not postulate such a first member, then we are not dealing with an essentially-ordered causal series. If we are not dealing with an essentially-ordered causal series, but an accidentally-ordered causal series, then an infinite regress of causes is conceivable.

St. Thomas does seem to deny an infinite regress in the first and second ways, however. On what grounds, then, does St. Thomas reject an infinite regress of accidentally ordered objects? According to Preller, St. Thomas's rejection of an infinite regress of an accidentally-ordered causal series is rooted in his Aristotelian understanding of the generation and corruption of materially composite beings. This understanding of generation and corruption suggests that over an infinite period of time, the dynamism of materially composite beings is such that it would cease or "run down." Preller observes,

The reason for the continuous and eternal agency of *Aristotle's* prime mover...is the conviction that the motion of the world is *necessarily* infinite in past duration, and the principle that any particular and limited communication of motion is necessarily dissipated over a finite period of time. Because the universe would have 'run down' by now if its source of dynamism were a finite entity, Aristotle must postulate (in the *Physics* at any rate) an infinite source of moving power which continuously keeps the finite amount of moving power possessed by the world from dissipating into impotency.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ See Preller, 112-113, 123-124.

⁹⁸ Preller, 121, original emphasis.

Given an infinite temporal period, then, the motion and causality about which the first and second ways argues would cease if left to itself, and therefore, in order for the series to continue, there would have to be some infinite being that is in principle capable of accounting for the motion that we observe here and now.

In the end, according to Preller, the first and second ways of St. Thomas fail to demonstrate the existence of the one true God of our Lord Jesus Christ. Both “proofs” present arguments about a physical reality that is manifest in our experience of the world, namely, physical motion. As such, they are not metaphysical arguments that successfully attain to some first principle beyond the world of experience. Further, because efficient causality is, according to Preller and following St. Thomas, necessarily temporal, the conclusion of the demonstration is not an eternal or transcendent reality.⁹⁹ Ultimately, we have either demonstrated the existence of a being who cannot be the God of Christianity or we are using the language of motion and causality in a way that offers no intelligibility.

Moreover, Preller maintains that the reason for St. Thomas’s rejection of the possibility of an infinite regress of an accidentally ordered causal series rests on St. Thomas’s assumption that the active potencies or intrinsic dynamism of finite being is subject to dissipation—each will “run down”—over an infinite duration and therefore requires the presence of a necessary and infinitely powerful being to account for the motion and efficient causality we witness here and now. We need not grant this assumption, however. Therefore, we need not suppose the existence of an eternal or necessary being to which we might credit the ongoing existence of the finite world.

⁹⁹ See Preller, 117-118.

B. *The Argument from Contingency*

Preller observes that the third way, or the so-called argument from contingency, is “considered by most commentators...to be the most explicitly ‘Thomistic’ of the five [ways].”¹⁰⁰ Moreover, he notes that contingency and necessity as categories are the “least removed from the creational notion that Aquinas...has in mind.”¹⁰¹ The relationship between contingent beings and a postulated necessary being in the third way is closer to St. Thomas’s understanding of the relationship between creatures and a creator than is the relationship of the first unmoved mover to thing moved or the relationship of the first uncaused cause to its effect. Nonetheless, Preller maintains, “It has not been altered enough, however, to be of assistance in generating the *ens realissimum* of Aquinas.”¹⁰² The notions of contingency and necessity as used by St. Thomas, according to Preller, do not allow the third way to succeed in demonstrating the existence of the necessary Creator being of Christianity.

First, according to Preller, the operative meaning of “contingency” in the third way applies to those beings that are subject to generation and corruption. Such beings are material things—composed of matter and form—and as such they are subject to the processes by which they are naturally brought from potency to act (generation) and those processes by which they are moved from act back to potency (corruption). The operative meaning of “necessity,” on the other hand, applies to those beings that are not subject to generation and corruption. Such beings are immaterial or simple things or separate substances. It is the nature of separate substances or necessary beings to be actual, having no natural principle of potency, such as matter, by which they might be subject to

¹⁰⁰ Preller, 126.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid., 128.

generation (movement from potency to act) or corruption (movement from act to potency).¹⁰³

Second, Preller argues that the third way is incapable of demonstrating the existence of an absolutely necessary being whose non-existence is inconceivable. He notes that it is conceivable that the contingent beings that are the point of the departure for the proof might not have actually existed. In that case, there would be no need to postulate a necessary being. Preller states,

*If something exists, its necessary causes necessarily exist. If there are entities subject to generation and corruption there necessarily exists an entity or entities not subject to generation and corruption. . . . If such a being exists (and it does), then it is not in fact (contingently) possible that it not exist, since it cannot change. It is, however, conceivable that it might not have existed—i.e., if the order of contingent things did not exist.*¹⁰⁴

It is only in light of the contingent fact of contingent existence that there must necessarily be a necessary cause of that contingent existence. It is therefore only contingently necessary that there be a necessary being. If there were no contingent being, there is no need to affirm the existence of a necessary being.

Third, Preller denies that the contingency of contingent beings is such that a necessary being, presumably God, must be actively conserving that contingent being in existence at each moment. He argues, “There is *no* indication of the radical contingency presupposed by Aquinas’ theology, such that contingent beings could not for one *second* maintain themselves in being without the *direct and continuous* creative act of God.”¹⁰⁵ Again, for St. Thomas, the world is not simply a world of pure passivity, in which case

¹⁰³ This is only partially true. While separate or immaterial substances lack one principle of potency, namely, matter, as noted above, they do not lack every principle of potency. While not composed of matter and form, separate or immaterial substances are composed of *esse* (act) and essence (potency).

¹⁰⁴ Preller, 128.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 129.

some necessary and infinitely powerful being is required to account for the dynamism of contingent being as we experience them. Much like the first and second ways, then, the third way depends on the premise that contingent beings—like finite movers and finite efficient causes—would eventually cease or fall to nothingness, and consequently, require a necessary being to account for the existence and conservation in existence of contingent beings here and now.¹⁰⁶

The third way of St. Thomas suffers from faults similar to those of the first two ways. We have either demonstrated the existence of a necessary but potentially immanent being to account for contingent beings, or we have not demonstrated the existence of a necessary being at all. If the former, then we have concluded to a being that is not obviously the transcendent God of Christianity. If the latter, we simply have not demonstrated anything, and we have therefore not demonstrated the existence of a necessary being that might even in principle be the God of Christianity. Ultimately, then, according to Preller, the third way fails. It either proves nothing or it proves the existence of a being who cannot be identified with the God of our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁷

C. The Argument from Degrees of Perfection

Preller considers the fourth way to be a confused attempt to bring Plato and Aristotle together. He remarks, “The fourth way depends on an equivocal confusion of Plato and Aristotle.”¹⁰⁸ By intermingling the language of participation and efficient causality, St. Thomas concludes to a highest perfection who accounts for the degrees of

¹⁰⁶ Preller remarks, “In order for the third way to have even the *appearance* of a valid argument, it must be arguing, with Aristotle, that any series of things capable of generation and corruption would ‘run down’ over an infinite period of time” (130-131).

¹⁰⁷ In fact, Preller maintains, “[T]he third way must be simply a restatement of the first two ways, both of which are incompatible with Aquinas’ theological use of ‘God’” (131).

¹⁰⁸ Preller, 134.

perfection observed in the world. This highest being cannot be, according to Preller, the God of Christianity.

First, Preller maintains that the language of participation implies a univocal understanding of predicates. The stick is hot just as the coffee is hot. “Hot” is univocally predicated of both the stick and the coffee; it has the same meaning for each.¹⁰⁹ Preller states, “It is difficult to see how the argument [i.e., the fourth way] could operate if ‘being,’ ‘truth,’ ‘goodness,’ and the like were *not* viewed as univocal logical genera.”¹¹⁰ The degrees of perfection from which St. Thomas begins the fourth way implies the use of common terms for both the participant and non-participant. Preller observes,

If Aquinas accepted all of the terms of the fourth way,...God would be ‘better’ and ‘truer’ (and more existent?) than his creatures, just as fire is ‘hotter’ than heated water; but his possession of those characteristics would be through the possession of a univocal generic form.¹¹¹

The non-participating source of all perfections to which the proof seems to conclude is not a transcendent being that could even in principle be the one true God of our Lord Jesus Christ; it is rather a being among beings, to all of which apply univocal predicates of perfection.¹¹² They are each “good,” “true,” and the like in the same sense. This situation does not and cannot fit the case of the transcendent God of Christianity.

¹⁰⁹ Further, he notes, “In a purely Platonic version of the argument, it would be maintained that fire is hot *by participation in the ‘form’ of heat*, just as is any other univocally hot object” (132).

¹¹⁰ Preller, 132.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 133, original emphasis.

¹¹² For discussions of a similar sort see, for instance, Martin Heidegger, “The Onto-Theo-Logical Constitution of Metaphysics,” in *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Christos Yannaras, *On the Absence and Unknowability of God: Heidegger and the Areopagite*, trans. Haralambos Ventis (New York: T & T Clark, 2005); Jean-Luc Marion, *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), originally published in 1977; *God without Being*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), originally published in 1982; “Saint Thomas d’Aquin et l’onto-théo-logie,” in *Revue thomiste* 95:1 (1995): 31–66; “In the Name: How to Avoid Speaking of ‘Negative Theology,’” in *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, ed. John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); John D. Jones, “Introduction,” in *The Divine Names and The Mystical Theology*, trans. John D. Jones (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2011); “A Non-Entitative Understanding of Being and

Second, Preller notes the odd claim that seems entailed by the fourth way—if we grant that the argument is valid—namely, that there are “degrees of existence.”¹¹³

Although he sets the issue aside, he does briefly note his confusion about “how there can be ‘degrees’ of existence and truth.”¹¹⁴ Either something is, or it is not; either something is true, or it is false. There seems to be no warrant to suppose that there are gradations of existence. Therefore, there is no warrant to suppose that the fourth way might successfully conclude to a perfectly existent being based on the degrees of perfection, a perfectly existent being in which all other beings must participate in varying degrees insofar as they exist.¹¹⁵

Unity: Heidegger and Neoplatonism,” in *Dionysius*, vol. VI (December 1982), 94-110; “An Absolutely Simple God? Frameworks for Reading Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite,” in *The Thomist* 69 (2005), 371-406; “The Character of the Negative (Mystical) Theology for Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite,” in *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 51 (1977), 66-74; “(Mis?)-Reading the Divine Names as a Science: Aquinas’s Interpretation of the Divine Names of (Pseudo) Dionysius Areopagite,” in *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 52, 2 (2008), 143-72; John D. Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982).

¹¹³ He is not alone in his bewilderment. Others have questioned what sense can be made of saying of one thing or another that it be “truer” or “exist more” than something else. Consider, for example, Christopher Hughes’s critique of St. Thomas: “I think I can understand the difference between having whiteness according to its full power and having whiteness according to something less than its full power, because, I take it, it is the difference between being other than perfectly white and being perfectly white. By contrast, there does not seem to be a difference between being perfectly existent and being less than perfectly existent. Existence is an on/off property: either you’re there or you’re not. Because existence is on/off, it would seem, either you have it according to its full power or you don’t have it at all” (Christopher Hughes, *On a Complex Theory of a Simple God: A Investigation in Aquinas’ Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 27). Presumably, insofar as existence and truth are perfections in which finite beings participate, then there are degrees of existence and truth. Yet, for Preller and Hughes, this is an odd claim indeed. See also, Anthony Kenny, *The Five Ways* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980). For a critique of Hughes and Kenny, see Barry Miller, *A Most Unlikely God: A Philosophical Enquiry* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), ch. 3, esp. 38-41; *The Fullness of Being: A New Paradigm for Existence* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), ch. 5. Admittedly, this bewilderment is bewildering. Created things are composed, at minimum, of act and potency. In all cases, this is at least the composition of *esse* (act) and essence (potency). Form or essence names diverse limits on the *act* of existing, which is to say, each names a different way in which *esse* is limited by form or essence. There are any number of instances in which things *act* in ways that vary in degree: jumping higher or lower, running faster or slower. Each thing is limited by the substantial and accidental forms that inform those capacities to act. Degrees of limitation of act are entirely intelligible. That the *act* of existing have degrees of limitation should be no different. So, the bewilderment of Preller, Hughes, Kenny, et al. seems based on a confusion.

¹¹⁴ Preller, 132.

¹¹⁵ Christopher Hughes, *On a Complex Theory of a Simple God: A Investigation in Aquinas’ Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 27.

Third, Preller notes that if the fourth way concludes to a non-participating source of all perfection, then that being is simply the highest being in a continuum of perfection.

A highest being, however, is not and cannot be, for St. Thomas, the God of Christianity.

Preller states,

[St. Thomas] denies that God possesses qualities by the ‘relation of many things to one’ (e.g., many substances to one form). And in the *De Potentia*, he says that God is not related to the perfections of his creatures as ‘more perfect’—in the way that fire is ‘hotter’ than heated water—but as the extrinsic and nonunivocal principle or cause of their perfections—as ‘heat itself’ is the principle of heat.¹¹⁶

For St. Thomas, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ is not the highest perfection or highest being. Rather, the God of Christianity is perfection itself or, as St. Thomas will often say, *ipsum esse subsistens*. Insofar as the fourth way concludes to a highest being, the fourth way does not, according to Preller, succeed in proving the existence of the God of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Preller believes, then, that the fourth way, too, has failed. In it, St. Thomas seems to betray a confused Platonism that involves the univocal predication of perfections to both God and creatures. Further, the argument as it is presented by St. Thomas would seem to imply that perfections such as truth and existence are subject to gradations or degrees. Preller finds this claim odd. Either something is true, or it is not; either something exists, or it does not. If the argument requires some understanding of truth and existence that allows of degrees, then Preller finds the argument unintelligible. Lastly, even if one were to grant the possibility of gradations of being, the fourth way would seem to conclude, if valid, to a “highest being.” St. Thomas explicitly denies, however, that the God of Christianity is such a being. Like the first three ways, then, the fourth way

¹¹⁶ Preller, 133-134. Preller is referring to *De potentia Dei* q. 7, a. 7, ad 2.

either fails or it does not succeed in demonstrating the one true God of our Lord Jesus Christ.

D. The Argument from Providence

According to Preller, the fifth way is an argument from teleology, but with a special emphasis on providence. It is either flawed on Aristotelian grounds, or it overestimates natural human capacities to know the nature of things, including God's providence over all things.

First, Preller argues that the fifth way is incompatible with the kind of Aristotelian causal argumentation St. Thomas presents in the first three ways. He notes, "Aristotle would not know what to make of the postulation of an intelligent, efficient cause of the intrinsic formal teleology of the world."¹¹⁷ Part of the difficulty, here, is that for Aristotle forms are sufficient to account for the dynamic activities characteristic of beings according to their respective kinds. We saw this in Preller's critique of "radical contingency" in the third way and of the supposed necessity of an essentially subordinated causal series in the first two ways. Beings have a dynamism of their own by virtue of the form that they instantiate; the form is sufficient to account for a thing's movement toward an end (*telos*). Preller remarks, "The immanent forms of things are sufficient reason for the regularity of operation manifested by most substances."¹¹⁸ According to Preller, then, some additional being who is responsible for the teleology of any given thing in the world is an unnecessary postulation.

Second, the fifth way also seems to smuggle the notion of intelligence into a discussion of the teleology of non-intelligent things. Only by presupposing that intelligent

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 134.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

beings are the only beings capable of directed action can St. Thomas infer to some super-intelligence responsible for the seemingly intelligent behavior of non-intelligent things. Preller states, “The fifth way...assumes that the regularity of operation found in nonintelligent beings must result from the efficacious purpose or intentions of an intelligent being—‘as the arrow is directed to the target by the archer.’”¹¹⁹ The assumption that non-intelligent being depends upon intelligent being for its directedness toward its end is, for Preller, unwarranted. Again, a thing’s form accounts for this directedness on its own.

Further, Preller argues that because natural human reason cannot attain perfect knowledge of the essence of sensible things, we cannot attain perfect knowledge of the purpose of sensible things upon which to base the fifth way. This weakness is sufficient to temper our optimism about possibly attaining knowledge of the end to which this or that essence or nature might be ordered. Preller observes, “[St. Thomas] denies that we can know the natures of things, and thus he denies that we can *in this life* know *how* God has ordered things to one another and to himself.”¹²⁰ Because we do not and cannot adequately know the nature of sensible beings, we do not and cannot adequately know the end to which those things are ordered. Because we do not and cannot know the end to which those things are ordered, the fifth way loses its force.

Finally, according to Preller, the fifth way assumes the doctrine of providence. He notes, however, that for St. Thomas providence is not known by natural reason. Rather,

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid. Preller is drawing on the *ScG IV*, ch. 1, 3, in which St. Thomas maintains, “[B]ecause of the weakness of the intellect we are not able to know perfectly even the ways themselves. For the sense, from which our knowledge begins, is occupied with external accidents, which are the proper sensibles—for example, color, odor, and the like. As a result, through such external accidents the intellect can scarcely reach the perfect knowledge of a lower nature, even in the case of those natures whose accidents it comprehends perfectly through the sense.”

like omnipotence, it is a reality that is revealed rather than justifiably inferred.¹²¹ He remarks, “That the world is ordered providentially by God is distinctly a part of [St. Thomas’s] teaching. He maintains, however, that God’s ‘providence over all...cannot be proved.’”¹²² If providence cannot be proved by natural reason, then using providence as the point of departure for a purely natural theological proof for the existence of God is impossible.

The fifth way is either incapable of proving the transcendent and intelligent God of our Lord Jesus Christ or it is presupposing the existence of the providential God that it is attempting to prove. Moreover, according to Preller, the fifth way fails because it is incompatible with St. Thomas’s Aristotelian understanding of causality, as presented in the first three ways. In addition, the argument smuggles in intelligence when no such move is warranted. Furthermore, it overlooks St. Thomas’s insistence that we do not and cannot know the natures of things, and that we therefore do not and cannot know their *teloi*. Lastly, the fifth way ignores St. Thomas’s insistence that providence is not accessible to natural reason, but is revealed. Like the first four ways, the fifth way fails to demonstrate the existence of the God of Christianity.

E. The “Throw Away” Argument from Desire

If the *quinque viae* have failed to demonstrate the existence of the one true God of our Lord Jesus Christ, then are there no argumentative grounds for affirming the existence of God? Preller maintains an argument for the existence of God within the *corpus thomisticum* that is more promising than the five ways. This is the argument from

¹²¹ As Preller notes, “There is no ‘universal providence’ possible in Aristotelian terms” (134).

¹²² Preller, 134. Here, Preller is citing *De veritate*. I cannot, however, find the reference to which he directs the reader.

natural desire. The argument from natural desire is, according to Preller, “an *Ur-*argument for the existence of God.”¹²³ Preller argues,

[St. Thomas’s] most profound ‘reasons’ for asserting the existence of God are ‘throw aways’—laconic claims made in contexts other than the five ways. Basically, they reduce to the optimistic claim that no natural inclination of the human mind or the human will can be *inane*. There must *be* in reality something that is able to give rest to the frustrated love and intellectual appetite of man.¹²⁴

The natural desires of the human intellect and will must have some term in which those desires cease or come to rest. Otherwise the existence of those desires would be in vain. Preller remarks that, for St. Thomas, “There must *be* that which is capable of giving rest to the restless seeking of the mind of man for total intelligibility.”¹²⁵ We are able to identify this “total intelligibility” as God because God is that for whom no further “reason” or “account” is required. Preller notes, “Aquinas evidently believes that the natural desire of the intellect for complete intelligibility cannot be satisfied by anything other than God.”¹²⁶

What underlies this argument for St. Thomas is the “viewpoint of creation.”¹²⁷ Preller notes, “The human mind is ordered to God the *Creator* as to One Unknown.”¹²⁸ St. Thomas presupposes the doctrine of creation from the outset, and in light of creation, he is able to make the move from the existence of desire to the existence of an object in which that desire would cease. Because St. Thomas believes that the all-good God of our Lord Jesus Christ would not create beings with desires while also withholding the

¹²³ Ibid., 164, original emphasis.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 156-157, original emphasis

¹²⁵ Ibid., 157.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 164. Preller observes on the same page, “That is the probable root cause of his willingness to accept *any* historical argument for the existence of God based on contingent or empirical matters of fact—they manifest the created tendency of the intellect to seek after God.”

¹²⁷ Ibid. Preller makes a similar claim about the first two ways. He remarks, “Aquinas is reading Aristotle’s argument, but he is hearing or intending the Doctrine of Creation” (123).

¹²⁸ Ibid., original emphasis.

possibility of the satisfaction of those desires, he is able to argue from the natural desires of the intellect and will to the existence of some reality in which those desires come to rest. The inference is justified because if God had withheld the possibility of satisfaction of desire, then God would have made something unbecoming of the all-good and loving God of Christianity. It would appear to be a kind of cruel divine joke. Because he knows that God is good and that God is Creator, St. Thomas knows that there must be some terminus—in principle, attainable—in which all intellectual and volitional desire ceases, fully satisfied, namely, God himself.

The argument from desire has certain advantages over the *quinque viae*. Unlike each of the five ways, the argument from desire does not require knowledge of what God is (*quid sit*). The affirmation of the existence of some reality that satisfies all desires, does not entail some concept or notion of what that reality might in fact be. The desires of the mind and the will remain open and indeterminate with respect to the object. The reality is simply understood as beatitude, without knowing what the beatific state is. Preller notes, “[T]here must be that of which we *cannot* conceive, whose ‘goodness’ and ‘intelligibility’ would provide the inexhaustible source of the fulfillment of our natural cravings.”¹²⁹ This openness and lack of determination, as well as the lack of intelligible content, is such that the reference of the intention very well could be the meta-empirical God of our Lord Jesus Christ.

A further advantage of the argument from desire is that it does not attempt to tie God into our conceptual system. It does not involve tying God into a causal framework, which would lead to the difficulties noted above, among them the lack of intelligibility and at best equivocal use of causal language for a meta-empirical reality. Nor does it

¹²⁹ Ibid., 157.

require that God be like other objects of our experience. There need not be some common category (for example, cause) under which God must fall. God is simply recognized as the end to which human existence tends, without knowing anything about what God is or how God satisfies the desire we recognize in ourselves.

The “throw away” argument for the existence of God based on our natural desire for complete intelligibility of the world of experience is, according to Preller, the most promising argument presented by St. Thomas. In light of revelation and the gift of faith, we know that God is an all-good God who would not create beings with desires that could not in principle be satisfied. There must be something that satisfies that natural human desire for complete intelligibility of the world of experience. This something is *scientia dei*, namely, the knowledge of God (*scientia dei*) possessed comprehensively by God alone and in manner by the *beati*.

Only through some conformation of the human mind to *scientia dei* might the human mind attain to the desired complete intelligibility of the world.

VIII. From the Failure of the Five Ways to Faith

According to Preller, the *quinque viae* are ways to nowhere, or at least, nowhere near the conclusion that the one true God of our Lord Jesus Christ exists. None of the arguments can produce the means by which one might prove the existence of the meta-empirical or transcendent reality that is the God of Christian faith. Therefore, the demonstrations cannot provide access to *scientia dei*, which means they are incapable of conforming the human mind to the knowledge that God has of himself, through which

one can be said truly to believe that God exists. Something else is required in order that we might intend and conform our minds to God, namely, faith.¹³⁰ In the next section, we shall consider Preller's account of faith and, in particular, the way the context of faith affects the possibility of affirming that pre-Christian pagan philosophers truly know the existence of the one true God of our Lord Jesus Christ.

A. *Fides et Infideles: Conformity and Ignorance of God*

Preller notes that “[f]or medieval man, the real question is not ‘Does a god exist?’ but ‘What is salvation?’ To prove that there is an unknown entity which *might* turn out to have soteriologically interesting features would be to prove the commonplace.”¹³¹ What is at stake for St. Thomas, then, is not the reality of God, but the end toward which our existence is ordered, as well as the means by which that end might be attained. The proofs for the existence of God contribute nothing to that end; faith does. In faith, the mind of the believer conforms to the mind of God, as a foretaste of the perfect conformation awaited in the beatific vision. In the end, according to Preller, we should recognize that, for St. Thomas, the mind of the pagan philosophers who lack the gift of faith do not conform to the mind of God. They have a defective knowledge of the one true and simple God, and they therefore cannot truly believe that God exists.

First, as noted, Preller thinks that philosophical inquiry does not have access to *scientia dei*. Such inquiry cannot even in principle result in the conformity of the mind to God. It is only in the gift of God's extrinsic and temporal self-expression in the

¹³⁰ Preller maintains, “Only faith can recognize the referent of the proofs, since only faith conforms the mind to the being of God” (30).

¹³¹ Preller, 30-31, original emphasis. Also, Preller notes, “To say that a proposition refers even if I do not know how it refers, is at least to claim that there *is* someone for whom the proposition is an expression of conceptually meaningful intentions” (187, original emphasis).

propositions of *sacra scriptura* and *sacra doctrina* that we can begin to gain access to the mind of God. Yet, according to Preller, we cannot see the truth or intelligibility of these propositions in themselves, but we can have faith that these truths conform to the mind of God. Much as one trusts the word of a friend regarding things that one has not seen or understood, in faith we trust the Word of God regarding the things of God that no one has seen and understood.¹³² Preller observes,

If I believe that my friend has just uttered a proposition, the terms of which I did not hear, and if I take it that he was referring to something, then I may believe that the proposition he uttered made a successful reference and was a true statement—my friend is to be depended upon in such things. I cannot be said, however, to believe the *proposition*, since I have no idea what the proposition stated.¹³³

In faith, then, we trust that God has uttered an intelligible proposition that conforms to *scientia dei*, while neither seeing its truth nor understanding its meaning. In faith, the believer trusts that any such propositions make an intelligible and successful reference to the mind of God.¹³⁴ He continues, “We might assume that the statement [of faith] is significant and intelligible to God; but we do not *see* its intelligibility.”¹³⁵

Because God gives the propositions of *scientia dei*, we trust that they are intelligible and make successful reference, at least for him, even if we do not and cannot understand them. This situation, however, creates a dilemma. Faith is described by the tradition as “thinking with assent” about God.¹³⁶ Preller thinks that “the language of faith

¹³² Ibid., 186.

¹³³ Ibid., 185-186, original emphasis. That this is what is meant by faith is debatable. There seems to be an obvious distinction between (a) understanding a proposition whose truth is not something seen but taken on the authority of a trustworthy source and (b) not even knowing what a proposition means and as such having to trust both that the proposition is intelligible and that it is true. In the next chapter, I will argue that the latter account of faith is clearly not St. Thomas’s.

¹³⁴ As Preller states, “Strictly speaking, to assent to the propositions of faith is not to assent to a set of intelligible truths, but to assent to the authority of the One who utters them” (188).

¹³⁵ Preller, 190, original emphasis.

¹³⁶ See Augustine, *On the Predestination of the Saints*, 2.5. Cf. *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 1; *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 1; *In Hebraeos*, ch. 11, lect. 1, no. 553.

purports to [make significant and conceptually meaningful references to God].”¹³⁷ Yet, we cannot “think” God,¹³⁸ for we do not know what God is (*quid sit*).¹³⁹ Either we can “think” God, in which case we can understand and believe the propositions of faith, or we cannot “think” God, in which case the propositions of faith are unintelligible and consequently un-believable. Preller denies the former; he must accept the latter.

How can one think the unthinkable? How can one believe the unbelievable?

According to Preller, we do so by grace and through the act of faith. He states, “[F]aith provides its own inexplicable mode of ‘apprehension,’ which is the apprehension enabling the believer to assent to propositions that are nonintelligible in the light of conceptual reason.”¹⁴⁰ He explains, “Because of God’s operation on the soul of the believer, he possesses a *kind* of intention, a *kind* of certainty and a *kind* of cognition proper to the act of faith and not to any other act of the intellect.”¹⁴¹ Now, according to Preller, faith is an act of God, not an act of ourselves. He maintains, “The believer does not possess a form of intelligibility which corresponds to the judgement of faith, but only a form of faith itself, conceived *by God* within the soul of believer—not by the believer himself.”¹⁴² Therefore, there is a mode of apprehension or cognition that is appropriate to faith. In the act of faith, God acts in the soul of the believer such that the mind conforms to the mind of God. The conformity remains, nevertheless, unintelligible to the believer.

¹³⁷ Preller, 185.

¹³⁸ Preller observes, “Since the propositions of faith seem to predicate specific qualities of God...it is difficult to see how they might be understood. But to believe is to ‘think with assent’” (185).

¹³⁹ Preller states, “‘God’...is a name which can never occur within our conceptual context which is meaningful to us. It is the name of that of which I can have no meaningful intention” (183). He concludes, “We are left, then, with the disturbing dilemma that *either* man is able to have a meaningful intention of God *or* the propositions of faith cannot be believed or believed to be true” (186, original emphasis). He also maintains, “One cannot believe—or disbelieve—a proposition as such without understanding it” (185).

¹⁴⁰ Preller, 241.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 240, original emphasis.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 247-248, original emphasis. Preller also states, “Just as reason knows the object of natural understanding in the conceived intentions of the intellect, so also the believer ‘knows’ the object of faith in the ‘intentions’ conceived in his mind by faith—which is to say, by God” (252).

The believer does not understand the propositions of faith,¹⁴³ but trusts God that they are intelligible, that they are true, and that the propositions make a successful reference, that God has graciously conformed the mind—though unintelligibly—to *scientia dei*. In this life, having yet to attain to the beatific vision, our only access to the mind of God is by trusting God in faith that propositions of *scientia dei*, as they come to us in *sacra scriptura*, are intelligible, true, and make a successful reference to the intrinsic and eternal *scientia dei*, namely, the Son of the Father.

Following St. Thomas and others, Preller's account of the conformity of the mind to God in faith emphasizes two components: (i) *fides ex auditu* and (ii) *fides infusa*. *Fides ex auditu* names the external origin of the act of faith, the material content of the faith that is preached to and heard by the believer. *Fides ex auditu*, then, pertains to the communication to the believer of the extrinsic and temporal expression of the Word of God in *sacra scriptura*. Preller notes, "Just as the natural intentionality of the mind is nonspecific without the matter supplied by sense experience, so also the internal 'inclination of the heart to believe' is 'inchoate' without the matter supplied *ex auditu*."¹⁴⁴ This encounter with extrinsic and temporal expression of *scientia dei* is, for Preller, the ordinary¹⁴⁵ external condition for the possibility of the conformity of the human mind to the mind of God, in which total intelligibility resides.

Although an encounter with the preached word of God is the ordinary condition for the possibility of the conformity of the mind to God, it is not sufficient. He states

¹⁴³ That the believer does not understand what the proposition of faith states, and therefore, what it means, seems to follow from Preller's analogy of believing a friend who "uttered a proposition, the terms of which I did not hear" and about which "I have no idea what the proposition stated" (185-186).

¹⁴⁴ Preller, 245.

¹⁴⁵ In using "ordinary" here I am simply gesturing toward or leaving open the possibility that there are extra-ordinary means by which the mind might be conformed to God. Such means would nonetheless be a gift of God.

further, “For belief in the propositions of faith there is required an ‘inclination of the heart to believe’... [this] is *fides infusa*.”¹⁴⁶ *Fides infusa* names the internal aspect of the act of faith, the subjective capacity to see the credibility of the propositions of faith. *Fides infusa*, then, pertains to the “eyes of faith” by which the believer is made able to see that the propositions of faith are revealed by God and as such are to be accepted as true.¹⁴⁷

We are left, still, with a problem. The propositions of faith are not understood. We only trust that they are true. But how? Preller considers, “If the propositions of faith are absolutely opaque to the understanding, they cannot conform *the mind* to the nature of God, regardless of the presumed ‘state of the will.’ The believer could not be said to believe anything *about* God.”¹⁴⁸ Further, he notes, “Aquinas’ position does not seem to differ from the radically untenable claim to believe that which is in no way understood.”¹⁴⁹ This is why Preller emphasizes the role of the notion of beatitude for St. Thomas. Beatitude names the God in whom our desires have their rest. As yet unknown to us, beatitude nevertheless provides us with a meaningful and intelligible “substitute”

¹⁴⁶ Preller, 236.

¹⁴⁷ Preller observes, “The proposition of the language of faith can be believed in the formal sense only when the intellect possesses an intentional orientation to its final end under the formality of salvation and beatitude. That intentionality is supplied by God in the infusion of faith; and so it is God who makes the propositions really refer to their supernatural objects” (246). Further, he notes, “On the intentional level, infused faith is said to incline the intellect and will toward a nonexperienced beatific state of knowing and loving” (252). For an account that is very similar, though not identical, to Preller’s, see, for instance, Pierre Rousselot, *Intellectualism: Sense of Being, Faculty of God*, trans. Andrew Tallon (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1999), originally published in 1908; “Les yeux de la foi,” in *Recherches de science religieuse* 1 (1910), 241-259, 444-475 ; *The Eyes of Faith and An Answer to Two Attacks*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Fordham University Press, 1990). Cf. *Essays on Love and Knowledge*, trans. Andrew Tallon, Pol Vandeveld, and Alan Vincelette (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2008).

¹⁴⁸ Preller, 237, original emphasis.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

for our ignorance of the God in whom we in fact have our beatitude.¹⁵⁰ In faith, there is some “inexplicable mode of ‘apprehension’” of the God who reveals.¹⁵¹

The form of faith that Preller has in mind is living faith. In living faith, which is to say, the faith that is formed by charity, the believer can be said to intend or “have in the mind” the intentions of God, namely, *scientia dei*. Preller remarks, “Unless God ‘takes the opportunity’ of infusing the intentional forms of live faith, the mind of the ‘believer’ will not be conformed to the being of God.”¹⁵²

In order for faith to be “real,” according to Preller, the act of faith must be accompanied or informed by the theological virtue of charity. We cannot know, however, whether charity is present in our soul.¹⁵³ Therefore, we cannot know whether our intentional states with respect to the propositions of faith are such that our minds are conformed to the mind of God. We can know that in faith our minds would be conformed to the mind of God, if charity were present, but we cannot know whether charity is in fact

¹⁵⁰ See Preller, 237.

¹⁵¹ Preller, 241. Preller admits, “The manner in which that ‘state of mind’ called ‘faith’ exemplifies or is isomorphic with the intentional being of God is known only to God and the *beati*. The language of faith—in so far as the words have meaning to us—is analogous to the language of God by an analogy of extrinsic attribution: it is claimed that there exists in the eternal Word of God an analogical counterpart of the linguistic system of faith” (241).

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 263.

¹⁵³ Preller admits that this account of faith raises another “crucial problem in the entire analysis” (262). How do people know if they have faith? He comments, “How does a believer know that he is in a state of real or infused faith—in, as we say, a state of grace? It cannot be said that he knows it on the basis of his belief that the propositions of faith are true, since even a person with ‘dead’ faith shares that belief or opinion. Both ‘living’ and ‘dead’ faith are virtues or powers which dispose a man to ‘confess’ the articles of faith—to say ‘Yes’ to certain propositions which are said to be about God. As Aquinas puts it, ‘living’ and ‘dead’ faith are—as virtues of the intellect—of the same species” (262). He continues, “If the claims of faith are correct, then something like them must be present in the ‘soul’ or ‘inner being’ of the ‘true’ believer. If, however, they are not intelligibly grasped or introspectively known by the mind, how can the believer know that they are really there at all? How can he know that he is a ‘true’ believer? It would appear that he cannot” (263). Preller argues that this is precisely the intention of St. Thomas in his account of faith. He observes, “We could only know that we had ‘living’ faith—that we were doing more than giving assent to totally opaque propositions—if we knew that we had charity. We could only know that our ‘minds’ contained intentional analogues of the being of God if we could know that grace had ‘seized’ our will and turned our affections to the Unknown God. According to Aquinas, however, we cannot know whether we have charity or not” (264).

present. Therefore, the conscious minds or intentional states of the true believer, whose faith is informed by charity, and of the nonbeliever, with respect to the propositions of faith, are potentially the same. Neither the believer nor the unbeliever sees the intelligibility and syntactical justification for asserting the truths of the propositions communicated in *sacra scriptura* and *sacra doctrina*, and neither of them knows whether he or she has charity. As Preller maintains, “There is no more in the conscious mind of the true believer than *may* be present in the conscious mind of the nonbeliever.”¹⁵⁴

In faith, we assent to the truth of the propositions of faith. We do so as we accept the truth of an utterance of a trusted friend. We believe that the propositions are intelligible, even though we might not in fact see their intelligibility. We believe that the propositions are true, even though we might not in fact see the justification for that judgment. In faith, we trust the God who reveals, not ourselves. The conformity of the mind to God occurs by virtue of *fides ex auditu* and *fides infusa*. The former is the external condition for the possibility of conformity of the mind to God, providing the material content through which the mind be might conformed to the mind of God. The latter is the internal grace that enables the mind to assent to the truth of the propositions of faith, providing the eyes of faith by which we recognize the propositions as revealed by God. Of course, it is not the case, according to Preller, that one can know whether one has true faith. Apart from knowing if one is in a state of grace, one cannot know that one has attained the conformity of the mind to God. The believer and nonbeliever are in same situation with respect to the propositions of faith.

¹⁵⁴ Preller, 265.

B. *The Smoking Gun: Summa Theologiae II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3*

Only through faith can the mind of the believer conform to the mind of God. By virtue of the faith of believers, we can affirm that they truly believe that God exists. In fact, this affirmation is only true of the believer. Conversely, the pre-Christian pagan philosopher cannot be said truly to believe God exists. The “smoking gun” for this claim is, for Preller, *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3.

As we noted in our discussion of referential opacity,¹⁵⁵ Preller remarks that St. Thomas seems to affirm that Aristotle had demonstrated the existence of God. We also noted, however, Preller’s claim that St. Thomas also denies that such knowledge could be attributed to a pagan. Recall Preller’s observation that “[in certain] contexts [St. Thomas] denies that *any* pagan can be said to believe that God exists.”¹⁵⁶ For Preller, it is only by faith, which is God’s acting in us, that the soul of the believer is even in principle conformed to the mind of God. In faith, the believer can affirm by analogy of extrinsic attribution that “God exists” is intelligible and makes a successful reference within God’s

¹⁵⁵ Preller does mention the possibility of referential transparency in the context of philosophical knowledge of God. If he left it here, then there would be less of a difficulty. He would have granted referential transparency such that we could affirm pre- or non-Christian pagan philosophical knowledge of the existence of God. And yet, Preller does not stop there. He immediately qualifies the possibility of affirming philosophical knowledge of God in terms of referential transparency. He maintains that in “most theological contexts” it is less misleading to deny (in terms of referential opacity) that the natural or philosophical theologian successfully refers to the God of Jesus Christ (143). In fact, shortly thereafter, when speaking of Aristotle in particular, Preller is quick to deny “in the terms that are most appropriate to the situation” that Aristotle believed that God exists. He notes, “In order to emphasize...the controlling role of revealed *rationes* in the properly *theological* use of ‘God,’ we ought...to reply in terms of referential opacity: ‘No! Aristotle...did not believe that “The God referred to by the revealed articles of faith exists” is true’” (144, 145). Preller goes on to claim that the philosophical use of “God” involves a “complete indeterminacy with regard to the referential range” and that “God” would “have no more predicative, restrictive, or referential value than ‘something’” (147). One might suggest that Preller is setting up a dialectic in this context, but his account of the “problem of reference” with respect to God, as well as what he goes on to say about faith as the only means of conformity of the mind to God, it is difficult to see his affirmation of referential transparency in any other way than completely negated.

¹⁵⁶ Preller, 143, original emphasis.

conceptual system, while nonetheless, its intelligibility and successful reference is not grasped nor seen by the believer.

Now, according to Preller, the pre-Christian pagan philosopher, who lacked the graces of special revelation and *fides ex auditu*, could not affirm by analogy of extrinsic attribution that “God exists” is intelligible and makes a successful reference within God’s conceptual system when “God” is taken to name the one true God of our Lord Jesus Christ. As Preller maintains, “The proposition ‘God exists’...takes on such utterly new significance for faith that Aquinas is willing to say that the pagans (who after all proved the truth of the proposition ‘God exists’) cannot be said to believe in God.”¹⁵⁷ In order to ground his interpretation firmly in the texts of St. Thomas, Preller draws our attention to a particular passage in St. Thomas, namely, *Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3. This passage provides the explicit exegetical foundation for Preller’s interpretation of St. Thomas on the possibility of pre-Christian pagan philosophical knowledge of the existence of the God of Christianity.¹⁵⁸

In the relevant passage, St. Thomas appears to deny explicitly that a non-Christian can assent to the truth of the proposition “God exists.” There, St. Thomas considers and responds to the following objection:

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 228.

¹⁵⁸ There are other passages in which St. Thomas seems to make a similar point, for example, *ScG* III, ch. 118, no. 4 and *In Ioan.*, lect. 6, no. 2265. All English translations of *In Ioan.* come from, with light modifications, *Commentary on the Gospel of John: Chapters 1-8*, trans. Fabian R. Larcher (Lander: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2013) and *Commentary on the Gospel of John: Chapters 9-21*, trans. Fabian R. Larcher (Lander: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2013). Other scholars, most notably, Bruce Marshall, have highlighted these passages. Preller, however, focuses his attention on *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3. Here, the relevant Aristotelian maxim regarding defective knowledge of simple beings is more clearly stated than in those other passages. They tend to be allusions that lack concision. We will have much more to say about these other passages below in Chapter Four.

That which can be said of unbelievers cannot be called an act of faith. But unbelievers can be said to believe that God exists. Therefore it should not be reckoned an act of faith.¹⁵⁹

How can something that an unbeliever does also be said to be an aspect of the Christian act of faith? Because they are said “to believe” that God exists, do they not, then, have the theological virtue of faith, or at least an aspect of it? Aquinas responds, saying,

Unbelievers cannot be said *to believe in a God* by what we would understand as an act of faith. For they do not believe that God exists under the conditions that faith determines; hence, they do not truly believe in a God, since as the Philosopher observes (*Metaph.* ix, text. 22) *to know simple things defectively is not to know them at all.*¹⁶⁰

It seems rather straightforward. The unbeliever, who is said to believe that God exists, does not believe that God exists as the believer does, “under the conditions that faith determines.” Therefore, the unbeliever has a defect in cognition with respect to the metaphysically simple God of faith, and by virtue of the relevant Aristotelian maxim, the unbeliever cannot be said to truly believe that God exists. This passage seems to show, then, that Aquinas denies that *infideles*, including pre-Christian pagan philosophers, could be said to know that God exists.

The context in which we find this passage is *Summa theologiae* II-II, qq. 1-16, the so-called “treatise” on faith. In q. 2, a. 2, St. Thomas considers whether the internal act of faith is suitably distinguished as *credere Deum*, *credere Deo*, and *credere in Deum*. According to St. Thomas, this “threefold relationship to God” involves both the intellect and the will and constitutes a single act, rather than three.¹⁶¹ *Credere Deum* and *credere Deo* specifically pertain to the intellect’s assent to the truths of faith. The former concerns the content to which the intellect assents, while the latter concerns the means by which,

¹⁵⁹ *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, arg. 3.

¹⁶⁰ *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3.

¹⁶¹ Preller, 228.

or motivation for which the intellect assents. Regarding the former, Preller states, “The matter or content of faith is either God himself or other things as ordered to him. Nothing is proposed for belief except insofar as it pertains to God.”¹⁶² *Credere Deum*, then, pertains to the material object (*materiale obiectum*) of the intellect in the single act of faith, the “what” to which our intentional act of assent is directed. Preller notes that the material object of faith is the only aspect of the act of faith that could in principle be attributed to a pre-Christian pagan philosopher. He suggests, “It should be noted that *credere deum* translates almost exactly as ‘believe that God exists.’ Aquinas does not even consider the notion that a pagan might believe in God in either of the *other* senses.”¹⁶³

As noted, the second intellectual aspect of the single act of faith—*credere Deo*—pertains to the means by which, or motivation for which the intellect assents to the truths and reality to which the propositions of faith point. Preller observes, “Formally speaking...they [i.e., the content of faith] possess another and more profound character: they have been revealed by God.”¹⁶⁴ God, the First Truth, in whom no falsehood exists, is the trustworthy guarantor of the truth of the material contents to which the intellect assents in the internal act of faith. In the act of faith, the believer believes the God who

¹⁶² Ibid., 228. Preller continues, “In giving assent to the propositions of Sacred Doctrine, the intellect of the believer is related to God (or acknowledges him) by the very nature of the matter to which it assents. By the mere fact of assent, therefore, the believer may be said to ‘believe in God’ (*credere deum*)” (228).

¹⁶³ Ibid., 229, original emphasis. On this account, then, it might be possible to say that the pre-Christian pagan philosopher assented to the truth of the material content of faith, for example, the proposition “God exists.” As we have seen, however, according to Preller, referential opacity complicates, if not vitiates, the possibility of pre-Christian pagan philosophical knowledge of the material object of faith.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. Further, Preller states, “In giving assent to Sacred Doctrine, the believer submits to the teaching authority of God himself. He adheres to God precisely as the *veritas prima*—the first truth—the highest and most authoritative object of the intellect. He may thus be said to ‘believe God’ (*credere deo*)” (229).

reveals, and because of doing so believes in what is revealed. Therefore, only believers are capable of believing God (*credere Deo*).¹⁶⁵

Already, then, according to Preller, the pre-Christian pagan philosopher falls short of what it means to perform the act of faith. He states, “Aquinas does not consider the charge that *credere deum* ought to not be included in a formal definition of *faith*. His answer is that the pagan *cannot* be said to believe that *God* exists, since he does not even believe that God exists ‘under the conditions that faith determines,’”¹⁶⁶ which is to say considered formally as “revealed by God.” By assenting to the truth of the proposition “God exists” because of something other than the authority of the First Truth who reveals, the pre-Christian pagan philosophers fail to satisfy the conditions for the act of faith, namely, the threefold relationship of the believer to God in intellect and will. Having failed to satisfy the conditions for the act of faith, the pre-Christian pagan philosopher who is said to believe that God exists simply does not, lacking the faith of the believer.

It should not surprise us, then, that Preller also notes that the pre-Christian pagan philosopher also lacks the grace that affects the human will such that the believer is said to believe unto or into God (*credere in Deum*). Preller states, “The will is also related to God in the act of faith in that the intellect is moved by the will to give its assent....The will adheres to God as *summum bonum*. According to the volitional aspect of the act of

¹⁶⁵ Only those with faith believe the contents of faith on the authority of God. On the other hand, having demonstrated the existence of God or a first principle of finite being, pre-Christian pagan philosophers, believe that, as the conclusion of a philosophical argument, God exists in the light of natural reason, as the conclusion of a philosophical argument. In this case, the *formalis ratio obiecti* is not the supernatural God who is First Truth, but rational argumentation by the light of natural reason. Therefore, the pre-Christian pagan philosopher cannot be said to *credere Deo*, even in principle. It is not on the authority of God that they believe that God exists.

¹⁶⁶ Preller, 229, original emphasis.

faith, a man is said to ‘believe in (or be motivated by) God.’”¹⁶⁷ By grace, God frees the will and properly orders us to our beatitude in God. In faith, our intellects are moved by the graces of special revelation and *fides ex auditu* (enabled by *fides infusa*) to assent to the truths of God because they are revealed by God and because God is our proper supernatural end and ultimate good. Without grace, the will of the pre-Christian pagan philosopher is not healed and freed to be ordered toward supernatural beatitude. Without the graces of special revelation and faith, the intellect of the pre-Christian pagan philosopher is moved to assent to the truths of God neither because they are revealed by God nor because God is his or her proper supernatural end and ultimate good. Therefore, the volitional aspect of the act of faith (*credere in Deum*) is not present, and none of the conditions of the threefold act of faith is met.

Insofar as the pre-Christian pagan philosopher does not perform the act of faith, and, insofar as only the act of faith conforms the mind to God, the pre-Christian pagan philosopher cannot be said to have attained to the conformity of the mind to God. Preller notes, “Thus, in that form of ‘belief’ produced by natural theology (and present in the pagans), the mind is not conformed to God and the will is not motivated by God—the ‘beliefs’ of natural theology do not terminate in God, but in the world. God is not the formal object of the ‘proofs for the existence of God’ in natural theology.”¹⁶⁸ He continues, “[U]nlike natural theology, faith *does* terminate in God, and in the *whole* of God.”¹⁶⁹ The *scientia divina* or natural theology of the pre-Christian pagan philosophers, then, does not and cannot even in principle terminate in God; conformity of the mind to *scientia dei* is not for them possible.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 230.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 230, original emphasis.

For Preller, the proposition “God exists,” and the assent to its truth, means something “radically different” for Christians than they do for non-Christians.¹⁷⁰ Because the conditions for the act of Christian faith do not obtain in the pre-Christian pagan philosophers, they must be counted among those unbelievers who, according to *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3, do not truly believe that God exists. Although the pagan might be said to have attained to the material object of faith, namely, God’s existence,¹⁷¹ because they do not believe by virtue of the authority of God as the First Truth nor by the command of the will informed by charity, the pagan does not truly believe “God exists.” In fact, by virtue of the Aristotelian axiom, because of this deficiency with respect to belief in the metaphysically simple God, the pagan is entirely ignorant of God.

IX. Concluding Remarks

According to Victor Preller, the *quinque viae* fail, and St. Thomas intended them to fail. Because proofs for the existence of God, like the five ways, pertain the language of philosophy, our natural language with its syntactical rules and axioms, God is neither the subject nor the conclusion of such demonstrations. Our only access to the language of God (*scientia dei*) is through faith. *Scientia divina* is insufficient to justifiably conclude to the existence of God. In faith, however, God intends in us a successful and significant reference to him, allowing us to affirm “God exists.” Through infused faith, the language

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 226; see also Kerr, *After Aquinas*, 67, cited at n. 7, above.

¹⁷¹ See Long, *Speaking of God*, 139. As far as I can tell, Aquinas does not hold the philosopher, who has demonstratively proven the existence of God, “believes” in the relevant sense. I do not think that the philosophers who know God exists through demonstration attain to the first aspect of the act of faith, namely, the material object. They do not “believe” that God exists (*credere Deum*); rather, insofar as they have demonstrated the truth of the proposition “God exists,” they “know” that God exists (*scire Deum*), at least in a qualified sense by *quia*-demonstration. A fuller treatment of this matter does not have a place in the present inquiry.

of philosophy is made capable of doing what it could not do otherwise. Moreover, only by virtue of “real” faith informed by charity can our intentions be such to successfully refer to God.

As such, only believers can believe “God exists.” This denial of non-Christian knowledge of the existence of God is seemingly confirmed in *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3. There St. Thomas denies that unbelievers believe “God exists” under the conditions determined by faith. One who lacks faith, then, cannot believe. Unbelievers have a defect in cognition of God, but to have a defect in cognition, per the Aristotelian axiom, is to betray complete ignorance of him.

CHAPTER TWO

Belief: Christian Faith and the Conditions It Determines

In the introduction, we quoted various passages from St. Thomas in which he appears to affirm the possibility, and in some instances, actuality, of pre-Christian pagan philosophical knowledge of the existence of God. These texts were drawn from diverse works and from different periods of his career. Preller draws our attention, however, to another passage, one that seemed to contradict the others. This particular passage appeared to deny any possibility of pre-Christian pagan philosophical knowledge of the existence of the one true God. Here, again, is the passage from *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3:

Unbelievers cannot be said *to believe in a God* as we understand it in relation to the act of faith. For they do not believe that God exists under the conditions that faith determines; hence they do not truly believe in a God, since as the Philosopher observes (*Metaph.* ix, text. 22) *to know simple things defectively is not to know them at all.*¹

This passage is for Preller and others the smoking gun for a reformulation of St. Thomas, because it provides the reader with what appears to be textual evidence for Preller's claim that St. Thomas denied the possibility of pre-Christian pagan philosophical knowledge of the existence of God. In this reply to an objection, St. Thomas clearly denies that unbelievers (*infideles*) truly believe that God exists. He clearly indicates that the unbeliever suffers from a defective cognition (*defectus cognitionis*) of the relevant object. As the operative Aristotelian axiom implies, with respect to metaphysically simple things, such as God, any defect in cognition is an indication of total (*totaliter*) ignorance of that simple thing. Consequently, the unbeliever's defective cognition with respect to

¹ *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3.

the existence of the simple God is such that the unbeliever cannot be said to believe in God at all.²

Given the significance of *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3 for Preller's interpretation of St. Thomas regarding the possibility of pre-Christian pagan philosophical knowledge of the existence of God, it is crucial that he has interpreted St. Thomas rightly here. But has Preller done so here? Has he provided sufficient grounds for maintaining an interpretation that denies such a possibility? Has Preller properly identified the *infideles*? Has he rightly identified the "conditions that faith determines"? Has he rightly understood the *defectus cognitionis*? And consequently, has he correctly interpreted and utilized the Aristotelian axiom drawn from the *Metaphysics*, especially in the context of a discussion of the act of faith? Ultimately, is Preller's exegetical work on this passage adequate and sufficiently attentive to the context from which it is drawn, or does it seem forced, perhaps for the sake of his "reformulation"? In short, Preller has misinterpreted St. Thomas in *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3, on several points. Preller's interpretation thus gives rise to tensions where there are none. Specifically, his interpretation gives rise to a tension between St. Thomas's affirmations and denials of the possibility (or actuality) of pre-Christian pagan philosophical knowledge of the existence of God when no tension exists. Our analysis will argue that the *infideles* of St. Thomas's denial of belief in God in *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3 are not the *philosophi* of his affirmations elsewhere. If so, then *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3 cannot be utilized to underwrite the denial of the possibility of pre-Christian pagan philosophical knowledge of the existence of God of Jesus Christ. It is important to note that, if for no other reason than to avoid misunderstanding, the objective here is not to respond point by point to the interpretation of Preller. This would require a book much

² For Preller's discussion of this passage, see especially 228-230.

longer than anything presented here. The objective in the following exegesis of St. Thomas is not to go “shot-for-shot,” but to present an alternative account that shows how the problems that Preller perceives are not real, and do not even arise if St. Thomas is interpreted differently.

A first step toward determining whether Preller has properly interpreted *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3 requires us to understand St. Thomas’s use of certain terms. In the end, identifying the *infideles* and isolating the *defectus cognitionis* will help establish for us what Christian faith is for St. Thomas, as well as the conditions that faith determines (*his conditionibus quas fides determinat*). What are these conditions? In what way has faith determined them? In what way might this determination clarify for us who are the *infideles* who cannot be said to believe “God exists”? How might it clarify the defect from which the *infideles* suffers such that they cannot be said to believe? Unfortunately, interpreters are not clear on what St. Thomas intends in these matters. As Fergus Kerr observes, “Frustratingly, he [St. Thomas] does not spell out what the faith-conditions are for the claim that ‘God exists’ to be truly about God.”³ Although interpreters like Preller and others have offered some insights regarding the relevant conditions, a lack of clarity about them remains.⁴

In the present chapter, I shall establish and clarify on textual grounds St. Thomas’s account of Christian faith and the conditions that faith determines in the context of *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3. This discussion and the chapters that follow will enable us to determine whether Preller has interpreted St. Thomas rightly here. Taken together, these discussions will enable us to address whether there really is a tension

³ Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas*, 67.

⁴ See, for example, Preller, 237; Marshall, “Faith and Reason Reconsidered,” 10; D. Stephen Long, *Speaking of God*, 141.

between St. Thomas's affirmations and denials of pre-Christian pagan philosophical knowledge of the existence of God. To this end, the discussion in this chapter will be threefold. (1) I shall begin by examining St. Thomas's account of believing (*credere*) in general, as distinguished from other acts of assent, namely, scientific knowing (*scire*) and opining (*opinari*). (2) I shall provide an exposition of St. Thomas's account of Christian faith. This will cover (a) the necessity of belief and the truths of faith, (b) the threefold act of faith, including, *credere Deum*, *credere Deo*, and *credere in Deum*, (c) the internal and external causes of faith, namely, infused faith (*infusa fides*) and faith that comes from hearing (*fides ex auditu*), (d) the content of faith, namely, the articles of faith, (e) the manner by which faith believes, which is to say, explicitly or implicitly, and (f) the essence of faith vis-à-vis the theological virtue of charity. (3) Based on the analysis offered, I shall articulate St. Thomas's notion of the conditions that faith determines (*his conditionibus quas fides determinat*). Having established and clarified the act of Christian faith and the conditions that faith determines in *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3, we shall be well situated in the Chapter Three to identify the *infideles* and in Chapter Four to characterize the *defectus cognitionis*.

I. Belief according to St. Thomas: *Credere* and Its Alternatives

According to St. Thomas, all acts of the intellect pertain to truth and falsehood. Yet, an act of intellectual assent can occur in different ways. In the act of assent, the intellect is moved by either the object itself or a command of the will. The intellect is moved to assent by the object itself when the object is seen, either directly or indirectly

through demonstration. This is the assent of science (*scientia*). While in modernity scientific knowledge is often reductively identified with the conclusions of the natural or mathematical sciences—to the exclusion of the humanities, including philosophy—in the pre-modern world and for St. Thomas, philosophy, especially, metaphysics, was the pinnacle of natural scientific knowledge. For the medieval philosopher or metaphysician, scientific knowledge named those truths known and that could not be otherwise, for example, the self-evident principles of human reasoning and the conclusions of demonstrations. In his commentary on the *Posterior Analytics*, St. Thomas observes, “[W]hat we know scientifically is necessary, i.e.,...it cannot be otherwise.”⁵ Therefore, he remarks, “Now the assent of science is not subject to free-will, because the scientist is obliged to assent by force of the demonstration.”⁶ In the assent of science the object of knowledge is for the knower an object seen. Insofar as the object of science is seen, the object obliges or forces the intellect to assent. As obliged, the act of assent in science lacks freedom, and by extension, the merit of choice. As St. Thomas notes, “[S]cientific assent is not meritorious.”⁷ In short, because scientific knowledge is of what is seen and cannot be otherwise, the assent of the intellect in science is firm, unerring, and compelled by the object.

⁵ *In Post. Anal.*, Book I, lect. 4. All English translations of *In Post. Anal.* come from, with light modifications, *Commentary on Aristotle's Posterior Analytics*, trans. Richard Berquist (Notre Dame: Dumb Ox Books, 2007). St. Thomas does recognize, in this passage, a distinction between *scientia* in an unqualified sense and *scientia* in a qualified sense. On the one hand, he notes, “[W]e are said to know a thing *in an unqualified sense* when we know it in itself.” On the other hand, he remarks, “[W]e are said to know it *in a certain sense* when we know it through something else in which it exists.” The former results from what is called a *propter quid* demonstration. The latter results from what is called a *quia* demonstration. For a more substantial consideration of the meaning and function of such demonstrations, see the brief discussion of the *quinque viae* in the conclusion.

⁶ *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 9, ad 2. Cf. *ST II-II*, q. 1, a. 5, sc.; *ST II-II*, q. 1, a. 4, resp.

⁷ *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 9, ad 2. The merit of scientific assent is more complicated in the context of faith. For St. Thomas's discussion of merit for those who believe, see *ST II-II*, q. 9.

Now, the intellect might also be moved to assent by a command of the will. Insofar as assent involves choice, that assent is subject to free-will and without irresistible compulsion. In such cases, the intellect “turns voluntarily to one side rather than to the other.”⁸ In those acts of assent in which the intellect is moved by a command of the will, the intellect freely assents to one side of a contradictory, which is to say, the intellect either affirms or denies the truth of some proposition. Moreover, as a voluntary act, the assent of the intellect moved by the will is marked out as a specifically human act. As St. Thomas observes, “[S]ince man especially knows the end of his work, and moves himself, in his acts especially is the voluntary to be found.”⁹ Acts of assent in which the intellect is moved by a command of the will, in which the intellect assents freely to one side of a contradictory, occurs, for St. Thomas, in various ways. Among them, and of special interest for us, he counts opinion (*opinari*) and belief (*credere*).¹⁰

Opinion, for St. Thomas, names an act of assent in which the intellect inclines to an object as true by a command of the will and without compulsion. The opining inclination to assent to one side of a contradictory happens, however, with trepidation that the opposite could be true.¹¹ Although assent is given by the intellect moved by a command of the will, this is not necessarily a firm assent, but weak a one. As St. Thomas

⁸ *ST II-II*, q. 1, a. 4, resp. Cf. *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 1, resp. As such, the act of intellectual assent by a command of the will can be meritorious.

⁹ *ST I-II*, q. 6, a. 1, resp. For a discussion of human acts, especially insofar as they are voluntary, see *ST I-II*, qq. 6-21, esp. qq. 6 and 17. Cf. *De malo*, q. 6. All English translations of *De malo* come from, *On Evil*, trans. Richard Regan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹⁰ In this context, St. Thomas also discusses doubt (*dubitare*) and suspicion (*susplicere*), but they need not detain us here. Like opinion doubt is neither firm nor unerring, but unlike opinion, it does not incline toward either side of two contraries. The doubter has no more inclination to assent to one side than the other, but simply hesitates between the two. Like someone with an opinion, one who suspects tends toward one side of two contraries while lacking firm assent, though with a weaker inclination than in the case of opinion. See *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 1, resp.; *In Hebraeos*, ch. 11, lect. 1, no. 558; *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 1, resp.; *Super Boet. de Trinitate*, q. 3, a. 1, resp.

¹¹ *ST II-II*, q. 1, a. 4, resp. Cf. *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 1, resp.; *Super Boet. de Trinitate*, q. 3, a. 1, resp.; Cf. *In Hebraeos*, ch. 11, lect. 1, no. 558: “[The intellect] opines, if it has a reason for one side, not altogether resting the intellect, but with fear of the other side.”

says, “the inclination [of opinion] does not move the understanding enough to determine it fully to one of the members...it accepts one member, but always has doubts about the other.”¹² Insofar as opinion lacks firm assent, it is unlike the assent of science. Moreover, insofar as the conclusion to which opinion assents is not thought to be necessary, because there is fear and doubt of the other side, opinion lacks the certainty of science as well. Thus, opinion is neither unerring nor firm, it neither sees nor is rationally compelled.¹³ As St. Thomas observes, “[A] man whose mind holds a conclusion without knowing how it is proved, has not scientific knowledge, but merely an opinion about it.”¹⁴ Opinion, then, is assent without proof and without sight.

In contrast, believing (*credere*), for St. Thomas, names an act of assent in which the intellect is moved by a command of the will, but it falls between scientific knowledge and opinion. As such, it shares certain characteristics with each. St. Thomas distinguishes between belief in general, which he calls “common faith” (*fide communiter*), and belief that is the act of Christian faith, which is ordered toward beatitude (*ordinatur ad beatitudinem*). As he notes, “[W]e distinguish the virtue of faith from faith commonly so called, which has no reference to the beatitude we hope for.”¹⁵ We shall see that Christian faith is but an instance, a very special instance, according to St. Thomas, of the broader notion of believing (*credere*). In *De veritate*, he describes belief or faith in general as that “situation [in which] our understanding is determined by the will, which chooses to assent to one side definitely and precisely because of something which is enough to move

¹² *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 1, resp. All English translations of *De veritate* q. 14 come from, with light modifications, *Truth*, 3 volumes, trans. James V. McGlynn (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1995).

¹³ Insofar as one is belief not compelled, but the will merely tends toward some one side of a contrary, the movement is free and, therefore, potentially meritorious.

¹⁴ *ST II-II*, q. 5, a. 3, resp

¹⁵ *ST II-II*, q. 4, a. 1, resp. His discussions of this sort are often in the context of an analysis of whether “faith is the substance of things to be hoped for, the evidence of things that appear not” (Hebrews 11:1) is a suitable definition of faith. See also *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 2, resp.; Cf. *In Hebraeos*, ch. 11, lect. 1, no. 559.

the will, though not enough to move the understanding, namely, since it seems good or fitting to assent to this side.”¹⁶ He continues, “This [belief] may happen when someone believes what another says because it seems fitting or useful to do so.”¹⁷ In such instances, people assent to the truth because it is good to do so, according to the trustworthiness and authority of the one from whom they have heard.¹⁸ Insofar as belief involves assent to truths beyond the believer’s sight, assent is given on the basis of the testimony of one who has the eyes to see what the believer cannot.

Believing the testimony of an expert is both good and reasonable. In fact, it can, in certain instances, provide more certainty than one’s own knowledge. St. Thomas notes, “[O]ther things being equal, vision is more certain than hearing. But if the person from whom someone hears greatly surpasses the seer’s sight hearing is more certain than sight.”¹⁹ In those areas where one’s sight is impaired, one is better off believing the testimony of one whose sight is not impaired than simply trusting in what one sees alone. This general sense of belief is not unfamiliar to anyone. St. Thomas commonly emphasizes the role of belief in the context of teaching and learning, in which we all participate. In his commentary on Hebrews, for instance, he observes, “We...see this in the liberal sciences, which, if a person wishes to learn them, he must first accept their principles, which he must believe (*credere*) when they are delivered to him by the

¹⁶ *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 1, resp. One must always keep in mind, when discussing the role of the will in faith or justification in *De veritate*, that St. Thomas’s views on the role of grace in the movement of the will develops in his later career. On the essential descriptive points at issue here, *De veritate* remains helpful for understanding St. Thomas’s account of faith. On this development, see Reinhard Hütter’s “‘Thomas the Augustinian’—Recovering a Surpassing Synthesis of Grace and Free Will,” in *Dust Bound for Heaven: Explorations in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2012), 249-282; Henri Bouillard, *Conversion et grâce chez s. Thomas d’Aquin: Étude historique* (Paris: Aubier, 1944), esp. 91-134; Bernard Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005).

¹⁷ *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 1, resp.

¹⁸ As Pieper describes, “[T]he mind, insofar as it believes, is operating not on its own but on alien soil” (Josef Pieper, *Faith-Hope-Love* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), 52).

¹⁹ *ST II-II*, q. 4, a. 8, ad 2.

teacher.”²⁰ In order to learn, the pupil must assent to truths communicated by the teacher, not because the pupil sees their truth, but because of the authority of the teacher from whom the pupil receives testimony about those truths renders that testimony trustworthy. Insofar as the pupil engages in such belief, he or she is believing (*credere*) in the general sense (*fide communiter*) the testimony of the teacher. According to St. Thomas, we believe a great deal about the world based on the authority or expertise of a trustworthy witness. In fact, because of the limitations of human existence, most of what we count as our knowledge of the world is necessarily of this sort. We do not live a day without believing (*credere*).²¹

Already, the reader should have begun to recognize how belief shares certain characteristics with both science and opinion. On the one hand, like the assent of science, belief involves a firm assent of the intellect to one side of a contradictory. As St. Thomas states, in belief “[the intellect] cleaves firmly to one side, in which belief has something in common with science and understanding.”²² Further, like science and unlike opinion, the assent of belief is given with “certainty and no fear of the other side.”²³ St. Thomas observes, “With science and understanding it [belief] has in common unerring and firm assent.”²⁴

²⁰ *In Hebraeos*, ch. 11, lect. 1, no. 557. Elsewhere, St. Thomas notes, “[E]very science has presuppositions which the learner must believe” (*Super Boet. de Trinitate*, q. 3, a. 1, resp.). Note the relevance of this discussion to St. Thomas’s account of *sacra doctrina* in *ST I*, q. 1. There too, he highlights the necessity of certain fields of study presupposing or believing (*credere*) the principles of its field because they lie outside the bounds of the science itself. Cf. Davies, *Thomas Aquinas’s Summa Theologiae*, 402 n17.

²¹ The necessity of belief for human existence and in particular, the necessity of Christian belief for human existence, will be discussed below. See the section “The Necessity of Faith.”

²² *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 1, resp.

²³ *ST II-II*, q. 1, a. 4, resp.

²⁴ *Super Boet. de Trinitate*, q. 3, a. 1, resp. As John Jenkins points out, “[The truths of faith] are believed with as firm a conviction as if one had *scientia* of them” (Jenkins, *Knowledge and Faith in Thomas Aquinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 162).

On the other hand, unlike the object of science, but like opinion, the object of belief remains unseen. Therefore, unlike science, belief is an act of assent in which the intellect is moved by a command of the will and not by the object itself. St. Thomas notes, “With opinion it [belief] shares the fact that it has to do with matters that are not clear to the mind, in which respect it differs from science and understanding.”²⁵ Further, St. Thomas goes to great lengths to highlight that science and belief cannot be present in the same person, at the same time, and in the same respect. He observes, “[T]here can be no faith about things which are an object of science.”²⁶ The object of belief, although it is firmly assented to, is unseen, as the believer “does not know it by demonstration.”²⁷ Believing in the general sense is the more or less firm and more or less certain assent of the intellect by a command of the will to an object that remains unseen, an assent based on a more or less authoritative and trustworthy witness.²⁸

There are, then, diverse acts of assent of the intellect, among them science, opinion, and belief. Science names that act of intellectual assent that is firm and unerring, moved by the object itself as seen or demonstrated. Opinion names that act of assent that is neither firm nor unerring and is moved by the will not by the intellect’s grasp of the object. One who opines is one whose act of assent is a certain inclination toward one side of a contradictory proposition, but with fear that the opposite side could in fact be true. Belief names that act of assent in which the intellect is moved by a command of the will to one side of a contradictory on the testimony of a trustworthy authority. Like science,

²⁵ *Super Boet. de Trinitate*, q. 3, a. 1, resp. Cf. *ST II-II*, q. 1, a. 5, sc. As Pieper maintains, “We believe, not because we see, perceive, deduce something true, but because we desire something good” (Pieper, *Faith-Hope-Love*, 37).

²⁶ *ST II-II*, q. 1, a. 5, sc. Cf. *ST II-II*, q. 1, a. 4, ad 2.

²⁷ *ST II-II*, q. 1, a. 5, resp.

²⁸ Pieper notes, “If we pursue this consistently, it follows that belief itself is not yet ‘purely’ achieved when someone accepts as truth the statement of one whom he trusts, but only when he accepts if *for the simple reason* that the trusted person states it” (Pieper, *Faith-Hope-Love*, 31, original emphasis).

but unlike opinion, the assent of belief is firmer and more certain than opinion. Like opinion, but unlike science, the objects of belief remain unseen to the intellect and assent to them comes from the movement of the will.

II. Christian Faith: Belief that is Ordered to Beatitude

According to St. Thomas, Christian faith (*fides*) is a specific instance, enabled by grace, of the more general act of assent that is to believe (*credere*). In his various treatments of Christian faith, St. Thomas goes to great lengths to distinguish *credere* from other acts of assent. St. Thomas draws special attention to the similarities and dissimilarities between *credere* and other acts of assent, and precisely in order to show that *credere* is not the same as the others. The distinctions among *credere*, *opinari*, and *scire* in the *Secunda Secundae* are not an isolated instance. St. Thomas makes the same distinctions in his *De veritate*, *Super Boethium de Trinitate*, and *In Hebraeos*. His discussion of the distinctions is frequent, and it nearly always occurs in the context of his various accounts of Christian faith. In order to see why this distinction is so important to St. Thomas, let us now turn to a more detailed analysis of the specific act of Christian *credere*.

As a specific instance of the broader notion of believing in general, Christian faith is an act of intellectual assent moved by a command of the will on the basis of the testimony of a trustworthy authority of God. As St. Thomas maintains, “[T]his choice [of faith] rests on God’s authority.”²⁹ The believers (*fideles*), then, believe or have faith in

²⁹ *In Hebraeos*, ch. 11, lect. 1, no. 558. Here, St. Thomas also observes, in faith, “on God’s authority the intellect is convinced about things it does not see.” As John Jenkins notes, “Propositions believed as part of

truths of faith because it is reasonable and good to believe what is revealed by God, who is the First Truth and who is neither deceived nor deceives. Belief in the Christian sense, then, involves an assent of the intellect moved by a command of the will, based on the authority of God as revealer.

Because divine authority is of a unique sort, the assent of the intellect in faith, which is based on that authority, is also of a unique sort.³⁰ Of course, as an instance of belief in general, Christian faith, shares certain qualities in common with both science and opinion. As St. Thomas remarks, “Faith [like belief in general] is a mean between science and opinion.”³¹ Like science, but unlike opinion, Christian faith is certain and unerring. Like opinion, but unlike science, Christian faith lacks the compulsion of demonstration or the advantage of sight.³² But unlike belief in general (*fides communiter*), Christian faith does not admit of degree. While *credere* in the general sense is more or less firm and more or less certain on the basis of a more or less authoritative and trustworthy witness, Christian faith is the act of intellectual assent moved by a command of the will based on the testimony of God himself, whose unimpeachable authority and trustworthiness makes the assent of Christian faith most firm and most certain.

faith are believed on the basis of divine authority” (*Knowledge and Faith in Thomas Aquinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 162). Cf. Further, he notes, “[The truths of Christianity are] delivered to them [believers] by way of faith, being told to them, as it were by God himself who cannot lie” (*ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 4, co.). As Pieper notes, “[T]he certainty of the believer cannot possibly stretch farther than the insight and reliability of the witness on whom he depends” (Pieper, *Faith-Hope-Love*, 54). For St. Thomas, the fact that God cannot lie places the reliability of God beyond reproach. See also, *ST II-II*, q. 6, a. 1, co.; *Super Sent.* III, d. 24, q. 1, a. 1.

³⁰ As Roger Aubert observes, “The specific and determining element in faith is the divine testimony” (Roger Aubert, *Le problème de l’acte de foi* (Louvain: Warny, 1958), 49).

³¹ *ST II-II*, q. 1, a. 2, sc.

³² Aubert notes, “[T]he truth of the propositions for belief do not impose themselves on the [believer]” (Aubert, *Le problème de l’acte de foi*, 49).

In this section, I shall briefly unpack this more specific notion of belief that is Christian faith. The discussion will be sixfold. (a) I shall briefly discuss St. Thomas's account of the necessity of faith in comparison with natural human reason and belief in the general sense. (b) I shall consider St. Thomas's distinction between the formal and material objects of the act of faith, especially insofar as they bear on the distinction between the three aspects of the act of faith, namely, *credere Deum*, *credere Deo*, and *credere in Deum*. (c) I shall briefly unpack St. Thomas's account of faith as internally and externally caused by *infusa fides* and *fides ex auditu*, respectively. (d) I shall consider the articles of faith as what faith believes, as well as certain of their presuppositions or preambles. (e) I shall discuss the implicit and explicit faith as it is required of the faithful. And lastly, (f) I shall discuss St. Thomas's essential notion of faith, especially as it relates to the presence or absence of the theological virtue of charity. Such considerations will place us in good stead to establish more explicitly, in the concluding section, St. Thomas's understanding of the act of Christian faith and the conditions that faith determines.

A. *The Necessity of Faith: What St. Thomas Does (Not) Say*

In his *Super Boethium de Trinitate*, St. Thomas maintains, “[B]ecause in human society one person must make use of another just as he does himself in matters in which he is not self-sufficient, he must take his stand on what another knows and is unknown to himself, just as he does on what he himself knows. As a consequence, faith is necessary in human society, one person believing what another says.”³³ Human existence is such

³³ *Super Boet. de Trinitate*, q. 3, a. 1, resp. Josef Pieper notes, “A community in which men did not dare talk to one another with impunity or to meet each other in ordinary situations with trust and belief would be

that a life devoid of belief in this sense is impossible.³⁴ We assent to truths by a command of the will because we are often not in a position to have knowledge or expertise in those areas of human existence. Without believing each other in this sense, people cannot live in society together. We must trust others to provide knowledge of those things about which we do not or cannot have any.³⁵ Children believe parents; students believe teachers; scientists believe other scientists; hearers believe preachers, and consequently, they believe the God who reveals. There are very few areas of human existence in which belief of someone else about what one does not personally see does not factor.

It should be no surprise, then, that belief would constitute a necessary aspect of communal religious life.³⁶ There are different reasons for this necessity. First, St. Thomas notes that, apart from grace, and insofar as religion pertains to knowledge about God, not all people are equally competent.³⁷ Apart from Christian faith, only a learned few have the opportunity to have knowledge of God.³⁸ Not everyone has the acumen nor even the time needed to study in order to attain such knowledge. Most individuals are distracted with everyday occupations involved in the various exigencies of human existence, and understandably so. Into this situation, God chose to introduce himself, to reveal himself,

something inhuman. In such a community, men would be robbed of the uniquely human possibility of one man's participating, by listening, in another's possession of reality" (Pieper, *Faith-Hope-Love*, 82).

³⁴ As Brian Davies observes, "[W]hat Aquinas means by faith, considered simply as belief that we cannot demonstrate to be true, is something we all have and think ourselves reasonable in having" (Brian Davies, *Thomas Aquinas: A Very Brief History* (London: SPCK, 2017), 101). Davies also remarks, "[A]ll of us find it perfectly reasonable to believe certain things even though we are in no position to prove that what we believe is true...And much that we take to be knowledge rests on belief or faith that we have because people told us that this, that or the other is the case" (pp. 101-102).

³⁵ See also *In Hebraeos*, ch. 11, lect. 1, no. 557.

³⁶ For St. Thomas's other discussions of the necessity of faith, see *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 10; *Super Sent.* III, d. 24, q. 1, a. 3.

³⁷ The reader should note that the claim here is rather minimal. I do not maintain that we know a great deal about God, nor do I think that knowledge of God, at least of a natural sort, is salvific.

³⁸ See *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 10, resp.

providing us with truths about God accessible by faith.³⁹ Christian faith makes the truths of God available to more people than those truths otherwise would be. St. Thomas concludes, “[I]t is evident that the provision of the way of faith, which gives all easy access to salvation at any time, is beneficial to man.”⁴⁰

A second and related difficulty concerns the length of time it takes for one to be in a position even in principle to attain to knowledge of God. Even if one sets aside the issues of “temporal needs” or the “number of occupations,” knowledge of God depends upon and results from one’s knowledge of other sciences. St. Thomas observes, “[There are] many preliminary items of knowledge that are needed to reach a knowledge of God by human reasoning. Indeed, a knowledge of almost all the sciences is required for this, since the purpose of all of them is the knowledge of God. And yet, very few persons reach these preliminaries.”⁴¹ Very few people have the opportunity to devote enough time to the kinds of study necessary for potentially arriving at knowledge of God. Of those who might be capable and inclined to learn those things that might lead to knowledge of God, St. Thomas states, “[E]ven these could do it only after a long time.”⁴² Study takes time. Study sufficient to attain knowledge of God takes an enormous amount of time. Because most people could live their whole lives before they could attain to truths about him, God has provided knowledge of himself in revelation that can be accepted in faith.⁴³

³⁹ *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 4, resp.: “[I]t is necessary to people to receive through the mode of faith not only those things that are beyond reason, but even those that can be known through reason, and this for three reasons...Second, in order that the knowledge of God may be more general. For many are unable to make progress in the study of science, either through dullness of mind, or through having a number of occupations, and temporal needs, or even through laziness in learning, all of whom would be altogether deprived of the knowledge of God, unless Divine things were brought to their knowledge under the guise of faith.” See also, *Super Boet. de Trinitate*, q. 3, a. 1, resp.; *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 10, resp.

⁴⁰ *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 10, resp.

⁴¹ *Super Boet. de Trinitate*, q. 3, a. 1, resp.

⁴² *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 10, resp. Cf. *CT I*, ch. 36.

⁴³ *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 4, resp.

In this way, knowledge of God would not be reserved for a few at the end of a long process of investigation, but it would be made available to many through faith.

The third difficulty regarding knowledge of God concerns the reality of error. Given the excellence of its object, all investigation into the divine by natural means alone is prone to error. Therefore, natural human reasoning about God can and will often lead to errors of various kinds. St. Thomas observes, “[H]uman 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.”⁴⁴ In order to avoid erroneous accounts of the divine, who better to rely upon than God himself? Through faith, God chose to make himself known, such that the believer might not fall into error.

The fourth difficulty overcome by faith concerns certainty. Knowing we can err in the conclusions of natural human rational investigation, absolute certainty is difficult. In order that we might be fully certain with respect to divine things, God chose to offer knowledge of divine things to be received in faith. St. Thomas states, “[I]n 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.”⁴⁵ On the side of its cause, namely, God, the knowledge of faith is more certain than natural wisdom, natural knowledge, and natural understanding about God. Therefore, in faith the believer can have greater certitude objectively regarding

⁴⁴ *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 4, resp.

⁴⁵ *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 4, resp. St. Thomas also reasons, “[A] man of little science is more certain about what he hears on the authority of an expert in science, than about what is apparent to him according to his own reason: and much more is a man certain about what he hears from God, Who cannot be deceived, than about what he sees with his own reason, which can be mistaken” (*ST II-II*, q. 4, a. 8, ad 2).

divine things, and those things that pertain to our supernatural beatitude than he or she could otherwise have.⁴⁶

The fifth and most significant difficulty overcome by faith concerns the ultimate purpose of human existence just noted. Human beings are ordered to beatitude in union with God. This end is beyond the capacities of natural human capacities to know and to will. Our end is, as such, supernatural. Therefore, St. Thomas concludes, “[N]atural knowledge does not suffice for [human] perfection, and some supernatural knowledge is necessary.”⁴⁷ Not only does faith overcome the limitations of human nature and human existence, but it provides the supernatural truths about which we could not otherwise have cognition and by which we could not otherwise be ordered to God as our beatifying end.

Natural capacities are not, for St. Thomas, sufficient means of attaining the supernatural end to which humanity has been called, nor are they sufficient for knowledge of that end. The means or way (*via*) of attaining this supernatural end is a supernatural gift from God. As Stephen F. Brown notes, “One only could know of it [our supernatural end] if the unlimited First Truth, who is not only the end or goal of one’s life but also the ground, reached down and told about it in a way that limited minds could

⁴⁶ For those who are familiar with the *Summa theologiae*, this discussion of the necessity of faith should sound very familiar. In the first article of the first question of the Prima Pars, St. Thomas offers nearly identical reasons for the necessity of *sacra doctrina* vis-à-vis the other sciences. As in the treatise on faith, St. Thomas notes there that God chose to reveal himself in order that many people (and not few), quickly (and not after a long time), and without error (and not with error) might know the God to whom all are called as to the beatifying goal of all human existence. We shall have more to say about this discussion of the necessity of *sacra doctrina* and faith as prelude to a discussion of the *quinque viae* in Chapter Five.

⁴⁷ *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 3, ad 1. Elsewhere, he notes, “There are...some aspects of the divinity that human reason is utterly incapable of knowing fully; we await their clear knowledge in the life to come, where our happiness will be complete. An example is the unity and trinity of the one God. We shall be advanced to this knowledge not by anything due to our nature but only by divine grace” (*Super Boet. de Trinitate*, q. 3, a. 1, resp. See also, *ST* II-II, q. 6, a. 1, resp.; *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 10, resp.). Cf. Cessario, *Christian Faith and the Theological Life* Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 58.

grasp to some degree.”⁴⁸ This special condescension of God occurs in his self-revelation to Israel, which revelation culminates in Jesus Christ. This is why St. Thomas can call Christ “our way unto God (*via...in Deum*).”⁴⁹ Christ and God’s self-revelation in Christ are the means by which we might know God in such a way as to attain our beatitude. Christ thus offers the way unto God (*in Deum*). Christ is the way by which our lives might tend salvifically toward God and, as we shall see below, do so in the perfective love of charity.

This is not the same claim as the claim that Christ is our only *via* by which or within which we might attain God in anyway whatsoever. There is no such connotation in this text of St. Thomas.⁵⁰ In fact, the very question in which St. Thomas calls Christ the way unto God, is the same question in which he affirms that the existence of God is demonstrable by natural reason.⁵¹ Christ is the *via*, but the *via* to a particular end, namely, supernatural beatitude. Through faith in Christ, we are healed and elevated by grace such that we can now live in charity, which is to live unto God (*in Deum*). That we might

⁴⁸ Stephen F. Brown, “The Theological Virtue of Faith,” in *The Ethics of Aquinas*, ed. Stephen J. Pope (Washington D. C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 224.

⁴⁹ *ST I*, q. 2, prol. Cf. *In Ioan.*, ch. 5, lect. 5, no. 936.

⁵⁰ For an opposing interpretation to the one articulated here, see D. Stephen Long, “The Way of Aquinas,” in *Studies in Christian Ethics*, vol. 19, no. 3 (Dec. 2006), 339-357.

⁵¹ Some scholars, like Preller, would maintain that St. Thomas is not serious about proving by demonstration the existence of God in the *quinque viae*. They will note that medieval Christians were not concerned with convincing atheists of the existence of God. This seems true. But it also misses the very obvious textual point. The *quinque viae* are explicitly intended to answer the question whether God exists (*an sit*). St. Thomas very easily could have skipped to the question of what God is (*quid sit*), or more precisely, who God is. A great deal needs to be said, but for now I simply affirm Bauerschmidt’s observation: “While the knowledge thus produced [by the five ways] is spare, it is genuine. Thomas clearly considers his demonstrations of God’s existence to be formally valid proofs, by which I mean arguments that move from true premises to a true conclusion by means of a proper inference. We may not judge them to be so, but we must strain mightily against the text in order to maintain that Thomas did not so consider them” (Bauerschmidt, *Thomas Aquinas*, 94). Further, regarding Preller, Bauerschmidt remarks, “While I am sympathetic to aspects of Preller’s approach, I think it is misleading to say, ‘the proofs as they stand in the *Summa theologiae* are logically incompatible with Aquinas’s own teaching on the nature of God and our ‘cognitions’ of him’....This implies not simply that the five ways have been misread by interpreters, but that they are being presented by Thomas as arguments in need of deconstruction (thus Preller habitually refers to Thomas as ‘quoting’ the *viae*, not ‘arguing’ them)” (Bauerschmidt, *Thomas Aquinas*, 94).

know that God exists by natural reason is a distinct issue. This, then, is the most significant reason for the necessity of special revelation and faith, namely that we might assent to and be ordered by supernatural truths revealed in Christ for the sake of salvation.

According to St. Thomas, God's self-revelation in Christ is not offered to provide an otherwise unavailable knowledge of the existence of God. Rather, he clearly states that knowledge of God is possible for natural human reason.⁵² It is attainable, however, for only a few, after a long time, with some uncertainty, and often with error. Concerning the latter, St. Thomas gives no obvious indication that natural human reason will always commit error concerning God. Some interpreters, Preller included, suggest that St. Thomas thinks error with respect to God is "inevitable."⁵³ This notion is not present in his Latin, nor is it obviously implied by it. Of course, natural human reason (apart from grace and faith) has in fact led to multiple errors with respect to God, but this is a very different claim than saying human reason (apart from grace and faith) in principle or "inevitably" leads to error with respect to God. St. Thomas does not make the latter claim. In fact, in his *Compendium theologiae*, St. Thomas explicitly states that "some of them [philosophers] erred about" God, which is very different from saying *all* of them erred about God.⁵⁴

The assertion of inevitability with respect to natural reason's errors about God is similar to the claim that individual human beings cannot in principle ever do the good

⁵² See the list of affirmative statements in the introduction to this work.

⁵³ See Preller, 23. Similarly, D. Stephen Long states, "[W]hat reason alone presents of God will easily mislead because it is always 'mixed with many errors'" (Long, *The Perfectly Simple Triune God: Aquinas and His Legacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 9). See also, Marshall, "Thomas, Thomisms, and Truth," 501-502.

⁵⁴ *CTI*, ch. 36. Note that "some" is logically equivalent to "not all."

apart from grace. St. Thomas explicitly denies such a claim. Natural human capacities (apart from grace) cannot do the good in every instance, having been affected by sin, but this is not to say that natural human capacities (apart from grace) cannot do the good in particular instances. In his treatise on grace in the *Prima Secundae*, St. Thomas maintains, “[B]ecause human nature is not altogether corrupted by sin, so as to be shorn of every natural good, even in the state of corrupted nature, it can, by virtue of its natural endowments, work some particular good, as to build dwellings, plant vineyards, and the like.”⁵⁵ Likewise, St. Thomas’s treatment of faith (and *sacra doctrina*) affirms the natural human capacity to demonstrate the existence of God. St. Thomas states, “[I]t is clear that, if it were necessary to use a strict demonstration as the only way to reach a knowledge of the things which we must know about God, very few could ever construct such a demonstration.”⁵⁶ For this reason, he notes that faith is necessary “in order that the knowledge of God may be more general.”⁵⁷ St. Thomas does not say in these quotations that faith or special revelation is necessary that the knowledge of God may be *possible*.⁵⁸ Rather, he says that faith and special revelation are necessary that the knowledge of God may be *more general*, which is to say, that it may be open to more people than it would

⁵⁵ *ST I-II*, q. 109, a. 2, resp. St. Thomas makes the comparison between speculative and practical knowledge more than once. See *ST I-II*, q. 90, a. 1, ad 2; q. 94, a. 1, co.; q. 94, a. 2, sc and co.; *ST I-II*, q. 93, a. 1, co.; q. 95, a. 2, co.; q. 95, a. 3, co. For a discussion of our knowledge of the natural law or the first principles of speculative reason (apart from grace and faith) as analogous to our knowledge of principles of the arts like building and planting (apart from grace and faith), see my article “*Ars Legis*: Reflections on Aquinas’s ‘Christian’ Articulation of the Natural and Human Law,” in *Lex Naturalis*, vol. 1 (Spring 2015), 75-92.

⁵⁶ *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 10, resp.

⁵⁷ *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 4, resp.

⁵⁸ Elsewhere, St. Thomas even denies that one must be good in order to know God. *ST I*, q. 12, a. 12, ad 3 states, “As the knowledge of God’s essence is by grace, it belongs only to the good; but the knowledge of Him by natural reason can belong to both good and bad; and hence Augustine says (*Retract. I*), retracting what he had said before: *I do not approve what I said in prayer, ‘God who wills that only the pure should know truth.’ For it can be answered that many who are not pure can know many truths*, that is, by natural reason.” This position on the capacities of natural reason of both the good and the bad parallels St. Thomas’s position on the capacity of those with lifeless faith assenting to the truths of faith. See section (f) below.

be if there were no faith or special revelation. He claims here and elsewhere that in a world without faith or special revelation few, not none, would know God.⁵⁹ And certainly, in a world without faith or special revelation, no one would be able to know God so as to live unto God (*in Deum*). Thus, the necessity of the supernatural truths of faith.

B. The Threefold Act of Faith: Credere Deum, Credere Deo, and Credere in Deum

St. Thomas notes that, as an act of *credere*, Christian faith is an act of intellectual assent moved by a command of the will.⁶⁰ In the act of faith, the intellect does not see the truth of that which is proposed to it for belief, directly or indirectly (through demonstration), but the will commands the intellect to assent insofar as it is good for the intellect to do so.⁶¹ A full account of the act of faith, then, will involve a discussion of both the intellect and the will. As St. Thomas observes, “[T]he object of faith can be considered either on the part of the intellect, or on the part of the will that moves the intellect.”⁶² More specifically, St. Thomas maintains that we can consider the object of faith in three ways, two in relation to the intellect and one in relation to the will. He states,

One of these is the material object of faith, and in this way an act of faith is *to believe in God (credere Deum)*... The other is the formal aspect of the object, for it is as the medium on account of which we assent to such and such a point of

⁵⁹ For a discussion of his commentary on John, ch. 17, lect. 4, in which he makes the same sort of claim, see Chapter Four.

⁶⁰ See *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, resp.; *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 1, ad 3; *In Hebraeos*, ch. 11, lect. 1, no. 553.

⁶¹ This is not to say that one does not in faith see the credibility of some proposed truth. They do see this, either habitually in faith or through certain signs of credibility like miracles. Faith, of course, is more than a mere assent to what is credible, however. That would be mere natural faith, in which one assents to the truths of faith because of miracles as opposed to assenting on the authority and trustworthy testimony of the God who reveals. For a discussion of natural faith, see Pierre Rousselot, “Remarks on the History of the Notion of Natural Faith,” in *Essays on Love and Knowledge* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2008), 183-224.

⁶² *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, resp.

faith; and thus an act of faith is *to believe God (credere Deo)*, since...the formal object of faith is the First Truth, to Which man gives his adhesion, so as to assent for Its sake to whatever he believes. Thirdly, if the object of faith be considered in so far as the intellect is moved by the will, an act of faith is *to believe unto God (credere in Deum)*. For the First Truth is referred to the will, through having the aspect of an end.⁶³

In the act of faith, the material object of faith is the matter or content proposed for belief, such as “God exists,” “God became incarnate,” and the like.⁶⁴ Avery Dulles simplifies: “The content or material of faith is what God says.”⁶⁵ The formal object of faith, which is “medium on account of which” one assents to the material object of faith is God as Revealer. The formal object is God alone, under the aspect of First Truth. In the Christian act of faith, the material object of faith is believed because of the trustworthy authority of the formal object, the One who is revealing, in this case, the God who cannot lie.⁶⁶

⁶³ *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, resp. For similar discussions of these distinctions among *credere Deum*, *credere Deo*, and *credere in Deum*, see *In Ioan.*, ch. 6, lect. 3, no. 901; *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 7, ad 7; *In Rom.*, ch. 4, lect. 1, no. 327; *Super Sent.* III, d. 23, q. 2, a. 2, qc 2, resp. Assent might occur based on other circumstances. As Josef Pieper observes, “[S]omeone may accept the doctrines of Christianity as truth, *not* because they are witnessed and warranted by the revealing Logos of God, but because he is impressed by their ‘coherence,’ because the boldness and depth of the conception fascinate him, because those doctrines fit in with his own speculations on the mystery of the universe” (Pieper, 30-31). As we shall see in the next chapter, such assent is assent otherwise than by faith.

⁶⁴ See *ST II-II*, q. 1, a. 1, resp.: “If...we consider materially the things to which faith assents, they include not only God, but also many other things, which, nevertheless, do not come under the assent of faith, except as bearing some relation to God, in as much as, to wit, through certain effects of the divine operation, man is helped on his journey towards the enjoyment of God.” See section (d) below for more thorough discussion of the specific content of faith.

⁶⁵ Avery Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For: A Theology of Christian Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 35. See also Romanus Cessario, *Christian Faith and the Theological Life*, 53: “A material object designates the term of an action; it signifies the specifying reality, the thing, from the point of view of its givenness or facticity.”

⁶⁶ T.C. O’Brien helpfully describes the formal object as “the special value or interest or aspect in the object that is the reason or formal source of the act’s engagement with it” (O’Brien, “Appendix 1,” in *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 31: *Faith 2a2ae. 1-7*, trans. T. C. O’Brien (London: Blackfriars, 1974), 178). Elsewhere, O’Brien notes, “The ‘first truth’ is the true God, the faithful God; faith accepts the one who speaks in order to accept what he speaks. From its formal objective faith is a personal contact with God himself. This personal contact is complete when the assent of faith to the one who reveals is conjoined to the surrender of love and commitment that charity brings about” (O’Brien, “Appendix 2,” in *Summa Theologiae*, vol. 31: *Faith 2a2ae. 1-7*, trans. T. C. O’Brien (London: Blackfriars, 1974), 192). Cessario notes, “[I]n a strict sense, nothing created pertains to the formal object of theological faith” (Cessario, *Christian Faith and the Theological Life*, 61). Cf. *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 7, ad 7; *In Rom.*, ch. 4, lect. 1, no. 327. All English translations of *In Rom.* come from, with light modifications, *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans*, trans. F. R. Larcher (Lander: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012).

Elsewhere, St. Thomas notes, “[T]his choice [of faith] rests on God’s authority, and by it the intellect is fixed, so that it clings firmly to the things of faith and assents to them with the greatest of certainty.”⁶⁷

Interpreters like Preller argue that the truths to which the believer assents in faith are unintelligible. Indeed, he maintains, “Strictly speaking, to assent to the propositions of faith is not to assent to a set of intelligible truths, but to assent to the authority of the One who utters them.”⁶⁸ That this is what St. Thomas means by faith is debatable. There seems to be an obvious difference between (a) understanding a proposition whose truth is not something seen but taken on the authority of a trustworthy source and (b) not even knowing what a proposition is (nor understanding it) and as such having to trust both that the unknown proposition is intelligible and that it is true, or even that it is a proposition at all. The latter case (Preller’s) does not square with St. Thomas. There are certainly instances in which one believes a friend regarding those things about which one personally has little or no knowledge. That this constitutes an instance in which the believer believes a proposition that is wholly unintelligible seems false. And yet, again, Preller offers the following analogy of Christian faith:

If I believe that my friend has just uttered a proposition, the terms of which I did not hear, and if I take it that he was referring to something, then I may believe that the proposition he uttered made a successful reference and was a true statement—my friend is to be depended upon in such things. I cannot be said, however, to believe the *proposition*, since I have no idea what the proposition stated.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ *In Hebraeos*, ch. 11, lect. 1, no. 558. As Joseph Wawrykow states, “God reveals the truths held by theological faith, and it is on God’s authority that one assents to these truths” (“The Theological Virtues,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies and Elenore Stump (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 289. Similarly, Avery Dulles observes, “[F]aith is belief in God as witness” (*Assurance*, 33).

⁶⁸ Preller, 188.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 185-186.

Is this really what St. Thomas is saying about Christian faith? Does the believer assent to a proposition they “did not hear”? And if they do, how do they know it is the sort of thing to which assent is an appropriate response? How does the believer know that the utterance was a proposition at all? In order to know that it is the sort of thing to which one might assent seems to require some further communication in intelligible terms that the proposition was in fact a proposition. Otherwise, the believer would be in no way aware that assent might or ought to be given. This is not to say the believer understands much. In fact, the believer might understand very little. But the suggestion that there is no understanding of the propositions of faith is implausible, and not St. Thomas’s position. As St. Thomas observes, “Faith cannot altogether precede understanding, for it would be impossible to assent by believing what is proposed to be believed, without understanding it in some way.”⁷⁰ Believers do not have comprehensive understanding of the truths of faith, in fact, they might have little understanding of them. This is a very different claim than saying that what is proposed for belief is wholly unintelligible.⁷¹

Additionally, Preller notes that, for St. Thomas, faith is “thinking with assent.” Specifically, faith is believing certain propositions about God. This is a problem according to Preller. He states, “We are left, then, with the disturbing dilemma that *either* man is able to have a meaningful intention of God *or* the propositions of faith cannot be believed or believed to be true.”⁷² Because of the “problem of reference,” however, the former cannot be true. We do not and cannot, for Preller, think “God.”⁷³ If the

⁷⁰ *ST* II-II, q. 8, a. 8, ad 2. For a defense of Preller on a similar point, see Adam Eitel, “Making Motions in a Language we do not Understand: The Apophaticism of Thomas Aquinas and Victor Preller,” in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 65 (February 2012), 17-33.

⁷¹ T.C. O’Brien rightly maintains, “[I]n fact faith is not contentless” (*Summa Theologiae*, vol. 31, 202).

⁷² Preller, 186.

⁷³ This, of course, might be qualified by the observation that God is our beatitude, that object in which all desire ceases. This is materially true, though not formally. Even in desiring beatitude or happiness

propositions require our ability to think “God,” and we do not have this ability, then it seems that we cannot understand the propositions of faith to which we might otherwise assent.⁷⁴

This theory of language and reference has created a problem concerning “thinking with assent” that does not exist for St. Thomas. Just like the apparently contradictory positions of St. Thomas on the possibility of pre-Christian pagan knowledge of the existence of God, Preller’s account has raised a problem that would not exist if he had correctly understood St. Thomas. Eliminate the presuppositions Preller brings to the text, and the dilemma disappears. In the end, it is more reasonable than Preller’s position, exegetically and systematically, to maintain that St. Thomas is intending us to recognize that in faith the believer assents to the truths of faith on the authority of God, not as wholly unintelligible, but as non-comprehensive. The believer understands the truths of faith, as St. Thomas says, “in some way.”

The first (*credere Deum*) and second (*credere Deo*) aspects of the act of faith involve belief in the truths of faith, with some minimal understanding, because God as the First Truth who cannot be deceived or deceive reveals them. The first and second aspects, then, pertain to the intellect and its assent to the material object of faith. The third aspect of the act of faith, namely, *credere in Deum*, concerns the will. More specifically, this third aspect pertains to the will’s tendency toward God under the aspect of the good.⁷⁵ In this third aspect of the act of faith, the will tends toward God in love as

(formally) is not yet desiring God (materially). This is why, for St. Thomas, we can err about the material object in which happiness is found.

⁷⁴ See Preller, 185. That the material object of faith is God and everything as it relates to God entails that the truths of faith are about God in some way, not merely as beatitude, but as God. Beatitude is merely one aspect of the truths about which we learn in God’s self-revelation in Christ.

⁷⁵ Mark D. Jordan describes this third aspect of the act of faith as “believing for the sake of attaining God as one’s last end, as the goal of one’s willing” (Jordan, *On Faith: Summa Theologiae 2-2, qq. 1-16 of St.*

ultimate end or beatitude, or as Joseph Wawrykow nicely describes, “[as] the beatifying end of the human journey.”⁷⁶ This is an act of the intellect moved and enabled by the grace of charity.

Although St. Thomas has not offered his discussion of the significance of the virtue of charity for this threefold understanding of the act of faith, it is clear that what he has in mind is living faith.⁷⁷ In living faith, which is to say, faith informed by charity, the will of the believer tends toward God in love as beatitude. In order not merely to believe the object of faith, but to love that object as well, the will must be quickened by charity. As we shall see, because the perfection of the virtue of faith requires the perfection of both principles of faith, namely, the intellect and the will, charity must be present in order that the threefold act of the virtue of faith obtain.

In sum, then, as an act of *credere*, Christian faith involves both the intellect and the will. Specifically, the single act of faith involves the assent of the intellect to the content of faith (*credere Deum*) grounded in the authority of the God who speaks (*credere Deo*), and, in the perfection of virtue, it is accompanied by a will ordered by charity to God as end (*credere in Deum*). The content to which the intellect gives assent is the material object of faith; the authority, namely, God, on whose word assent is given is the formal object; and the movement of the will toward God as ultimate end is the object for the sake of which one believes, namely, God. For this single act of faith to attain the perfection of virtue, all three aspects involving both the intellect and the will

Thomas Aquinas, trans. Mark D. Jordan (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 69-70 n14). Cf. Aubert, *Le problème de l'acte de foi*, 58.

⁷⁶ Wawrykow, “The Theological Virtues,” 289.

⁷⁷ See below for a discussion of the significance or insignificance of the presence of charity for the act of faith.

must be present.⁷⁸ Yet, in order that these three aspects might be present in the intellect and will and because, as we saw above, the object and end of faith is supernatural, something else must be present, namely, the grace of God.

C. *The Internal and External Causes of Faith: Infusa Fides and Fides ex Auditu*

St. Thomas discusses certain causes of the act of faith that is *credere Deum*, *credere Deo*, and *credere in Deum*. Each cause is an instance of grace. He notes,

As regards man's assent to the things which are of faith, we may observe a twofold cause, one of external inducement, such as a miracle witnessed, or the persuasion of someone leading a person to faith, neither of which is a sufficient cause, since of those who see the same miracle, or who hear the same preaching, some believe, and some do not. Hence it is necessary to assert another internal cause, which moves man inwardly to assent to matters of faith...[T]his must needs accrue to him from some supernatural principle moving him inwardly, which is God.⁷⁹

In his commentary on Romans, he states,

[T]wo things are required for faith: one is the inclination of the heart to believe; and this does not come from hearing, but from the gift of grace; the other is a determination of what is to be believed, and this comes from hearing (*ex auditu*). Thus, Cornelius, whose heart was inclined toward belief, needed Peter to be sent to him so that the latter could give him something determinate to believe.⁸⁰

The cause of faith, then, is twofold. There is both an external and an internal cause. There is both something that comes from without and something that happens within believers in order that they might in principle believe the truths of faith (material object) on the

⁷⁸ See the discussion of formed (living) and unformed (lifeless) faith, which is to say faith formed by charity and faith without charity, in section (f) below.

⁷⁹ *ST II-II*, q. 6, a. 1, resp.

⁸⁰ *In Rom.*, ch. 10, lect. 2, no. 844. See also *De veritate*, q. 18, a. 3, resp.: "But faith is twofold, according to a twofold hearing and a twofold speaking. For 'faith comes by hearing,' as is said in Romans (10:17). Now, there is an external speaking, by which God speaks to us through preachers, and an interior speaking, by which He speaks to us through an internal inspiration. This internal inspiration is called a kind of speaking, according to its similarity to external speaking. Indeed, just as in external speaking we present to the hearer not the thing itself which we want to make known but a sign of that thing, that is to say, a word which expresses some meaning; so in internal inspiration it is not His essence which God presents to view, but some sign of His essence, which is some spiritual likeness of His wisdom." Similarly, at *De veritate*, q. 11, a. 1, ad 7.

authority and trustworthy witness of God the First Truth (formal object) for the sake of eternal union with the triune Lord (end).

On the one hand, according to St. Thomas, the external “inducement” or cause of faith is the grace of God in the form of an encounter with God’s self-revelation in Christ. Due to the supernatural character of the content of faith, St. Thomas notes, “[F]aith must needs be from God. Because those things which are of faith surpass human reason, hence they do not come to man’s knowledge, unless God reveal them.”⁸¹ This is *fides ex auditu*; the faith that is from hearing.⁸² As St. Thomas observes, “[T]he things which are of faith should be proposed to man: this is necessary in order that man believe anything explicitly.”⁸³ One cannot believe the truths of faith explicitly if those truths have not been proposed for belief.⁸⁴ The revelation of God in Christ must be preached and heard. This preaching, or as Preller says, “the matter supplied,”⁸⁵ is the external cause of the act of faith, or *fides ex auditu*.

On the other hand, the internal cause of faith is the grace of God in the form of the habit of faith and its healing and elevating effects. The habit of faith establishes a new capacity. It is the capacity to believe (*credere*) what God has revealed. Against the Pelagians, St. Thomas maintains that the beginning of faith is from God, and not from a proportionate capacity of human nature, fallen or otherwise.⁸⁶ He remarks, “To believe

⁸¹ *ST II-II*, q. 6, a. 1, resp.

⁸² As Stephen Brown observes, “God uses human instruments, such as preachers and teachers, to beget, nourish, defend, and strengthen faith” (Brown, “The Theological Virtue of Faith,” 226).

⁸³ *ST II-II*, q. 6, a. 1, resp. Cf. *In Rom.*, ch. 15, lect. 2, no. 1171; *In Ioan.*, ch. 8, lect. 4, no. 1193; *In Ioan.*, ch. 12, lect. 3, no. 1619. As Preller rightly remarks, “Just as the natural intentionality of the mind is nonspecific without the matter supplied by sense experience, so also the internal ‘inclination of the heart to believe’ is ‘inchoate’ without the matter supplied *ex auditu*” (Preller, 245).

⁸⁴ Whether the truths of faith should be believed explicitly or implicitly is discussed below.

⁸⁵ Preller, 245.

⁸⁶ *ST II-II*, q. 6, a. 1, resp. For a helpful discussion of St. Thomas on the *initium fidei*, see Reinhard Hütter’s “‘Thomas the Augustinian’—Recovering a Surpassing Synthesis of Grace and Free Will,” in *Dust Bound*

does indeed depend on the will of the believer: but man's will needs to be prepared by God with grace."⁸⁷ St. Thomas is not saying, then, that the human will is not involved, nor that the human will is not free in the assent of faith. Rather, he is highlighting the role of healing and elevating inward grace in preparing the intellect and will for the assent of faith. As St. Thomas notes, [F]aith, as regards the assent which is the chief act of faith, is from God moving man inwardly by grace."⁸⁸ This internal cause or interior inclination of the heart is *infusa fides*, which is entirely a gift from God.⁸⁹

The preparation of grace in faith, of course, is twofold. It involves both the intellect and the will. First, because faith concerns those things that are disproportionate to the capacities of the light of natural human reason, God offers a further light, namely, the light of faith (*lumen fidei*). In the grace of faith, the intellect is healed and elevated such that it can now assent to truths beyond its natural capacities. As St. Thomas states, "[B]y the light of faith... a man assents to matters of faith and not to those which are against faith."⁹⁰ We receive this light, as St. Thomas notes, "in order that [they] may be raised to things which are above his nature."⁹¹ Having been "enlightened by faith,"⁹² the

for Heaven: Explorations in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2012), 249-282. Cf. Henri Bouillard, *Conversion et grâce chez s. Thomas d'Aquin: Étude historique* (Paris: Aubier, 1944), esp. 91-134.

⁸⁷ *ST II-II*, q. 6, a. 1, ad 3. Hütter observes, "[O]ne's own act of preparation is caused by God without that act losing its integrity as the will's proper operation, being drawn toward its end—but now being the special end of adhering to God" ("Thomas the Augustinian'—Recovering a Surpassing Synthesis of Grace and Free Will," 277-278). For extensive analyses of the relation of operative and cooperative grace to freedom, see Bernard Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), esp. 3-149.

⁸⁸ *ST II-II*, q. 6, a. 1, resp. Cf. *ST II-II*, q. 6, a. 1, ad 1. As Romanus Cessario observes, "[Faith] requires in the hearer an interior locution, a direct divine touch of faith that moves the believer to accept whatever is proposed for belief" (Cessario, *Christian Faith and the Theological Life*, 69).

⁸⁹ Cf. Preller, 236.

⁹⁰ *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 3, ad 2. For an interesting discussion of the light of faith and the *instinctus* of faith, especially vis-à-vis Max Seckler, see Schillebeeckx, *Revelation and Theology*, vol. 2, trans. N.D. Smith (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968), esp. 32-54.

⁹¹ *ST II-II*, q. 6, a. 1, ad 3. Cf. *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 2, resp.

⁹² *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 3, ad 2.

believer has the eyes to see the credibility of what has been proposed for belief, not by the sight of science and demonstration, but by the sight of the one in whom they believe.

While the first aspect of preparation of grace in faith pertains to the intellect, the second involves the will. It too needs healing and elevation that it might rightly and effectively command the intellect to assent to the truths of faith based on the authoritative witness of God and lovingly. The will must be turned back toward God in love. It must be given a divine instinct (*instinctus*) that it might tend toward the things of God. As Michael Sherwin states, “Aquinas describes God’s action on the will in faith as an *instinctus*... ‘the interior *instinctus* to believe.’”⁹³

This appetitive aspect of St. Thomas’s account of faith developed throughout his career, however.⁹⁴ Sherwin has argue convincingly that in St. Thomas’s mature work the interaction between the intellect and the will in faith is analogous to the interaction between the intellect and the will in practical reasoning.⁹⁵ Given that faith is an act of *credere* in which one assents to the truths of faith by a command of the will, this should not surprise. Early in his career, however, St. Thomas did not emphasize the necessity of grace for both the intellect and the will. This was remedied in his mature moral

⁹³ Sherwin, *By Knowledge and By Love*, 144. Cf. Cessario, *Christian Faith and the Theological Life*, 134. Similarly, Benoit Duroux observes, “It is necessary to stop at this very important idea, namely, interior movement, and see how St. Thomas conceives and explains it. Among the terms employed to designate it, those of ‘interior motion,’ ‘instinct,’ ‘inclination of the heart,’ signify the impressed impulse on the affectivity” (*La psychologie de la foi chez saint Thomas d’Aquin*, 99).

⁹⁴ For a discussion of the shifts in St. Thomas’s thought on this point, see Michael Sherwin, *By Knowledge and By Love: Charity and Knowledge in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005). See also, Edward Schillebeeckx, *Revelation and Theology*, vol. 2, trans. N.D. Smith (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968); Reinhard Hütter’s “‘Thomas the Augustinian’—Recovering a Surpassing Synthesis of Grace and Free Will,” in *Dust Bound for Heaven: Explorations in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2012), 249-282; Henri Bouillard, *Conversion et grâce chez s. Thomas d’Aquin: Étude historique* (Paris: Aubier, 1944), esp. 91-134; Bernard Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), esp. 3-149.

⁹⁵ Sherwin notes, “[B]elief is analogous to an act of practical reasoning. In both cases, the intellect’s act is shaped by the action of the will” (*By Knowledge and By Love*, 131).

psychology. Sherwin argues, “An infused cognitive light and an appetitive *instinctus* become the twin principles of faith’s act, analogous to the natural light of practical reasoning and the natural inclination of the will that together form the twin principles of the natural human act.”⁹⁶ Further, Sherwin observes, “In Aquinas’s mature theology of faith, . . . faith both imparts a higher cognitive light, which is a fuller participation in the divine light, and a higher appetitive inclination, which is a fuller participation in the divine *instinctus*.”⁹⁷

In faith, the intellect, enabled by the grace of the *lumen fidei*, assents to the truths of faith by a command of the will, enabled by the grace of the “divine *instinctus*,” and on the basis of the authority and testimony of God revealing. In faith, the intellect and will are both healed and elevated by grace such that the assent of faith is possible. As St. Thomas observes, “The believer has sufficient motive for believing, for he is moved by the authority of Divine teaching confirmed by miracles, and, what is more, by the inward instinct of the Divine invitation: hence he does not believe lightly.”⁹⁸

We must be clear, however, that the *instinctus* of the will in faith is not identical with the theological virtue of charity. Charity, in fact, presupposes the existence of the movement of the will in faith. As Sherwin observes, “Aquinas regards charity as perfecting the appetitive component of faith.”⁹⁹ In faith, the will, by virtue of a graced divine *instinctus*, tends toward the objects of faith. This appetitive component of faith is presupposed and not identical to the tendency of the will informed by charity. This appetitive component precedes the charity. Sherwin observes, “[F]aith’s act requires an

⁹⁶ Sherwin, *By Knowledge and By Love*, 136.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁹⁸ *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 9, ad 3.

⁹⁹ Sherwin, *By Knowledge and By Love*, 121.

act of the will. Charity elevates this voluntary component of faith and brings it to perfection.”¹⁰⁰ In his commentary on the *Sentences*, St. Thomas maintains, “[I]t should be said that faith, as such, precedes charity, since the act of will that is required for faith [namely, to be willing to believe] is able to exist without charity.”¹⁰¹ In fact, according to him, the theological virtue of charity “presupposes” “right faith” about God. As he notes elsewhere, “[C]harity, when it comes, is said to form the preexistent faith.”¹⁰² Similarly, in his commentary on 1 Corinthians, “But because nothing can be loved unless it is known, for the love of charity a knowledge of God is first required. And because this is above nature, there is required, first of all, faith which is concerned with things not seen.”¹⁰³ As Sherwin observes, “In St. Thomas’ view, charity’s act presupposes and depends on conceptual knowledge in the intellect. It presupposes faith’s knowledge of charity’s proper object, God.”¹⁰⁴

According to Sherwin, in St. Thomas’s account of faith, charity does not constitute the *instinctus* of faith, but elevates and perfects the *instinctus* that is already present.¹⁰⁵ The divine *instinctus*, which is also a gift from God, constitutes the appetitive component or graced will-act of the assent of faith. It is not, however, identical to charity. Sherwin notes, “[O]n its own the *instinctus fidei* is not a sufficient agent of [virtuous]

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 163.

¹⁰¹ *Super Sent.* III, d. 23, q. 3, a. 1, qa. 1, ad 1. Cf. *Super Sent.* III, d. 23, q. 3, a. 4, qa. 3, resp: “unformed faith preexists [charity].”

¹⁰² *Super Sent.* III, d. 23, q. 3, a. 4, qa. 3, ad 3.

¹⁰³ *In 1 Cor.* ch. 13, lect. 4, no. 806. All English translations of *In 1 Cor.* come from, with light modifications, *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians*, trans. F. R. Larcher, B. Mortensen, and D. Keating (Lander: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012). Cf. *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 5, ad 4: “faith precedes charity in regard to the merely cognitional element of faith.”

¹⁰⁴ Michael Sherwin, *By Knowledge and By Love: Charity and Knowledge in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 147. Cf. 161, 203, and 154: “[F]aith has priority in revealing the object [to charity].”

¹⁰⁵ Sherwin maintains, I think rightly, “[F]aith itself has an appetitive component. Thus, stated more accurately, charity’s priority consists in elevating the appetitive component of faith’s own act” (Sherwin, *By Knowledge and By Love*, 154 n. 31).

action. It moves the believer to assent to the truths of faith, but it does not, of itself, enable the believer to attain faith's end, which is a joyfully loving union with God. Only charity's presence in the will empowers faith to attain its end."¹⁰⁶ The command of the will in faith, enabled by grace, is a fuller participation in the divine *instinctus*. And it is presupposed by charity. The virtue of charity perfects a will-act already there in faith.

In summary, the cause of the act of faith is twofold: external and internal. The external cause is the faith that is preached and heard (*fides ex auditu*), namely, the gospel message of redemption and God's self-revelation in Christ. The internal cause of faith is the infused habit of faith (*infusa fides*), a habit that heals and elevates both the intellect and the will such that assent to the truths of faith becomes possible. With respect to the intellect, in the grace of faith, the believer is given a further light, namely, the light of faith (*lumen fidei*). With respect to the will, in the grace of faith, the believer is given a fuller participation in the divine *instinctus*, namely, the instinct of faith (*instinctus fidei*). Apart from its external and internal causes, and the graces they bestow, the act of Christian faith, which is the act that is *credere Deum*, *credere Deo*, and *credere in Deum*, cannot obtain.

D. *What Faith Believes? The Articles of Faith*

St. Thomas makes a distinction between the object of belief in itself and the object(s) of belief as communicated according to the mode of the believer. Strictly speaking and considered in itself, the object of faith is God, and God is simple. St. Thomas thus maintains that the object of faith *simpliciter* is simple, which is to say that it is not composed of parts. The referent of faith is the one metaphysically simple God. We

¹⁰⁶ Sherwin, *By Knowledge and By Love*, 146.

cannot end with this, however. In this context, St. Thomas observes, “Now we can only get a glimpse of divine Truth by way of analysis, since things which in God are one, are manifold in our intellect.”¹⁰⁷ Indeed, from the side of the believer, “things that are simple in themselves...are known by the intellect with a certain amount of complexity.”¹⁰⁸ Whether in writing or by hearing, the object of the faith is communicated in words through propositions, which are complex since each proposition is composed of its grammatical parts.

Even though faith must utilize complex propositions, according to St. Thomas, “[T]he act of the believer does not terminate in a proposition, but in a thing. For as in science we do not form propositions, except in order to have knowledge about things through their means, so is it in faith.”¹⁰⁹ Further, he notes, “Hearing is of words signifying what is of faith, but not the things of themselves that are believed.”¹¹⁰ As Frederick Bauerschmidt states, “[W]hat is grasped by the mind is not the proposition, but the truth that the proposition signifies.”¹¹¹ The written and spoken propositions are not what is believed, but rather the means by which the object of faith is signified or communicated. By means of propositions, the believer assents to the truths to which those words and propositions point, the things that those words and propositions signify, and not the words and propositions themselves.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ *ST II-II*, q. 1, a. 6, sc.

¹⁰⁸ *ST II-II*, q. 1, a. 2, resp.

¹⁰⁹ *ST II-II*, q. 1, a. 2, ad 2. Similarly, Wawrykow observes, “The act of faith terminates in a reality” (Wawrykow, “The Theological Virtues,” 290). Cf. O’Brien, likewise, remarks, “The knowing of truth by judgments [like faith] does not stop at the mental medium, but intends the existent; the act has as its term, not a proposition but a reality” (O’Brien, “Appendix 3,” 200).

¹¹⁰ *ST II-II*, q. 1, a. 4, ad 4.

¹¹¹ Bauerschmidt, *Thomas Aquinas*, 149.

¹¹² Pieper notes, “[W]hat the act of belief truly aims at is reality and not a message or a report” (Pieper, *Faith-Hope-Love*, 53).

St. Thomas compares the assent to the truths of faith with the natural act of judgment in which one assents to the truth or falsity of a proposition. In the case of the latter, he notes, “The second operation of the understanding is that by which it joins and divides concepts by affirmation or denial. Now, in this operation we do find truth and falsity, just as we do in the proposition, which is its sign.”¹¹³ By virtue of the comparison, then, faith, like natural judgment, assents to truths of which propositions are signs. Whether in natural judgment or in faith, the act of assent to a truth does not terminate in the proposition, but in that which the proposition signifies. In faith, the reality in which complex propositions terminate is the simple God himself.

The complex propositions that communicate and signify the simple object of faith are the articles of faith. This is, as Bauerschmidt describes, “[the] identifiable cognitive content” of faith.¹¹⁴ This material content is threefold: (a) primary and direct articles of faith, (b) secondary and indirect propositions of faith, and (c) presupposed propositions called preambles, which are not strictly speaking truths of faith. First and principally, the believer believes those things that are directly constitutive of the content of faith, namely, the articles of faith. These St. Thomas alternatively describes as “the primary points or articles of faith” and “that whereby man is made one of the Blessed,”¹¹⁵ and which are all first and principally about the First Truth.¹¹⁶

From the primary articles of faith, St. Thomas distinguishes secondary or indirect truths of faith that are related to or dependent upon the primary articles. He notes, “On

¹¹³ *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 1, resp.

¹¹⁴ Bauerschmidt, *Thomas Aquinas*, 145. Note Bauerschmidt’s affirmation of “cognitive content.” His is a more positive evaluation of the intelligibility of the content of faith than that of Preller, et al.

¹¹⁵ *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 5, resp.

¹¹⁶ See *ST II-II*, q. 1, a. 1, resp: “Consequently from this point of view also the object of faith is, in a way, the First Truth, in as much as nothing comes under faith except in relation to God.”

the side of faith the distinction to be made is that certain things, of themselves, come directly under faith, such as the mystery of three Persons in one God, and the Incarnation of God the Son; whereas other things come under faith, through being subordinate, in one way or another, to those just mentioned, for instance, all that is contained in the Divine Scriptures.”¹¹⁷ Further, St. Thomas describes this second category of the content of faith as “those matters, the denial of which leads to corruption of some articles of faith.”¹¹⁸ According to St. Thomas, then, the primary and direct matters of faith are found in the articles of faith, which deal directly with God and our redemption in Christ. The secondary and indirect matters of faith are those things related to or depend upon the primary and direct matters of faith, the denial of which would corrupt belief in the articles of faith.

St. Thomas makes a further distinction between, on the one hand, the articles of faith and those things closely related to or dependent upon them, and on the other hand, those things presupposed by the articles. He variously describes these as presuppositions or preambles. He states, “Such are the truths about God that are proved by natural reason, for example, that God exists, that he is one, and other truths of this sort about God or creatures proved in philosophy and presupposed by faith.”¹¹⁹ Also, “Things which can be proved by demonstration are reckoned among the articles of faith, not because they are believed simply by all, but because they are necessary presuppositions to matters of faith, so that those who do not know them by demonstration must know them first of all by faith.”¹²⁰ This passage might give someone the impression that St. Thomas, in *Summa*

¹¹⁷ *ST II-II*, q. 8, a. 2, resp. Cf. *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 5, resp.

¹¹⁸ *ST II-II*, q. 11, a. 2, resp.

¹¹⁹ *Super Boet. de Trinitate*, q. 2, a. 3, resp.

¹²⁰ *ST II-II*, q. 1, a. 5, ad 3.

theologiae, counts those things that “can be proved by demonstration,” that is, preambles, as articles of faith. If the passage ended after the first clause, that might be plausible. He continues, however. Those things that are demonstrable are not articles of faith simply, but can be called such because, again, they are presupposed. St. Thomas is gesturing toward the reality that the preambles are believed by some and known by others. Nonetheless, as he notes in his commentary on Hebrews, “[The existence of God] was known even by the philosophers (*philosophis*) and does not fall under faith.”¹²¹

In the treatise on faith, St. Thomas notes similarly, “That God exists and other such things that can be known (*nota*) by natural reason...are not articles of faith but preambles to the articles...Nevertheless, nothing forbids something demonstrable and knowable (*scibile*) in itself from being accepted on faith by one who cannot grasp the demonstration.”¹²² Here, we find St. Thomas very clearly describing the scientific knowability (*scibile*) of the existence of God. This is one of numerous instances in which what Eugene Rogers calls “Preller’s Rule” is shown to be false. According to Rogers, Preller’s Rule maintains “that *scire* is never used in connection with cognitions of God through natural reason.”¹²³ In *ST I*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 1, in an explicit discussion of cognitions of God, St. Thomas asserts that God’s existence is demonstrable and scientifically knowable (*scibile*), and precisely in distinction from that which is “accepted” by faith. This analysis confirms what was noted above, namely, that certain things about God are

¹²¹ *In Hebraeos*, ch. 11, lect. 2, no. 577. As John Jenkins states, “For Aquinas the belief that God exists not only does not constitute faith, it is not, strictly speaking, even a part of faith” (*Knowledge and Faith in Thomas Aquinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 162).

¹²² *ST I*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 1. See also *Super Boet. de Trinitate*, q. 2, a. 3, resp.

¹²³ Rogers, *Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth*, 36. See Preller, 32: “‘Cognitions of God,’ then, are not necessarily instances of intelligible knowledge of God. The ordinary word for ‘know’ in Aquinas is *scire*, which is never used in connection with cognitions of God through natural reason. *Cognitio* and *cognoscere* are the broadest possible generic terms, referring to any state of mind connected with the apprehension of reality.”

beyond the capacities of human nature to know while others are not. Knowledge of the existence of God, which is demonstrated by the philosophers (*philosophi*), is not one of those things about God beyond the capacities of natural reason. As such, knowledge of the existence of God is not, according to St. Thomas, an article of faith.

We can summarize this discussion of the object or content of faith in the following way. The object of faith, simple in itself, is the First Truth. Yet, humans communicate and receive cognitions of the metaphysically simple God of faith by means of complex propositions. The assent of faith, however, does not terminate in complex propositions, but in the realities of faith that the propositions signify. Although the content of these truths is materially and formally one, in that they pertain to the metaphysically simple God, the content is materially diverse *quoad nos*. The diverse articles of the faith communicate the principal and direct points of the faith. Other secondary or indirect matters communicate those things that relate to or are dependent upon the articles. Certain other truths, while not falling under faith, are presupposed by faith, namely, *praeambula fidei*. These latter presuppositions include the existence of God, that God is one, and the like.¹²⁴ Strictly speaking, then, the act of Christian *credere* pertains to the articles of faith that surpass natural human capacities and not certain preambles like the existence of God.

E. How Faith Believes? The Explicit and Implicit Character of Faith

Another distinction in St. Thomas's discussion of the act of faith is that between explicit and implicit faith. In order to explain this distinction, St. Thomas compares faith with natural reason. In the treatise on faith, he remarks, "The articles of faith stand in the

¹²⁴ Cf. *ST I*, q. 2, a. 2, resp.; *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 4, sc.; *ScG I*, ch. 3, no. 2; *In Hebraeos*, ch. 11, lect. 1, no. 560; *Super Sent. Revised*, d. 3, q. 1, a. 1, sc; *Super Sent. Revised*, d. 3, q. 1, a. 2, sc.

same relation to the doctrine of faith as do self-evident principles to a teaching based on natural reason. Among these principles there is a certain order, so that some are contained implicitly in others.”¹²⁵ Just as some first principles of a science naturally known are virtually and implicitly contained in other first principles, so too, certain matters of faith can be virtually and implicitly contained in other explicit matters of faith. St. Thomas offers the following examples:

In like manner all the articles are contained implicitly in certain primary matters of faith, such as God’s existence, and His providence over the salvation of man....[T]he existence of God includes all that we believe to exist in God eternally, and in these our happiness consists....[W]hile belief in His providence includes all those things which God dispenses in time, for man’s salvation, and which are the way to that happiness: and in this way, again, some of those articles which follow from these are contained in others: thus faith in Redemption of mankind includes belief in the Incarnation of Christ, His Passion and so forth....But after sin, man believed explicitly in Christ, not only as to the Incarnation, but also as to the Passion and Resurrection, whereby the human race is delivered from sin and death: for they would not, else, have foreshadowed Christ’s Passion by certain sacrifices both before and after the Law.¹²⁶

Certain primary matters of faith, for example, the existence of God and the redemption of humanity, implicitly contain, for St. Thomas, other matters of faith, like the Incarnation and the Passion.

We see, then, that the explicitness of belief will vary according to circumstances.

When one recognizes a truth to be contained in the articles of faith, one is required to assent. St. Thomas states, “Then alone is he bound to believe such things explicitly, when it is clear to him that they are contained in the doctrine of faith.”¹²⁷ By virtue of God’s progressive self-revelation in salvation history, at an early stage of that history certain matters of faith are less clear and therefore less requiring of explicit faith than at a later

¹²⁵ *ST II-II*, q. 1, a. 7, resp. Cf. *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 11; *Super Sent.* III, d. 25, q. 2, a. 1.

¹²⁶ *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 7, resp.

¹²⁷ *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 5, resp.

stage. St. Thomas observes, for instance, “[B]elief of some kind in the mystery of Christ’s Incarnation was necessary at all times and for all persons, but this belief differed according to differences of time and persons....If...some were saved without receiving any revelation, they were not saved without faith in a Mediator, for, though they did not believe Him explicitly, they did, nevertheless, have implicit faith through believing in divine providence, since they believed that God would deliver mankind in whatever way was pleasing to Him, and according to the revelation of the Spirit to those who knew the truth.”¹²⁸ St. Thomas is describing a situation in which certain people in certain times were saved “without receiving any revelation,” while also assenting to the truth of “divine providence.” There is or can be some concrete situation in which one might be capable of assenting to the truth of God’s providence without revelation. And those persons, according to St. Thomas, might be said to assent to other matters of faith as implicitly or virtually contained in their assent to the truth of God’s providence.

This should caution those who, like Preller, potentially overstate the necessity of revelation for belief in providence. Recall that Preller maintains, “That the world is ordered providentially by God is distinctly a part of his [St. Thomas’s] teaching. [St. Thomas] maintains, however, that God’s ‘providence over all...cannot be proved.’”¹²⁹ Further, Preller remarks, “Aquinas maintains...that such attributes as ‘providence’ cannot be known except by revelation.”¹³⁰ Other interpreters have argued the opposite. Cessario, for instance, counts providence among the preambles of faith. He states, “These truths, such as the existence of God or the fact of a divine providence or government, do not

¹²⁸ *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 7, ad 3.

¹²⁹ Preller, 134.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 176.

surpass the capacity of natural reason in itself.”¹³¹ Jörgen Vijgen, similarly, affirms, “[B]oth in his systematic works as in his commentaries, we have found him [St. Thomas] arguing for divine providence on philosophical grounds.”¹³² Preller’s position is hardly the majority position, and St. Thomas clearly makes room for certain situations “without...any revelation” in which one might assent to the truth of God’s providence.

According to St. Thomas, at minimum, the believer must always and everywhere in some way believe the articles of faith. But belief in the articles of faith can be more or less explicit and so more or less implicit. Certain fundamental matters of faith must be, in some sense, believed explicitly. Among these, as noted above, St. Thomas includes the existence and providence of God.¹³³ Those who explicitly believe these things, so long as they have the will to believe whatever God might reveal, believe the rest of the content of faith virtually and implicitly. After the Incarnation, of course, the content of belief receives further determination. The explicitness of belief, then, also received further determination. Nonetheless, belief remains more or less explicit, which is to say more or less implicit vis-à-vis further determinations, depending on the nature of the preaching heard.

Regarding explicit and implicit belief in the articles of faith, St. Thomas makes a further distinction between the “simple” and the “learned.” For instance, concerning implicit belief in Christ and the offering of sacrifices, St. Thomas remarks,

[T]he meaning of which sacrifices [before and after the law] was known by the learned explicitly, while the simple folk, under veil of those sacrifices, believed

¹³¹ Cessario, *Christian Faith and the Theological Life*, 80.

¹³² Jörgen Vijgen, “Did St. Thomas Attribute a Doctrine of Divine Providence to Aristotle?,” *Doctor Angelicus* 7 (2007): 76. One could raise the question of the extent or kind of providence to which one assents. To affirm of providence that it is (*an sit*) is not yet to affirm of it what it is (*quid sit*). The kind of awareness that certain people may or may not have had “without...any revelation” is an interesting question, but one to leave for another day.

¹³³ *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 8, ad 1.

them to be ordered by God in reference to Christ's coming, and thus their knowledge was covered with a veil....Wherefore just as, before Christ, the mystery was believed explicitly by the learned, but implicitly and under a veil, so to speak, by the simple, so too was it with the mystery of the Trinity.¹³⁴

He implies that greater explicitness in faith is proper for people of learning: “[M]en of higher degree (*superiors homines*), whose business it is to teach others, are under obligation to have fuller knowledge of matters of faith, and to believe them more explicitly.”¹³⁵ In fact, St. Thomas suggests that “the simple...ought, in matters of faith, to stay by the learned.”¹³⁶

In short, for St. Thomas, Christian belief can be more or less explicit. This varies according to persons, places, and times. The learned are required to believe more things explicitly than are the simple. In the New Covenant, the believer is required to believe more explicitly in the Paschal Mysteries of Christ than is the believer under the Old Covenant. For all times and all people, what is necessary is belief in the existence of God and his being a rewarder of righteousness, which virtually and implicitly contain everything else.

¹³⁴ *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 7, resp.

¹³⁵ *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 6, resp.

¹³⁶ *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 6, sc. Here, St. Thomas is referring to Gregory's gloss on Job 1:14: “The oxen were ploughing, and the asses feeding beside them.” Cf. *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 11, resp.; *In Hebraeos*, ch. 11, lect. 2. On this relationship between the simple and the learned, Davies observes, “Many Christians are unlettered and unable to talk in a sophisticated theological way concerning the articles of faith, yet even such people attend to what their teachers in the faith have to say insofar as they are teaching correctly, and therefore they [the simple] believe explicitly at a remove, so to speak” (Davies, *Thomas Aquinas's Summa Theologiae*, 234). For a discussion of how the simple in the faith are in many ways superior to the learned, see St. Thomas, *Expositio in Symbolum Apostolorum*, prol.; Marshall, “*Quod Scit Una Uetula*: Aquinas on the Nature of Theology,” in *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Rik Van Nieuwenhove and Joseph P. Wawrykow (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 1-35.

F. The Essence of Faith: Charity and the Perfection of the Intellect in Faith

According to St. Thomas, the act of faith can be either formed or unformed.

Formed faith is what the Apostle calls “faith working through love.”¹³⁷ Love, which is to say the theological virtue of charity, is the form of living faith for St. Thomas. By “form,” in general, he means that by which an act is specified, for anything that specifies something else does so, as he says, “after a manner of a form.”¹³⁸ Human acts, namely, voluntary acts, are specified by the end or good toward which that act moves. For St. Thomas, the end of the act of faith is God. God, then, is in a certain way the specifying end or form of the act of faith. Insofar as faith involves both the intellect and the will, however, God as the specifying end or form of the human act of faith can be considered in two ways. On the one hand, we can consider God as the specifying form for the intellect’s role in faith. In this case, God is considered under the aspect of First Truth because it is to him revealing himself that faith assents. On the other hand, we can also consider God as the specifying form for the will’s role in faith. Here, God is considered under the aspect of the divine goodness, the beatifying end to which the believer tends. Only one of these specifications of the act of faith, however, is essential to the habit and act of faith as such, while the other is necessary for the perfection of faith as a virtue.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Galatians 5:6. Cf. 1 Corinthians 12; James 2, esp. vv. 20, 26.

¹³⁸ *ST* II-II, q. 4, a. 3, resp.

¹³⁹ The distinction between the habit of faith and the virtue of faith should not be surprising. According to St. Thomas, a habit is merely a disposition toward acting in a particular way. A disposition, however, is not yet a virtue because, in order to be a virtue, a disposition must be ordered to act well. There are dispositions to act badly, namely, vices. Because the act of faith as virtue involves the intellect and the will, St. Thomas distinguishes between the habit by which the intellect might act well and the habit by which the will might act well. If only the former obtains, the habit of faith is not yet the virtue of faith, because the believer has only attained to the perfection of the intellect and not yet the will. This distinction will become clearer as this section proceeds. For a general discussion of habits and virtues in the *Summa theologiae*, see *ST* I-II, qq. 49-67; Cf. *Quaestio disputata de virtutibus in communi* and *Quaestio disputata de virtutibus cardinalibus*.

One might be tempted to suggest that an act of faith, which has God as its end, cannot be without charity, that charity is the essential form of faith. This is not so, however. St. Thomas very clearly maintains that faith without charity remains faith. In this context, he distinguishes between “lifeless” or “unformed” faith. On the one hand, one who does not have charity has lifeless faith. One who has faith informed by charity, on the other hand, has living faith.

While St. Thomas uses the language of form, here, he insists that faith is not faith because it is accompanied by charity. Faith is not essentially faith because it has the “form” of charity. Rather, faith remains faith with or without charity. As St. Thomas observes, “[T]o believe is immediately an act of the intellect, because the object of that act is ‘the true,’ which pertains properly to the intellect. Consequently, faith which is the proper principle of that act, must needs reside in the intellect.”¹⁴⁰ He specifies, “Faith resides in the speculative intellect.”¹⁴¹ Faith, strictly speaking, pertains to the intellect and not the will. Therefore, he adds, “[W]hat pertains to the will, does not pertain directly to faith, so as to be able to differentiate the habit of faith. But the distinction of living from lifeless faith is in respect of something pertaining to the will, that is, charity, and not in respect of something pertaining to the intellect. Therefore, living and lifeless faith are not distinct habits.”¹⁴² In fact, St. Thomas states, “[L]iving and lifeless faith are one and the

¹⁴⁰ *ST* II-II, q. 4, a. 2, resp. See also, *In Hebraeos*, c. 11, lect. 1, no. 558; *Super Sent.* III, d. 23, q. 2, a. 3.

¹⁴¹ *ST* II-II, q. 4, a. 2, ad 3.

¹⁴² *ST* II-II, q. 4, a. 4, resp. For St. Thomas’s other discussions of living and lifeless faith, see *Super Sent.* III, d. 23, q. 3, a. 1, qc 3; *Super Sent.* III, d. 25, q. 1, a. 1, qc 2, ad 2; *Super Sent.* III, d. 25, q. 1, a. 2, ad 4; *ST* III, q. 49, a. 1, ad 5; *ST* III, q. 68, a. 4, ad 3. Recall, the act of faith, both living and lifeless, does involve an act of the will enabled by grace, namely, the divine *instinctus*. This act of the will, however, is not identical to the act informed by charity. Charity, again, presupposes the will-act or appetitive component already present in the act of faith.

same habit.”¹⁴³ Living and lifeless faith are the same habit, they share the same species or specifying form.¹⁴⁴ The presence or absence of charity is not, for St. Thomas, the determining form of faith *qua* faith. Again, faith remains faith with or without charity.¹⁴⁵

We should be clear here about what St. Thomas is not saying. He is not claiming that lifeless faith is meritorious. That is to say, he is not claiming that lifeless faith or the assent to the truths of faith moved by a command of the will, enabled by grace, on the basis of the authority and testimony of God the revealer merits eternal life. Throughout the corpus, St. Thomas consistently maintains this position. In his commentary on 1 Corinthians, he states, “[W]ithout charity having knowledge [of truths of faith] is useless to them, as though to say: you have knowledge, but it does not profit you, because you pride yourselves in it...Hence charity must be added to knowledge.”¹⁴⁶ Elsewhere, he

¹⁴³ *ST II-II*, q. 4, a. 4, resp. St. Thomas also remarks, “Living and lifeless faith do not differ specifically, as though they belonged to different species” (*ST II-II*, q. 4, a. 5, ad 3). Cf. *De veritate*, q. 14, aa. 5-7; *Super Sent.* III, d. 23, q. 3, aa. 1 and 4. See *Super Sent.* III, d. 23, q. 3, a. 1, qa. 3, sc 1: “Habits are diversified by acts and objects. But formed and unformed faith do not differ with respect to the proper object of faith, which is the first Truth. Therefore, formed and unformed faith do not differ in species.”

¹⁴⁴ Elsewhere, he states, “Since therefore charity, when it comes, takes away nothing from faith except its unformedness, it stands that the substance of the *habit* of faith still remains” (*Super Sent.* III, d. 23, q. 3, a. 4, qa. 1, resp.). Garrigou-Lagrange observes, “The habit of faith, formed or unformed, with or without charity, remains numerically one and the same” (*On Faith A Commentary on St. Thomas' Theological Summa Ia Iae, qq. 62, 65, 68 and Ia Iae, qq. 1-16*, trans. Thomas a Kempis Reilly (Lexington: Ex Fontibus Co., 2016), 278).

¹⁴⁵ It is important to recognize that, for St. Thomas, even though the presence or absence of faith is not determined by the presence or absence of charity, this is not to say that faith without charity is meritorious. He maintains that faith can be meritorious, but not without charity. See *ST II-II*, q. 2, aa. 9-10. T.C. O’Brien observes, “The act of formless faith is not an integrally human act, because it lacks the direction of charity towards the ultimate end...But it is a good act, not an evil act...[A]ny act of faith in one whose will is attached to mortal sin is inconsistent with that attachment, yet it remains an act of faith” (*Summa Theologiae*, 133 n. 1). Similarly, Garrigou-Lagrange notes, “With the impulse of an actual grace, when an act of faith is elicited by one who is in mortal sin, the deed is supernatural, and its aim is infallibly in the direction of divine truth revealed. This makes the act good. But good though it be, such an act of faith is not up to the proper standard [of virtue]” (*On Faith*, 284).

¹⁴⁶ *In I Cor.* ch. 8, lect. 1, no. 423. In this same section, St. Thomas states, “Now there are two ways of knowing: having knowledge, and making use of knowledge, just as there are two ways of seeing: to have sight, and to make use of sight” (*ibid.*). Cf. *In I Cor.* ch. 8, lect. 1, no. 426.

states very clearly, “[N]o act can be meritorious and acceptable to God unless it proceeds from love [which is to say, charity].”¹⁴⁷

The issue, then, in claiming that charity is not determinative of faith’s assent to the truths of faith, is not a claim about the merit of lifeless faith. Such faith is not meritorious because it lacks its extrinsic form, namely, charity. In charity, faith, rather than merely assent to the truth of its end, now loves that which it believes and can attain its end. As Sherwin observes, “[F]or faith to merit the promises it believes, this faith must be formed by charity.”¹⁴⁸ This is the perfection of the virtue of faith, not what is essential to faith as such. Faith, whether formed or not, is the act upon which charity depends.

As the same habit, living and lifeless faith are of the same species. In light of this, it is important to consider how they relate one to the other within that species. It is important to note that, for St. Thomas, the relationship is not between a good and a bad act, a vice and a virtue.¹⁴⁹ Rather, the relationship between living and lifeless faith is the relationship between that which is perfect to that which is imperfect. St. Thomas states, “For formed faith, assents to first truth with a perfect will, whereas formless faith does the same with an imperfect will.”¹⁵⁰ Also, “Living and lifeless faith do not differ

¹⁴⁷ *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 5, sc 3. Also, St. Thomas observes, “Nature is compared to charity which is the principle of merit, as matter to form: whereas faith is compared to charity as the disposition which precedes the ultimate form. Now it is evident that the subject or the matter cannot act save by virtue of the form, nor can a preceding disposition, before the advent of the form: but after the advent of the form, both the subject and the preceding disposition act by virtue of the form. . . . Accordingly neither nature nor faith can, without charity, produce a meritorious act” (*ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 9, ad 1).

¹⁴⁸ Sherwin, *By Knowledge and By Love*, 145. Cf. *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 10, resp.

¹⁴⁹ As Garrigou-Lagrange rightly observes, for St. Thomas, “[U]nformed or lifeless faith is not a false virtue” (*On Faith*, 285).

¹⁵⁰ *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 7, resp. See also, *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 7, ad 6: “[T]hey are as perfect [i.e., formed faith], which attains to the character of the genus, and the imperfect [i.e., formless faith], which has not yet attained to it.” Cf. *Super Sent.* III, d. 23, q. 3, a. 1, qa. 3, resp and ad 1

specifically, as though they belonged to different species. But they differ as perfect and imperfect within the same species.”¹⁵¹

Because faith involves two principles, namely, the intellect and the will, the perfection of virtue requires the perfection of each. St. Thomas notes, “Wherefore an act that proceeds from two such powers must be perfected by a habit residing in each of them. Again...to believe is an act of the intellect inasmuch as the will moves it to assent. And this act proceeds from the will and the intellect... Consequently, if the act of faith is to be perfect, there needs to be a habit in the will as well as in the intellect.”¹⁵² Elsewhere, similarly, “If we take virtue in its proper sense, formless faith is not a virtue. The reason for this is that virtue, properly speaking, is a habit capable of eliciting a perfect act. However, when an act depends on two powers, it cannot be said to be perfect unless the perfection is found in both powers.”¹⁵³ In the faith *qua* faith, even lifeless faith, the intellect is perfected with respect to its proper object, namely, the true. In order that faith be perfect as a virtue, this must be joined by the perfection of the will with respect to its object, namely, the good, and more specifically, God as beatifying good. Nevertheless, the perfection of faith with respect to the object of the essential subject of faith, namely, the intellect and the true, obtains whether or not charity is present.

At this point, an exegetical difficulty arises. St. Thomas does explicitly call charity the form of faith. He is clear about this. He says, “Each thing works through its form. Now faith works through charity. Therefore, the love of charity is the form of

¹⁵¹ *ST* II-II, q. 4, a. 5, ad 3. Garrigou-Lagrange observes, “Unformed faith differs from living faith as an imperfect from a perfect condition, within the same species” (*On Faith*, 284).

¹⁵² *ST* II-II, q. 4, a. 2, resp.

¹⁵³ *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 6, resp.

faith.”¹⁵⁴ And yet, as we saw above, faith remains faith even if charity does not accompany it. Is St. Thomas being inconsistent? How is this so?

If charity is the form of faith, the form is that which specifies an act, and habits are specified by the acts toward which they dispose a person, then how is it that living and lifeless faith are of the same species of habit? To account for this, St. Thomas has recourse to a distinction between what he calls the intrinsic and the extrinsic forms of an act. He maintains that charity is the form of faith in the manner of an extrinsic form rather than an intrinsic form. He states, “Now the lifelessness of faith is not essential to the species of faith, since faith is said to be lifeless through the lack of an extrinsic form.”¹⁵⁵ But this is simply to say, according to St. Thomas, “[T]hat which gives faith its form, or makes it live, is not essential to faith.”¹⁵⁶ Lifeless faith, which is the same habit as living faith, is, like the latter, “perfective of the intellect.”¹⁵⁷ To the objection that “a form and the thing of which it is the form are in one subject, since together they form one thing simply. Now faith is in the intellect, while charity is in the will. Therefore, charity is not the form of faith,”¹⁵⁸ St. Thomas replies, “This objection is true of an intrinsic form, but it is not thus that charity is the form of faith, but in the sense that it informs the act of faith.”¹⁵⁹ Charity is not the intrinsic form of faith. It is a distinct habit that quickens the

¹⁵⁴ *ST* II-II, q. 4, a. 3, sc.

¹⁵⁵ *ST* II-II, q. 6, a. 2, resp.

¹⁵⁶ *ST* II-II, q. 4, a. 4, ad 2. St. Thomas remarks, “Lifeless faith, though it is not simply perfect with the perfection of a virtue, is, nevertheless, perfect with the perfection that suffices for the essential notion of faith” (*ST* II-II, q. 6, a. 2, ad 1).

¹⁵⁷ Joseph Wawrykow, “The Theological Virtues,” 292. As Cessario notes, “[T]heological faith—as a distinctive *habitus* in the human person—shapes principally the mind of the believer” (Cessario, *Christian Faith and the Theological Life*, 137).

¹⁵⁸ *ST* II-II, q. 4, a. 3, arg. 2.

¹⁵⁹ *ST* II-II, q. 4, a. 3, ad 2.

habit and act of faith.¹⁶⁰ Charity does not determine the species of faith, but it supervenes on the faith that is already possessed, perfecting it by quickening it or making it living, which is to say, makes it love and live for what it already believes.

Unformed faith has what it needs to be a habit, but not what it needs to be a virtue; to be the latter, it needs to be formed by charity. Faith itself, whether living or lifeless, is essentially a habit; when charity accompanies faith, the latter remains what it essentially is, a habit, but it achieves the excellence of a habit that is now a virtue. Accompanied by charity the habit of faith becomes the virtue of faith. As St. Thomas notes elsewhere, “[T]he act of faith will be perfect, if the will is perfected by the habit of charity and the intellect by the habit of faith, but not if the habit of charity is lacking. Consequently, faith formed by charity is a virtue, but not unformed faith.”¹⁶¹

Some interpreters have challenged that lifeless faith is, for St. Thomas, truly faith.¹⁶² The suggestion seems to be that lifeless faith is not faith according to its essential notion. This is clearly false, however. As we have seen, St. Thomas goes to great lengths to show that charity is “not essential” to faith, that charity is not “an intrinsic form” of faith. Lifeless faith is sufficient for the “essential notion of faith.” St. Thomas is even willing to call charity, and the form it brings to faith, accidental or less. In *De veritate*, he states, “[T]hat which faith receives from charity is accidental to faith in its natural constitution.”¹⁶³ Further, “Since the habit of charity is not intrinsic to faith, it cannot be

¹⁶⁰See *ST II-II*, q. 4, a. 3, ad 1 and *ST II-II*, q. 6, a. 2, resp. Cf. *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 7, sc 2: “But charity is outside of the essence of faith. Therefore, the habit of faith is not differentiated because it has or does not have charity.”

¹⁶¹ *In Rom.*, ch. 1, lect. 6, no. 106.

¹⁶² See Chapter Three for a discussion of this misunderstanding.

¹⁶³ *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 6, ad 1.

called either its substantial or its accidental form.”¹⁶⁴ The claim that lifeless faith is not true or real faith does not bear close scrutiny. Lifeless faith remains essentially faith.¹⁶⁵

Faith is indeed perfected by charity. The perfective love of charity joins to the intellectual assent of the believer the will to love and live unto God (*in Deum*). For St. Thomas, faith as a virtue, rather than as a mere habit is “perfected and formed by charity.”¹⁶⁶ In faith accompanied by charity, both the intellect and the will are perfected with respect to each of their proper objects, the true and the good. The habit of faith is made capable of the good to which it is ordered as end, namely, God as Goodness Itself, known and loved beatifically. Wawrykow observes, “Charity orders acts, including the act of faith, to God as beatifying end; and acts done under the influence of charity bring the actor closer to that end and are meritorious of that end. When charity is present, the habit of faith is truly good, and the habit is deemed a virtue. Unformed faith, where charity is lacking, is not a virtue.”¹⁶⁷ Only living faith, which is to say, the habit of faith accompanied by the habit charity, is truly a virtue that is meritorious of the promises faith believes.¹⁶⁸

That some movement of the will brings the intellect to its assent in faith is true. Part of what it means for one to believe (*credere*) is for the intellect to be moved by a command of the will. In considering this fact, as noted above, St. Thomas distinguishes

¹⁶⁴ *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 5, ad 4.

¹⁶⁵ St. Thomas observes, “Charity is not called the form of faith in the way in which a form is part of an essence...It is called form in so far as faith acquires some perfection from charity” (*De veritate*, q. 14, a. 5, ad 1). Elsewhere, he notes, “But charity is a habit separate from faith in essence” (*Super Sent.* III, d. 23, q. 3, a. 1, qa. 3, sc 2). Cf. *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 7, resp. Cf. *Super Sent.* III, d. 23, q. 3, a. 4, qa. 3, sc 1: “what gets informed is the same faith that was hitherto unformed.” Also, *Super Sent.* III, d. 23, q. 3, a. 4, qa. 3, resp: “...nor is the faith that arrives something other [than the faith that was already there].” See also, *ST II-II*, q. 4, a. 4, ad 4 and *In Rom.*, ch. 1, lect. 6, no. 107.

¹⁶⁶ *ST II-II*, q. 4, a. 3, resp.

¹⁶⁷ Wawrykow, “The Theological Virtues,” 293. Sherwin, likewise, observes, “faith...depends on charity’s act in order to function as a true virtue and attain its end” (*By Knowledge and By Love*, 162).

¹⁶⁸ Garrigou-Lagrange observes, “Faith enlivened by charity is a perfect virtue. This cannot be said of lifeless faith” (*On Faith*, 282).

between two kinds of acts of the will. He notes, “Some act of the will is required before faith, but not an act of the will informed by charity. This latter act presupposes faith, because the will cannot tend to God with perfect love, unless the intellect possesses right faith about Him.”¹⁶⁹ In faith, the intellect assents to God as First Truth moved by a command of the will. This act of the will, for St. Thomas, is not charity. Rather, whether or not it is accomplished by charity, this act of the will leads to the assent of the intellect to God as First Truth (*credere Deum* and *credere Deo*), not as beloved and beatifying end (*credere in Deum*). We see again that, for St. Thomas, the command of the will that is operative in the habit or act of faith is not identical to the act of the will that is ordered to God in the perfect love of charity.

In light of this discussion, we can see various levels and subjects of perfection in faith and charity. The intellect is perfected in truth through the habit and act of faith, whether or not charity is present. Therefore, in both lifeless and living faith the intellect can be said to be perfected insofar as the intellect is healed or purified enough to assent to divinely revealed truth because it is divinely revealed, and to refuse assent to what contradicts that truth.

¹⁶⁹ *ST II-II*, q. 6, a. 7, ad 5. Cf. *Super Sent.* III, d. 23, q. 2, a. 5. Romanus Cessario observes, “Even though this initial will-act does not result in the grace of justification, this first movement of the will toward belief depends on divine help, which theological usage identifies as an actual grace” (Cessario, *Christian Faith and the Theological Life*, 138). Cessario also notes, “Catholic teaching states that the initial act of belief as an effective assent to God’s word depends on a movement of divine grace, though in the adult this initial grace does not equal a full infusion of habitual or sanctifying grace that charity alone produces” (*ibid.*, 139). See discussion of Sherwin above. As Wawrykow observes, “[I]t may be that the person never receives the charity that would form faith to God as beatifying end. That person will simply believe and do so on the basis of God’s authority, but to no good, saving effect” (Wawrykow, “The Theological Virtues,” 293). Note, the healing of unbelief that faith brings to the believer is not salvific. The believer with lifeless faith attains a certain good, namely, purification from error regarding matters of faith. This is not the same thing as saying the belief of lifeless faith is salvific. It clearly is not. Just because it is not salvific, however, is not to say that it is not real faith vis-à-vis the intellect and the true. Also, see Wawrykow, *A-Z of Thomas Aquinas* (London: SCM Press, 2005), 56-57: “But charity can be lost by mortal sin, while faith remains—as unformed.” Cf. 56: “The former [lifeless faith] lacks love, and is the simple affirmation of these truths.” Even in lifeless faith, assent to the truths of faith obtains.

Like lifeless faith, living faith purifies the intellect of error. Yet, unlike lifeless faith, living faith, which is informed by the extrinsic form of charity ordering one in perfect love, places the believer in a state of grace without grave sin. Living faith does not merely heal the believer of error, like lifeless faith, but it heals the will as well. Further, like lifeless faith, living faith causes in the believer the fear of God. Yet, unlike lifeless faith, which merely causes servile fear (or fear of punishment), faith perfected in love causes filial fear (or fear of love) “because it makes man adhere to God and to be subject to Him by charity.”¹⁷⁰ Beyond the purification from error and the presence of servile fear, faith informed by charity brings purification from grave sin and the presence of filial fear of the God that is part of being ordered to God as ultimate end. Charity, again, enables the believer to believe and to love what they believe unto God (*credere in Deum*).

Here, we see that St. Thomas’s account of the role of charity for faith is contrary to the interpretation of Preller. Recall that, for Preller, the faith that conforms the mind of the believer to the mind of God, the only faith that could truly be said to be without error, is faith accompanied by charity. He maintains, again, “Unless God ‘takes the opportunity’ of infusing the intentional forms of live faith, the mind of the ‘believer’ will not be conformed to the being of God.”¹⁷¹ Similarly, D. Stephen Long argues, “Without the theological virtues [among them faith], there is no knowledge of God because there is no conformity to God.”¹⁷² It is difficult to see how this interpretation follows from what

¹⁷⁰ *ST II-II*, q. 7, a. 1, resp. Cf. *ST II-II*, qq. 19 and 22; *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 7 and q. 28, a. 4, ad 4.

¹⁷¹ Preller, 241.

¹⁷² Long, *Speaking of God*, 143. There is also an ambiguity elsewhere in Long. He says, “[T]he defect in any knowledge of God that lacks the formal object and the will’s movement, finally lacks true knowledge of God altogether” (*ibid.*, 141). If Long simply means by “the will’s movement” the command of the will that is part of the habit and act of faith, then, yes this is indeed St. Thomas’s position. If, however, Long intends by “the will’s movement” the habit of charity, then, he is, on Thomistic exegetical and systematic

St. Thomas has said on this point. He explicitly states, “[H]e who receives faith from God without charity, is healed from unbelief [*sanatur ab infidelitate*], not simply speaking (because the guilt of his previous unbelief is not removed) but in a manner of speaking, namely, in the point of ceasing from committing such and such a sin.”¹⁷³ That he qualifies the character of this healing from unbelief might give us pause, but it need not. It is true, insofar as the fault or guilt (*culpa*) of previous unbelief remains, the healing is partial. With respect to the assent of the intellect, however, those with lifeless faith are healed of unbelief.¹⁷⁴ Lifeless faith heals the believer of error about God. It is difficult to understand how healing of unbelief or the removal of error could be taken seriously if lifeless faith did not conform the mind of the believer to the mind of God at least with respect to the intellect’s proper object, namely, the true. As we saw above, nothing false falls under faith. Lifeless faith is intrinsically and essentially faith. As such, lifeless faith, for St. Thomas, heals of unbelief, removes error, conforms the intellect to the true, and certainly conforms the intellect of the believer to the mind of God.¹⁷⁵ Preller’s identification of “real” faith with faith accompanied by charity, or as Preller notes, faith in the “state of grace,” does not reflect the thought of St. Thomas.¹⁷⁶ In lifeless faith, the intellect of the believer assents to the true, which is to say, it is healed from unbelief and error about God, which cannot be anything other than conformity, even if partial and imperfect, to the mind of God.

grounds, incorrect. Faith without charity does conform the intellect to God insofar as it heals it of unbelief and error about God. In this passage, Long could be read either way. In the later passage, however, his position seems to depart from St. Thomas’s teaching as does Preller’s. In correspondence, Long has suggested that he would specify his claim much more. He is primarily concerned with whether natural knowledge is salvific. This seems more in line with my argument here.

¹⁷³ *ST* II-II, q. 6, a. 2, ad 3. See the next chapter for a more thorough analysis of this passage.

¹⁷⁴ See below Chapter Four for a more thorough discussion of this matter vis-à-vis *infideles*.

¹⁷⁵ Whether the intellect is related to God salvifically is beyond my and St. Thomas’s point here.

¹⁷⁶ See Preller, 262.

There is a further consequence of Preller's misinterpretation of St. Thomas on this point. If only living faith conforms the mind of the believer to the mind of God, then only living faith can in principle assent to the truth "God exists." Therefore, those with lifeless faith would be incapable of assenting to the truth that "God exists." In this case, those with lifeless faith would be unbelievers. In the next chapter, we shall see that this is not St. Thomas's position. Insofar as those with lifeless faith share the same habit as those with living faith, they have the habit of faith in the essential sense. They are healed of the same unbelief or error with respect to the truths of faith as those with living faith because lifeless faith assents to the same revealed truths as does living faith. Therefore, according to St. Thomas, lifeless faith assents to the truth "God exists" just as much as living faith does. There are no exegetical grounds for Preller to maintain otherwise.¹⁷⁷

In summary, the lack of charity does not keep people from believing the truths of faith through a real habit and act of faith. Both lifeless and living faith perfect the intellect with respect to the true and to the truths of faith that surpass natural human capacities.¹⁷⁸ Both lifeless and living faith heal the believer of unbelief and error about God.

¹⁷⁷ If my interpretation is correct, Preller's concern about the would-be believer's knowledge of whether they are in the state of grace (i.e., have charity) is moot. The question for the believer is no longer, "Can you know if you are in the state of grace?"—to which St. Thomas would respond in the negative—but "Do you believe the truths of faith?" This is a very different. It should be clear from the discussion thus far, whether one is in a state of grace does not determine whether one has faith since charity is an extrinsic not intrinsic form of faith.

¹⁷⁸ As we shall see below, St. Thomas offers a qualification on this point. Briefly, he makes a distinction between what he considers obstinate assent to falsehoods and accidental error in those who have the habit of faith (*infusa fides*) but whose formation in the preached faith (*fides ex auditu*) is inadequate or incomplete, through no fault of their own. The former he calls unbelief; the latter, simply error.

III. Christian Faith and the Conditions That Faith Determines: Résumé

Having discussed St. Thomas's account of the Christian habit and act of faith, we can begin to specify more precisely the conditions that faith determines (*sub his conditionibus quas fides determinat*). In what remains of this chapter, I shall briefly bring together the key aspects of St. Thomas's account of faith and those who believe (*fideles*), in order that we might be well situated in the next chapter to consider who might count as unbelievers (*infideles*).

First, the believer is one whose belief conforms to a certain rule of faith. Preller describes this conformity as “the conditions specified by revelation.”¹⁷⁹ This is correct. St. Thomas identifies the rule to which faith must conform variously as “the First Truth”¹⁸⁰ and “the Divine Truth,”¹⁸¹ but more specifically, the First Truth as expressed in Scripture,¹⁸² the teachings “defined by the Church,”¹⁸³ and the “sound interpretations of the Fathers.”¹⁸⁴ As O'Brien observes, “There is a given, historical divine economy and a saving message; there is a hierarchy of teaching communicated through revelation to prophets, to the man Jesus, to the Apostles.”¹⁸⁵ In faith, believers avail themselves of this message. By conforming to the truths of faith revealed by God as First Truth, mediated by Scripture and the Church, believers conform to the rule of faith. Whatever the conditions that faith determines are, those conditions at least include the conformity of

¹⁷⁹ Preller, 237.

¹⁸⁰ See *ST II-II*, q. 5, a. 3, resp. and ad 2.

¹⁸¹ See *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 6, ad 3.

¹⁸² See *ST II-II*, q. 5, a. 3, resp. and ad 2.

¹⁸³ *ST II-II*, q. 11, a. 2, ad 3. See also, *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 6, ad 3; *ST II-II*, q. 5, a. 3, resp. and ad 2. St. Thomas observes that the authority to define teachings to be believed by faith “resides chiefly in the Sovereign Pontiff” (*ST II-II*, q. 11, a. 2, ad 3).

¹⁸⁴ *ST II-II*, q. 10, a. 1, ad 3.

¹⁸⁵ O'Brien, “Appendix 2,” 194.

the believer to the First Truth as revealed in Christ and communicated in Scripture and the Church.

Further, the conformity of the believer to the rule of faith that we call believing (*credere*) involves the intellect's assent moved by a command of the will to the truths revealed by God. As an act of believing (*credere*), Christian faith is neither scientific knowing (*scire*) nor merely opining (*opinari*). The believer believes what is revealed (*credere Deum*) on the authority of the one revealing (*credere Deo*). The conditions that faith determines includes the act of *credere* in the specifically Christian sense. As such, success or failure to assent in an act of Christian *credere* must be judged on its own terms as an act of *credere*.

Christian faith is an act of believing (*credere*) that is only possible through grace. According to St. Thomas, the conditions for the possibility of explicit Christian faith are twofold: internal and external. The external condition or cause of Christian faith is the gift of the truths proposed, namely, the faith that comes from hearing (*fides ex auditu*). The believer, then, for St. Thomas, is one who has received the habit of faith and encountered in some way the truths of faith. The internal condition or cause of Christian faith is the gift of the infused habit of faith (*infusa fides*). By virtue of the infused habit of faith, the believer is able to see what is to be believed and what one ought not believe, while not seeing how what is believed is in fact true in itself, since Christian faith is an act of believing (*credere*) not scientific knowing (*scire*). The internal cause of faith includes graces to both the intellect and the will. To the intellect, God offers a fuller participation in the divine light, namely, the light of faith (*lumen fidei*). To the will, God offers a fuller participation in the divine instinct, namely, the instinct of faith (*instinctus*

fidei). The infused habit of faith, by virtue of a graced intellect and will, allows one to see that the credibility of the truths of faith as revealed by the First Truth who cannot lie. The conditions that faith determines, then, includes the external and internal causes of faith, namely, the Gospel preached and heard and the healing and elevating infusion of graced faith, respectively.

St. Thomas specifies the content of the faith preached by distinguishing between the primary and direct truths of faith, the secondary and indirect truths of faith, and those truths presupposed by faith. The primary and direct truths of faith include propositions about the Incarnation, the Trinity, and the like. The secondary and indirect truths of faith include those matters closely related to or dependent upon the primary and direct truths. These secondary and indirect truths include, for instance, propositions the denial of which might lead to heresy, truths such as that Abraham had two sons or David was from the root of Jesse. Propositions that are not strictly speaking part of the content of faith, but are presupposed, are called the preambles to faith (*praeambula fidei*); insofar as they are knowable (*scibile*) and demonstrable (*demonstrabile*) by natural human reason, they do not fall under faith.¹⁸⁶ For St. Thomas, then, believing (*credere*) in the supernatural and Christian sense pertains to matters beyond natural human reasoning. The conditions that faith determines include the assent in faith to the supernatural truths that are the primary and direct matters of faith, namely, the articles of faith, as well as secondary and indirect matters from Scripture, but not the preambles of faith.

Either a person believes (or is ready to believe) all that is proposed by God for belief and so is a believer, or the person is not a believer. As Bruce Marshall maintains,

¹⁸⁶ *In Hebraeos*, ch. 11, lect. 2, no. 577.

“[T]he articles of Christian faith are for Thomas strictly a package deal.”¹⁸⁷ The believer, then, for St. Thomas, is required to assent to the whole content of faith, whether actually or virtually. Insofar as faith assents to propositions presented by a God who cannot lie, one must assent (or be ready to assent) to all that is proposed (or could be proposed); otherwise one cannot be said to assent to any of it at all. The conditions that faith determines includes this all or nothing component.

The explicitness with which one believes the content of the faith proposed (*fides ex auditu*) varies according to persons, times, and places. While belief in God’s existence and in his character as rewarder is required at all times and in all places, this belief is not sufficient at all times and in all places.¹⁸⁸ According to St. Thomas, explicit belief in God’s existence and his character as a rewarder virtually contains belief in God as revealed in Christ.¹⁸⁹ After reception of God’s self-revelation in Christ presented in the preaching of the Gospel, explicit assent to the primary and direct truths revealed by God in Christ is required. This includes, for instance, that God is triune and became incarnate. Even after the Incarnation, the explicitness with which one believes the primary and direct content of faith varies from one person to another. On the one hand, the learned, those who have the opportunity and acumen for further study, are required to have explicit belief in the primary and direct truths of faith. On the other hand, the simple, those with either no opportunity or no acumen for study, may have less explicit belief in fewer of the primary and direct truths of faith. The less explicit belief of the simple

¹⁸⁷ Marshall, “Faith and Reason Reconsidered,” 9.

¹⁸⁸ As Wawrykow notes, “What was virtually contained in the faith, objectively taken, has been made explicit, been more finely articulated” (Wawrykow, “The Theological Virtues,” 290).

¹⁸⁹ Pieper notes, “[W]hoever in the pre-Christian and extra-Christian worlds has accepted the wisdom warranted by sacred tradition, whoever has accepted the tenet that God, in a manner pleasing to him, will be a liberator of men, has believed *implicite* in Christ” (Pieper, *Faith-Hope-Love*, 79).

would, for St. Thomas, virtually contain belief in other primary and direct matters of faith. The conditions that faith determines, then, includes a certain explicitness of belief, while remaining open, in some instances, to varying degrees of implicitness of belief.

St. Thomas makes clear, finally, that the one who has the infused habit of faith while assenting to the truths of faith by a command of the will on the authority of God as First Truth does not necessarily have theological charity. Living and lifeless faith are the same habit, of the same species. Insofar as charity is the “form of faith,” it is as an extrinsic or non-essential form that quickens but does not constitute the habit of faith as such. Even without charity, the believer is “healed from unbelief” by his or her faith. Even without charity, faith is perfect with respect to the proper object of the intellect, namely, the true. Charity perfects faith, in particular with respect to the will, insofar as it orders the believer unto God, making his or her faith a graced act of *credere in Deum*, and as such, meritorious. For St. Thomas, however, the believer is one who has the habit of faith with or without the habit of charity. The charity that makes faith living is not, according to St. Thomas, essential to faith. The conditions that faith determines do not require the presence of charity in the believer.

In this chapter, we have discussed St. Thomas’s account of the habit and act of Christian *credere* and the conditions that faith determines. From this we get a good sense about who might count for St. Thomas as a believer. From this, also, the reader is well situated to begin to identify what might count as unbelief and who might count as *infideles* of *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3. This is the task of the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

Infideles and the Proper Sense of Unbelief

In the previous chapter, we discussed St. Thomas's account of the act of Christian faith and the conditions of belief in God that faith determines (*his conditionibus quas fides determinat*).¹ That chapter provided the exegetical and systematic foundations in St. Thomas for identifying the unbelievers (*infideles*) and determining the defective cognitions (*defectus cognitionis*) operative in *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3. We are now well situated to define more clearly the terms this passage utilizes in order to re-read and interpret St. Thomas's denial of unbelievers' belief in God's existence in *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3. This re-reading will enable us to see whether Preller has rightly interpreted St. Thomas on the possibility of pre-Christian pagan philosophical knowledge of the existence of God.

In discussions of belief and unbelief in our time, the operative meaning of the terms "unbelief" and "unbeliever," as well as "faith," sometimes remain broad.² Thomistic studies are no different. Some suggest that unbelief is simply the absence of Christian faith, that unbelievers are simply those who lack faith. In the context of the treatise on faith, I shall argue, St. Thomas does not intend something so broad. Rather, in

¹ The broad outlines of this present chapter, as well as many of its conclusions, appeared in my essay "*Infideles et Philosophi*: Re-Reading *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3," in *Nova et Vetera*, vol. 15, no. 2 (2017), 653-673. In that article, my analysis of possible candidates for unbelief did not include some relevant candidates that I consider here.

² In the context of interreligious dialogue, authors attempt to articulate an account of belief and faith that might be operative and recognizable within diverse religious traditions. Examples include John Hick, *Faith and Knowledge* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1966); Terence Penelhum, "The Analysis of Faith in St. Thomas Aquinas," in *Religious Studies* 3 (1977); Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991); *Faith and Belief: The Difference Between Them* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1998); Bernard Lonergan, "Faith and Beliefs," in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan: Philosophical and Theological Papers 1965-1980*, ed. Robert C. Croken and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 30-48.

this context, St. Thomas offers various distinctions that bring the reader to a more precise understanding of key terms. *Infideles* is one of those terms. In the context of the treatise on faith in the *Summa theologiae*, *infideles* has a definite meaning that is rarely co-extensive with non-believer. In order to show this, we must provide a substantive analysis of St. Thomas's understanding of unbelief in the treatise on faith, and elsewhere. This analysis will allow us to identify the *infideles* of St. Thomas, and to see whether pre-Christian pagan philosophers might be counted among them.

In what follows, then, I shall first offer a detailed discussion of what counts as the proper sense of unbelief: the mere absence of faith (pure negation) or the sin of unbelief (opposition). Here, we will have to make an interpretive choice regarding St. Thomas's use and breadth of meaning in the relevant context. Second, having discussed what counts as unbelief in the proper sense, I shall consider the kinds of individuals we might identify as the *infideles* in *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3 in order to determine which kinds really are *infideles* meant in *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3. In the end, I shall argue that pre-Christian pagan philosophers are not on St. Thomas's radar in this passage.

I. Unbelief: The Broad Outlines of St. Thomas's Account

St. Thomas makes a clear distinction between unbelief as negation and unbelief as opposition. He states,

Unbelief may be taken in two ways: first by way of pure negation, so that man be called an unbeliever, merely because he has not the faith. Secondly, unbelief may be taken by way of opposition to faith; in which sense a man refuses to hear the faith, or despises it...[I]t is this that completes the notion of unbelief, and it is in this that unbelief is sin.³

³ *ST II-II*, q. 10, a. 1, resp.

Unbelief, then, can be considered as the absence of assent or the presence of dissent.⁴ Here, St. Thomas is making obvious the distinction between *not* doing something and *un-*doing (or an unwillingness to do) something. Just as not tying my shoes is distinct from my untying (or my unwillingness to tie) my shoes, so too, for St. Thomas, not-believing the articles of faith is distinct from un-believing them. Just as not tying my shoes simply names a non-act with respect to tying my shoes, so too, according to St. Thomas, not-believing names a non-act with respect to assenting to the articles of faith. Moreover, just as untying shoes is an act in opposition to tying my shoes or shoes being tied, so too, un-believing is an act in opposition to believing the articles of faith or having once believed those articles.

John O'Callaghan dismisses the relevance of this distinction for *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3. He maintains, "Aquinas has not yet made the distinction of *ST* II-II, q. 10, a. 1, between unbelief as simple negation (not having faith) and unbelief as opposition to faith. So I think his point here should be taken generically and not restricted to an unbeliever who opposes faith."⁵ Bruce Marshall offers a similar interpretation. He claims, "The pre-Christian philosopher and the heretic are equally, though of course differently, species of *infidelis*."⁶ Further, "Since each involves a *defectus cognitionis* regarding God, they have the same epistemic outcome: *est in non attingendo totaliter*; the *defectus* in each case is different in species, but the same in genus (*infidelitas*, viz. absence of Christian faith)."⁷ Both those who have not faith through a lack of encounter with revelation (pure negation)

⁴ See also, *ST* II-II, q. 10, a. 6, resp., in which St. Thomas distinguishes unbelief as resisting faith from unbelief as the pure negation of faith.

⁵ O'Callaghan, "Can We Demonstrate That 'God Exists'?" in *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition, vol. 14, no. 2 (2016), 625 n. 16.

⁶ Marshall, "Thomas, Thomisms, and Truth," 504.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 504-505.

and those who have resisted the faith (opposition) would count as unbelievers in this sense. *Infideles* encompasses individuals of both types.

The dismissal of the significance or relevance of the distinction between pure negation of and opposition to faith is, to be fair, an interpretive option with some plausibility. There are reasons in its favor. There are passages in the treatise on faith that seem to support at least the possibility that unbelief can be taken in a broader sense than the specific vice articulated in q. 10 and following. For instance, *ST* II-II, q. 1, a. 5 ad 1 states, “Unbelievers are in ignorance of things that are of faith.” Here, we have an identification of the unbelievers with those ignorant of the things of faith. This seems to suggest that St. Thomas, at least in this text, has unbelief as pure negation or mere absence in mind. The text is ambiguous, however. It clearly has to do with ignorance of some sort, but the nature of that ignorance is left unsaid. This matters because there could be two senses of ignorance in the treatise on faith, as well as elsewhere.⁸ There is the ignorance of those who have never encountered the Gospel message. This ignorance follows from a pure negation of faith. There is also the ignorance of those who have a will that resists or opposes faith. If the pure negation of faith is a defect in cognition such that one is said to be wholly ignorant, per the Aristotelian axiom, then so too is the opposition to the faith. The former are merely ignorant, having never heard, while the latter betray ignorance because they err about that which they think themselves to be thinking or speaking. Wrong cognition of a simple thing betrays ignorance of that thing. St. Thomas’s description of unbelievers who are ignorant of the things of faith, then, does

⁸ See, for instance, *In Rom.*, ch. 1, lect. 6, nos. 112, 114-115, lect. 7, nos. 125-126, 128-129, 131, 135, and lect. 8, nos. 153, 155-157; *In Job*, ch. 21, lect. 1 and ch. 34, lect. 2. All English translations of *In Job* come from, with light modifications, *Commentary on the Book of Job*, trans. Brian Thomas Becket Mullady (Lander: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2016).

not clearly tell us whether St. Thomas has pure negation or opposition, or both, in mind. Therefore, this passage does not say enough to determine what St. Thomas has in mind in *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3.

The unbelievers are mentioned in other passages prior to q. 10 as well. One of these is ambiguous, not providing us with enough information to determine what St. Thomas has in mind.⁹ Some, however, are clearer. These latter passages preclude interpreting unbelievers or the unbelief from which they suffer as pure negation of faith. *ST II-II*, q. 3, a. 2, ad 1, for instance, speaks of the “attacks of unbelievers.”¹⁰ To attack is to oppose. That this might be the pure negation of faith is implausible, or at least far less than obvious. *ST II-II*, q. 3, a. 2, ad 2, on the other hand, is clear. There St. Thomas is concerned with unbelief which is opposition since the unbelievers here insult the faithful in a context of endangerment of the faith. And so, neither of these passages can be straightforwardly marshalled in support of the broader sense of unbelievers in *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3 because they show that before St. Thomas gives the clear distinction between mere lack of faith and sinful opposition to faith in q. 10, he already has the latter sort of unbelief in mind when he uses the word *infidelis*.

We see, then, that of those places where St. Thomas mentions unbelievers prior to his specification and distinction of the vice of unbelief in q. 10, none is an obvious instance of St. Thomas using unbelievers in the broad sense of a mere absence of faith. To the contrary, there are reasons to suppose that St. Thomas means something more specific, namely, that unbelief in the relevant sense is the vice or sin of unbelief, which is the sin of opposition to faith.

⁹ See *ST II-II*, q. 4, a. 4, ad 3.

¹⁰ *ST II-II*, q. 3, a. 2, ad 1.

First, it is not uncommon for St. Thomas to specify a given position or term after having already used it or depend on it in an earlier text. For instance, St. Thomas does not articulate a thorough Christology until the *Tertia Pars*. We are not thereby warranted to dismiss later specifications and distinctions from the *Tertia Pars* when interpreting the *Prima Pars* and *Secunda Pars*. In fact, St. Thomas begins the *Summa theologiae* with an eye to what is yet to come.¹¹ Of more immediate relevance, in the second question of the *Secunda Secundae*, St. Thomas has yet to identify or discuss charity as the form of faith, or what charity is, for that matter, and yet, charity as the form of faith is clearly operative in his account of the threefold act of faith as a virtue in *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3. The form of charity is that which perfects the appetitive component of faith such that the believer now also loves what it believes. In short, then, just because St. Thomas makes some specification or distinction explicit in a later text, we should not always conclude that it is not operative in an earlier text. It might just not have been unpacked yet.

Second, for methodological reasons, St. Thomas often postpones certain considerations until after he has discussed others especially in his treatments of the virtues. His specification of the vices opposed to particular virtues does not occur until after his positive treatment of the relevant virtue. For instance, in his account of the moral virtues in the *Prima Secundae*, St. Thomas provides a positive account of each virtue before treating of the vice that opposes it. He follows this method in his discussions of the theological virtues as well. In his treatise on hope, St. Thomas postpones a discussion and specification of the vices opposed to theological hope (qq. 20-22) until after articulating positively what the virtue is (qq. 17-19). Similarly, in his treatise on charity, St. Thomas postpones a discussion and specification of the vices opposed to charity (qq.

¹¹ See the various prologues throughout the *Summa theologiae*.

34-46) until after articulating positively what the virtue is (qq. 23-33). St. Thomas follows this method in the treatise on faith, as well. He begins with a positive account of what the virtue of faith is before specifying those things that are opposed to faith. In each case, this method does not prevent St. Thomas from utilizing these as yet unspecified vices in the earlier positive discussions of virtue. We must be cautious, then, about dismissing the proper and specific sense of a vice given later, for methodological reasons, when considering earlier passages. In the case of *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3, one should not preclude the possibility that St. Thomas already has the vice of unbelief in mind.¹²

Third, as we shall see below,¹³ there are individuals who both count as non-believers, in the sense of pure negation or mere absence, and do not fall under the limitations noted in *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3. Here, I have in mind, philosophers who do not *believe* the truth “God exists” but know scientifically the truth “God exists.” In this context, St. Thomas’s concern is those who are said to *believe* “God exists,” and as such, potentially be said to perform an aspect of the act of faith. The pre-Christian pagan philosopher, however, is not one who *believes* “God exists” at all, so does not enter into the objection to which St. Thomas is replying in *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3.

Fourth, St. Thomas is clear that, in the treatise on the virtue of faith, his primary understanding of unbelief is the vice of unbelief, namely, opposition to faith. He explicitly names the opposition to faith as the “the act proper to unbelief.”¹⁴ O’Callaghan is correct in saying that *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3 is concerned with unbelief “generically.”

¹² What follows, then, is not exegetically apodictic, as if much were. It is, I take it, the more obvious reading of what St. Thomas has in mind. Where one falls with respect to this interpretive choice does matter. I leave the reader to decide for themselves, both in the immediate and remote contexts of St. Thomas’s corpus.

¹³ See 171-184 below.

¹⁴ *ST II-II*, q. 10, a. 2, resp. Cf. *ST II-II*, q. 10, a. 3, resp. and ad 2; *ST II-II*, q. 10, a. 5, resp.; *ST II-II*, q. 10, a. 6, resp. In *ST II-II*, q. 10, a. 1, resp., he notes already that sinful opposition to belief fills out the very notion of unbelief: “*in hoc proprie perficitur ratio infidelitatis.*”

But when he comes to an expression of vices opposed to faith, what St. Thomas highlights in his discussion of “unbelief in general” (*de infidelitate in communi*), however, is not the pure negation of faith. The response St. Thomas offers in the first article of this discussion in *ST* II-II, q. 10 is the only identification of the perfection of the notion (*ratio*) of unbelief that he gives in the *Summa theologiae*, and he identifies that perfection with opposition to faith, and not with mere lack of faith.¹⁵ In his treatment of vices opposed to faith, unbelief “in general” is the vice of unbelief. Overall, in the treatise on faith, this identification of the proper sense of unbelief with opposition has few, if any exceptions. As noted above, there are places where St. Thomas points out the ignorance involved in unbelief. As we saw, St. Thomas could in these places mean unbelief to be either pure negation or opposition, or both. Is *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3 one such text?

No position is exegetically apodictic. An interpretive choice must be made. I have made my choice. For the reasons noted above, I take St. Thomas’s primary meaning—the “proper” meaning—of unbelief to be the vice of unbelief as opposition to faith.

According to St. Thomas, then, not believing is not the very same thing as unbelieving. This act of unbelief is dissent from or resistance to the truths of faith. As Joseph Wawrykow states, “Unbelief [in the treatise on the virtue of faith] is more than the simple absence of faith. It involves a hostility to faith, a rejection of faith. The act of faith is to think with assent; unbelief involves dissent, and a malice of the will, which commands the act of the intellect.”¹⁶

Additionally, as an act of dissent from or resistance to the truths of faith, the proper sense of faith very clearly involves the will. It involves not merely the absence of

¹⁵ See the same identification of that perfection of the *ratio* of infidelity in *ST* II-II, q. 10, a. 2, ad 2.

¹⁶ Wawrykow, “The Theological Virtues,” 293.

assent in intellect, but also a certain movement of the will. St. Thomas remarks, “Now dissent, which is the act proper to unbelief, is an act of the intellect, moved, however, by the will, just as assent is. Therefore unbelief, like faith, is in the intellect as its proximate subject. But it is in the will as its first moving principle, in which way every sin is said to be in the will.”¹⁷ Similarly, he notes, “The will’s contempt causes the intellect’s dissent, which completes the notion of unbelief. Hence the cause of unbelief is in the will, while unbelief itself is in the intellect.”¹⁸ This act, which is the proper act of *infideles* as such, is obviously more than simply not assenting to the articles of faith.

As an act of intellectual and willful dissent from or resistance to matters of faith, unbelief is dissent from or resistance to truth. Indeed, unbelief is a voluntary act of the intellect by which the unbeliever in fact assents to untruth. As St. Thomas observes,

Every sin consists formally in aversion from God...Hence the more a sin severs man from God, the graver it is. Now man is most ever separated from God by unbelief, because he has not even true knowledge of God: and by false knowledge of God, man does not approach Him but is severed from Him. Nor is it possible for one who has a false opinion of God to know Him in any way at all, because the object of his opinion is not God.¹⁹

As an act of intellectual dissent moved by a command of the will, unbelief is an act of dissent from or resistance to the self-revelation of the First Truth, who cannot lie. By dissenting, the unbeliever denies the truth of that which is revealed by the Truth, which is to say, the unbeliever says of what is that it is not and of what is not that it is. In short, the unbelievers assent to what is false or at least untrue. For St. Thomas, then, “[U]nbelievers

¹⁷ *ST* II-II, q. 10, a. 2, resp.

¹⁸ *ST* II-II, q. 10, a. 2, ad 2.

¹⁹ *ST* II-II, q. 10, a. 3, resp. St. Thomas’s final statement in this passage should sound vaguely familiar. As we shall see below, he is here alluding to the Aristotelian axiom mentioned in *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3. Cf. *ScG* III, ch. 118, nos. 3-5.

follow many false opinions.”²⁰ With respect to heresy, which is one type of unbelief, he states, “Falsehood is contrary to truth. Now a heretic is one who devises or follows false or new opinions. Therefore, heresy is opposed to the truth.”²¹

We need to be clear about the manner in which the unbeliever is said to assent to what is false. It is not simply an error in judgment on the part of the unbeliever. St. Thomas distinguishes between those who assent to falsehoods because of simple error and those who assent to falsehoods because of the obstinacy of their will. St. Thomas states, “A man who obstinately disbelieves a thing that is of faith, has not the habit of faith, and yet he who does not explicitly believe all, while he is prepared to believe all, has the habit.”²² Those who assent to what is false simply erroneously, possibly because of a lack in their formation, might still have a readiness of will to assent to the truth when correction is offered. These are not opposed to faith but are merely in material error. One can imagine innumerable situations in which novices are poorly informed with respect to what the Church teaches. They are not unbelievers, but simply incomplete believers who happen to err materially. If, on the one hand, some who happen to assent to what is false are willing to assent to the truths of faith as held by the Church when presented to them, they would thereby be believers, having the habit of faith, and not unbelievers in the proper sense. If, on the other hand, someone who assent to what is false in matters of the faith are unwilling to be corrected when shown the true teachings of the Church, they would thereby be unbelievers opposed to the habit of faith, unbelievers in the proper

²⁰ *ST II-II*, q. 10, a. 5, ad 1. Note that there are diverse vices opposed to faith. Such vice is both determinate and indeterminate in number, however. It is determinate in that it is an act of dissent in opposition to a truth of faith. It is indeterminate in that one can dissent in opposition to any number of truths. There are many false opinions to which one might give assent. Yet, in all such cases, one is doing the same kind of thing, namely, opposing the truth of the faith.

²¹ *ST II-II*, q. 11, a. 1, sc.

²² *ST II-II*, q. 5, a. 4, ad 1.

sense. St. Thomas maintains that “unless the simple hold obstinately to their individual errors, against the faith of the universal Church, which cannot err,”²³ then they are not unbelievers in the proper sense, but they are in accidental error.²⁴

Thus far we have identified certain key aspects of unbelief according to St. Thomas. Unbelief in the proper sense in the treatise on faith is the will-commanded act of the intellect by which someone dissents from or resists the acceptance of truths of faith (whether actually through an encounter or virtually through an unwillingness to believe). For St. Thomas, then, unbelief in the proper sense is not the mere absence or “pure negation” of belief. In the treatise on faith, St. Thomas is almost exclusively concerned with intellectual and willful opposition to the truths of faith. Unbelief is an act of dissent, weakly tending toward one side of a contradictory, on the basis of the personal and willful judgment of the unbeliever, however tenacious that willfulness might be. Moreover, insofar as it dissents from or resists the truth revealed by God, unbelief is a will-commanded assent of the intellect to what is opposed to truth, namely, falsity.²⁵ This assent of the unbeliever to that which is false is not due simply to error, but is the result of an obstinate will in the face of the truths of the faith. Simply to be in error is not yet to be an unbeliever. Only willful dissent from or resistance to the matters of faith once recognized as such is, for St. Thomas, unbelief in the proper sense.

²³ *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 6, ad 3.

²⁴ We shall further discuss below those who are in accidental error. See 147-150 below.

²⁵ Assent to what is false is, as we shall see in the next chapter, crucial for understanding the *defectus cognitionis* from which unbelievers suffer.

II. Who Are the Unbelievers?

In light of the above specification of unbelief in the proper sense, we can now consider varieties of potential unbelief in the proper sense, and there are, for St. Thomas, multiple. He notes, “[F]aith is one virtue through adhering to the one First Truth; yet, there are many species of unbelief, because unbelievers follow many false opinions.”²⁶ Similarly, he states, “[I]f unbelief be considered in comparison to faith, there are several species of unbelief.”²⁷ Although St. Thomas recognizes the potential for diverse acts of unbelief, he does maintain that the kinds are “determinate in number.”²⁸ Specifically, he identifies two ways that one might have unbelief in the proper sense.²⁹ He states,

For since the sin of unbelief consists in resisting [*in renitendo*] the faith, this may happen in two ways: either the faith is resisted before it has been accepted, and such is the unbelief of pagans or heathens; or the Christian faith is resisted after it has been accepted, and this either in the figure and such is the unbelief of the Jews, or in the very manifestations of truth, and such is the unbelief of heretics.³⁰

From this passage, one might get the impression that the unbelief of the pagan or heathen is the mere absence of faith, namely, the unbelief of those who have never heard. This is not St. Thomas’s intended meaning, however. As we have seen, unbelief as pure negation or mere absence, what I have called non-belief, is not, for St. Thomas, the proper sense, it is not the act proper to unbelief. What he has in mind here, then, is the resistance of the

²⁶ *ST* II-II, q. 10, a. 5, ad 1.

²⁷ *ST* II-II, q. 10, a. 5, resp. Cf. *ST* II-II, q. 10, a. 5, sc.: “[S]everal species of vice are opposed to [faith].”

²⁸ *ST* II-II, q. 10, a. 5, resp.

²⁹ There are two ways once pure negation or mere absence is set aside, as it is by St. Thomas. Otherwise, we would speak of three ways.

³⁰ *ST* II-II, q. 10, a. 5, resp. See also, *ST* II-II, q. 10, a. 8, resp. Cf. *ST* II-II, q. 10, a. 8, ad 2; *ST* II-II, q. 10, a. 9, resp.

unbeliever to the truths of faith, whether as encountered or virtually through a lack of a good will.³¹ The kind of unbelief at issue here, then, is not the mere absence of faith.

The second way by which one might resist the faith is turning away from the faith to which one had previously assented. Unbelief of this sort is more problematic for St. Thomas. He notes, “[H]e who resists the faith after accepting it, sins more grievously against faith, than he who resists it without having accepted it, even as he who fails to fulfil what he has promised, sins more grievously than if he had never promised it.”³² The Jews of the Old Covenant who once received the truths of faith in figure or shadow, but then, in the face of the reality of the Gospel message, turn away are unbelievers of this more serious type.³³ Christians who turn away from the truths of the faith previously assented to are likewise unbelievers in this sense.³⁴

Already, we have a clear indication of those who count or might count as unbelievers (*infideles*) for St. Thomas. We have at least a general understanding of that from which unbelief in the proper sense suffers in general. What remains of this section, then, is dedicated to considering precisely the various groups that might seem to count as *infideles*. Among these candidates, I shall include the following: (a) those who materially err with respect to truths of faith, namely, those living and teaching prior to a dogmatic definition, as well as the simple in the faith; (b) those with lifeless faith; (c) Jews; (d) Muslims; (e) demons; (f) schismatics; (g) heretics; (h) apostates; and lastly, (i)

³¹ St. Thomas has already made the distinction between the pure lack of faith and the opposition to faith. Therefore, those who have resisted the faith must, in this context, be those who have done so in reality or virtually by virtue of a lack of good will. This group includes pagans and Jews who have heard the Gospel message but turned from it or pagans or Jews who resisted before an encounter through their will. There are certainly pagans or heathens who fall into these groups, not because they are pagan, but because of their resistance. In this context, having made the crucial distinction and identification of the proper sense of “unbelief.” St. Thomas has narrowed the operative meaning of the term.

³² *ST II-II*, q. 10, a. 6, resp.

³³ See *ST II-II*, q. 10, a. 6, resp. Cf. *ST II-II*, q. 10, a. 8, resp.

³⁴ *ST II-II*, q. 10, a. 8, resp.

philosophers (*philosophi*), especially insofar as they are pagan or heathen. In the end, we shall see that each of those who count as *infideles* in the proper and operative sense suffers from an obstinate adherence to what is false, thinking and speaking of what is that it is not or of what is not that it is. This is, with respect to the act of Christian *credere*, a failure to conform to the conditions that faith determines, and as such, it is a failure to believe at all.

A. Believers in Error: Material Heretics and the Simple

In the previous chapter, we raised the possibility of individuals who assent to material error about the primary matters of faith, but who cannot be said to have departed from the faith. This error was named “material heresy.” By heresy, here, I simply mean any dissent from or opinion contrary to the revealed truths of the faith. But material heresy alone does not represent an absence of faith because the habit of faith or readiness to believe could remain operative in a material heretic. The circumstances in which this might occur can vary. Living before the Church declared certain errors, some believers endorsed these errors as speculative theological articulations of the primary matters of faith. Additionally, in every period in the Church’s history, some have assented to material error, not because of a willful aversion to truth or God’s witness, but because of a lack of proper formation. In this section, I shall show how the individuals who fall into these kinds of error do not count as unbelievers in St. Thomas’s proper sense.

For instance, St. Thomas observes, “[C]ertain doctors seem to have differed...even in matters of faith, which were not as yet defined by the Church; although if anyone were obstinately to deny them after they had been defined by the authority of

the universal Church, he would be deemed a heretic.”³⁵ Material error of this sort is not unbelief in the proper sense, which involves a certain obstinacy of the will that refuses to embrace doctrines simply because one recognizes them as taught on God’s authority alone. Many errors, even in the primary and direct truths of faith, are recognized as such only in hindsight. In the early Church, especially prior to the Council of Nicaea, before certain truths of the faith were definitively declared, material diversity on primary matters of the faith was common. Once a matter of the faith has been defined by the Church, however, obstinate adherence to material error on that particular matter constitutes a departure from the faith. The lack of readiness or willingness to believe the faith proposed and heard (*fides ex auditu*) indicates a lack of belief in the God who reveals (*credere Deo*), which betrays the absence of the habit of faith (*infusa fides*). Those who are well-informed and who continue to maintain material error are, for St. Thomas, no longer simply in error, but they are now at odds with the First Truth as communicated and mediated by the Church. These are, for St. Thomas, unbelievers (*infideles*) in the proper sense. Those who are wrong about a matter of faith are not obstinately refusing to accept the truths of faith once defined are not unbelievers in this sense, but shown to have merely been in material error.

In the previous chapter we discussed St. Thomas’s distinction between the simple and the learned. The learned were able and expected to assent to the primary and direct matters of faith more explicitly than those St. Thomas calls the simple. Because of the limitations of the simple, St. Thomas suggested that “the simple...ought, in matters of

³⁵ *ST* II-II, q. 11, a. 2, ad 3.

faith, to stay by the learned.”³⁶ Just as the beginner depends upon the experienced, so too, the simple ought to rely, at least in part, on the learned.

The formation offered to the simple by the learned, however, can be more or less adequate. If the simple or at least those who would not know any better were formed in a heretical tradition, they would believe certain material errors with respect to the faith. This belief would be unfortunate, but not due to a lack of the habit of faith. Those who are willing and ready to assent to the truths of faith once proposed and heard (*fides ex auditu*) show themselves to have the habit of faith (*infusa fides*).³⁷ As St. Thomas notes, “A man who obstinately disbelieves a thing that is of faith, has not the habit of faith, and yet he who does not explicitly believe all, while he is prepared to believe all, has the habit.”³⁸ So, even when the simple assent to material error, they still may have the habit of faith, because once the true faith is effectively presented to them, they show themselves willing and ready to believe, and moreover, to believe on the authority and witness of the revealing God (*credere Deo*). Therefore, the simple who are in material error but have the habit of faith do not and cannot count, for St. Thomas, as unbelievers (*infideles*) in the proper sense.

In sum, the opposition to believing the fullness of faith proposed and heard (*fides ex auditu*) indicates a lack of the formal object of faith, namely, the authority of God who reveals as the motive of belief (*credere Deo*), which lack betrays the absence of the habit of faith (*infusa fides*). For St. Thomas, these unbelievers (*infideles*) in the proper sense lack this habit because they have the vice of opposition to it. On the other hand,

³⁶ *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 6, sc. Here, St. Thomas is referring to Gregory’s gloss on Job 1:14: “The oxen were ploughing, and the asses feeding beside them.” Cf. *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 11, resp.; *In Hebraeos*, ch. 11, lect. 2.

³⁷ *ST II-II*, q. 5, a. 3, resp.

³⁸ *ST II-II*, q. 5, a. 4, ad 1.

inadequately formed Christians who deny certain truths of the faith materially, but who are ready and willing to believe the truths of the faith proposed and recognized as such, are not unbelievers, they are simply believers who err. In this case, the assent to what is false is accidental to one's act of *credere*. What is essential to this act of *credere* is that one understands oneself to be assenting to what God has revealed, whatever that be. That one is mistaken about what God has revealed is an accidental feature of one's faith, perhaps due to poor formation or the inadequate mediation of the Gospel. In this case, lacking dissent commanded by an obstinate will to avoid embracing what God reveals, one would not be among the *infideles* in the proper sense.

B. Faith without Charity: The (Un)Belief of Those with Lifeless Faith

In the examination of the specifically Christian act of faith and the conditions that faith determines, we noted St. Thomas's distinction between living or formed (*formata*) faith and lifeless or unformed (*informis*) faith. The former is faith accompanied by the theological virtue of charity, while the latter is faith without that virtue. We saw that, for St. Thomas, charity is called the form of faith,³⁹ but not the form of faith *simpliciter*, that is, the essential or intrinsic specifying form of faith. Rather, charity is the extrinsic form of faith.⁴⁰ Charity provides a further determination of someone's faith, perfecting the will or appetitive component already in faith's assent in love for the sake of living unto God (*credere in Deum*).⁴¹ However, faith is faith with or without the habit of charity.⁴² The habit of a faith informed by charity is, as St. Thomas describes, identical to the habit of

³⁹ See *ST II-II*, q. 4, a. 3, sc.

⁴⁰ See *ST II-II*, q. 4, a. 3, ad 1 and ad 2; *ST II-II*, q. 4, a. 4, ad 2; *ST II-II*, q. 6, a. 2, resp. and ad 1.

⁴¹ See *ST II-II*, q. 4, a. 3, resp.; *ST II-II*, q. 7, a. 1, resp.

⁴² See *ST II-II*, q. 4, a. 4, resp. Cf. *ST II-II*, q. 4, a. 5, ad 3; *De veritate*, q. 14, aa. 5-7; *Super Sent.* III, d. 23, q. 3, aa. 1 and 4.

faith without charity.⁴³ Faith can remain even in the presence of “mortal sins,” which is to say, for St. Thomas, even in the absence of theological charity.⁴⁴

Now, as we saw, the habit of faith heals and purifies the believer of error and falsehoods. In the act of assent in faith, enabled by grace, the intellect is moved by a command of the will to assent to the truths of faith based on the authority and testimony of the revealing God, who cannot lie. With respect to the matters of faith to which they assent, then, the intellect of the believer is healed of error. This purification from error in faith occurs whether or not faith is accompanied by charity.

We have seen that St. Thomas distinguishes between the role of the will that is essential to faith and the role of the will that pertains to charity. He affirms that “some act” of the will is required in faith, but he denies that that act of the will is an act of the will informed by charity.⁴⁵ In fact, the essential notion of faith, which does not require the presence of charity, is presupposed in order that charity might be rightly ordered to its object. Charity presupposes “right faith” about God (*credere Deum*) in order that the believer might be perfected in love and live unto God (*credere in Deum*).⁴⁶ Although the virtue of faith requires an act of the will formed by charity, the essential notion of the habit of faith does not. In the essential notion of faith, however, the intellect is not necessarily perfected in the virtue of faith so as to believe for the sake of the person’s beatifying end, namely, God.⁴⁷ The habit and act of faith, with or without charity, can be

⁴³ See *In Rom.*, ch. 1, lect. 6, no. 107.

⁴⁴ *ST II-II*, q. 20, a. 2, resp. In his commentary on 1 Corinthians, St. Thomas even grants the ability to perform miracles to those with lifeless faith. In the context of a discussion of the faith that can move mountains, he states, “[I]t should be noted here that strong faith, even without charity, can perform miracles” (*In I Cor.*, ch. 13, lect. 1, no. 767).

⁴⁵ *ST II-II*, q. 4, a. 7, ad 5. Cf. *Super Sent.* III, d. 23, q. 2, a. 5.

⁴⁶ *ST II-II*, q. 4, a. 7, ad 5.

⁴⁷ Cessario observes, “[W]hen Aquinas says that unformed faith is not a virtue, he means simple that ‘dead’ faith, lacking the indwelling grace of the Holy Spirit that characterizes formed faith, does not possess thee

perfect on the part of the intellect. The intellect is perfected in faith with respect to its proper object, namely, the true. This faith is sufficient, according to St. Thomas, that the believer be healed of error and unbelief. This is possible even though this faith is not yet the virtue of faith, in which the habit and act of faith are made good by the act of the will informed by charity, again, by which the person might be said to believe unto God (*credere in Deum*).

We see, then, that St. Thomas's account of the role of charity for faith is at odds with the interpretation of Preller on this point. Recall that, for Preller, the faith that conforms the mind of the believer to the mind of God, the only faith that could truly be said to be without error, must be faith accompanied by charity. He maintains, again, "Unless God 'takes the opportunity' of infusing the intentional forms of live faith, the mind of the 'believer' will not be conformed to the being of God."⁴⁸ Similarly, D. Stephen Long argues, "Without the theological virtues [among them faith], there is no knowledge of God because there is no conformity to God."⁴⁹ It is difficult to see how this interpretation squares with what St. Thomas has said on this point.

St. Thomas explicitly states, for instance, "[H]e who receives faith from God without charity, is healed from unbelief [*sanatur ab infidelitate*], not entirely (because the sin of his previous unbelief is not removed) but in part, namely, in the point of ceasing

stability and perfection that the complete notion of a virtuous *habitus* requires. Nevertheless, unformed faith maintains the basic structure of a *habitus*, for by it the person who believes still give assent to authentic divine truth" (Cessario, *Christian Faith and the Theological Life*, 144).

⁴⁸ Preller, 241.

⁴⁹ Long, *Speaking of God*, 143. There is also an ambiguity elsewhere in Long. He says, "[T]he defect in any knowledge of God that lacks the formal object and the will's movement, finally lacks true knowledge of God altogether" (ibid., 141). If Long simply means by "the will's movement" the command of the will that is part of the habit and act of faith, then, yes this is indeed St. Thomas's position. If, however, Long intends by "the will's movement" the habit of charity, then, he is incorrect, on Thomistic exegetical and systematic grounds. Faith without charity does conform the mind to God insofar as it heals the mind of unbelief and error on matters revealed by God himself. In this passage, Long could be read either way. In the later passage, however, his position seems to be the same as Preller's. I take this latter position to contradict the position of St. Thomas.

from committing such and such a sin.”⁵⁰ That he qualifies the character of this healing from unbelief might give us pause, but it need not. Insofar as the fault or blame (*culpa*) of previous unbelief remains, the healing is partial. With respect to the current assent of the intellect, however, those with lifeless faith are healed of unbelief, and moreover, it is a gift.⁵¹ Lifeless faith enabled by grace heals the believer of error. It is difficult to understand how healing of unbelief or the removal of error could be taken seriously if lifeless faith did not conform the mind of the believer to the mind of God. As we saw above, nothing false falls under faith. Further, lifeless faith is intrinsically and essentially faith. Therefore, lifeless faith, for St. Thomas, heals of unbelief, removes error, conforms the intellect to the true, and as such, faith conforms the mind of the believer to the mind of God revealing what lifeless faith embraces because God reveals it. Even lifeless faith provides a fuller participation in the knowledge of truth, which is first and foremost God’s knowledge.

Preller’s identification of “real” faith with faith accompanied by charity, or as Preller notes, faith in the “state of grace,” is at best misleading.⁵² In lifeless faith, the intellect of the believer assents to the true, which is to say, it is healed from unbelief and error, which cannot be anything other than conformity, even if partial, to the mind of God. To assent to what is true insofar as it is true is to assent to what God already knows to be true. Our assent to truth, even in mundane matters, is to assent to truths held in the mind of God. Our participation in truth is a participation in God’s mind by virtue of our proper operation as thinking beings. Assent to the truths of faith even in lifeless faith,

⁵⁰ *ST II-II*, q. 6, a. 2, ad 3. See the next chapter for a more thorough analysis of this passage.

⁵¹ See below for a more thorough discussion of this matter vis-à-vis *infideles*.

⁵² See Preller, 262.

insofar as it is an assent to truth, is an assent to what God already knows and a participation of the believer in the mind of God. Preller is at odds with St. Thomas here.

There is a further consequence of Preller's misinterpretation of St. Thomas on this point. If only living faith conforms the mind of the believer to the mind of God, then only living faith can in principle assent to the truth that "God exists." Therefore, those with lifeless faith would be incapable of assenting to the truth that "God exists." In this case, those with lifeless faith would lack faith because it presupposes the affirmation "God exists." We have just seen that this is simply not St. Thomas's position. Insofar as those with lifeless faith share the same habit as those with living faith, they are believers in the essential sense. St. Thomas is clear about this idea. In fact, to make this very point, in the earlier *De veritate*, he does what he does not often do. He grants an objection. He considers the objection: "It was said that unbelief is opposed only to formed faith.—On the contrary, habits must be opposed whose acts are opposed. But the acts of formless faith and unbelief, namely, assent and dissent, are opposed. Therefore, formless faith is opposed to unbelief."⁵³ He replies, "We concede the third difficulty."⁵⁴ He also states, "[I]t should be said that even a disposition to virtue is opposed to vice; hence it is not necessary that unformed faith, which is opposed to infidelity, be a virtue."⁵⁵ Lifeless faith, then, is not a kind of unbelief, it is "opposed to infidelity." Those with lifeless faith assent to the same truths of faith as those with living faith and for the same reason. Those with living faith are healed of the same unbelief or error as those with lifeless faith.⁵⁶

⁵³ *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 6, arg. 3.

⁵⁴ *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 6, ad 3. See also, *De veritate*, q. 14, a. 6, ad 2: "unbelief is opposed to formless faith"; *ST II-II*, q. 10, a. 1, sc.

⁵⁵ *Super Sent.* III, d. 23, q. 3, a. 1, qa. 2, ad 3.

⁵⁶ This healing from unbelief and error must be qualified, of course, to account for those who find themselves in accidental material error, as discussed above.

Therefore, lifeless faith, according to St. Thomas, assents to the truth that “God exists” just as living faith does. There are no exegetical grounds for Preller to maintain that St. Thomas thinks otherwise.

If my interpretation is correct, Preller’s concern about the would-be believer’s knowledge of whether or not they are in the state of grace (that is, has charity), is moot. The question for the believer is no longer, “Can you know if you are in the state of grace?”—to which St. Thomas would respond in the negative—but “Do you believe the truths of faith?” This is a very different and potentially answerable question on Thomistic grounds. It should be clear from the discussion thus far that determining whether or not one is in a state of grace does not determine whether or not one has faith. Again, charity is an extrinsic not intrinsic form of faith.

In sum, even though those with lifeless faith do not have the virtue of faith, they have the habit of faith, which allows the intellect to be perfected by the revealed truth. St. Thomas explicitly maintains that even those with lifeless faith are healed of unbelief and purified of the error that is false opinion on matters of faith.⁵⁷ Those with lifeless faith can be said to believe the truths of faith (*credere Deum*) based on the authority and testimony of the revealing God (*credere Deo*). This is sufficient for the perfection of the essential notion of the habit and act of faith, even without charity, by which they might, by virtue of faith, tend to God as beatitude (*credere in Deum*). Therefore, those with lifeless faith cannot count as unbelievers (*infideles*) in the proper sense. They are not those who are denied belief in God in *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3.

⁵⁷ Again, this can and should be understood to accommodate those instances in which those with lifeless faith find themselves also assenting to material error accidentally. In that case, the assent to false opinions alone would not of itself mark them as unbelievers in the proper sense because they may still be willing and ready to assent to the truths of faith on the authority of God as revealer.

C. *The Chosen People: Believers or Not?*

In light of St. Thomas's various distinctions, there are five ways to discuss the Jews' relation to belief: (a) as believers in figure, (b) as unbelievers in figure, (c) as believers in reality, (d) as unbelievers prior to accepting the faith, and (e) as unbelievers after accepting the faith.⁵⁸ A brief consideration of each will help us understand further the ways in which one might count or not count Jews as unbelievers.

Those Jews who "accepted the figure of [the] faith in the Old Law" were, for St. Thomas, believers.⁵⁹ These Jews heard and accepted the self-revelation of God as mediated through the law and the prophets, which was a figure of the reality of God's full self-revelation in Christ. Having accepted this revelation in faith, in figure only, they are nonetheless believers. They, then, do not count, for St. Thomas, as unbelievers in the proper sense. On the other hand, those Jews who at some time assented to the truths of faith in the figure of the Old Law, but then were moved by an obstinate command of the will to dissent from those truths would be unbelievers in the proper sense.⁶⁰ They would be Old Covenant heretics or apostates analogous to the heretics and apostates of the New

⁵⁸ For other discussions of the "unbelief" of Jews, discussions that make slightly different distinctions, see, for example, Steven C. Boguslawski, *Thomas Aquinas on the Jews: Insights into His Commentary on Romans 9-11* (New York: Paulist Press, 2008), esp. chapter 3; John Y.B. Hood, *Aquinas and the Jews* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), esp. 84-105. Hood takes St. Thomas to have largely appropriated and defended the status quo, as he had received it. This position seems to deemphasize the theological significance of the Jews for St. Thomas, in favor of dealing with the socio-political realities of Jews in the midst of a Christian world. Boguslawski highlights the distinctive and specifically theological character of St. Thomas's account of the Jews, especially as it relates to election and providence.

⁵⁹ *ST II-II*, q. 10, a. 6, resp. It is conceivable that there might have been Jews who, prior to Christ, were "unwilling to assent" to the truths revealed by God, whether directly or indirectly through the various mediators of the covenants. This is analogous to those who resist the faith before having accepted it. St. Thomas does not discuss this possibility, but I suspect that he would treat that situation much as he would the unbelievers who when they first encounter the Gospel resist and refuse to assent to the truths revealed. This case is distinct from the situation of those Jews who, having at some time accepted the faith in the figure of the Old Law, later dissent. Nonetheless, this case would count as a kind of unbelieving in the proper sense.

⁶⁰ This category of unbelief is not explicitly considered by St. Thomas in his treatise on faith. The articulation I offer here, which transposes his usual considerations into the context of belief prior to Christ, is justified on the basis of the distinctions and categories I have already presented.

Covenant.⁶¹ They would be those who “have abandoned it [the faith] after knowing it in some way.”⁶²

Second, consider those Jews who accepted the faith during or after the time of Christ, not in figure, but in reality. These Jews are believers, like Saints Peter and Paul. They believe in the truths of faith as revealed in Christ, assenting to those truths by a command of the will (*credere Deum*) on the basis of the authority and testimony of the revealing God (*credere Deo*). They believe in Christ as the Messiah of Israel and would in no way count as unbelievers (*infideles*) in the proper sense meant in *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3.

St. Thomas also discusses those unbelievers who, having encountered the Gospel, resist and refuse to assent to the truths revealed. The Jews, for example, who resist and refuse to assent to the truths revealed in Christ are, for St. Thomas, unbelievers in this sense. Their unbelief, however, is of two kinds. From the perspective of their first encounter with the reality of Christ, their unbelief is that of resistance and refusal. Their obstinate unwillingness to assent to the truths of faith by a command of the will (*credere Deum*) on the basis of the authority and testimony of the revealing God (*credere Deo*) betrays their vice opposed to faith. They are, for St. Thomas, unbelievers (*infideles*) in the proper sense because they resist the faith prior to having accepted it.⁶³ However, from the perspective of a prior acceptance of the faith in the figure of the Old Law, their unbelief is of a different kind. In this case, their obstinate dissent from (at least one of) the truths of the faith accepted in the figure of the Old Law betrays the loss of the habit of faith previously possessed, namely, the habit by which they assented to the figure of the Old

⁶¹ See 166-171 below for a discussion of these latter heretics and apostates.

⁶² *ST* II-II, q. 10, a. 6, sc.

⁶³ *ST* II-II, q. 11, a. 1, resp.

Law. Having opposed the previously possessed habit of faith, they have shown themselves to be unbelievers (*infideles*) in the proper sense.

The dissent from or resistance to the Gospel in figure or in reality is a rejection of truth. As a rejection of truth, this dissent or resistance, according to St. Thomas, involves the assent to what is false. He remarks that “they corrupt [the faith] by their bad interpretations.”⁶⁴ Like those who obstinately continue in material error after the Church has defined something as a primary matter of faith, the Jew who obstinately continues to assent to false opinions and false interpretations oppose believing the truths of faith (*credere Deum*) on the basis of the authority and witness of the revealing God (*credere Deo*). Therefore, they have the vice opposed to the habit of faith. Whereas the error or assent to falsity might have at one point been only accidental to their assent in faith, once they have obstinately resisted they have shown themselves to lack the formal object of faith, namely, God as the absolutely trustworthy authority revealing what is to be believed. For St. Thomas, then, individual Jews can count as *infideles* in the proper sense, but only on the condition that their error is due to the obstinacy of the will and not to poor mediation of the Gospel.⁶⁵

D. Muslims: Unbelievers or Heretics (or Both)?

The resources for consideration of the belief or unbelief of the Muslims according to St. Thomas are far fewer than those about the Jews. We have indications of a position

⁶⁴ *ST* II-II, q. 10, a. 6, resp.

⁶⁵ The relationship between Christianity and Judaism is more complicated than this account. In our contemporary interreligious context, we should consider the ways in which Judaism and Christianity worship the same God. A discussion of this sort, however, is beyond the scope of the present work, and must be left for another day. For a discussion of St. Thomas and Jewish thought, in addition to Boguslawski and Hood, see, for instance, David B. Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God: Ibn Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992); *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993).

at the beginning of the *Summa contra Gentiles*,⁶⁶ but the most explicit treatment by St. Thomas is found in his *De rationibus fidei contra Saracenos, Graecos et Armenos ad Cantorem Antiochenum*. In this work, St. Thomas addresses certain issues contested between (Roman) Catholics, on the one hand, and Muslims, Greek Christians, and Armenians, on the other. In the framework we have thus far established, his brief considerations in *De rationibus fidei*, show that, for St. Thomas, Muslims can be *infideles* in the proper sense.

In the sense in which it is sin, unbelief is not the mere absence of belief but dissent from or resistance to the truths of faith, due a lack of good will or in a first encounter with them or after having once accepted them. The Muslim faith, as St. Thomas understands it, has its origin in the Prophet Muhamad (ca. 570-632) and has encountered and rejected certain dogmas of Christianity. Therefore, insofar as their dissent or resistance is due to an obstinate will, Muslims would count as *infideles* in the proper sense. This interpretation is confirmed by St. Thomas's language in *De rationibus fidei*. There he identifies his task as contributing to the work of standing "safe against all attack or mockery of unbelievers (*infidelium*)."⁶⁷ In particular, he notes,

These, then, are the points, which, as you affirm, are attacked and ridiculed by the unbelievers. For the Muslims (*Saraceni*), as you say, ridicule our claim that Christ is the Son of God, since God does not have a wife....They also mock our statement that Christ, the Son of God, was crucified for the salvation of the human race, because if God is omnipotent, He could have saved the human race without the suffering of His own Son; He could also have so constructed man that he could not sin. They rebuke Christians because daily at the altar they eat their God

⁶⁶ *ScG I*, ch. 2, no. 3.

⁶⁷ *De rationibus fidei*, ch. 1. All English translations of *De rationibus fidei* come from, with light modifications, *Aquinas on Reasons for Our Faith: Against the Muslims, and A Reply to the Denial of Purgatory by Certain Greeks and Armenians: To Cantor of Antioch* (New Bedford: Franciscans of the Immaculate, 2002).

and because the body of Christ, were it even as big as a mountain, should long since have been consumed.⁶⁸

Not surprisingly, at the heart of the apparent unbelief of Muslims is a rejection, and in fact, mockery, according to St. Thomas, of certain primary and direct matters of the faith. Such dissent and resistance is unbelief in the proper sense.

Some Muslims count, for St. Thomas, at least in principle, as those who have dissented from or offered resistance to the articles of faith. Because they lack the formal aspect of the object of faith, even in those cases in which they assent to what is true (about Jesus or Mary, and the like), they do not do so because such things were revealed by God, but on the basis of their own will or judgment. Further, having come after the time of Christ, and having rejected the truths of the faith as mediated in Scripture and the Church, Muslims count as those who have despised the faith (opposition) rather than merely lacking the faith (pure negation). Therefore, for St. Thomas, the *Saraceni* who dissent from the truth, which is to say assent to what is false, and do so not merely in accidental material error due to formation, are *infideles* in the proper sense.⁶⁹

E. Demonic Faith

The question of whether demons (fallen angels) have faith is of particular interest because of the nuanced light it sheds on St. Thomas's understanding of lifeless faith. Not

⁶⁸ *De rationibus fidei*, ch. 1.

⁶⁹ As between Christianity and Judaism, the relationship between Christianity and Islam is obviously more complicated than this account. In principle many if not most contemporary Muslims would not fall neatly into the category of *infideles*. It is possible or likely that many would be more appropriately deemed in material error due to formation and concrete existential circumstances. In our contemporary interreligious context, we should consider the ways in which Islam and Christianity worship (or not) the same God. On the basis of the Aristotelian axiom of *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3, it is in principle possible that at least some Muslims are not and could not be said, for St. Thomas, to believe that God exists. This possibility raises obvious difficulties. A response to these difficulties, however, is beyond the scope of the present work, and must be left for another day. For a discussion of St. Thomas and Islamic thought, see, for instance, David B. Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God: Ibn Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992); *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993).

surprisingly, in this context, St. Thomas repeatedly quotes James 2:19: “Even the demons believe—and shudder.” There is some sense that, for him, one can and should affirm that the demons or fallen angels do believe in the truths of faith. St. Thomas says so explicitly in a response to an objection: “[I]t is possible for lifeless faith to be in the damned.”⁷⁰ We know that the demons are among the “damned” about whom he speaks because he quotes James 2:19 in the objection to which he replies here.

The demons, then, believe, but they believe in a way that is not salvific. St. Thomas calls this way of believing lifeless faith. In Pauline fashion, he maintains that the demons believe in the truths that God reveals, but to no avail. St. Thomas remarks, “The demons are, in a way compelled to believe, by the evidence of signs, and so their will deserves no praise for their belief.”⁷¹ The demons are able to recognize the divine origin of certain doctrines, not on the basis of the authority and testimony of the revealing God, but on the basis of evidence that compels. They see the credibility of the truths without seeing the realities indicated by the truths. St. Thomas notes, “[T]hey see many evident signs, whereby they recognize that the teaching of the Church is from God, although they do not see the things themselves that the Church teaches, for instance that there are three Persons in God, and so forth.”⁷² The demons, then, assent to the truths of faith, apart from charity and as such to no avail. They assent to the truths of the faith to which though these truths are “displeasing to them.”⁷³ The will of the demon with faith is not ordered to

⁷⁰ *ST* II-II, q. 18, a. 3, ad 2.

⁷¹ *ST* II-II, q. 5, a. 2, ad 1

⁷² *ST* II-II, q. 5, a. 2, resp. A consideration for further study is the shift in St. Thomas’s emphasis on whether demonic faith is compelled or free. At different points, he seems to indicate both. How is he being consistent here? Determining how he is or is not being consistent is beyond the scope of this study. As far as I can tell, determining does not undermine the main points I am making here.

⁷³ *ST* II-II, q. 5, a. 2, ad 2.

the good. Because their faith assents to what they do not love, their belief is not meritorious nor praiseworthy.⁷⁴

It is important to note, however, that the lifeless faith of the demons is not identical to the lifeless faith of humans. St. Thomas observes, “Faith, which is a gift of grace, inclines man to believe, by giving him a certain affection for the good, even when that faith is lifeless. Consequently, the faith which the demons have, is not a gift of grace. Rather are they compelled to believe through their natural intellectual acuity.”⁷⁵ Unlike human beings who intellectually assent to the truths of faith moved by a command of the will on the basis of the authority and testimony of the revealing God and aided internally by grace, the intellectual assent of demons, though based on the same formal object, namely, the God who reveals, is motivated not by grace but by external signs. The assent of faith (living or lifeless) in humans is only possible by grace. The assent of faith (always lifeless) in demons is made apart from grace. Both are, nonetheless, voluntary acts of assent commanded by the will on the basis of the same formal object, namely, the God who reveals.

So, if the lifeless faith of demons is not identical to the lifeless faith of humans, why might St. Thomas call demonic faith “lifeless faith” at all? First, it fits the definition of lifeless faith for St. Thomas. It is a will-commanded act of assent firmly given to truths that remain unseen. Second, the lifeless faith of demons is, like the lifeless faith of humans, an act of assent to truths of faith, but to no avail. Such assent is not salvific. In fact, knowledge of the truth is displeasing to the demons with lifeless faith and at best,

⁷⁴ See *ST II-II*, q. 7, a. 1, sc, in which St. Thomas brings in an authority to counter the idea that fear is not an effect of faith. As an instance of the fear that arises from faith, he references, by quoting James 2:19, the fear or “trembling” of the demons who believe. Therefore, for St. Thomas, the demons have a faith-assent to truths of the faith, truths that cause them fear.

⁷⁵ *ST II-II*, q. 5, a. 2, ad 2.

not loved fully by the humans with lifeless faith. Third, and closely related to the previous point, like lifeless faith in humans, the faith of demons obtains apart from charity, which is to say, apart from graced love of God and sanctifying grace. This latter aspect is that which makes faith “lifeless.” It is belief, but in the absence of sanctifying grace and the indwelling of Christ and the Spirit. As St. Thomas observes, “For Christ does not dwell in us by unformed faith; otherwise he would dwell in the devils of whom Jas (2:19) says: ‘the devils believe and tremble.’”⁷⁶

In short, according to St. Thomas, the demons have lifeless faith. As such, they assent to the truths of the faith, only begrudgingly and to no avail, and apart from infused grace. Nevertheless, they do believe what is true and not what is false. Their error is in their lack of love for the God in whom and about whom they believe and the ends to which the truths of faith are ordered. In the end, however, like humans with lifeless faith, insofar as the demons do not dissent from or resist the truths of the faith, but rather assent to them, they have faith. Therefore, demons cannot count, for St. Thomas, as *infideles* in the proper sense.⁷⁷

F. Schismatics

In his treatise on charity in the *Summa theologiae*, St. Thomas dedicates one brief question to schism as a sin against charity. He counts schism among the various “vices contrary to peace.”⁷⁸ St. Thomas defines schism as a sin against, or vice in opposition to

⁷⁶ *In 1 Cor.*, ch. 3, lect. 2, no. 155.

⁷⁷ That the demons assent to the truth of the identity of Jesus Christ is explicit in the Gospels. See Mk 1:21-28; 5:1-20; Cf. Mt 8:28-34; Lk 4:31-37; Lk 8:26-39.

⁷⁸ *ST II-II*, q. 39, prol. Among the other vices opposed to peace, St. Thomas mentions strife, sedition, and war.

Church unity.⁷⁹ As a sin against peace and unity, schism is a sin against charity.

Therefore, the one in schism is one without charity. St. Thomas states, “Hence the sin of schism is, properly speaking, a special sin, for the reason that the schismatic intends to sever himself from that unity which is the effect of charity: because charity unites not only one person to another with the bond of spiritual love, but also the whole Church in unity of spirit.”⁸⁰ Similarly, he states, “[S]chismatics properly so called are those who, willfully and intentionally separate themselves from the unity of the Church.”⁸¹

Even though schism is a sin against charity, St. Thomas is clear that schism is not of itself a sin against faith. Using heresy as his primary example of unbelief, St. Thomas observes, “Heresy and schism are distinguished in respect of those things to which each is opposed essentially and directly. For heresy is essentially opposed to faith, while schism is essentially opposed to the unity of ecclesiastical charity. Wherefore just as faith and charity are different virtues, although whoever lacks faith lacks charity, so too schism and heresy are different vices, although whoever is a heretic is also a schismatic, but not conversely.”⁸² Those without faith are also without charity, because, as noted above, charity presupposes the act of assent that is faith.⁸³ Those without charity are not necessarily those without faith. While those in schism, which is to say, without charity, separate themselves from ecclesial unity, they are not yet heretics, separating themselves

⁷⁹ *ST II-II*, q. 39, a. 1, resp.

⁸⁰ *ST II-II*, q. 39, a. 1, resp. St. Thomas’s identification of schism with the breach of ecclesiastical peace and unity and with sinning against charity is nothing new. He is following, among others, St. Augustine, “On Baptism, against the Donatists,” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, vol. 4, trans. J. R. King and Chester D. Hartranft (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 411-424.

⁸¹ *ST II-II*, q. 39, a. 1, resp.

⁸² *ST II-II*, q. 39, a. 1, ad 3.

⁸³ Michael Sherwin, *By Knowledge and By Love: Charity and Knowledge in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington DC: CUA Press, 2005), 161. Cf. 203.

from the faith. This is another one of the many instances in which St. Thomas affirms that faith can remain even apart from charity.⁸⁴

Having distinguished schism from unbelief, St. Thomas next considers whether schism is a graver sin than unbelief. In this context, he notes, “Now heresy results from something being added to schism, for it adds corrupt doctrine.”⁸⁵ Heresy is the graver sin because it goes more directly against God than does schism. St. Thomas observes, “[I]t is evident that unbelief is a sin committed against God himself, according as He is himself the First Truth, on which faith is founded; whereas schism is opposed to ecclesiastical unity, which is a participated good, and a lesser good than God himself.”⁸⁶ Again, it is clear that, for St. Thomas, the sin of unbelief, which is opposed to faith, is not identical to the sin of schism, which is opposed to charity. The schismatic lacks charity, but he or she is not simply thereby an unbeliever because he or she can still have faith. This is why St. Thomas can affirm Augustine’s claim that “[a] schismatic is one who holds the same faith [as the Church],” even though he or she does not have charity.⁸⁷ Schismatics assent to what is true with respect to the faith and not to what is false, though they have separated themselves from Christ’s Church through a lack of charity.

Although schism names a certain privation and imperfection, namely, the opposition to charity and ecclesiastical unity, it is not of itself the sinful defect of unbelief, namely, opposition to the faith. Like other will-commanded assents to the truths of faith on the basis of the authority and testimony of the revealing God, but apart from

⁸⁴ See also, *ST II-II*, q. 39, a. 2, ad 2: “[T]he good of ecclesiastical unity, to which schism is opposed, is less than the good of Divine truth, to which unbelief is opposed.” Again, for St. Thomas, a sin against charity (schism) is not yet a sin against faith (unbelief).

⁸⁵ *ST II-II*, q. 39, a. 2, sc.

⁸⁶ *ST II-II*, q. 39, a. 2, resp. St. Thomas does here offer the following qualification: “[I]t may happen that a particular schismatic [person] sins more grievously than a particular unbeliever, either because his contempt is greater, or because his sin is a source of greater danger, or for some similar reason.”

⁸⁷ *ST II-II*, q. 39, a. 1, sc.

charity, the faith of the schismatic is lifeless faith. Schismatics are still healed of unbelief because they assent to what is true of God and not to what is false. And yet, because they lack charity their faith is to no avail, according to St. Paul. It is not salvific faith. Insofar as they assent to the truths of faith, though with a lifeless faith, schismatics cannot count as *infideles* in the proper sense.

G. Heresy

An analysis of this obvious instance of unbelief will be especially useful for articulating what constitutes unbelief in the proper sense meant by St. Thomas when he mentions unbelievers (*infideles*) in *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3. This discussion will enable us to determine in the next chapter precisely that cognitional defect from which unbelievers suffer and on account of which we must say, in light of the Aristotelian axiom, that they do not believe God exists (*credere Deum*) at all (*totaliter*).

For St. Thomas, a heretic is one who, having previously assented to the truths of faith (*credere Deum*), on the basis of the authority and witness of the revealing God (*credere Deo*), now dissents from one or another truth of faith. According to St. Thomas, the heretic has “resisted [faith] after it has been accepted.”⁸⁸ He notes also, “[T]here are unbelievers who at some time have accepted the faith, and professed it, such as heretics and apostates.”⁸⁹ The heretic, then, dissents from some truth or truths of faith previously accepted with faith. Therefore, their dissent does not conform to the rule of faith specified by Christ and communicated in Scripture and the Church. In short, the heretic does not conform to the articles of faith.

⁸⁸ *ST II-II*, q. 10, a. 5, resp.

⁸⁹ *ST II-II*, q. 10, a. 8, resp.

Moreover, according to St. Thomas, the heretic who once accepted the faith, now having dissented from it, corrupts the faith. For this reason, the unbelief of the heretic is much graver than that of those who never accepted the faith (for example, certain Jews and pagans). St. Thomas states, “[T]he unbelief of heretics, who confess their unbelief in the Gospel and resist that faith by corrupting it is a more grievous sin than that of the Jews, who have never accepted the Gospel faith.”⁹⁰

Heretics corrupts the faith by dissenting from some truth or truths of faith. Therefore, they now affirm, against the truth, something false. Their denial of certain truths of the faith is an assent to that which is false. Again, just as my un-tying my shoe is in direct opposition to my tying my shoes or my shoes having been tied, unlike my merely not-tying my shoes, the unbelief of heretics, which is a form of dissent in direct opposition to the truth, constitutes an assent to what is false, rather than a mere indifference or non-assent. St. Thomas says as much: “[H]eresy is opposed to truth.”⁹¹ That which stands in opposition to truth is falsehood. In this context, the “corruption of the Christian faith” happens “only when a person has a false opinion about things belonging to the faith.”⁹² Part and parcel of the heretic’s resistance to the truths of faith is a denial of what is true, which is in this case the assent to what is false.

Now, heresy’s act of assent to what is false is not merely the material error of the invincibly ignorant or the simple. Rather, the assent to what is false in heresy is an act of dissent moved by an obstinate command of the will. As St. Thomas maintains, “[I]f

⁹⁰ *ST II-II*, q. 10, a. 6, resp. St. Thomas notes here, as well, that insofar as a Jew has resisted the Gospel, which he or she had accepted in the figure of the Old Law, he or she corrupt the faith with “bad interpretations.” Cf. *ST II-II*, q. 11, a. 2, sc.

⁹¹ *ST II-II*, q. 11, a. 1, sc.

⁹² *ST II-II*, q. 11, a. 2, resp. This articulation of the relationship between dissent from truth and assent to falsehood will become qualified by our later discussion of truth and untruth, as opposed to falsity, with respect to a simple thing, among which we might or might not count faith *simpliciter*.

anyone were obstinately to deny them [the truths of faith] after they had been defined by the authority of the universal Church, he would be deemed a heretic.”⁹³ Heretics are not merely in error, but they willfully and knowingly dissent from some truth or truths of faith, as communicated in Scripture and the Church, namely, the articles of faith. This dissent can, of course, extend to more or fewer articles of faith. The heretic may assent to some of those articles but not to others.

Because heretics affirm some, if not most, truths of the faith, one might suppose that they are not unbelievers in the proper sense. Yet, because the assent of faith is an act of assent moved by a command of the will on the basis of the authority and testimony of God, who cannot lie, real faith must be willing to give assent to all that God revealed. No faith assent extends only to some of what is revealed. There is nothing about God as a consequence of which some article of faith might be true while another is false. There is no ground upon which assenting to what is contrary to the faith might be true. God cannot lie. Therefore, insofar as one assents to some of the truths of faith but not others, one believes the truths of faith (*credere Deum*) not on the authority of the God who reveals (*credere Deo*) but because of one’s own judgment.⁹⁴ Such is not the assent of theological faith. So, as St. Thomas argues, “[I]t is evident that a heretic who obstinately disbelieves one article of faith is not prepared to follow the teaching of the Church in all things.”⁹⁵ Consequently, St. Thomas states, “[A] heretic with regard to one article has no faith in the other articles.”⁹⁶

⁹³ *ST* II-II, q. 11, a. 2, ad 3.

⁹⁴ *ST* II-II, q. 5, a. 3, resp.; II-II, q. 10, a. 5, resp.

⁹⁵ *ST* II-II, q. 5, a. 3, resp. Recall that, for St. Thomas, the Church’s definition of articles of faith is intimately connected to God as revealer. An unwillingness to assent to these articles, then, is not merely to reject what the Church has defined, but to reject the one who reveals, namely, God. See the conclusion in Chapter Two.

⁹⁶ *ST* II-II, q. 5, a. 3, resp.

The heretic who disbelieves one article of faith does not conform to the rule of faith and, therefore, does not believe under the conditions that faith determines. In their disbelief of even one article, they show themselves unwilling to believe in those things revealed by the God who cannot lie simply because it is he who reveals them. In doing so, they betray a complete lack of the formal object of faith, the specifying principle of Christian faith. Therefore, by willfully and knowingly dissenting from the truth of faith, the heretic has betrayed a complete lack of the habit of faith. Even in those things of faith to which they assent, they do so otherwise than by faith because it is for a reason other than the fact that God reveals those things.⁹⁷ For this reason, heresy, even in those truths affirmed by faith, cannot count as Christian *credere*.

A heretic, then, is one who assents to the truths it does on the basis of his or her own judgments and not on the basis of the authority and witness of the revealing God. As such, a heretic does not have the formal object of faith, which is to say, they do not have Christian faith. That heretics do not assent to all that is revealed is not an indication that they do not assent to some revealed truths, but simply that the act by which they assent is no longer *credere* in the specifically Christian sense. Therefore, St. Thomas takes the heretic as the primary instantiation of sinful unbelief. They are for him *infideles* in the proper sense.

H. Apostasy

St. Thomas describes apostasy as a kind of “backsliding from God.”⁹⁸ St. Thomas highlights three ways in which backsliding from God can occur: (a) backsliding from the religious life or Holy Orders, (b) backsliding from the commandments in particular cases,

⁹⁷ *ST II-II*, q. 10, a. 5, resp.

⁹⁸ *ST II-II*, q. 12, a. 1, resp.

and (c) backsliding from the faith. Only the third way is relevant to our discussion since one can engage in the first and the second without engaging in the third, and only the third is apostasy in the simple and absolute sense. It alone represents essentially opposition to the faith.⁹⁹

Those former believers who have left the faith completely are not merely “corrupting the faith” as heretics do; these apostates err “by entirely renouncing the faith.”¹⁰⁰ St. Thomas observes, “Now apostasy regards unbelief as the term ‘whereto’ of the movement of withdrawal from the faith; wherefore, apostasy does not imply a special kind of unbelief, but an aggravating circumstance thereof.”¹⁰¹ Apostasy is the term of the total movement away from faith. An apostate, then, has left the faith. In this way, as St. Thomas notes, “[The apostate] seems to turn away from God altogether.”¹⁰² Having turned from God, the God who reveals the truths of faith, the apostate does not and cannot count among those who believe the truths of faith (*credere Deum*) on the basis of the authority and testimony of the revealing God (*credere Deo*), and certainly not with a will informed by charity (*credere in Deum*).

For St. Thomas, only the turn away from the faith altogether is apostasy, strictly speaking. This turn away from the faith once held, then, does fall on the side of proper unbelief. It is not, however, according to St. Thomas, “a special kind” of unbelief, but apostasy is the term of movement away from the faith, away from belief. Insofar as apostasy is dissent from or resistance to the articles of faith, for St. Thomas, apostasy

⁹⁹ *ST II-II*, q. 12, a. 1, resp.

¹⁰⁰ *ST II-II*, q. 10, a. 9, resp.

¹⁰¹ *ST II-II*, q. 12, a. 1, ad 3.

¹⁰² *ST II-II*, q. 12, a. 1, resp.

does represent a form of unbelief in the proper sense. Therefore, the apostate can be counted among the *infideles* in St. Thomas's treatise on faith.

I. The "Belief" of the Philosophi

Unlike those who clearly count and those who clearly do not count as *infideles*, philosophers are a more complicated case. One difficulty in considering the position of the philosopher is that they do not seem of interest to St. Thomas in his various treatments of faith. The relative absence of the philosophers from his discussion of belief and unbelief offers prima facie evidence that they are not particularly relevant to his account. The minor textual presence there is of the philosophers in the treatise on faith does not provide grounds for counting philosophers among the *infideles* to which St. Thomas refers in *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3. In fact, in the treatise on faith, St. Thomas mentions the philosophers (*philosophi*) seven times. In each case, either St. Thomas affirms the actuality that the philosophers have demonstrated the existence of God, or he offers no denial of that affirmation.

The first time St. Thomas refers to the philosophers in the treatise on faith is at *ST* II-II, q. 1, a. 5, ad 3. There, he is considering whether "those things that are of faith can be known (*scita*)," or as asked in the prologue, "[w]hether an object of faith can be anything known (*scitum*)?"¹⁰³ In the course of this inquiry, he considers the following objection:

[T]hings which are demonstrated are known, since a 'demonstration is a syllogism that produces scientific knowing.' Now certain matters of faith have been demonstrated by the philosophers [*philosophis*], such as the existence and unity of God, and so forth. Therefore, things that are of faith can be known.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ *ST* II-II, q. 1, prol.

¹⁰⁴ *ST* II-II, q. 1, a. 5, arg. 3.

It seems that the objector points out instances in which some objects of faith are also an object of science. The objection fails to recognize certain key distinctions, however. St.

Thomas responds,

Things which can be proved by demonstration are reckoned among the articles of faith, not because they are believed simply by all, but because they are necessary presuppositions to matters of faith and those who do not know them by demonstration must presuppose them if only by faith.¹⁰⁵

Presented with an apparent instance of scientific knowledge about something that falls under faith, namely, the existence of God, St. Thomas responds by denying neither that the existence of God is demonstrable, that the philosophers (*philosophi*) did succeed in providing such a demonstration, nor that certain believers do assent to the truth that God exists on the basis of faith. His response here denies that the truth that God exists is even a matter of faith. Throughout his works, St. Thomas consistently counts the existence of God as a preamble to the faith and not as an article of faith. The articles of faith surpass the capacities of natural human reason.¹⁰⁶ According to St. Thomas, the existence of God does not surpass per se the capacities of natural human reason and has been demonstrably proven by philosophers. It is a presupposition (or preamble) of the faith and not per se a part of the content of faith. Every act of Christian belief presupposes some act of assent to the existence of the God who reveals, even though not every believer assents to the truth “God exists” as an act of *credere*. Those who have demonstrably proven the existence of God, however, do not assent to the truth “God exists” by an act of *credere*, but by an act of *scire*.

¹⁰⁵ *ST* II-II, q. 1, a. 5, ad 3.

¹⁰⁶ See *ST* II-II, q. 6, a. 1, resp. *ST* I, q. 1, a. 8, ad 1; I, q. 2, a. 2, ad 1; I, q. 46, a. 2, sc; II-II, q. 1, a. 6; II-II, q. 1, a. 8, ad 1; II-II, q. 2, a. 10, ad 2.

In *ST* II-II, q. 1, a. 5, St. Thomas is clearly discussing contexts in which certain things are known (*scit*). Among the things possibly known, as indicated by II-II, q. 1, a. 5, arg. 3 and ad 3, is the demonstrated knowledge that the philosophers (*philosophi*) have of the existence of God. Here again, he uses forms of *scire* to indicate possible “cognitions of God,” to use Preller’s language. This is an instance in which “Preller’s Rule” fails. Recall, according to Eugene Rogers, Preller’s Rule maintains “that *scire* is never used in connection with cognitions of God through natural reason.”¹⁰⁷ At II-II, q. 1, a. 5, arg. 3 and ad 3, we see St. Thomas doing precisely what Preller denies.

The objection that St. Thomas considers here, then, misses the point. To the extent that individual believers assent to the existence of God on the authority and testimony of God as revealing, namely, by faith, they do not assent to the existence of God as an object of science, as a conclusion of a demonstrable proof. To the extent that someone knows by demonstration that God exists, that person does not have faith in this truth, which is, in any case, a preamble presupposed by the articles of faith. Therefore, the objection that God’s existence is a matter of faith that can be known does not work. The former case shows that the object of faith in question is not an object of science. The latter case shows that the object of science is strictly speaking not an object of faith. Here, St. Thomas does not affirm that the philosophers might count as *infideles* in the proper sense. This interpretation becomes much more likely when one considers the numerous

¹⁰⁷ Rogers, *Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth*, 36. Preller, again, maintains, “‘Cognitions of God,’ then, are not necessarily instances of intelligible knowledge of God. The ordinary word for ‘know’ in Aquinas is *scire*, which is never used in connection with cognitions of God through natural reason. *Cognitio* and *cognoscere* are the broadest possible generic terms, referring to any state of mind connected with the apprehension of reality” (Preller, 32).

affirmations of the actuality of demonstrable knowledge of the existence of God by the light of natural reason elsewhere in St. Thomas's oeuvre.¹⁰⁸

The second and third times St. Thomas mentions the *philosophi* in the context of the treatise on faith occur in the first objection and its reply at *ST II-II*, q. 1, a. 8. In a consideration of the question “[w]hether the articles of faith are suitably enumerated?,” St. Thomas considers a first objection:

It would seem that the articles of faith are unsuitably enumerated. For those things, which can be known by demonstration, do not belong to faith such that they are objects of belief for all, as stated above. Now it can be known by demonstration that there is one God; hence the Philosopher proves this (Metaph. xii) and many other philosophers have demonstrated this point. Therefore, that ‘there is one God’ should not be set down as an article of faith.

In *ST II-II*, q. 1, a. 5, arg. 3, the objection maintained that scientific knowledge comes by way of demonstration. Knowledge of the existence of God comes, for some, by way of demonstration. The existence of God, then, is an object of scientific knowledge. But the existence of God is also a truth of faith. Therefore, a truth of faith, in this case the existence of God, is also an object of science. St. Thomas argues that the objection misses the point because of a failure to maintain certain operative distinctions. In *ST II-II*, q. 1, a. 8, arg. 1, the objection moves in the other direction. The objection presupposes that what is scientifically demonstrable is not strictly speaking a truth of faith. The oneness of God is something scientifically demonstrable. Therefore, the oneness of God, insofar as it is scientifically demonstrable, is not a truth of faith, which is where we said St. Thomas ended up in response to *ST II-II*, q. 1, a. 5, arg. 3.

In his response to *ST II-II*, q. 1, a. 8, arg. 1, St. Thomas states, “By faith we hold many things about God, which the philosophers were unable to discover by natural

¹⁰⁸ See the affirmations noted in the Introduction.

reason, for instance, things about His providence and omnipotence, and that He alone is to be worshipped, all of which are contained in the one article of the unity of God.”¹⁰⁹ Here, St. Thomas is clearly distinguishing between the things of God accessible to natural reason and the “many things about God” accessible only in faith. However, he does not say that “all things” about God must be held by faith. This article would be the context in which to make such a claim, and yet, he does not. Rather, he simply maintains that there are certain and in fact “many” things about God that one might believe, which are beyond the per se capacities of natural reason, and he lets pass without comment the claim in the objection that other things about God are not held by faith and have been scientifically known by natural reason. He simply does not deny to philosophers scientifically demonstrable knowledge of the existence of God.

Further, St. Thomas clarifies the meaning of “there is one God” as used in the creed. This one article of faith is not a claim merely about the unicity of God. Rather, “there is one God” in the context of the first article of the creed appears with certain other truths about God as well, including, his providence and omnipotence. The philosopher, however, who may know through demonstration that God exists and that God is one apart from these other things. For the philosopher, however, the assent of *scire* to the truth that “there is one God” does not implicitly contain those other things, nor does it deny them.

The objector is concerned to show that the truth that “there is one God” should not be an article of faith because it is known by the philosopher. St. Thomas has responded by saying that the article of faith “I believe in one God” implies a great deal more in the mind of the believer than what is in that of the philosopher knowing God only by demonstration. Strictly speaking, that “the Philosopher” (Aristotle) or any other

¹⁰⁹ *ST II-II*, q. 1, a. 8, ad 1.

philosopher has demonstrated the truth of the existence of the same object as that to which the believer assents in faith, though under different formal aspects. The philosopher could in principle assent to the truth that “there is one God,” without assenting to something false or dissenting from something true about God (for example, God is triune). But assenting in faith to the unity of God, the believer assents to a certain conjunction of terms and propositions, for instance, “there is one God...and he is omnipotent...and he is providential over all things.” This is not to say that the material object or referent to which unicity and the rest is attributed is not the same. The one God whose existence is demonstrated by the philosopher is the same God whose existence, omnipotence, and providence is believed by the faithful, although the philosopher understands the unicity of God—the proposition “there is one God”—apart from such omnipotence and providence. This separable knowability of distinct formal aspects of God is affirmed by St. Thomas elsewhere in the *Summa theologiae*, in the context of the requirements for explicit belief. Indeed, St. Thomas claims “God’s sovereign goodness as we understand it now through effects, can be understood without the Trinity of Persons.”¹¹⁰ Such a claim seems to undermine thoroughly the position of those who maintain that knowledge of God’s unity apart from God’s triunity betrays, in light of the Aristotelian axiom about defective cognition of a simple being, a complete ignorance of God. I shall have more to say about this matter in the next chapter.

The fourth time St. Thomas refers to the philosophers in the treatise on faith is at *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 4, sc, where he is considering “[w]hether it is necessary to believe those things that are attainable by natural reason?” The *sed contra* is rather direct and pithy, as usual. St. Thomas affirms, “It is necessary to believe that God is one and incorporeal:

¹¹⁰ *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 8, ad 3.

which things the philosophers prove by natural reason.”¹¹¹ This is an unambiguous affirmation, in the context of the treatise on faith, that the *philosophi* in fact have proven certain things about God, namely, that God is one and incorporeal. This affirmation implies that philosophers have some knowledge of the existence of the God to whom they attribute unity and incorporeality since proof by natural means is a form of knowledge, as we established at the beginning of the previous chapter. I suppose one might maintain, however, that philosophers do not take a stand with respect to the actual existence of God when they are proving divine unity and incorporeality. Maybe the affirmation that God is one and incorporeal is simply an affirmation subsequent to the supposition of the existence of such a being, to which supposition assent is given apart from knowledge, even by faith. Already believing (*credere*) that God exists, one might reason to the unicity and incorporeality of God based on what one received in faith.

I find this hypothesis implausible given the above-mentioned frequent conjunction of the demonstrability of the existence of God and the unicity of God.¹¹² Because St. Thomas joins elsewhere the demonstrability of the existence of God with the demonstrability of God’s unicity, it is no exegetical stretch to read *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 4, sc as presupposing the demonstrability of the existence of the God of whom unicity and incorporeality are demonstrated by natural reason. This reading is more likely than the hypothesis noted above. What is clearly not present, in any case, is a denial that the existence of God is something to which the philosophers might conclude by demonstration. That denial is not even implied in the text. Like his first, second, and third

¹¹¹ *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 4, sc. At different times (see the affirmations listed above), St. Thomas will affirm that the philosophers have demonstrated the existence of God, that God is one, and “the like.” Here we see that he includes at least God’s incorporeality in “the like.”

¹¹² Again, see the affirmations listed above.

uses of *philosophi* in the treatise on faith, St. Thomas's fourth use of the term offers no indication, directly or indirectly, that the philosophers count as unbelievers in the sinful and proper sense. St. Thomas's position does allow for them to be non-believers. But these texts indicate that, insofar as their assent is an act of *scire* and not *credere*, the assent of philosophers to the truth of God's existence deserves analysis on its own terms, which I shall offer in the next chapter.

The fifth and sixth times we see St. Thomas mention the *philosophi* in the treatise on faith are at *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 4, resp. and a. 10, ad 3, respectively. The former states, "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." Here, St. Thomas is highlighting the frailty of human intellection. By natural means we can and do err. Far from suggesting that we always err, this passage makes the obvious claim that we often in fact do err. As such, this passage is too vague to be utilized as negating the possibility of pre-Christian pagan philosophical knowledge of God. The latter, similarly, speaks of what could be the case but is not necessarily so. Philosophers could and in all likely have opposed the faith. The passage does not indicate, however, that philosophers qua non-Christian count as those who oppose the faith. Moreover, that the philosophers are grouped with the heretic seems to indicate that the defect from which they suffer is opposition and not merely the absence of faith. This conforms with the position I have been articulating in this chapter and the one before. Insofar as one opposes faith, whether through an encounter or due to a bad will, that one counts as an unbeliever. This is not because they are pagan, but because of their unwillingness to submit to Christ.

St. Thomas's seventh mention of the philosophers is largely irrelevant. There, he states, "Though some say that the above words of the Apostle are not a definition of faith, yet if we consider the matter aright, this definition overlooks none of the points in reference to which faith can be defined, albeit the words themselves are not arranged in the form of a definition, just as the philosophers touch on the principles of the syllogism, without employing the syllogistic form." This passage neither affirms nor denies the possibility of pre-Christian pagan philosophical knowledge of God and be set aside.

Preller and those who agree with him to presuppose that the *infideles* of *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3 includes pre-Christian pagan philosophers. There are plenty of reasons to think that the *philosophi* are not on St. Thomas's radar in *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3. As we have seen, in the treatise on faith, the *philosophi* make few appearances and those few appearances provide no explicit exegetical warrant for counting the philosophers as *infideles* in the proper sense. St. Thomas never names nor considers the philosophers among the *infideles*. In the treatise on faith, St. Thomas re-affirms the possibility and actuality of scientifically demonstrable knowledge of the existence of God by philosophers and by the light of natural reason. According to St. Thomas, then, the philosophers do in fact assent to the truth of the existence of God, even if it is not in an act of *credere*, and do not count as *infideles* in the proper sense.

One might object at this point that St. Thomas would count all pagans or heathens (*paganorum sive gentilium*), including philosophers like Aristotle, among the unbelievers in the proper sense. After all, pagans or heathens are named among unbelievers at II-II, q. 10, a. 5, resp., and Aristotle and many other ancient philosophers were certainly pagans or heathens.

By this point, St. Thomas has already made the distinction between unbelief as the pure negation of faith and sinful unbelief as the opposition to faith. Second, and more importantly, in this passage, St. Thomas is explicitly concerned with “the sin of unbelief [which] consists in resisting the faith.” The sin of unbelief (opposition), which is not the punishment of unbelief (pure negation), consists in resistance. According to St. Thomas, this resistance is of two kinds: resistance before acceptance and resistance after acceptance. Insofar as unbelief in this context is explicitly a species of the sin of unbelief (opposition), resistance before acceptance cannot be reduced to unbelief as pure negation. Of course, opposition to faith comes in two forms as well: before an encounter and after an encounter. That one resists the faith in an encounter with faith, assuming the reception of the habit of faith, is the more obvious instance of the sinful of unbelief.¹¹³ Having the grace of the habit of faith, one has the capacity to see the credibility of the truths of faith. One’s resistance in this case, then, betrays a problem in the will. Insofar as pre-Christian pagan philosophers resist and have such a will in the face of an encounter with the faith, they count among the unbelievers in the sinful and proper sense.

Some people, however, may have a will resistant to the faith, without having encountered the faith. A pagan or heathen who has such a will counts as one resistant to the faith, not because they are unevangelized pagans, but because of their will. Apart from knowing whether particular pagans or heathens have such a will, though possible

¹¹³ This is not to say, of course, that one could not resist the faith in an encounter with it before accepting it due to unbelief as pure negation. One can imagine an individual who encounters the truths of faith, and yet lacks the grace of the habit of faith. Because they lack the habit of faith, they lack the capacity to see the credibility of faith. Because they do not see the credibility of the truths of faith, they cannot give the assent of theological faith. Resistance in this case would not be the sin of unbelief (opposition) but the punishment of non-belief (pure negation). This is an interesting case, but beyond the scope of the present work. Because St. Thomas has specified his considerations of the resistance of pagans or heathens as “sinful unbelief,” I shall leave a more thorough analysis of the situation of pagans and the punishment of non-belief to another time.

and plausible, we cannot attribute to them the sin of unbelief simply because they are pagan. Therefore, pagans or heathens as such do not necessarily count among the unbelievers in the sinful and proper sense. Consequently, pre-Christian pagan philosophers like Aristotle as pagan do not necessarily count among the sinful unbelievers simply because they are pagan or heathen.

That pagans qua pagan do not necessarily count as sinful unbelievers is confirmed by St. Thomas. He states,

[T]here are two ways in which a man may deviate from the rectitude of the Christian faith. First, because he is unwilling to assent to Christ: and such a man has an evil will, so to say, in respect of the very end. This belongs to the species of unbelief in pagans and Jews. Secondly, because, though he intends to assent to Christ, yet he fails in his choice of those things by which he assents to Christ because he chooses not what Christ really taught, but the suggestions of his own mind. Therefore, heresy is a species of unbelief, belonging to those who profess faith in Christ, but corrupt his teachings.¹¹⁴

Both pagans and Jews are guilty of deviating from the faith, through an unwillingness to assent to Christ, and as such, suffer from a species of unbelief. What is the nature of this unbelief? Whatever it is both pagans and Jews suffer from this species of unbelief. Again, it is not pure negation. The Jews do not as such suffer from a mere absence of belief. To the contrary, Jews have faith. They believe the truths of faith as revealed in the Old Law (faith in figure only). Unless St. Thomas has in mind Jews who resist the Old Covenant in their will, though not through an encounter,¹¹⁵ the Jewish unbelief he considers here is not unbelief as pure negation. This species of unbelief, then, describes the situation in which one is unwilling to accept the faith, whether encountered or not. If St. Thomas is describing a situation in which an encounter is assumed, then the point is made stronger.

¹¹⁴ *ST* II-II, q. 11, a. 1, resp.

¹¹⁵ I am not aware that St. Thomas considers such a situation. To the extent that the unbelief from which the Jew in question suffers is the same species of unbelief from which a pagan suffers, it is implausible to suppose that it is pure negation. The Jews suffer no such thing.

Unbelief in the relevant sense involves resistance to the truths of faith, whether it is the resistance of a Jew or a pagan. One suffers from this species of unbelief, then, not because one is a pagan, for, some Jews suffer from the same species of unbelief, as well. One suffers from this species of unbelief because one has resisted assenting to Christ because, then, the state of their will. Conceivably, then, because Jews could suffer from this unbelief as well, pre-Christian pagan philosophers like Aristotle are not *as pagan* necessarily counted among the unbelievers of this sort. If they are so counted, it is because of something else.

Because the unbelief with which St. Thomas is concerned is the opposition to and not pure negation of faith, the unbelief of pagans or heathens must involve, at minimum, an implicit resistance in the will to assenting to the person of Christ. Their status as pagans, then, does not in itself make pre-Christian pagan philosophers candidates for the *infideles* meant in *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3. That they could suffer from unbelief in this way is possible, and likely in particular cases, not because they are pagan, but because they have a will resistant to assenting to Christ. Therefore, on the basis of the passages studied thus far, to say that pagans or heathens, simply because they are pagans or heathens, are sinful unbelievers is incorrect.

That a pre-Christian pagan philosopher who demonstrably proves the existence of God does not count as an unbeliever in the relevant sense should not be surprising. Quite simply, as noted above, the *philosophi* who have scientifically demonstrated the existence of God do not fit the logic of unbelief as St. Thomas articulates it. Their act of assent to the truth “God exists” is not an act of *credere* at all, but an act of *scire*. Further, the *philosophi* have neither dissented from the faith previously accepted nor obviously

resisted the faith before having accepted it. At minimum, it is clear that, for St. Thomas, they have not resisted the truth of the existence of God.

I do not doubt that individual pagan philosophers can and have resisted the truths of faith, whether before or after an encounter through their will. Insofar as they have done so, they oppose the faith. Insofar as they have done so they count among the *infideles* in the proper sense. Ultimately, however, we would be hard-pressed to find exegetical or systematic warrant in the treatise on faith that necessitates our counting the *philosophi* as such among the *infideles* in the proper sense meant in *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3.

In short, the unbelievers who are said to believe that “God exists” in *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, arg. 3 and who are denied real belief in *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3 are not pre-Christian pagan philosophers. Each instance in which the philosophers appear in the treatise on faith provides indicates neither that St. Thomas counts them among the unbelievers nor that he denies that they assent to the truth of the existence of God. Further, St. Thomas expends a great of effort distinguishing the acts of *credere* from the act of *scire*. The philosophers, insofar as they have demonstrably proven the existence of God, do not assent as an act of *credere* at all. Therefore, the success or failure of their philosophical assent must be analyzed and judged on its own terms, and not in relation to the success or failure of an act of *credere*. Additionally, St. Thomas clearly admits the possibility of cognizing certain formal aspects of God apart from others. That one fails to cognize God’s triunity or incarnation or the like does not yet preclude the success of their having known the existence of God. Furthermore, St. Thomas affirms the actuality of demonstrable knowledge of the God’s unicity and incorporeality, which entails God’s

existence, in the treatise on faith. This also speaks against the notion that the act of assent given by philosophers fails.¹¹⁶

Of course, individual pre-Christian pagan philosophers could and, more than likely, did resist the faith and surely did assent to falsehoods with respect to the metaphysically simple God. In this sense (and this sense only), then, one might argue that the pre-Christian pagan philosopher did not know that God exists. Insofar as they did this, it is not because they are pagan, but because they are wrong about God. That they are ignorant of God, to the extent that this could be true, must be analyzed on its own terms as a deficiency with respect to an act of *scire*, not an act of *credere*. In the next chapter, just such an analysis will be offered.

III. *Infideles* in the Proper Sense: Résumé

Thus far our analysis has provided certain precisions to an understanding of unbelief for St. Thomas. We have considered various candidates for the *infideles* of *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3. We have seen that certain groups of individuals clearly do not count, for St. Thomas, as *infideles* in the proper sense, among them those in accidental material error alone, those with lifeless faith (that is, faith without charity), demons (in a qualified sense), and schismatics. We have also seen that certain groups of individuals clearly do count, according to St. Thomas, as *infideles* in the proper sense, among them heretics and apostates. There are others, however, who are not as easily categorized. For instance, we have seen that Jews and Muslims, depending on the particularities of the case, are

¹¹⁶ The discussion of St. Thomas's commentary on Romans below (Chapter Four) will shed further light on the belief and unbelief of philosophers.

potentially believers or unbelievers. In the Old Covenant, the people of Israel have the opportunity to either assent to or to dissent from the truths of faith in the figure of the law, while in the New Covenant they have the opportunity either to assent to or to dissent from those truths in the reality revealed by Christ. There are, of course, instances of dissent and resistance by Jews in both the Old and New Covenants that are not reducible to mere material error of the sort noted above, and as such, there are particular Jews who would count, for St. Thomas, as *infideles* in the proper sense. Similarly, particular Muslims, insofar as their dissent or resistance is not reducible to mere material error, would also count as *infideles* in the proper sense.

Likewise, the *philosophi* are a complicated case. As with Jews and Muslims, whether or not they count as unbelievers depends on the particular circumstances of the case. We observed that, insofar as they have demonstrable proof of the existence of God, the philosopher's assent is an act of *scire* and not *credere*. As such, the success or failure of that assent should be analyzed and determined on its own terms as a kind of act distinct from *credere*. Further, we noted that there is no straightforward indication in the treatise on faith that the philosophers count among believers in the proper sense. No text in which the *philosophi* are mentioned implicates them in unbelief. To the contrary, if anything, various texts affirm their knowledge of the existence of God through demonstration. Also, that pre-Christian pagan philosophers are pagan is not sufficient to place them among the unbelievers.

CHAPTER FOUR

Defectus Cognitionis: Error, Falsehood, and Ignorance of the Simple God

In the previous chapter, we discussed various candidates for the *infideles* of *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3. While there were certain indications about the operative meaning of unbelief in this context, we were left with an interpretive choice to make. Is the notion of unbelief restricted to resistance to and dissent from the truths of faith, as we find in q. 10 and following? Or, does the notion of unbelief include the mere absence or pure negation of faith as well? The readers' choice in this matter will make a significant difference for their interpretation of the relevant passage, as well as for their account of the possibility of pre-Christian pagan philosophical knowledge of the existence of God according to St. Thomas.

I have made my choice. Given certain methodological reasons, the almost exclusive emphasis on the sin of unbelief in the treatise on faith, as well as certain other considerations, I take St. Thomas's primary interest to be the sin of unbelief in the treatise on faith. We have solid exegetical and systematic grounds for maintaining that the proper sense of unbelief in *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3 is this specific sense of q. 10 and not simply the absence of faith. This interpretation is not unique to me. Frederick Crosson observes, "It is possible to classify the pre-Christian philosophers as 'unbelievers' only if the term is taken in a large and improper sense, i.e., as meaning simply non-believers."¹ Although pre-Christian pagan philosophers could oppose the faith, this was not because they are pagan but because their wills are opposed to the truths of faith.

¹ Crosson, "Reconsidering Aquinas as Postliberal Theologian," 448.

One's interpretive choice regarding the proper sense of unbelief, however, contributes only partly to a complete interpretation of *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3. The reader must also determine the meaning of the *defectus cognitionis* from which the unbelievers suffer, the defect that betrays complete ignorance of simple things. For as the Aristotelian axiom states, “to know simple things defectively is not to know them at all.”² Determining the precise nature of this defect in cognition will provide the reader further considerations for discerning the proper sense of unbelief, and consequently, the identity of the *infideles*, and moreover, whether pre-Christian pagan philosophers who have demonstrated the existence of God might count among them, and on what grounds.

Determining the *defectus cognitionis* from which the unbeliever suffers requires us to consider that St. Thomas is drawing on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* in his use of the Aristotelian axiom. We do well, then, to discuss the relevant passage and context on which St. Thomas draws. There we shall find some of the most relevant and helpful specifications for our understanding of a defect in cognition of simple things. Fortunately, St. Thomas has not left us his use of the axiom in the *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3 and the discussion in his commentary on the *Metaphysics* as the only datum. There are other instances of the Aristotelian axiom, at least by allusion. Each offers us more data from which to draw a more precise exegetical (and systematic) conclusion. For example, we find two other significant occasions in which St. Thomas utilizes the Aristotelian axiom, namely, in the *Summa contra Gentiles* III, ch. 118 and his commentary on the Gospel of John, ch. 17, lect. 6. These allusions to the axiom provide us with further data from which to determine the nature of the defect in cognition from which unbelievers suffer.

² *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3.

A thorough exegetical analysis of the meaning of *defectus cognitionis*, and more broadly, the whole of *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3, will require a discussion of each of these references to the Aristotelian axiom in St. Thomas. To that end, the discussion in this chapter will be twofold. (1) I shall discuss the context and application of the Aristotelian axiom as it appears in St. Thomas's commentary on the relevant portion of the *Metaphysics*. This section will discuss the being of the world upon which true and false cognitions depend, the standard account of truth and falsity with respect to composite things, the extended account of truth (and not falsity) as it applies to simple things, as well as the nature of the defect in cognition with respect to a simple thing that renders one ignorant. (2) I shall discuss those places outside *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3 where St. Thomas utilizes, either explicitly or by allusion, the Aristotelian axiom. This discussion will include considerations of other others place in the treatise on faith, *ScG* III, ch. 118, as well as St. Thomas's commentary on John, ch. 17, lect. 6, which is supplemented by certain considerations of his commentary on Romans.

Ultimately, I shall argue that the *defectus cognitionis* of the *ST* II-II passage is not the absence of the formal aspect of the object of faith or an incomplete or non-comprehensive knowledge of the metaphysically simple God. Rather, it is the more general deficiency in which one holds what is untrue to be true or what is true to be untrue of the purely actual and simple God. The defect in cognition with respect to knowledge of simple things is not a lack of enough knowledge or the appropriate formal aspect, but rather to think or speak of what is in act that it is not or that what is not in act that it is. The defect in cognition is not the absence of knowledge of God as triune or incarnate. Nor is it as Preller maintains that one lacks the formal object of faith. Rather, it

is to think or speak by any formal object whatsoever of what is in act that it is not or that what is not in act that it is with respect to a simple thing. To assent to what is non-actual and untrue with respect to a simple being is to betray one's ignorance; it is to show that one does not and did not know what they were thinking or speaking about. It is not to have known that the simple thing—that is, God—exists at all (*totaliter*). Insofar as a pre-Christian pagan philosopher does betray such ignorance, and some do, we must consider such a failure in terms of the kind of act it is, namely, an act of *scire*, not an act of *credere*.

I. Aquinas's Commentary on the Aristotelian Axiom (*Metaphysics* 1051^b30-33)

The Aristotelian axiom upon which St. Thomas draws in *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3 comes from Aristotle's *Metaphysics* Book 9, chapter 10. There, Aristotle is concerned to discuss the relationship between, on the one hand, truth and falsity, and, on the other hand, actuality and potentiality.³ Further, he grounds the discussion of truth and falsity and of actuality and potentiality in the related discussion of being and non-being. Aristotle believes that the being of things varies according to a diversity in or lack of composition of actuality and potentiality. The account of truth and falsity, then, which finds its ground in the variety we find in the being of the world, mirrors that variety. As St. Thomas explains, "Now truth follows being...The structure of things in being and in

³ *In Meta.* Book 9, lect. 11, no. 1895: "Here the Philosopher compares actuality to potency with reference to truth and falsity." All English translations of *In Meta.* come from, with light modifications, *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, trans. John P. Rowan (Notre Dame: Dumb Ox Books, 1995).

truth is the same. Hence, those things which are not similar in being are not similar in truth.”⁴

The being of things, upon which truth follows, is for Aristotle and St. Thomas either composite or simple. Composition and simplicity are not, however, themselves uniform notions. The being of things exhibits various kinds of composition and, at least in principle, different kinds of simplicity. A discussion of the truth that follows upon being will do well to note the various ways that the being of things is composed or simple. Having accounted for this diversity, we shall be well situated to discuss the account (or accounts) of truth as they relate to both composite and simple things.

To this end, the present section will be fourfold. (a) I shall discuss the kinds of composition and simplicity in the being of things in terms of act and potency. (b) I shall consider the “Standard Account” of truth and falsity, which concerns affirmation and negation, which is to say, the combination or separation of subjects and predicates.⁵ (c) I shall consider the more complicated and qualified case of truth with respect to simple things, to which the Standard Account of truth does not apply. (d) I shall apply the conclusions of the previous sections to the case of the *defectus cognitionis* of *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3. In particular, I shall consider the ways by which one succeeds or fails to know a simple thing, and in doing so, determine what counts, for St. Thomas, as the defect in cognition from which the ignorant suffer.

⁴ *In Meta.* Book 9, lect. 11, no. 1903. St. Thomas clarifies this relationship between truth and being, saying, like Aristotle, “[Y]ou are not white because we think truly that you are white; but conversely we think you are white because you are white. Hence it has been shown that the way in which a thing is disposed is the cause of the truth both in thought and in speech” (no. 1897).

⁵ I borrow the language of “Standard Account” of truth and falsity from Stephen Makin in his commentary on *Metaphysics* Θ . See Aristotle, *Metaphysics: Book Θ* , trans. and commentary Stephen Makin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006).

A. The Being that Truth and Falsity Follow

Following Aristotle, St. Thomas thinks that the truth of a thing follows the being of a thing. This account of truth will look different according to the various levels and modes of being. In his commentary on the *Metaphysics*, in the immediate context of the Aristotelian axiom, St. Thomas is particularly concerned with these levels and modes of being under a particular aspect, namely, act and potency. It is in treating these levels and modes in this way that he discusses composition and simplicity of being in a way that helps us to understand the Aristotelian axiom St. Thomas cites in *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3.

Act and potency have a prominent place in the interpretation and appropriation of St. Thomas's work, especially in the twentieth-century. The Twenty-Four Theses of Thomism famously begins with the affirmation of the distinction between act and potency. This fundamental distinction divides all being; everything is either pure actuality (i.e., God) or it is some composition of actuality and potentiality. Thesis One reads: "Potency and act so divide being that whatsoever exists either is a pure act (*actus purus*) or is necessarily composed of potency and act."⁶ This distinction between act and potency offers a solution to various philosophical problems, including the problem of the one and the many.⁷ Against Parmenides' monism, which reduces everything to being, and Heraclitus' pluralism, which reduces everything to becoming, Aristotle introduces a middle term between being and non-being, namely, being-in-potency.

⁶ "Thesis One," in *The Twenty-Four Fundamental Theses of Official Catholic Philosophy*, trans. Hugh McDonald (Middletown: CreateSpace Publishing, 2016), 6. St. Thomas references the division of all being into act and potency on numerous occasions, including *Sent. IV*, d. 49, q. 2, a. 6, resp.; *De veritate*, q. 8, a. 9, resp.; *De spir. creaturis*, a. 1, resp.; *In Phys.* I, lect. 15, no. 3; *ST I*, q. 77, a. 1, resp.

⁷ See W. Norris Clarke, *The One and the Many: A Contemporary Thomistic Metaphysics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2001) and Edward Feser, *Scholastic Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction* (Piscataway: Editions Scholasticae, 2014).

The Stagirite recognizes that the being of the world is not reducible simply to that or how things actually are (being-in-act) and the negation of that actuality (non-being). That or how things could be (being-in-potency) is also a real principle of the being of the world. There is something real in things that grounds the possibility or potentiality for becoming something other than what they actually are or for becoming in some way so that they are different from how they actually are.⁸ St. Thomas notes, “[W]hat is capable of being may possibly not be actual. Hence it is evident that what is capable of being may either be or not be; and thus the potency is at one and the same time a potency for opposite determinations, because the same thing is in potency both to being and non-being.”⁹ This being-in-potency, which is a real principle of the being of a thing, grounds, for instance, the reality of change such that the term of a change is not *creatio ex nihilo* as it were, but the actualization of a potentiality in the thing. For example, a piece of wood catches fire, not because a new fire-bearing-piece-of-wood comes from nothing, because a new piece of wood on fire replaces a previous piece of wood not on fire, but because a potency or power for being on fire that exists in the wood is actualized. When the piece of wood was not yet actually on fire, it was, by virtue of its being what it is, potentially on fire. Again, both the actuality and the potentiality of a thing, like wood, are real principles of its being.¹⁰

Most objects of our experience are composed of principles of actuality and potentiality, or act and potency, for short. They are in act insofar as they exist and do so as the kind of thing they are and in the manner they do. They are in potency as well. Most

⁸ See *In Meta*. Book 9, lect. 9, nos. 1868 and 1869.

⁹ *In Meta*. Book 9, lect. 9, no. 1869. Cf. *In Meta*. Book 9, lect. 9, no. 1881

¹⁰ The example of fire and wood as an instance of the relationship between act and potency is used by St. Thomas as an illustration of motion in the first way. See *ST I*, q. 2, a. 3, resp.

beings do not have just a single potency. Our piece of wood, for instance, exists in potency with respect to any number of actualities. It is potentially on fire. It is potentially a stool. The potentialities of wood, however, are not unlimited. There are any number of actualities to which wood does not and cannot, as the kind of thing it is, stand in potency. Wood is potentially a chair, but it is not potentially a sonnet. It is potentially round, but it is not potentially verbose. So long as it exists, it is potentially non-existent, which means that it can cease to exist and this “can” expresses a principle of potentiality determining the sort of existence it has. It is a real principle of its being.

It is crucial that we recognize the important role that this distinction between act and potency has for St. Thomas throughout his career. Already in *De ente et essentia* (ca. 1252-56), act and potency are key for understanding St. Thomas’s account of the division of being into material and immaterial substances, substantial and accidental forms, as well as composite and simple things.¹¹ As they were for Aristotle, act and potency are also key for understanding St. Thomas’s accounts of change or motion, which appear in a number of places.¹² Moreover, act and potency function significantly in St. Thomas’s articulation of the proofs or demonstrations for the existence of God, especially as they appear in the *Summa contra Gentiles* and the *Summa theologiae*.¹³ Because his commentary on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* Book 9, chapter 10, relates truth and falsity to act

¹¹ See *De ente et essentia*, cc. 2-4. All English translations of *De ente et essentia* come from, with light modifications, *On Being and Essence*, trans. Armand Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1949). For a helpful discussion, see Gaven Kerr, *Aquinas’s Way to God: The Proof in De Ente et Essentia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), esp. 57-58, 63-66.

¹² See his various accounts of the demonstration for God’s existence, and in particular, the first way. For a list of the occasions in which St. Thomas employs this, and the other proofs, see Baisnée, “St. Thomas Aquinas’s Proofs of the Existence of God Presented in Their Chronological Order.”

¹³ See, for example, Gaven Kerr, *Aquinas’s Way to God: The Proof in De Ente et Essentia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000); Edward Feser, *Five Proofs of the Existence of God* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017); Clarke, *The One and the Many*.

and potency, we shall do well to consider briefly the diversity of being in the world in terms of act and potency.

Here, the discussion will be twofold. (i) I shall discuss composite things, in particular material substances. I shall consider various instances of the composition of act and potency in such things: the compositions of matter and form, substance and accidents, supposit and the act of existing (*esse*), as well as active and passive potencies (or powers), habits, and operations. (ii) I shall give an account of St. Thomas's understanding of simple things. I shall consider the composition of act and potency—or the lack thereof—in things that are simple, in both a relative and an absolute sense. In particular, I shall consider separate or immaterial substances, essences, diverse modes of being like immobility and eternity, as well as Pure Act (*actus purus*), which is to say, God. Ultimately, this discussion will provide the metaphysical background for interpreting St. Thomas's account of truth in the case of composite and simple things in his commentary on the *Metaphysics* Book 9, chapter 10, and more specifically, his understanding of the Aristotelian axiom found there.

(i) Composite Being: The Actuality and Potentiality of Material Beings

Composite being can mean different things for St. Thomas, because its meaning depends on a specification of the different possible sets of components combined in different composite beings. In most instances, when he speaks of composite things, he has in mind material substances, which is to say, beings composed of matter and form. As St. Thomas observes, “[Composite being] embraces matter and form.”¹⁴ There are, of course, immaterial substances as well, which are also composite in their own way. In this

¹⁴ *De ente et essentia*, ch. 2.

subsection, our primary concern is the various levels of composition discernable in material substances. Among these, again, I include matter-form, substance-accidents, and supposit-esse composition, as well as powers, habits, and operations. Each sort of composition is a combination of act and potency. The varying relationships between act and potency in these different types of composition in beings ground different nuances in St. Thomas's account of truth.

First, consider the relationship between matter and form. Each is a co-constitutive principle of material being. Matter is the "principle of individuation" by which a form is concretized in and as this particular thing.¹⁵ It is also the principle of potency in a thing. St. Thomas describes it as "being in potency"¹⁶ and that "through itself matter can never exist."¹⁷ Form is the principle of specification by which this thing is this particular kind of thing, as well as "being in act."¹⁸ As St. Thomas states, "[F]orm gives existence to matter."¹⁹ Form is that act by which a thing's matter is actualized in being so that the thing is the kind of thing that it is. St. Thomas notes, "The production of act from the potentiality of matter is nothing else but something becoming actually that previously was in potentiality."²⁰ Apart from form, matter is not actually existing as any kind of thing, but it is only potentially so. Matter without form is in potency with respect to actual existence and to a determining form. In the extreme, considered apart from every

¹⁵ Cf. *De ente et essentia*, ch. 2. St. Thomas states, "[T]he essence of a composite substance differs from that of a simple substance in that the essence of the composite substance is not form alone, but includes form and matter" (*De ente et essentia*, ch. 2)

¹⁶ *De principiis naturae*, ch. 1, no. 6. Cf. *De principiis naturae*, ch. 1, no. 1; *De subst. sep.*, ch. 8, nos. 37 and 43. All English translations of *De principiis naturae* come from, with light modifications, *Aquinas on Matter and Form and the Elements: A Translation and Interpretation of the De Principiis Naturae and the De Mixtione Elementorum of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Joseph Bobik (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006).

¹⁷ *De principiis naturae*, ch. 1, no. 14.

¹⁸ *De principiis naturae*, ch. 1, no. 6. Cf. *De ente et essentia*, ch. 2.

¹⁹ *De principiis naturae*, ch. 1, no. 2.

²⁰ *ST I*, q. 90, a. 2, ad 2.

form, matter is purely potential without any actuality. This is called prime matter. Prime matter, then, does not exist in itself apart from some form through which it is actualized in being and as the kind of thing that it is. St. Thomas describes prime matter as “being in absolute potentiality.”²¹ In short, then, matter stands in potency to determinate form, which is its act and as the kind of thing it is.

Second, consider the relationship between substance and accidents. Again, each is a co-constitutive principle of material being. The former is the thing that has the potential for actualization by a whole host of accidental forms, and so the substance is what stays the sort of thing it is when it undergoes a change from having one accidental form to having another. The substance is a thing existing as its own entity and not as a component of any other entity. It is being of itself, not inhering in anything else. It is the subject in which accidental forms inhere. Regarding the former, St. Thomas observes, “[T]hat properly exists which itself has existence; as it were, subsisting in its own existence. Wherefore only substances are properly and truly called beings.”²² He notes, also, “[Substance as subject] is in potency to accidental existence.”²³ As the actualization of a substance’s potential to exist on its own in one way or another, but always as the sort of thing the substance is, the accidental form of a substance exists only in a substance. As St. Thomas remarks, “[A]n accident does not give existence to a subject, but the subject

²¹ *ST I*, q. 48, a. 3, resp. Elsewhere, St. Thomas observes, “That matter, however, which is understood without any form and privation” (*De principiis naturae*, ch. 1, no. 11). Cf. *In Physics* Book 1, lect. 13, no. 118; *De principiis naturae*, ch. 1, no. 14.

²² *ST I*, q. 90, a. 2, resp. Cf. *In Meta.* Book 4, lect. 1, no. 539; *De ente et essentia*, ch. 1; *In Phys.* Book 1, lect. 11, no. 91; *De hebdomadibus*, ch. 2. All English translations of *De hebdomadibus* come from, with light modifications, *An Exposition of the ‘On the Hebdomads’ of Boethius*, trans. Janice L. Schultz and Edward A. Synan (Washington D. C.: The Catholic University of America, 2001).

²³ *De principiis naturae*, ch. 1, no. 1. St. Thomas’s account of substance is more complicated than this. In various places (*In Meta.* And *De ente et essentia*), he distinguishes between different uses of “substance.” This includes substance considered as (a) first substance or subject of predication, (b) form, (c) quiddity as significative of the definition of a thing, as well as the difference between substantial form as (d) the form of the whole and (e) the form as a part of the whole. See *In Meta.* Book 5, lect. 10, nos. 898, 899, 899, and 904; *In Meta.* Book 5, lect. 1, nos. 762 and 764; *De ente et essentia*, cc. 1 and 2.

to the accident.”²⁴ Also, he states, “[I]t [i.e., an accident] does not exist of itself but in something else.”²⁵ It is that by which a substance of a given and constant sort is further specified as being that sort of thing in this or that way. In this case, the substance functions as the matter to the accidents’ form. The substance is in potency to that act that is an accident’s form. As the matter or potency to an accidental form or act, substances stand in potency with respect to any number of accidental forms.²⁶ For example, while remaining a human sort of being that he or she is and always existing on his or her own and not as a component of any other thing, a human being could become either pale or dark, short (say by aging) or tall, and the like. A human being stands in potency with respect to these accidental forms, which have existence only in one or another human, as actualization of that person’s possibilities of being human in this or that way. Insofar as a human being is pale or dark, short or tall, and the like, she is so because the relevant potency in her has been brought to act by the inherence of the accidental form in her. In short, then, a substance stands in potency to determinate accidental forms, which are its acts, not as its being or actuality without qualification, but in this or that respect.

Third, consider the relationship between a supposit or subject and the nature and act of existing (*esse*) of that supposit. A supposit is a substance considered not as a composite of matter and form having various potencies that can be actualized by various accidental forms, but as a matter-form and substance-accident composite considered as having had its potency for existence actualized by an act of *esse* or as not having that potency actualized by an act of *esse*. St. Thomas says, “[A] supposit is a singular in the

²⁴ *De principiis naturae*, ch. 1, no. 2.

²⁵ *In Meta.* Book 4, lect. 1, no. 542. Cf. *In Meta.* Book 5, lect. 2, no. 775; *In Meta.* Book 4, lect. 1, no. 543; *ST I*, q. 45, a. 5, resp. and q. 90, a. 2, resp; *De hebdomadibus*, ch. 2; *De ente et essentia*, cc. 1 and 2; *De subst. spir.*, ch. 8, no. 41.

²⁶ Cf. *ST I*, q. 90, a. 2, ad 2.

category of substance.”²⁷ As such, for material or composite things, the supposit is the thing constituted by the composition of matter and form, as well as substance and accident. Apart from being actualized by *esse* the supposit that could be does not yet exist in act. St. Thomas maintains, “[I]n the case of anything to which something which does not belong to the intelligible structure of its nature can be accidental, the thing and the essence, or the supposit and the nature, differ.”²⁸ Apart from its actualization by *esse* the supposit is a potency with respect to actually existing as the kind of thing it would be in the being of the world. As St. Thomas observes, “[N]o creature is its being but rather is something which has being.”²⁹ Even for those things that are form alone, namely, separate or immaterial substances, apart from *esse*, they stand in potency with respect to actually existing as the kind of thing they would be in the being of the world.³⁰ In short, then, in created beings (*ens creatum*), the supposit is a potency, actualized by the *esse* or the act of existing in the being of the world.

Fourth, it will be helpful to consider also powers, habits, and operations.³¹ Powers are certain potentialities for acting or being acted upon that are possessed by a thing because its matter is actualized by the form that makes it the kind of thing that it is, which form is called its natural, essential, or substantial form. Passive powers are receptive

²⁷ *Quodlibetal*, q. 2, a. 2, resp. Cf. *Quodlibetal*, q. 2, a. 2, sc and ad 2. All English translations of *Quodlibetal* come from, with light modifications, *Quodlibetal Questions 1 and 2*, trans. Sandra Edwards (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1983).

²⁸ *Quodlibetal*, q. 2, a. 2, resp.

²⁹ *Quodlibetal*, q. 2, a. 1, resp. Cf. *De hebdomadibus*, ch. 2; *De subst. sep.*, ch. 8, no. 42; *De ente et essentia* cc. 3 and 4.

³⁰ This distinction between the supposit and *esse* is like, though not identical to, the so-called “real distinction” between essence and *esse*. The latter maintains that an essence is not identical to its *esse*, which is to say, that to be of such and such essence does not imply or include the act of existing essentially. The supposit-*esse* distinction maintains that an individuated instance of a substance with all its accidents is not identical to its *esse*, which is to say, that to be this individual does not essentially imply or include the act of existing. See *In spir. creat.*, a. 1, ad 8; *Quodlibetal*, q. 2, a. 2, sc and ad 1; *Super in Boeth.*, q. 5, a. 4, ad 4; *De ente et essentia*, ch. 4.

³¹ See *ST* I-II, qq. 49-89; *ScG* III, 19-50.

powers by which a thing is or can be acted upon by another. When acted upon, the potency that is the passive power is brought to act. In human beings, the sense powers, for instance, are brought to act through the sense impressions of sensible objects. When the power of sight receives the influence of light and the sensible object's color, the operation of sight, which is otherwise only in potency, is actualized.

Active powers or potencies, on the other hand, are those by which a thing acts or operates from itself and upon another.³² In human beings, the intellectual powers, by which a human comes to understand the world, are both active and passive. These powers are passive insofar as the passive or potential intellect is receptive to or operated upon by the active intellect that turns the passive intellect toward the phantasm, abstracting from the phantasm. Intellectual powers are active insofar as the active or agent intellect is active in making what is of itself only potentially intelligible to be actually understood. As an active power, then, the agent intellect acts or operates upon something (though not something external to the knower), and in doing so, brings what was once only potentially intelligible to be understood in act. In this way, the active power of the active intellect brings the passive intellect to act.

Habits are tendencies or dispositions toward certain kinds of actions or operations. These habits are not essential to the being as the kind of thing that it is. They do reside, however, in the powers of a thing as the kind of thing that it is. A good habit, which is a disposition toward acting well, we call virtue. A bad habit, which is a disposition toward acting badly, we call vice. Insofar as these habits, whether virtues or vices, are not

³² This relationship of active and passive potencies should be considered broadly. Although the active intellect of a human being acts upon the passive intellect, abstracting from the phantasm, this is not a relationship between something internal and something external. Both the active and passive intellects remain internal to the intellectual being.

essential properties of a thing as the kind of thing that it is, they are accidents. Therefore, a thing, and more specifically a person, is in potency with respect to the accidental acquisition of dispositions of powers toward actions of a certain kind, good or bad. A human being, for example, is not essentially chaste or a Polish speaker. Human beings are only potentially chaste or a Polish speaker. Human beings have the powers by virtue of which they might be chaste or a Polish speaker. In order that the acts of such habits be in act, however, the act or operation must be in act.

Just as beings, for instance, human beings, are not essentially in act with respect to habits, neither are they essentially in act with respect to the operations or acts of those habits. The habitually chaste or Polish-speaking man is not in fact always doing chaste acts or speaking the Polish language. The habits or dispositions are ordered to these acts remain in potency to these acts as long as the agent is not presently acting in the relevant way. The habitually chaste man is only potentially behaving chastely insofar as he is not actually acting chastely but could be. They remain habitually chaste, but when not acting (for example, sleeping) they are not acting chastely. Habitual Polish-speakers, similarly, are only potentially speaking Polish insofar as they are not actually speaking Polish but could be.

In this subsection, we have considered the being of composite things upon which, according to St. Thomas, truth follows. Each of these is composed of principles of actuality and potentiality. In the case of the composition of matter and form, matter stands in potency to form as its act. Matter can at one time be determined by one form and at another time another form. Similarly, in the case of the composition of substance and accidents, substance stands in potency to accidents as its acts. A substance can be

determined at one time by a particular accidental form and at another by a different one. Also, in the case of created things, supposits stand in potency to *esse* as their act. Already existing created supposits have their potential to exist actualized, but supposits that do not exist but could exist have only the potential to exist, which can eventually be actualized when they are actually created. Likewise, powers stand in potency to operations and habits. A power can be at one time in act with respect to its operation and at another not in act. A power can be at one time habituated in one way and at another not. Further, a habitual act can be at one time in act and at another time not in act. In each of these cases, being actually in the world is a composition of act and potency. Some principle of being in each thing as the kind of the thing that it is stands in potency with respect to some act or actuality.

This is the being of the world of composite things upon which truth follows. Let us now turn to a consideration of the being of simple things in the world.

(ii) Simple Being: The Actuality and Potentiality of Immaterial Beings

Things can be simple in both a relative and an absolute sense. They can be relatively simple when they are simple in a certain respect but not in all respects. St. Thomas notes, “[N]othing prevents that [something] be simple according to some aspect, inasmuch as it lacks certain composition, yet that it not be altogether simple.”³³ They can also be simple in every respect. There are simple things in the absolute sense, as well, lacking every kind of metaphysical composition. Such a thing is purely actual, namely, God.

³³ *De hebdomadibus*, ch. 2.

First, I shall discuss the relative simplicity of separate or immaterial substances and the special case of essences. Then I shall discuss the absolute metaphysical simplicity of Pure Act (God). Like our discussion of composite being, each discussion articulates the relationship between act and potency, which in turn grounds St. Thomas's account of truth.

Although all created beings are composites of act and potency, St. Thomas and others sometimes speak of separate or immaterial substances as simple things. These are only relatively simple, however. St. Thomas observes, “[I]f there should be found certain forms not in matter, each one of them is indeed simple in that it lacks matter...Nevertheless, because every [such] form you like is determinative of ‘to be’ itself, not one of them is ‘to be’ itself, but rather is what possesses ‘to be.’”³⁴ Separate or immaterial substances do lack composition of act and potency at some level, though not at every level. Insofar as they are immaterial, separate substances lack composition of matter and form. They are form alone.

Even though separate substances lack the composition of matter and form, they are still composed of act and potency. As St. Thomas observes, “[E]ven though we do not find the composition of form and matter in the angels we can still find potency and act in them.”³⁵ Also, “Although substances of this kind are forms alone and immaterial, they are not in every way simple so as to be pure act. They do have an admixture of potency.”³⁶ Each separate substance still has a principle of potentiality. Insofar as it is created, the essence or form of each separate substance, which is its supposit, stands in potency with respect to, at minimum, its act of existing (*esse*). St. Thomas notes, “[B]ecause such [an

³⁴ *De hebdomadibus*, ch. 2.

³⁵ *Super Boet. de Trinitate*, q. 5, a. 4, ad 4.

³⁶ *De ente et essentia*, ch. 4.

immaterial substance] is not its being, something outside the intelligible structure of the species is accidental to it, namely, being itself.”³⁷ Separate substances can both be and not be. Already existing separate substances have their potential to exist actualized, but separate substances that do not exist in the world but could exist have only the potential to exist, which can eventually be actualized when they are actually created. So, while we may speak of them as simple in a certain respect, for instance, lacking the composition of matter and form, separate substances are not simple in the absolute sense of lacking all composition of act and potency. They are composed of essence and the act of existing.

Now, there is a sense in which we can speak of essences or forms (and their correlative definitions) as simple. St. Thomas variously names these as a “simple essence,”³⁸ “simple form,”³⁹ “simple conception,”⁴⁰ and “simple nature.”⁴¹ Essences are complete units not composed of parts. The human essence, for instance, is not composed of the parts “rational” and “animal,” as if they could be really separated in man.⁴² St. Thomas remarks, “[W]e say that man is a rational animal, not that he is composed of animal and rational as we say he is composed of soul and body.”⁴³ There is not a rational essence in composition with an animal essence by which that being is then a rational animal. Even though the correlative definition of man contains grammatical parts, in this case, “rational” and “animal,” it is not true that man qua man contains parts, rational and animal. The essence, then, is a unit, simple or non-composite and united. In terms of

³⁷ *Quodlibetal*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 1. Cf. *Quodlibetal*, q. 2, a. 2, sc; *In spir. creat.*, q. 1, ad 8.

³⁸ *ST I*, q. 90, a. 2, ad 1 and *Super in Beoth.*, q. 5, a. 4, ad 4.

³⁹ *In spir. creat.*, a. 1, ad 8. All English translations of *In spir. creat.* come from, with light modifications, *On Spiritual Creatures*, trans. Mary C. FitzPatrick and John J. Wellmuth (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1949).

⁴⁰ *In Meta.*, Book 5, lect. 4, no. 805.

⁴¹ *De ente et essentia*, ch. 4.

⁴² Keep in mind, of course, the various definitional parts can be separated conception.

⁴³ *De ente et essentia*, ch. 2.

potentialities, we might say that there are no potencies by which a rational man could be thought to be in potency to being a non-rational, and likewise for his animality, for to be without rationality or animality is simply not to be human at all. The human essence never stands in potency with respect to rationality and animality; the human essence, a being must actually be rational and animal. Insofar as man is man, then, rationality and animality are always in act. Something similar is true of other essences as well, whether it is the essence of horse or oak tree.

In St. Thomas, simplicity is also affirmed of various modes of being that are predicated of diverse kinds of things, like immobility, immutability, and eternity. Immobility, for instance, implies a lack of composition of act and potency by virtue of which a thing might move. Immobile things can be immobile in different ways, however. Some immobile things might be immobile in one but not every respect. Something immobile absolutely lacks every composition of act and potency by virtue of which it might move. There is no principle of potentiality for movement of any kind. Something immobile in only a relative or qualified sense may lack the composition of act and potency by virtue of which it might move in some but not every respect. Suppose, for the sake of argument, a thing is immobile with respect to a certain trajectory, but not with respect to local motion. It can and does move from place to place, but it cannot move off its current trajectory. This thing would be immobile with respect to trajectory though not with respect to place.

Like immobile things, eternal things can be eternal in different ways. Some are eternal because there is not a time at which they do not exist. Such things are always

actual with respect to time.⁴⁴ Many thinkers of the past thought of the world itself as eternal in this way.⁴⁵ There is another unique sort of eternity as well, namely, the eternity of God. To be eternal in this sense is not simply for there to be no time at which a thing does not exist. Rather, the eternity of God is to be outside of time, to be the transcendent origin of all created being, including time itself. In this sense, God simply lacks a principle of potentiality with respect to all time.

An analogous account might be offered for those beings that are immutable, incorruptible, etc. In each case, a being is, much like immaterial substances, incomposite or simple in a relative sense. They lack composition of act and potency at a certain level, but not necessary at every level. We can say, then, that in that respect in which they lack composition of act and potency, that being is simple. In that particular respect, then, the thing lacks the principle of potency by virtue of which that thing might be other than it is with respect to that aspect in which it is simple.

In addition to those things that are only relatively simple, there is *the one* thing that is absolutely simple. Like those things that are relatively simple, what is absolutely simple lacks the composition of act and potency. Unlike relatively simple things, however, what is absolutely simple lacks the composition of act and potency not in only a limited number of respects, but in every respect. Lacking every principle of potentiality, what is absolutely simple does not stand in potency with respect to anything whatsoever. Rather, what is absolutely simple is purely actual. It is *actus purus*, or Pure Act. This is God.

⁴⁴ *In Meta.*, Book 9, lect. 9, no. 1872. Cf. no 1881: "...eternal things, which are always actual."

⁴⁵ See St. Thomas's many discussions, and in dialogue with others like Aristotle, on the eternity of the world. For instance, see his *On the Eternity of the World*.

In Pure Act, there is no principle of potentiality as a consequence of which it might be other than it is. As pure actuality it is always and purely what it is and in every respect that it is. In fact, insofar as what is absolutely simple lacks the composition of essence and *esse*, it is always and purely actual with respect to existence by virtue of what it is. What is absolutely simple in any way cannot not be. Again, this absolutely simple thing is Pure Act or God.⁴⁶

Insofar as Pure Act lacks every principle of potentiality, we must deny of it anything that implies potency. Pure Act is not material, it has no accidents, it is not contingent, it does not participate in something above it, and the like. Similarly, to think or speak of Pure Act as though it could be many is to think or speak wrongly of Pure Act. In fact, it is a contradiction to speak of two “Pure Acts.” What is Pure Act lacks every principle of multiplicity or individuation, namely, every principle of potentiality, by virtue of which there might be more than one. St. Thomas makes this clear in *ST I*, qq. 3-11, but he also makes the same point and more quickly in *De ente et essentia*. There, he remarks, “[I]t is clear that the act of existing is other than essence or quiddity, unless, perhaps, there is a being whose quiddity is its very act of existing. And there can be only one such being, the First Being.”⁴⁷ Elsewhere, similarly, he notes, “For if we take away the potentiality of matter, there remains in them a certain potentiality insofar as they are not ‘to be’ itself but they share in ‘to be.’ For there can be only one being which is ‘to be’ itself; just as some form, if it should be considered by itself, can be only one.”⁴⁸ If the implications of Pure Act are understood, one recognizes that unicity or oneness is, in St.

⁴⁶ This marks the distinction between certain necessary things who are only contingently necessary (as in the third way) and God who is necessary absolutely and essentially.

⁴⁷ *De ente et essentia*, ch. 4.

⁴⁸ *De subst. sep.*, ch. 8, no. 42. All English translations of *De subst. sep.* come from *Treatise on Separate Substances*, trans. Francis J. Lescoe (West Harford: Saint Joseph College, 1959).

Thomas's terms, "self-evident" with respect to Pure Act. This is just simply what Pure Act is. There is no potency as a consequence of which Pure Act might be other than what Pure Act is, but there is also no potency as a consequence of which Pure Act might be many. Pure Act is essentially and eternally one.

This point about the unicity or oneness of Pure Act deserves a brief comment. For the sake of argument, let us entertain the idea that there are two "pure acts." This is not far-fetched. Due to a misunderstanding, one might ask, "Why could there not be two or more First Causes?" Insofar as the First Cause or First Principle of all being is, for St. Thomas, Pure Act, to think or speak of multiple First Causes is to betray that one does not know what they are thinking or speaking about. This is self-evident. Just as it is self-evident to the wise—namely, those who understand—that a part or the sum of the parts cannot be greater than the whole, even though this is not self-evident to all, so too it is self-evident to those who understand what St. Thomas means by Pure Act that it cannot be many.

Each putative "pure act" is actually what it is. As pure act each of them is absolutely simple, lacking every principle of potentiality. Yet, each "pure act," insofar as there are many, is not actual with respect to being another "pure act." At best, one of them stands in potency with respect to the actuality that some other is. In this case, the one or more "pure acts" stand in potency with respect to another "pure act." Each "pure act," then, is composed of act and potency, which is to say it is not really Pure Act. The other "pure act" to which some "pure acts" stand in potency is either really Pure Act, or it stands in potency to some other actuality, in which case, it is not Pure Act either. Only that thing in which there is no principle of potentiality is purely actual and Pure Act in the

strict sense. This Pure Act is and can only be one. There is no potency as a consequence of which it could be another.

Pure Act lacks every composition of act and potency, which is to say that Pure Act lacks every principle of potentiality as a consequence it might be other than it actually is. Pure Act is always in act with respect to every perfection. Like separate or immaterial things, Pure Act lacks the composition of act and potency as a consequence of which it might be individuated within a species, generated, or corrupted. Like eternal things, Pure Act lacks the composition of act and potency as a consequence of which it might not be actual with respect to time. Like essence or form, Pure Act lacks the composition of act and potency as a consequence of which it might not be actually the kind of thing that it is. Similarly, like immobile things and immutable things, Pure Act lacks the composition of act and potency as a consequence of which it might move or change. What is unique to Pure Act is that it lacks every composition of act and potency as a consequence of which it might ever and in any respect be other than what it actually is. It is the pure actuality of all perfections. As noted, this includes unicity or oneness. Because there is no principle of potentiality whatsoever in Pure Act, there is no potency for individuation or differentiation as a consequence of which Pure Act might be many.

B. Truth and Falsity: The “Standard Account” of Truth and Falsity

St. Thomas consistently, though not exclusively, maintains that truth and falsity only apply to affirmations and denials in thought or speech that might in principle correspond to the being of the world. As St. Thomas states, on the one hand, “[O]ne who thinks that to be separated which is separated in reality, has a true opinion....And the

same is true of one who thinks that to be combined which is combined in reality.”⁴⁹ On the other hand, he notes, “[O]ne who relates things in thought in a different way than they are in their own proper nature has an erroneous opinion...because when a thing is or is not, it is then said to be true or false.”⁵⁰ As Aristotelian scholar Stephen Makin observes, “[T]ruth is saying of what is the case that it is the case, or of what is not the case that it is not the case; falsity is saying of what is the case that it is not the case, or of what is not the case that it is the case.”⁵¹ On this account, then, an affirmation or denial in thought or speech (truth-bearer) depends for its truth or falsity on its correspondence with the being of the world (truth-maker).⁵² The truth of an affirmation or denial depends on the being of the world. Because truth follows being, truth must have its root or foundation in the being of the world. In the case of composite things, St. Thomas offers the following comment: “Therefore, if such an operation of the intellect should be traced to things as its cause, then in composite substances the combination of matter and form, or also the combination of subject and accident, must serve as the foundation and cause of the truth in the combination which the intellect makes in itself and expresses in words. For example, when I say ‘Socrates is a man,’ the truth of this enunciation is caused by combining the form humanity with the individual matter by means of which Socrates is a man; and when I say, ‘Man is white,’ the cause of the truth of this enunciation is the combining of whiteness with the subject.”⁵³

⁴⁹ *In Meta.* Book 9, lect. 11, no. 1896.

⁵⁰ *In Meta.* Book 9, lect. 11, no. 1896.

⁵¹ Makin, 248.

⁵² My use of “truth-bearer” and “truth-maker,” taken from contemporary philosophy, and in particular philosophy of language, is for the sake of generalization and simplicity. Briefly, on the one hand, a “truth-bearer” is a sentence, statement, proposition, or the like that is possibly either true or untrue. A “truth-maker,” on the other hand, is the being of the world to which the truth-bearer does or does not correspond, and consequently, is true or false.

⁵³ *In Meta.* Book 9, lect. 11, no. 1898.

Now, what is an affirmation or a denial? We can already gather from the above passages of St. Thomas that affirmations and denials have something to do with the combination or separation of predicates with or from subjects. When one combines a particular predicate with a particular subject, one has made an affirmation. When one separates a particular predicate from a particular subject, one has made a denial or negation. If an affirmation combines predicate and subject in thought or speech such that it corresponds or agrees with what is combined in the being of the world, then that affirmation is true. Otherwise, it is false. If a denial separates predicate and subject in thought or speech such that it corresponds or agrees with what is separated in the being of the world, then that denial is true. Otherwise, it is false. This is what Makin calls the “Standard Account” of truth in the *Metaphysics*.

According to Makin, the Standard Account of truth has two conditions. First, a proposition must have sufficient linguistic complexity that it constitutes an affirmation or denial. Second, the being of the world must have sufficient ontological complexity or composition with which the linguistic complexity of the proposition might correspond or agree. Makin observes, “The Standard Account [of truth] applies only in cases which satisfy two conditions: that there are truth-*bearers* of a certain complex structure (semantically significant units combined into affirmations and negations); and that there are truth-*makers* of a certain complex structure (appropriate worldly components combined and divided in various ways).”⁵⁴

Unless these two conditions obtain in a given situation, the Standard Account “will not apply”⁵⁵ to it. On the one hand, putative propositions (truth-bearers) might fail

⁵⁴ Makin, 251.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

to meet these conditions in various ways. For instance, a prayer or a command, while grammatically complex, is not such that they constitute affirmations or denials.⁵⁶ Other supposed propositions are not in fact propositions. Makin offers the following example: “numbers walk tunelessly.”⁵⁷ This is simply an unintelligible string of words. Similarly, simple terms like nouns and verbs are not sufficiently complex that they might constitute an affirmation or denial. The being of the world (truth-maker), on the other hand, might fail to meet these conditions in at least one significant way, namely, by lacking ontological complexity or composition. Certain things in the being of the world are not composite. Where there is no composition in the being of the world, there is no complexity with which affirmations or denials might correspond or agree. Therefore, the Standard Account of truth and falsity does not apply to such a case.

Consider some examples. When one affirms something of something else, a predicate of a subject, for instance, “Socrates is pale,” one is combining in thought or speech (truth-bearer) the predicate “pale” with the subject “Socrates.”⁵⁸ This proposition is true, on the one hand, if and only if the combination of “pale” and “Socrates” in the truth-bearer corresponds to the combination of the accident “paleness” with the subject named “Socrates” in the being of the world (truth-maker) because someone named Socrates is pale. On the other hand, it is false if there is no combination of the accident “paleness” with the subject Socrates, either because there is no one named Socrates or because Socrates is there but he is not pale. The truth or falsity of an affirmation depends upon the correspondence between, on the one hand, the combination of predicates and

⁵⁶ At least, they do not constitute affirmations or denials in any straightforward way.

⁵⁷ Makin, 251.

⁵⁸ For the sake of argument, in the examples offered here, let us suppose that both Socrates and Jeff are human beings.

subjects in thought or speech and, on the other hand, the combination of the realities signified by those predicates and subjects obtaining in the being of the world.

When one denies a predicate of a subject, for example, “Jeff is not thin,” the separation of Jeff and the accident thinness is thought and spoken in the thought or spoken denial “Jeff is not thin.” This proposition is true, on the one hand, if and only if the thought or spoken the separation of thinness from Jeff in the truth-bearer corresponds to the separation of the accident thinness from the subject Jeff in the being of the world either because there is no one named Jeff or because Jeff is there but not thin. On the other hand, the proposition is false if there is no separation of the accident thinness from the subject Jeff in the being of the world because someone named Jeff is thin. The truth or falsity of a denial depends upon the correspondence between the thought or spoken separation of accidents from subjects with the separation of those realities obtaining in the being of the world.

Both the examples given thus far pertain very clearly to what is contingent. The truth or falsity of the affirmation “Socrates is pale” depends on a contingent state of the being of the world, the reality of Socrates’s paleness. Paleness is an accidental quality of the subject Socrates. That he is pale could have been otherwise. Socrates would remain the subject he is apart from such an accidental determination of his being. If Socrates happened not to be pale, and if one affirmed that the was one would still be thinking or speaking of that subject Socrates, but one would be wrong about some aspect of the subject. What was thought or spoken would be false, but it would be falsely thought or spoken of the same subject.

Similarly, the truth or falsity of the denial “Jeff is not thin” depends on a contingent state of being of the world, the reality of Jeff’s not being thin. If Jeff goes on a diet, he could become thin and still be Jeff. In that case, if one denied that he was thin, one would still be thinking or speaking of the subject Jeff, but one would be wrong about some aspect of that subject and yet still be thinking or speaking of that subject. What is was thought or spoken would be false, but it would be falsely thought or spoken of the same subject.

How is it that one can think or speak falsely of something composite? Because of the composition of act and potency in composite things like Socrates and Jeff in the being of the world, the affirmations and denials could have different truth-values at different times. They could in one context or at one time be true and in another context or at a different time be false. As Stephen Makin observes, in these cases, “[A] truth-bearer can *come to be* true and *come to be* false at different times.”⁵⁹ He offers this helpful example: “Candy is sometimes combined with sitting, sometimes divided from sitting; and so the statement or belief that Candy is sitting [i.e., the truth-bearer] is sometimes true and sometimes false.”⁶⁰ St. Thomas offers a similar account. He states, “Hence it was shown that in the case of things which may be combined and separated one and the same statement is sometimes true and sometimes false; for example, the statement ‘Socrates is sitting’ is true when he is sitting; but the same statement is false when he gets up. And the same holds true in the case of thought.”⁶¹ Some kinds of propositions, then, can have different truth-values at different times, according to different states of the being of the world while remaining propositions about the same subject in any of those states of being

⁵⁹ Makin, 250, original emphasis.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ *In Meta*. Book 9, lect. 11, no. 1900.

of the world. The subjects Socrates and Jeff are not identical to the accidental forms paleness and non-thinness. Because the subjects are not identical to such actuations of their accidental potencies, one can think or speak falsely with respect to those determinations and yet still be thinking or speaking about the subject with which they are not identical.

For analogous reason, the same dynamic is at work in the case of affirmations or denials involving the actuation or lack thereof of a substance's active or passive potencies, as well as the composition of matter and form.

The composition of *supposit* and *esse* is more complicated. Separate or immaterial substances are sometimes thought or spoken of as though they are identical to their essences, which seems to undermine this claim about the non-identity of composite things. If separate or immaterial substances are identical with their essences, it would seem problematic to suggest a non-identity as a consequence of which one can think or speak wrongly and still be thinking or speaking of about such separate or immaterial substances. Nevertheless, even though separate or immaterial substances are identical to their essences, their essences are not identical with *esse*. The supposit that they are essentially are not their act of existing. They could be or not be. Therefore, one could think or speak of a separate or immaterial thing falsely with respect to the act of existing and yet still be thinking or speaking of the same thing.

Absolutely speaking, the truth or falsity of the affirmation "this separate substance exists or has *esse*" depends on the reality of its existing, which is a contingent state of being of the world. Separate or immaterial substances do not exist or have *esse* of themselves, however. As existing creatures, the separate or immaterial has a potency, at

least in principle, for non-existence. If that potency is actualized by the privation of its existence, and if we spoke of it as having ceased to exist, the separate or immaterial substance would remain the same subject as when we had earlier affirmed its existence, but now we would be considering that substance apart from *esse*, which is not part of its essence. For instance, God might not have created a particular angel, or even withheld *esse* from it such that it cease to be, and we might talk about this situation. The angel is, then, a subject, and essentially what it is, though discussed under the aspect of not actually existing, but only potentially existing. Therefore, one can wrongly affirm or deny some created thing's actual existence and yet still be thinking or speaking about that very thing. In that case, what was thought or spoken would be false, but it would be falsely thought or spoken about the same thing about which a true statement about its existence could be made. This point works for assertions about the existence or non-existence of any created substance, material or not.

In this section, we have discussed the "Standard Account" of truth and falsity as it pertains to composite things. One consequence of that account is that to be wrong about what is not identical to what the thing is essentially does not negate the fact that we still think or speak about that very thing. But this consequence of the Standard Account does not apply to simple things, as we shall see.

C. Truth without Falsity: The Truth of Simple Things

Because the being of simple things is different from the being of composite things, the account of truth for each will be different. St. Thomas notes, "[T]here is no composition in simple things by reason of which, when we express affirmatively that it is so, its composition is signified; and when we express negatively that it is not so, its

separation is signified.”⁶² In simple things, then, there is no composition of act and potency in the being of the world with which combination or separation in an affirmation or a denial might correspond or agree. Therefore, in simple things, truth will not be the correspondence or agreement between the linguistic complexity of affirmations or denials and the ontological complexity we find in the being of the world because simple things qua simple are not composed of parts in the being of the world. St. Thomas remarks, “[T]ruth is not present in the same way in simple things and in composite ones.”⁶³

Nevertheless, there are ways of thinking or speaking (truth-bearers)⁶⁴ truthfully about the being of simple things in the being of the world (truth-maker). As St. Thomas remarks, “[T]ruth exists in a different way in the case of simple things, if ‘what is truly a being,’ i.e., the quiddity or substances of a simple thing, is as it is understood to be; but if it is not as it is understood to be, no truth exists in the intellect.”⁶⁵ One can know the truth of simple things. That truth is thinking or speaking of the thing as it truly is, to think or say of what is in act that it is in act. In order to determine the relevant *defectus cognitionis* with which the Aristotelian axiom and *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3 are concerned, then, we must consider St. Thomas’s analysis and application of this non-standard account of the truth of simple things.

The attentive reader might notice something absent from this non-standard account, namely, falsity. At first, it might seem odd that the non-standard account is an account of truth or “quasi-truth”⁶⁶ but make no room for falsity. Yet, simple things are

⁶² *In Meta.* Book 9, lect. 11, no. 1902. See also no. 1901.

⁶³ *In Meta.* Book 9, lect. 11, no. 1901. See also no. 1903.

⁶⁴ In this context, truth-bearers ought not be understood to entail univocal predication. The move to consider simple things should be accompanied by a move to analogical predication as well.

⁶⁵ *In Meta.* Book 9, lect. 11, no. 1915.

⁶⁶ I am borrowing “quasi-truth” from Makin.

not the kinds of things about which one might say something false, in a strict sense. This is not to say that one cannot think or speak what is not true.⁶⁷ To say that something is not true is not yet to say that it is false.⁶⁸ St. Thomas remarks, “[T]o come in contact with simple things through the intellect and to express them constitutes truth; but not to come in contact with them is not to know them at all. For whoever does not grasp the quiddity of a simple thing is completely ignorant of it.”⁶⁹ Here, we have a version of the Aristotelian axiom used in *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3, according to which a defect in the cognition of a simple thing constitutes, not falsity, but complete ignorance. Error with respect to what or how a simple thing is is to have totally missed the mark.

St. Thomas does recognize the temptation to suppose that what Aristotle means to do in this context is to establish an account of both truth *and* falsity. St. Thomas remarks, “[I]t would seem that not to come in contact with them [simple things] is to be false or in error.”⁷⁰ This would be incorrect. As St. Thomas observes, “[Aristotle] did not say this...but said that not to come in contact with them is not to know them.”⁷¹ Here, again, we have a version of the Aristotelian axiom used in *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3. To fail to come in contact with or attain to (*atingere*) the quiddity of a simple thing, the quiddity with which that simple thing is identical, is to fail to grasp or attain to the simple thing

⁶⁷ The claim here, then, is not that, with respect to simple things, there is neither truth nor falsity. Rather, with respect to simple things, there is only truth and non-truth. Ultimately, one can think or speak of a simple thing truthfully or not at all. Again, this is not to say that when one understands of a simple thing what or how it is in the being of the world that they think or speak neither truthfully nor falsely, but that they can only think or speak truthfully, or not be thinking or speaking about the simple thing at all.

⁶⁸ This should not surprise us. Propositions that lack sense are not true. Not being true, however, they are not yet false. They are neither true nor false because they are gibberish. Again, prayers and commands, likewise, are neither true nor false.

⁶⁹ *In Meta.* Book 9, lect. 11, no. 1905. See also, *In Meta.* Book 9, lect. 11, no. 1907: “...for either a person comes in contact with a thing’s quiddity through his intellect, and then truly knows what that thing is; or he does not come in contact with it, and then does not know what it is.” Cf. *In Meta.* Book 9, lect. 11, no. 1912: “[T]hey [simple quiddities] must either be understood if they are grasped by the intellect, or not be understood at all if they are not grasped by the intellect.”

⁷⁰ *In Meta.* Book 9, lect. 11, no. 1906.

⁷¹ *In Meta.* Book 9, lect. 11, no. 1906.

altogether and thus to be totally ignorant of it because, as St. Thomas remarks, “in the case of simple substances the thing itself and its quiddity are one and the same.”⁷² One cannot fail to attain to an understanding of a simple thing’s essential properties, which are all strictly identical to each other and to the simple thing itself without also totally failing to understand the simple thing itself. To have a defect in the cognition of a simple thing in this way, which is the only way to have such a defect, is not to think or speak of the simple thing falsely, but rather to have missed it entirely, and think and speak in total ignorance of that simple thing. You are not in fact thinking or speaking of the simple thing at all. In order for a simple thing to have been contacted in thought or speech, that thing must be in the being of the world “as it is understood to be” in thought and expressed in speech. This is to think or speak truthfully. Thought and speech must think or speak of what is actually the case, and essentially, with respect to the simple thing, or else one betrays a certain ignorance. In that case, one does not know what one is trying, and failing, to talk about. To think or speak of a simple thing what or how it is in act in the being of the world is true, to do otherwise is not false but ignorant.

We have discussed the possibility of thought and speech “coming in contact” with a simple thing, but we have yet to define what St. Thomas has in mind here. What is it to come in contact with such a thing? It has something to do with thinking or speaking of what a thing is in act and essentially. St. Thomas states, “[T]o come in contact with a simple thing through the intellect, in such a way as to apprehend what it is ‘and to express it,’ i.e., to signify this simple thing verbally, constitutes the truth present in simple things.”⁷³ To apprehend and “express” what something is is to come in contact with that

⁷² *In Meta.* Book 9, lect. 11, no. 1907.

⁷³ *In Meta.* Book 9, lect. 11, no. 1904.

thing, and this is, for St. Thomas, the truth of simple things. Again, as St. Thomas observes, “[T]o come in contact with simple things through the intellect and to express them constitutes truth.”⁷⁴

But what is it to “express” something, as opposed, for instance, to affirm it? St. Thomas argues, “[S]ince sometimes the word ‘to express’ is taken for affirmative predication, which involves composition, he [Aristotle] rejects this interpretation. He says that affirmation and expression are not the same, because affirmation occurs when one thing is predicated of something else, and this implies combination, whereas expression is the simple utterance of something.”⁷⁵ To affirm or deny something of another, then, is to express what is combined or separated in the being of the world. In simple things, however, at least in that respect in which they are simple, there is no combination or separation in the being of the world which thought or speech might express. Affirmation and denial, strictly speaking, do not apply to thought and speech about simple things.

Expression in this way is to think or speak of what is in act and essentially, not as combination, but as a pure unit. Definitional expressions are of this kind. They are the expressions of a thing that imply no corresponding composition in the being of the world. To state a definition is not to affirm composition in the real thing signified by that definition, but it is to express of a thing what it is. It is to make an identity claim. This is not to deny that properties signified by definitional predicates are not formally distinct. “Rationality” is not identical to “animality” in human beings. Nonetheless, there is no real, as opposed to conceptual, distinction in the thing in the being of the world.

⁷⁴ *In Meta.* Book 9, lect. 11, no. 1905.

⁷⁵ *In Meta.* Book 9, lect. 11, no. 1904.

Though definitions are, at least in thought and speech, linguistically complex, that is to say, they are composed of grammatical parts, what they signify is not strictly speaking something combined or separated. Definitions include what Makin describes as definitional predications of a thing as the kind of thing that it is. He maintains, I think rightly, “What is given by a definitional account is the same as the object defined.”⁷⁶ The subject defined is not combined with certain parts that are signified by definitional predicates, but rather, the subject defined is identical to that which the predicate signifies. St. Thomas notes, “[I]n the case of essential predications the essence of a thing does not differ from the thing of which it is the essence.”⁷⁷

What does this failure to attain a simple thing look like concretely? Recall the various simple things in the being of the world. Some are simple relatively and some absolutely. Among those things that are only relatively simple we included separate or immaterial substances, essences or forms, and particular modes of being like immobility, immutability, eternity, and the like. Each of these things is simple in some respect, but not every respect. Insofar as these things are simple, the Standard Account of truth and falsity would not seem to apply. Insofar as these things are not absolutely simple, being composite in some respect, the Standard Account of truth and falsity would apply.

First, consider separate or immaterial substances. Such substances lack the composition of matter and form essentially. With respect to the composition of matter and form, then, immaterial substances are simple.⁷⁸ To express—which does not necessarily mean to affirm or deny—immaterial substances qua immaterial that they were

⁷⁶ Makin, 259. Makin also observes, “A definitional predicate is correlated with a worldly essence” (Makin, 255).

⁷⁷ *In Meta*. Book 7, lect. 5, no. 1362.

⁷⁸ St. Thomas notes, “[I]f such a thing exists which is only a form, it will have no individuating principles in addition to the nature of its species” (*In Meta*. Book 8, lect. 3, no. 1710).

material is not simply to think or speak what is untrue. It is to think or speak in such a way that one betrays ignorance of immaterial substance. The being of separate or immaterial substances is not “as it is understood to be.” This is to have failed to attain to (*atingere*) or to have missed the referent entirely. To separate immateriality from an immaterial substance in one’s understanding is no longer to be thinking or speaking about an immaterial substance, it is no longer to be thinking or speaking about the same thing. There is no principle of potentiality by which one might in their understanding truthfully separate immateriality essentially from an immaterial thing without also betraying complete ignorance of what it is. To be wrong about separate or immaterial substances in this way is not think or speak falsely, but to show that one does not know what one is talking about at all (*totaliter*).

Second, similarly, consider the special case of essences or essential forms. Essences, and their correlate definitions, think or speak what a thing is. They name what is essentially in act insofar as a thing is that kind of thing in the being of the world. Insofar as essences include potencies, they are only as indeterminate. For example, again, the essence of man is rational animal. This includes the composition of matter and form. The definition, however, does not include designated matter, namely, this particular flesh or this particular bone. Rather, the essence of man includes undesignated matter. There is in the essence of man a principle of potentiality as a consequence of which one might truthfully affirm of an individual man that he is pale or thin. There is not in the essence of man a principle of potentiality as a consequence of which one might truthfully express or understand that man qua man is a rabbit. Man qua man is never essentially such a thing, nor is he non-rational nor an ass. St. Thomas notes, “[S]ome things are separated and it is

impossible for them to be combined, for example, black and white, and the form of an ass and that of a man.”⁷⁹ There is no potency as a consequence of which one might truthfully understand or express of such things of man qua man. To think or say this is not simply to be wrong but, again, it is to betray complete ignorance of what man is essentially. It is not falsity, but rather, it is ignorance.⁸⁰ St. Thomas maintains, “Therefore to come in contact with [*atingere*] simple things through the intellect and to express them constitutes truth; but not to come in contact with them is not to know them at all. For whoever does not grasp the quiddity of a simple thing is completely ignorant of it.”⁸¹ And as Makin states, “Ignorance—getting it wrong—is failing to provide the right definitional predicate for the definiendum indicated by the context.”⁸² This is to fail to have come in contact with (*atingere*) the essence of thing, to fail to grasp what it is, which is to say, not to know what one thinks themselves to be thinking or speaking about.

Third, consider the various modes of being that are relatively, though not necessarily, absolutely, simple.⁸³ Immobile things, for instance, lack the composition of act and potency as a consequence of which that thing might move. Immobile things, then, lack a principle of potentiality as a consequence of which one might at any time truthfully understand or express of it motion of that thing and in that respect. Similarly, immutable things lack the composition of act and potency as a consequence of which that being might change. Immutable things, then, lack a principle of potentiality as a consequence of

⁷⁹ *In Meta.*, Book 9, lect. 11, no. 1899. Cf. *In Meta.*, Book 9, lect. 11, no. 1908.

⁸⁰ Makin rightly observes, “Aristotle [and I would say St. Thomas] is not denying the plain fact that people can get it right or get it wrong when they offer a definition. His claim is rather that there is good reason to view the definitional predicate which someone provides when she gets it right as quasi-true; while there is good reason not to view what she does when she gets it wrong in terms of quasi-falsity” (Makin, 256).

⁸¹ *In Meta.*, Book 9, lect. 11, no. 1905.

⁸² Makin, 256.

⁸³ Whether or not these modes of being imply some of the others, or even absolute simplicity, is beside the point, at present. Here, the point is to consider how we might think about relative simplicity in its possible modes.

which one might at any time truthfully understand or express of it change of that thing and in that respect. Likewise, eternal things⁸⁴ lack the composition of act and potency as a consequence of which that being might be at one time and not at another. Eternal things, then, lack a principle of potentiality as a consequence of which one might at any time truthfully understand or express of it the temporal absence of that thing and in that respect. As St. Thomas notes, “[A]ll eternal things as such are actual.”⁸⁵ In each of these cases, to think or speak of such things and with respect to that aspect in which they are simple other than how they are in act and essentially qua simple, is not simply to think or speak wrongly or falsely, but rather, it is to think or speak ignorantly. One does not understand what one is talking about.

Fourth, having considered truth and ignorance in relatively simple things, let us consider the case of an absolutely simple thing, namely, Pure Act. In this case, there is no principle of potentiality as a consequence of which one might truthfully understand or express of it that it is otherwise than it is essentially and in act. Pure Act is identical to all of its properties. In this case, to think or speak of it other than how it is in act, essentially and absolutely, is not to think or speak wrongly or falsely, but it is to think or speak ignorantly. One does not understand what one is talking about. In the case of Pure Act, one can only think or speak of it what is in act, because it is only act. There is no potency of which to think or speak.

⁸⁴ Note that “eternal” can have different meanings in St. Thomas. A created thing is eternal insofar as it is incorruptible, which is to say, it is simple with respect to time. Incorruptible or necessary created things lack the composition of act and potency as a consequence of which it might be at one time and at another not be. These are the relatively necessary things in need of an absolutely necessary being in the third way. This is distinct from the eternity of God who transcends time, but also lacks a principle of potency as a consequence of which God might be at one time and at another not be.

⁸⁵ *In Meta.*, Book 9, lect. 9, no. 1872. Cf. *In Meta.*, Book 9, lect. 9, nos. 1867 and 1881.

In the case of the absolutely simple thing, to understand or express of it some principle of potentiality is to have missed the mark. One is no longer thinking or speaking of that thing. It is Pure Act. There is no composition of act and potency. There is no potency. Any thoughts or speech that introduce the composition of act and potency into that which is Pure Act betrays ignorance, then. Any thought or speech that expresses of Pure Act that it is not in act in some way, is to be not wrong, untrue, and ignorant. For example, insofar as Pure Act lacks the composition of matter and form, any thought or speech that expresses of it that it is bodily, which is to say, that it has a potency (qua Pure Act) for being this or that sort of body, is to have missed the mark. This is not to have been wrong, but to betray that one thinks one is talking about Pure Act when one is not doing so. Similarly, insofar as Pure Act can only be one, any thought or speech that expresses of it that it is many is to have missed the mark. Again, this is not to have been wrong, but to betray that one does not understand what one is talking about. Likewise, insofar as Pure Act is the principle of all finite being, any thought or speech that expresses of it that it is a being among beings, is to have missed the mark. This is not to have been wrong about God, but to betray that one is wrong in believing that one is talking about God at all because one is not doing so.⁸⁶

In this whole account of expressions about God, St. Thomas does not seem concerned with the formal object in this context. It is not a question of the presence or absence of a certain formal object that determines whether one can or does have

⁸⁶ This last example is pertinent to the current debates between Christianity and the so-called “New Atheists.” As David Bentley Hart rightly observes, when the modern atheist treats God (Pure Act) as though he were just one being among many, “[he] has not yet begun to talk about God at all” (Hart, *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013). See also, Hart, *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009). Cf. Edward Feser, *The Last Superstition: A Refutation of the New Atheism* (South Bend: St. Augustine’s Press: 2010); Terry Eagleton, *Reason, Faith, and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

knowledge of a simple thing. It is material untruth, which is to say, material ignorance that is at issue. Any assent to what is materially untrue with respect to a simple thing betrays ignorance, whether that ignorant assent is by means of one formal object or another.

D. Truth and Ignorance in Faith: Defectus Cognitionis of ST II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3

Let us now discuss how St. Thomas's account of truth in simple things impacts our interpretation of the *defectus cognitionis* in *ST II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3*. Because he draws on his commentary on the *Metaphysics* for his use of the Aristotelian axiom, it was helpful if not necessary that we consider what he has in mind there.

Keep in mind that the act of cognition at issue in *ST II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3* is an act of Christian *credere*. As such, determining the nature of the *defectus cognitionis* should be in terms of an act of Christian *credere*. As an act of Christian *credere*, we must keep in mind that here we are concerned with neither *scire* nor *opinari*. Further, insofar as we are concerned with assent to the articles of faith, we are concerned with truths that surpass the capacities of natural reason and not certain preambles.⁸⁷ Determining the success or failure of an act of Christian faith, then, must be done with this in mind.

There are two ways to approach this. We can consider the act of faith with respect to (a) the material object and (b) the formal object.⁸⁸ Ironically, in each case, material

⁸⁷ That St. Thomas is discussing *credere Deum* in this context does not undermine this claim. First, *credere Deum* is short for God and everything else insofar as it relates to God. Second, that the unbeliever cannot be said to *believe* that "God exists" (i.e., a preamble) is the simple recognition that insofar as one lacks the formal object of faith through some defect in cognition they do not and cannot be said to assent to the truth "God exists" as a specifically Christian act of *credere*. This says nothing about whether or not they might assent to the truth "God exists" by means of some other formal object (e.g., natural reason, natural *credere*, etc.).

⁸⁸ Recall that for St. Thomas the presence or absence of charity in the will is not determinative of the presence or absence of faith. The absence of charity does not make one an unbeliever. The *defectus*

untruth betrays a failure to understand what one is talking about. It is either not to realize that one is not thinking or speaking about the material object who is God or not to see that one is not thinking or speaking about the formal object by which someone comes to believe. In either case, to think or speak wrongly betrays a lack of cognition, and specifically, a lack of belief of what one is talking about.

First, consider God as the material object of faith.⁸⁹ God is the simple thing about which the propositions or articles of faith speak. Even though truths of faith are diverse *quoad nos*, the faith in itself is simple and refers to the simple God. Recall also that the truths of faith are, as Marshall notes, a “package deal.”⁹⁰ One cannot believe some revealed truths of faith and not others. Because the faith is a unit, it is all or nothing. The refusal to assent to all that the faith proposes fails to conform to the rule of faith, namely, the divine truth expressed in Scripture,⁹¹ the teachings “defined by the Church,”⁹² and according to the “sound interpretations of the fathers.”⁹³ To think or speak what is not true about the material object of faith (*defectus cognitionis*), then, is to have betrayed a lack of belief. One does not believe at all (*totaliter*). There is no principle of potentiality in God as a consequence of which an untrue belief with respect to the truths of faith might be true. It is always untrue. It is always simply about something else, and one does

cognitionis in *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3, then, cannot be a lack of charity. We are left to consider defects in cognition with respect to *credere Deum* and *credere Deo*.

⁸⁹ This makes sense in light of St. Thomas’s emphasis in his commentary on the relevant portions of the *Metaphysics*. There his concern is not the formal object by which something might be known, but rather the material object about which one is wrong. In the context of faith, then, a material error (*defectus cognitionis*) with about the simple faith and simple God of faith betrays the lack of the formal object, which is to say, it is not an act of Christian belief at all (*totaliter*).

⁹⁰ Marshall, “Faith and Reason Reconsidered,” 9.

⁹¹ See, for instance, *ST* II-II, q. 5, a. 3, resp.

⁹² *ST* II-II, q. 11, a. 2, ad 3.

⁹³ *ST* II-II, q. 10, a. 1, ad 3.

not know what one is thinking or speaking about. It is always a lack of Christian belief, a lack of the formal object.

Second, consider God as the formal object of faith. God is the simple thing by means of which the assent of faith is possible. God is the First Truth who reveals the articles of faith. To assent to what is untrue or to dissent from what is true because one does not think trustworthy the God who reveals and cannot deceive or be deceived is to have betrayed ignorance of the God by whom anyone with faith believes. It is not to realize that, if one does take himself to believe with faith some articles of faith, one is not doing so by faith, which assents on the basis of the trustworthiness of the God who cannot lie and so cannot reveal things that would be false.⁹⁴ For an article of faith not to be worthy of assent, there must be some principle of potentiality in the revealer as a consequence of which that article might be true. But God is simple and lacks a principle of potentiality as a consequence of which he might reveal what is not true. This is not the case. What God reveals insofar as it is revealed is necessarily true. To be wrong about the one who reveals is to think one is taking a position on God's trustworthiness when one is not even thinking or speaking about God at all. It is, once again, to have missed the mark regarding God, who is absolutely simple and so one about whom false opinions are not possible. In the case of the revealing God, not believing all that he reveals betrays a total lack of grasping who God is. In doing this, one reveals that one does not know what one is thinking or speaking about. One is not in fact believing God at all. There is a lack of belief.

In both cases, the error about which we are concerned is an error about one's own thought or speech, namely, the misidentification of the material object of one's

⁹⁴ *ST* II-II, q. 5, a. 3, resp.; II-II, q. 10, a. 5, resp.

considerations or expressions. One thinks one is taking a position on God whereas one is really conceiving or expressing a reality other than God. In the first case above, whether the thinker or speaker approaches his or her thoughts or expressions by the formal object of faith is not relevant. The person simply thinks or says something untrue while thinking that it is about God when it is not. In that case, the person's thought or speech have not attained God as their object and so the person has a total defect of cognition about the simple God.

As we have seen, St. Thomas thinks that a person thinking or speaking something true of God, for example, that God exists and is unique, can do so by the formal object of faith (assenting because the trustworthy God reveals it) or without that formal object (assenting because the person proves by natural reason that God exists and is unique). Either way, there is not total defect in cognition about God.⁹⁵

The concern for St. Thomas is not whether one might assent to God's existence or unicity by a particular formal object, especially in his commentary on the *Metaphysics* on which he draws. The same material object might be attainable by any number of formal objects. Michael Sherwin offers an excellent illustration worth quoting at length. He notes,

Let us suppose that you are living in one of the beautiful Victorian houses on Alamo Square known as the 'painted ladies.' Let us further suppose that, every afternoon a beautiful black Labrador retriever squeezes under your neighbor's fence and frolics in your garden for a few minutes before returning home...he's a black lab with white paws and a friendly disposition. There is no faith involved here: you have evident and demonstrable knowledge of him, even though, in your interactions with him, you just call him by the generic term 'dog.' Let us also suppose that you have never met the dog's owner (since he only moved in a few weeks before) and that he is, in fact, blind. Unbeknownst to you, the dog is a guide dog for the blind: a well-trained and professional working dog. With regard

⁹⁵ More will be said about the natural knowledge through demonstration below, when I discuss success and failure to know God as an act of *scire* on its own terms.

to that aspect of the dog, you are ignorant. Let us now consider...the neighbor on the other side of the house: she is a shut in, who has never seen either the owner or his dog, but is well informed about neighborhood business from her childhood friend who lives across the square. This lady, although she has never seen the dog, believes (from the detailed reports from her friend) that there is a guide dog for the blind next door. Let us consider the two cases: the lady has faith that there is a dog next door, a dog that she knows a lot about....You, on the other hand, have knowledge, demonstrable knowledge, about the black lab with white paws, but you have no faith or even an inkling that the dog is a guide dog. Your situation is analogous to that of Aquinas's infidel: your faulty cognition is absolute—you do not have faith in what you do not know anything about. The conditions that determine the lady's faith, and thus her fuller knowledge of the dog, are not present to you. Thus, you do not believe. The dog, however, is the same in each case.⁹⁶

Sherwin highlights how two different people might assent to certain truths about the same referent (material object) and by two distinct means (formal object), one by belief and the other by firsthand knowledge. Moreover, Sherwin's illustration shows how one with faith might assent to certain truths about the referent, truths inaccessible to you, about which you know nothing. The lady believes rightly that the dog is a guide dog, while you, through no fault of your own, remain unaware. Nevertheless, by means of distinct formal objects both people are able to assent to certain shared truths (for example, there is a dog, the dog is a black lab with white paws, etc.).

In principle the same object can be known by different means. This should not surprise us. St. Thomas grants to unbelievers assent to certain truths of faith. This is not an act of Christian *credere*, but it is intellectual assent to truth. Recall, St. Thomas affirms that the heretic assents to certain truths of faith "about which they do not err."⁹⁷ Again, that heretics do not assent to all that is revealed is not an indication that they do not assent

⁹⁶ Michael Sherwin, "Painted Ladies and the Witch of Endor: Response to John O'Callaghan's 'Can We Demonstrate that God Exists?'" in *Nova et Vetera*, vol. 14, no. 2 (2016), 650-651. Sherwin continues, "The pagans can arrive at demonstrable knowledge that God exists, but they do not believe he exists because they do not have intimate knowledge of his triune life or of the redemptive mission of his son; belief comes with grace" (Sherwin, "Painted Ladies," 651).

⁹⁷ *ST* II-II, q. 10, a. 5, resp.

to some revealed truths at all, but simply that the act by which they assent is no longer *credere* in the specifically Christian sense. With respect to the articles of faith their assent cannot be based on demonstration, which is to say that it cannot be an act of *scire*, because the truths of faith surpass natural human rational capacities. It must be something other than Christian *credere* and *scire*.

Whether one assents to the truth of God's existence and unicity by an act of *scire* through demonstration is not ruled out. In fact, in light of the many affirmations that the philosophers have done so, this is no surprise. In order to determine the success or failure of demonstrable knowledge must be considered on its own terms as an act of *scire*, not an act of *credere*. Though different, the account is analogous to what has been said regarding a defect in cognition of the simple God and simple faith by an act of Christian *credere*. In short, the Aristotelian axiom still applies.

Because the God whose existence and unicity and the like might demonstrably proven is metaphysically simple, the *philosophi* still must assent to what is the case. They must think or speak of what is in act that it is in act. There is no principle of potentiality as a consequence of which God might be other than he is. As such, to think or speak of God what is untrue is to betray ignorance of God. It shows that one's act of assent is not in fact an act of *scire* about the God whom one thinks themselves to be thinking or speaking scientifically about. This is not because one is a pagan or heathen but because one thinks or speaks untruth about a simple thing, namely, God.

Examples abound in St. Thomas. Among them, a few deserve mention: that God has a body, that God is the soul of the world, and that God is a being among beings. Because, for St. Thomas, to have a body is to be composite, to think or speak of God that

he is or has a body is to introduce a principle of potentiality into Pure Act. As Pure Act, however, there is no such principle. Because God is not a part of the world, to think or speak of God that he is the soul of the world or Zeus is to introduce limitation into the God who is unlimited, to make immanent the God who is transcendent. Similarly, to think or speak of God as though God were a demiurge or craftsman or divine watchmaker who forms the world from matter or is a first member of a temporal series is to introduce finitude into the infinite God. There is no principle of potentiality as a consequence of which one might truthfully think or speak of God in this way. To think or speak of God in this way betrays a defect in cognition, and as such, to betray that one is ignorant about God. It is to have missed the mark entirely.

Insofar as one thinks or speaks of God as though he were composed of principles of act and potency, one is thinking or speaking of God as if God were a creature. To think or speak of God that he is a creature is not to have thought or spoken of God at all. There is no principle of potentiality as a consequence of which what one is thinking or speaking about could be God. It is to think or speak of what is pure act that it is not. To the extent that a pre-Christian pagan philosopher thinks or speaks of God in this way, they have failed to attained God, not because they are pre-Christian or pagan, but because they are wrong. And as Aristotle states, “He who thinks about things otherwise than as they are, is wrong.”⁹⁸

Note that to think or speak of God that he exists and is unique but not triune is not yet to have thought or spoken untruth. It is not yet to think or speak of what is only in act that it is not in act. A failure to think or speak everything about a simple thing is not the same thing as thinking or speaking an untruth. For example, to think or speak of the

⁹⁸ *Metaphysics* 9, 1051b3 4.

essence of man that it is rational, but not yet mentioned (or denied) that it is animal, is not to have thought or spoken untruth. In this case, one has thought or spoken of what is in act that it is in act. As such, one has thought or spoken truthfully (though not comprehensively) about a simple thing. Similarly, to think or speak of God incompletely is not yet to suffer from a defect in cognition such that one betrays ignorance of God.⁹⁹ The philosopher, then, who only thinks or speaks of God as existing and unique thinks or speaks truthfully of the metaphysically simple God.

II. Allusions to the Aristotelian Axiom: The Rest of the Corpus

Thus far, our primary interest has been to interpret the Aristotelian axiom in *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3 in light of St. Thomas's commentary on the relevant portions of the *Metaphysics* on which he is drawn. Fortunately, St. Thomas makes allusions to the axiom elsewhere in his oeuvre.

I shall consider in this section the allusions to the axiom of special note are those we find in the treatise on faith, *Summa contra Gentiles* III, ch. 118, and St. Thomas's commentary on the Gospel of St. John, ch. 17, lecture 6. Each provides us more exegetical considerations for determining the meaning of the axiom and, in particular, the meaning of the *defectus cognitionis* from which the unbelievers suffer. Each allusion confirms the interpretation of *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3 presented above.

⁹⁹ If this were not the case, even the faithful *in via* would be said to have a defect in cognition. This is neither the case for acts of *credere* nor the case for acts of *scire*.

Because the allusion in the commentary on John, and the context in which we find it, is more complicated than the others are, the discussion of the commentary will be more extensive.

A. *ST* II-II, q. 10, a. 3, resp.

The treatise on faith provides us with at least one other allusion to the Aristotelian axiom. In this case, it tells us what the defect in cognition is, namely, assent to untruths. In *ST* II-II, q. 10, a. 3, resp., St. Thomas states,

Every sin consists formally in aversion from God....Hence the more a sin severs man from God, the graver it is. Now man is more than anything distanced from God by unbelief, because he has not even true knowledge of God: and by false knowledge of God, man does not approach Him, but is distanced from Him. Nor is it possible for one who has a false opinion of God to know Him in any way at all, because the object of his opinion is not God.

The unbeliever who is averse to God does not have real knowledge of God. What cognition they think themselves to have of God is not in fact a cognition of God at all. To have a “false opinion” of God is to betray ignorance of Him. What one has in mind is not God, even though one thinks it is. In fact, given the specifications offered above, their cognition is not even false in the strict sense, but untrue, and as such, ignorant.¹⁰⁰

Although the language of this text is less explicit, the Aristotelian axiom seems clearly operative here. In the case of God (simple thing), a defect in cognition (false opinion, which is untrue) betrays complete ignorance. In not thinking or speaking truthfully of the absolutely simple God, one has shown that one does not know what one is actually thinking or speaking about.

¹⁰⁰ In this context, and others, St. Thomas is less precise about distinguishing falsity from untruth. Given his emphasis on the absence of falsity with respect to a simple thing, it is warranted to see the use of the language of “false” or “falsehood” here as loose. Such words can be read as “untrue” or “untruth.”

To have a false (or untrue) opinion of God is to betray that, as St. Thomas notes, “the object of his opinion is not God.” Falsehoods with respect to simple things miss the mark. They do not intend the proper referent. “False” is used in this context rather loosely. It follows the understanding of error about one’s thinking or speaking of simple things, however. In such a case, one cannot think or speak wrongly and still be thinking or speaking of God. To err in this way is not strictly speaking falsity it is ignorance. Similarly, here, to err—to have a false opinion—with respect to the absolutely simple God is not strictly speaking falsity about God, it is ignorance of God and falsity in one’s conception of what one is doing.

B. Summa contra gentiles III, ch. 118

The *Summa contra gentiles* provides us with at least one clear allusion to the Aristotelian axiom. Like the case noted just prior, this allusion also tells us what the defect in cognition is, namely, assent to untruth with respect to a simple thing. First, in *ScG III, ch. 118, no. 4*, St. Thomas states,

Besides, whoever is in error regarding something that is of essence of a thing does not know that thing. Thus, if someone apprehended an irrational animal with the notion that it is a man, he would not know man. Now, it would be a different matter if he erred concerning one of man’s accidents....But this cannot happen in reference to simple beings; instead, any error at all completely excludes knowledge of the thing. Now, God is maximally simple. So, whoever is in error concerning God does not know God, just as the man who thinks that God is a body does not know God at all, but grasps something else in place of God. However, the way in which a thing is known determines the way in which it is loved and desired. Therefore, he who is in error about God can neither love God nor desire Him as an end.

St. Thomas begins here by mentioning our knowledge of what is essential to a thing. He again offers the example man. To understand by “man” an irrational animal, one betrays that one does not understand what a man is. This is not to know what one is talking about.

St. Thomas notes, also, that “it would be different” if one were to be in error about something accidental to man. For instance, in the example earlier, it was possible to err about whether Socrates is pale or whether Jeff is thin and yet still be thinking or speaking about Socrates or Jeff. Error with respect to accidents is not error with respect to the essence of the subject. To betray error in this way is not yet to have betrayed ignorance of the thing.

Untrue thoughts or speech about simple things cannot co-exist with any degree of knowledge of those simple things, however. Because a simple thing is identical to its essential properties, one cannot err about those properties and still be thinking or speaking of the same thing. In the case of the simple God, then, one cannot err and still be thinking or speaking of God. St. Thomas gives the example of thinking or speaking of God as a body. A body implies a composition of matter and form. This is not to be simple. To think or speak of God in this way is erroneous. Further, to think or speak of God in this way is not to think or speak of God at all. Whatever it is that one is thinking or speaking about is not in fact God. One has thought or spoken of what is only in act that it is not only in act, by thinking or speaking that God has a body.

Again, to think or speak an untruth of the absolutely simple God is to have betrayed total ignorance of the God about whom one thinks oneself to be thinking or speaking. With respect to God (simple thing) an untrue opinion betrays complete ignorance. One must think or speak of what is only in act that it is only in act and of what is not in act that it is not act. To do otherwise, is not to know what one is talking about.

C. Commentary on John, ch. 17, lect. 6

St. Thomas's commentary on the Gospel of John provides us with our final allusion to the Aristotelian axiom to consider. In this context, he is discussing God and the claim that "the world knew him not" (John 1:10). He notes a potential difficulty with this claim, namely, that God "has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made" (Rom 1:19). He solves the difficulty by observing, "Although some gentiles knew God as having some of those attributes which are knowable by reason, they did not know God as the Father of an only begotten and consubstantial Son, and our Lord is talking about knowledge of these things."¹⁰¹ So, while some knew that God exists and has certain attributes knowable by natural reason, they did not know the revealed divine truths of his Trinitarian nature.

St. Thomas continues,

Again, if they did have some speculative knowledge of God, this was mixed with many errors: some denied his providence over all; others said he was the soul of the world; still others worshipped other gods along with Him. For this reason, they are said not to know God.¹⁰²

This is the prominent translation of the English Dominican Fathers. It seems misleading, however. Their translation of the Latin leaves us with a potential ambiguity. The knowledge of God had by some gentiles "was mixed with many errors." The claim that gentile knowledge of God is mixed with error seems straightforward. Whether this reading is necessary, however, is ambiguous. Do all gentiles qua gentiles think or speak of God erroneously or untruthfully?

Is it the case, as some interpreters have argued, that error by the pagan or gentile is inevitable, and that all pagans or gentiles suffer from a defect in cognition (error) such

¹⁰¹ *In Ioan.*, ch. 17, lect. 6, no. 2265.

¹⁰² *In Ioan.*, ch. 17, lect. 6, no. 2265.

that they cannot be said to know God? It seems not. First, note, as discussed earlier, that St. Thomas also maintains elsewhere that “some” have erred about God.¹⁰³ Elsewhere in his commentary on John, St. Thomas makes a claim that amounts to something similar, that “some” pagans knew or could know God. *In Ioan.*, ch. 1, lect. 5, he notes, “[I]f some have known him, this was not insofar as they were in the world, but above the world; and the kind for whom the world was not worthy, because the world did not know him. Hence if they mentally perceived anything eternal, that was insofar as they were not of this world.”¹⁰⁴ Some (*aliqui*) gentiles or pagans, even before the time of Christ, could know God. This must be kept in mind. There is another reason to be cautious about the inevitability of such error. There is an ambiguity in St. Thomas’s use of the preposition *dum*. The English Dominican Fathers, as well as others,¹⁰⁵ leave this conjunction untranslated. An implication of this lacuna seems to be that gentile qua gentile (or pagan) knowledge of God is inevitably mixed with error “since” or “because” they assent to these falsehoods. This would be to suggest that gentiles or pagans qua non-Christian suffer from a defect in cognition.

I would like to suggest another interpretation of the work that the conjunction is doing, and this work confirms St. Thomas’s statement that “some” err in their so-called knowledge of God. It seems plausible to read *dum* as “while” or “when.” *While* or *when* gentiles deny that God has providence of all things, affirm that he is the soul of the world, and the like, *then* they err. This statement does not maintain that gentiles inevitably err, and consequently, that all gentiles err in this way. It says only that *while* or *when* (*dum*)

¹⁰³ See *CT I*, ch. 36.

¹⁰⁴ *In Ioan.*, ch. 1, lect. 5, no. 138. Thank you to Joseph Mueller for bringing this passage to my attention.

¹⁰⁵ Bruce Marshall in fact leaves out the preposition altogether, simply using an ellipsis in place of *dum*. This is not damning of course, but it does seem to neglect what significance it could have for an interpretation.

they erroneously assented to something that is untrue *then* their knowledge of God was mixed with error, and “[f]or this reason they are said not to know God.” This interpretation is consistent with St. Thomas’s observation that “some erred” about their knowledge of God.

The Aristotelian axiom is made explicit when St. Thomas observes, “Thus, even though some erred only slightly in their knowledge of God, they are said not to know him.”¹⁰⁶ Because God is simple, and simple things are identical to their essential properties, one cannot think or speak untrue things about those properties and still be thinking or speaking of that thing.

This exegesis of *In Ioan.* Ch. 17, lect. 6 is confirmed when we recognize the cases against which St. Thomas sets the case of knowledge about the simple God. In *Summa contra gentiles*, he states, “Composite things can be known in part, and unknown in part, while simple things are not totally attained, they are not known.”¹⁰⁷ If we are not totally right about God, we simply do not know him. If we do not think or speak of God what is only in act that it is only in act, we miss the mark.

Thus far, I have not mentioned St. Thomas’s affirmation that the gentile or pagan does have “speculative knowledge of God.” This alone seems to confirm my interpretation that St. Thomas affirms the possibility of pagan knowledge of God. That it is followed by the claim that “they are said not to know God,” complicates things. Here, in his commentary on John, like he does in his commentary on Romans, St. Thomas makes a distinction between speculative and affective knowledge of God. The pagan

¹⁰⁶ *In Ioan.*, ch. 17, lect. 6, no. 2265.

¹⁰⁷ *In Ioan.*, ch. 17, lect. 6, no. 2265.

might, in principle, succeed at the former while at the same time not succeed at the latter.¹⁰⁸

In his commentary on Romans, St. Thomas discusses “those men who detained the truth of God, i.e., true knowledge of God” through their wickedness.¹⁰⁹ He grants that some gentiles or pagans “did possess some true knowledge of God,” and in this way, they are not ignorant.¹¹⁰ He affirms that “men had such knowledge through the light of reason.”¹¹¹ This is the knowledge of God that grounds their guilt; “they cannot be excused on the plea of ignorance.”¹¹² This “first guilt” is not of ignorance.¹¹³ St. Thomas affirms that the gentile or pagan has speculative knowledge of God.

A certain ignorance, however, “proceeded from this [first] guilt.”¹¹⁴ This “affective ignorance,” “was the result of their [first] guilt.”¹¹⁵ Affective ignorance makes their speculative knowledge of God “futile.”¹¹⁶ Having put their “trust in themselves and not in God,” these gentiles or pagans have taken their speculative knowledge of God captive.¹¹⁷ This affective ignorance contributes to their “acting contrary to the divine wisdom.”¹¹⁸ Note that this pertains to the will, and the actions that follow from that will. The futility has to do not with the intellect’s assent to the truth of God’s existence but the

¹⁰⁸ Of course, the pagan could fail to attain to both speculative and affective knowledge. The point here, however, is that a failure in the case of affective knowledge does not entail a failure of speculative knowledge.

¹⁰⁹ *In Rom.*, ch. 1, lect. 6, no. 112.

¹¹⁰ *In Rom.*, ch. 1, lect. 6, no. 114.

¹¹¹ *In Rom.*, ch. 1, lect. 6, no. 115.

¹¹² *In Rom.*, ch. 1, lect. 7, no. 125.

¹¹³ *In Rom.*, ch. 1, lect. 7, no. 126.

¹¹⁴ *In Rom.*, ch. 1, lect. 7, no. 126.

¹¹⁵ *In Rom.*, ch. 1, lect. 7, no. 128.

¹¹⁶ *In Rom.*, ch. 1, lect. 7, no. 129.

¹¹⁷ *In Rom.*, ch. 1, lect. 7, no. 129.

¹¹⁸ *In Rom.*, ch. 1, lect. 7, no. 131.

will's relationship to God. Having turned from God, the guilty have willfully "exchanged" the glory of God for creatures.¹¹⁹

St. Thomas states that the affectively ignorant gentile or pagan "did not approve of having God in their knowledge."¹²⁰ In support of this, St. Thomas draws on the book of Job. In Job 21:14, the unbeliever has "said to God: depart from us we do not desire knowledge of your ways."¹²¹ If we turn to St. Thomas's commentary on the relevant passages of Job, we see that St. Thomas specifies the kind of ignorance at issue as "affected ignorance."¹²² The defect from which the affectively ignorant suffer is not an intellectual defect but a "defect of love."¹²³ Those who detained the truth about God are not ignorant *simpliciter*, but suffer from an affected or affective ignorance.

Affective ignorance pertains to the will. It is a certain lack of desire or disposition toward an object of knowledge. In the case of the knowledge of God, it is "ungodliness" that betrays such ignorance. The one who has "sinned against knowing God either by refusing to acknowledge him or by thinking that they do not know him" betrays affective ignorance.¹²⁴ They rebel against the God that they know or could know. This is not unlike the faith of the demons. Again, it is a "defect of love." They believe what the Church proposes, but they hate it. Similarly, the gentile or pagan who knows that God exists (speculatively) denies God through action (affective ignorance). They do not love what they know. This is a kind of "lifeless knowledge" analogous to "lifeless faith."¹²⁵ Their "actions," "wickedness," and "transgressions" betray a disdain for what they do or could

¹¹⁹ *In Rom.*, ch. 1, lect. 7, no. 135.

¹²⁰ *In Rom.*, ch. 1, lect. 8, no. 153.

¹²¹ *In Rom.*, ch. 1, lect. 8, no. 153.

¹²² *In Job*, ch. 21, lect. 1.

¹²³ *In Job*, ch. 21, lect. 1.

¹²⁴ *In Rom.*, ch. 1, lect. 8, no. 155.

¹²⁵ Of course, this knowledge need not require grace. I do not want to push this analogy too far, but there is something akin to lifeless faith happening in the gentile or pagan who suffers from affective ignorance.

know.¹²⁶ This is confirmed in another discussion of affective ignorance, also in his commentary on Job, when St. Thomas observes, “[A]though they can see what they must do, they despise it.”¹²⁷

What of the sins for which the gentile or pagan knower is guilty, for they are sinners? It is the sin of ungodliness or impiety (*impietatis*). Impiety is a lack of due reverence. Again, it has to do with the will and its acts. Impiety might obtain in any number of circumstances, among them, a lack of due reverence to one’s parents.¹²⁸ As such, then, the affective ignorance betrayed by such impiety does not also betray a complete ignorance of the one to whom reverence is due. One can be impious towards one’s parents without denying that they exist. Likewise, those affectively ignorant of God need not be denied knowledge of the God to whom they fail to offer due reverence. They can have speculative knowledge while also suffering from affective ignorance of God. Affective ignorance can but need not betray speculative ignorance.

The gentiles or pagans who, according to St. Thomas in *In Ioan.* and *In Rom.*, suffer from affective ignorance need not be counted among those who are also speculatively ignorant. They do, insofar as they do not assent to untruths of the metaphysically simple God, know that God exists. They do not, however, offer him due worship, having turned to creatures.

¹²⁶ *In Rom.*, ch. 1, lect. 8, nos. 156 and 157.

¹²⁷ *In Job*, ch. 34, lect. 2.

¹²⁸ See *ST* II-II, q. 122, a. 5, ad 4.

While this analysis is not exegetically apodictic—few are—it is consistent with what St. Thomas indicates elsewhere. It sits nicely with the numerous affirmations of pagan philosophical knowledge of God he makes elsewhere in his oeuvre.¹²⁹

D. Allusions to the Aristotelian Axiom: Résumé

Each of the other allusions to the Aristotelian axiom confirms our interpretation of the *defectus cognitionis* in *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3. In each case, what is at issue is the assent to material untruth and not the presence or absence of a particular formal object. Untrue thoughts or speech about God betrays the lack of a certain formal object with respect to faith, but they do not indicate that the lack of a certain formal object is the cause or reason for ignorance of God. Like St. Thomas's commentary of the relevant portions of the *Metaphysics*, the formal object does not seem to be his concern. It is conceivable, at least in principle, that knowledge of God by means of distinct formal objects, and without error, might obtain without betraying ignorance. Of course, in assenting by means of some formal object (for example, natural reason) to something untrue that one thinks is about that simple thing, one has betrayed ignorance of that thing.

¹²⁹ It is well-known, of course, that some Christian thinkers have disputed the relevance of Romans 1:19ff to support the possibility of natural philosophical knowledge of the existence of God by pagans. It is not my present concern to defend my interpretation of Romans 1 against these thinkers, but simply to highlight the distinction between speculative and affective knowledge (or ignorance) in St. Thomas's commentary on Romans in order to shed light on his commentary on John ch. 17. For critiques of the traditional appropriation of Paul and Romans to defend natural theology, see, for instance, Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 6th edition, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), originally published in 1928; *A Shorter Commentary on Romans* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2012), 29: "Paul does not dream of paying the Gentiles anything resembling a compliment and of trying to find in their religions some point of contact for the understanding of the Gospel; on the contrary he is merely and simply calling them to faith in God's verdict." This work grew out of Barth's lectures in Basel in 1940-41. As a single text, it was first published by SCM in 1960. For a recent appropriation of Barth's interpretation of Romans 1, see Rogers, *Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth*. For helpful discussions of natural theology and Romans 1, specifically as it relates to studies of St. Thomas, see Kerr, *After Aquinas*, esp. 61-65; Matthew Levering, "Variations on a Theme by Paul: Romans 1:20 in the *Summa Theologiae*," in *Pro Ecclesia* 22 (2013), 153-166; *Paul in the Summa Theologiae* (Washington D. C.: The Catholic University of America, 2014), esp. 219-235.

So, again, it is not the presence or absence of a certain formal object but assent to material untruth that betrays this ignorance.

CONCLUSION

Victor Preller's *Divine Science and the Science of God* and its reformulation of the thought of St. Thomas has been a significant influence on much contemporary Anglo-American systematic theology, both Catholic and Protestant. For this reason alone, it is worthy of engagement. But it is also a work of precision and complexity that challenges the engaged reader, forcing one to read slowly and attentive. It is a work of clarity, which can only benefit those who read it closely.

As a work of influence, if one wishes to disagree, it is important to take seriously the claims that Preller makes and his reasons for making them. The present work has been an attempt to do so. In particular, I have taken seriously Preller's interpretation of *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3, in which, according to him, St. Thomas denies that pre-Christian pagan philosophers (*philosophi*) could know the existence of the one true God of Jesus Christ. I have also taken seriously Preller's reasons for interpreting this passage the way that he does. Unbelievers (*infideles*), among them presumably non-Christian pagans like Aristotle, do not believe that God exists under the conditions determined by faith, and as such, by virtue of the Aristotelian axiom concerning defective cognitions (*defectus cognitionis*) of simple things, they cannot be said to believe in God at all (*totaliter*).

I have found both this interpretation and the reasons for it unconvincing. Among other things, Preller is inattentive to the context in which certain terms are used or from which they are drawn, leading to imprecise understandings of the work those terms do in *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3. For instance, St. Thomas goes to great lengths to distinguish the act of believing (*credere*) from both scientific knowing (*scire*) and opining (*opinari*). The

distinction is hugely significant for understanding what it is that believers do when assenting to the truths of faith. This becomes more obvious when one recognizes that St. Thomas explicitly makes this same distinction in every major discussion of what Christian faith is. There is no obvious indication that Preller recognizes the distinction, let alone its significance for considering whether an act of assent succeeds in this context. It is not just any act of assent that is at issue in *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3. Rather, it is the act of Christian *credere*, and as such, its success or failure, and one's interpretation of the failure of unbelievers, must be judged on its own terms, as an act of *credere*. Insofar as a pre-Christian pagan philosopher has demonstrated the existence of God, however, their act of assent is not an act of *credere* at all but of *scire*. This should already caution us regarding whether the *philosophi* might be counted among the *infideles* who have a defective belief.

We saw in Preller also a certain neglect of St. Thomas's repeated and explicit designation of the existence of God as a preamble to and not a matter of faith. Faith strictly speaking pertains to realities that surpass the natural human capacities. That God exists is not one of those things that surpasses those capacities. Preller seems to want to say that it does. Recall Preller's Rule: "that *scire* is never used in connection with cognitions of God through natural reason."¹ We have seen multiple instances that show this "rule" to be false. It is simply not true that St. Thomas does not speak of the existence of God as scientifically knowable (*scibile*) by natural reason.² Assent to the truth "God exists" is not per se, for St. Thomas, a matter of *credere*. It can be an act of *scire*. This is why the existence of God is not a matter of faith, for St. Thomas, but a

¹ Rogers, *Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth*, 36.

² See, for instance, *ST* I, q. 2, a. 2, ad 1 and II-II, q. 1, a. 5, arg. and ad 3.

presupposition or preamble. It is not like matters of faith, which cannot be demonstrated. Rather, the existence of God is demonstrable. In fact, in many places, St. Thomas does not merely suggest that the existence of God is *demonstrable* but that it has been *demonstrated* (and by philosophers, nonetheless).³

Another aspect of Preller's interpretation of St. Thomas that overlooks key emphases is his claim that only "real" or living faith conforms to the mind of God, and such that one can believe "God exists." We have seen that, for St. Thomas, this is clearly false. St. Thomas repeatedly affirms that lifeless and living faith are the same habit. What is essential to the notion of faith is present in both lifeless and living faith. Even lifeless faith heals the believer of unbelief and error.⁴ Said differently, faith without charity is healed of unbelief. Just as belief might remain in one who lacks the theological virtue of hope, so too can belief remain in one who lacks the virtue of charity. Of course, lifeless faith is not the perfection of virtue. Though it is perfected with respect to its proper subject and object, namely, the intellect and truth, respectively, it is not perfect with respect to the will. The one with lifeless faith assents to the truths of faith, but not with perfective love. Nevertheless, contrary to Preller, living faith is not the only faith that allows one to the assent to the truths of faith, which is to conform to the mind of God. Faith without charity suffices. Contrary to Preller, for St. Thomas, charity is not necessary to assent to truths about God.

Preller's interpretation is further complicated by what St. Thomas has to say about demonic faith. The demons "believe and tremble" (James 2:19). Their faith, however, is not living faith, but lifeless. Moreover, unlike Christian believers who are enabled by

³ See, for instance, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum* Revised Text, d. 3, q. 1, a. 1, sc and a. 2, sc 2; also, *In Hebraeos*, ch. 11, lect. 1, no. 560.

⁴ See *ST II-II*, q. 6, a. 2, ad 3.

grace to believe, the demons do so apart from grace. They believe the truths of the faith, but they do not love them. Rather, they despise them. That they can assent to these truths at all, again, is not due to a special grace, as it is for those with human lifeless faith, but due to a certain natural acumen. Nevertheless, they believe, and apart from grace. Grace, then, is not necessary to assent to truths about God, at least, not for the act of demonic *credere*. This certainly leaves open the possibility that an act of *scire* apart from grace might also attain to truths about God, though not revealed truths.

What is unbelief and who are the unbelievers, then? According to Preller and others, unbelief is simply the absence of belief, and the unbelievers are those individuals who lack that belief. As such, the unbelievers who are denied belief in God in *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3 are any individuals who lack Christian faith. This would very clearly include pre-Christian pagan philosophers like Aristotle. We have seen, however, that the identification of the unbelievers is not so simple. St. Thomas, in principle, might intend by *infideles* any individual who lacks faith, but there are reasons to think this is imprecise. There is no instance in the treatise on faith where St. Thomas clearly intends by “unbelievers” those who merely lack faith, other than where he specifies that that is not what he means. In q. 10, St. Thomas distinguishes between those who lack faith (pure negation) and those with sinful unbelief (opposition). There he explicitly designates opposition to faith as the proper sense, which is to say, the vice or sin of unbelief.

Is this distinction operative in q. 2, a. 2, ad 3? One must make an interpretive choice. There are reasons for thinking that is already operative. First, among those instances in which St. Thomas mentions the *infideles*, none clearly includes unbelief as pure negation. Second, following St. Thomas’s consistent method, we should not be

surprised that the full articulation and specification of vice follows a thorough and positive discussion of the virtue to which that vice is opposed. Given this, also, we should not be surprised that a certain understanding of the vice is already operative in the positive account of the virtue and before the account of the vice. Third, we have an instance in q. 2 itself that should caution us to not look to what is posterior to inform what is prior. *Credere in Deum*, which is the movement of the will toward its beatifying end, namely, God, and in love, pertains to faith that is accompanied by charity. And yet, St. Thomas has not specified charity as the form of faith, nor what that means. It is assumed in q. 2 nonetheless. So, again, an interpretive choice must be made. Does unbelief in *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3 include both the mere absence (pure negation) and the sin of unbelief (opposition), or is it restricted to the “proper” sense of unbelief (opposition) articulated in q. 10? I take, for reasons given, that St. Thomas, who deals almost exclusively in the treatise on the sin of unbelief, to mean by unbelievers in q. 2 those who oppose the faith.

Who are these unbelievers? For Preller, again, the unbelievers include anyone who might count as a non-believer, whether through ignorance or opposition. Also, Preller, insofar as he maintains that only those with “real” or living faith conform to the mind of God, those with lifeless faith would count as unbelievers. We have reason to question this, however. There are numerous candidates for the *infideles*, and identifying them is not nearly as simple as Preller’s account would suggest. Among those who do not count as unbelievers, we have included individuals who merely err materially, though with a willingness or readiness to believe when corrected, those with lifeless faith, both humans and demons, as well as schismatics. The latter, like those with lifeless faith, lack

charity due to their sin against ecclesiastical peace and unity, but they remain, for St. Thomas believers. The situation of the Jews and Muslims is more complicated, but it follows the same rationale. Insofar as the Jew or Muslim falls into merely material error, while remaining by grace willing and ready to believe what God proposes, they are believers. For various reasons, whether due to formation or misunderstanding, the error to which they assent may not be indicative of the formal object of faith, which is to say, a lack of belief.

Heretics and apostates, on the other hand, are very clearly unbelievers in the proper sense. They have dissented from the truths of faith after having previously accepted them. They are, as such, *infideles* par excellence.

The *philosophi*, however, are not obviously so. First, nowhere within the treatise on faith does St. Thomas deny the possibility of pre-Christian pagan philosophical knowledge of the existence of God. To the contrary, there are multiple instances in which he affirms the opposite. In general, the philosophers are discussed in a context that has little or no bearing on our question. But some of them say precisely what Preller and others reject, namely, that philosophers can demonstrate the existence of God. Of course, a pagan philosopher could fail in knowing anything about God. According to St. Thomas, however, this is not because they are pagan but because they have either bad will or they have thought or spoken untruth with respect to the metaphysically simple God. Philosophers qua pagan are not unbelievers, but qua unwilling or wrong.

This position becomes clearer in light of our discussion of the *defectus cognitionis* from which unbelievers suffer. In the context of his commentary on the *Metaphysics*, we see that the primary concern is not the presence or absence of a particular formal object

(i.e., faith in God). Rather, the overriding concern is material error. Material objects and errors about those material objects can obtain via diverse formal objects. One can see (or fail to see) a wall, just as one can touch (or fail to touch) the same wall. In the commentary on the *Metaphysics*, St. Thomas is concerned to relate truth to being, and in terms of act and potency. For instance, the being of composite things is such that there is a principle of potentiality as a consequence of which something that is untrue (say, about an accident) could be at another time true. The being of simple things, however, has no principle of potentiality as a consequence of which something untrue might ever be true. Therefore, to think or speak of the metaphysically simple God untruthfully is not even to think or speak falsely, but to think or speak ignorantly. One does not know what they are thinking or speaking about. To be ignorant in this way, again, is not a matter of the presence or absence of a particular formal object, but a matter of assenting (by any formal object) to an untruth with respect to a simple thing.

The *infideles* of *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3 are not ignorant because they lack the formal object of faith, but because, presuming to have it, they assent to untruths that do not conform to the rules of faith or the conditions that faith determines (*his conditionibus quas fides determinat*). They assent to untruths with respect to the simple faith and the simple God. Their assent to untruths is a defect in cognition (*defectus cognitionis*). As such, in light of the Aristotelian axiom, they cannot be said to believe at all (*totaliter*). Their error with respect to the God of faith betrays their total ignorance, which betrays their lack of the formal object of faith. Even in those things of faith to which they assent, it is not on the basis of the trustworthy testimony of God, but by some other means.

None of this entails that we count the pre-Christian pagan philosopher among the *infideles*. To the extent that their act of assent is an act of *scire*, the success or failure of that assent should be judged on its own terms. St. Thomas consistently affirms that the philosophers can and have demonstrated the existence of God. So, the pre-Christian pagan philosopher is not obviously one who is incapable of assenting to the truth “God exists.” Insofar as they do fail, this is not because they are pagan but because they have a defect in cognition of the sort discussed. That is to say, insofar as a pagan is ignorant of God, this is not because they are pagan but because they think or speak untruthfully of the metaphysically simple God. In thinking or speaking such untruth of a simple thing, they betray that they do not know what it is that they think themselves to be thinking or speaking about. They are indeed entirely ignorant of God. But again, contra-Preller, this is not because they are pagan but because they are wrong about what they think is God.

As we see, then, the *infideles* do not obviously include the pre-Christian pagan philosophers. In fact, there are good reasons for maintaining that they are not even on St. Thomas’s radar in *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3. Moreover, the *defectus cognitionis* from which unbelievers suffer is not the absence of some formal object, like faith, but rather the assent to untruths of a simple thing that lacks all potentiality as a consequence of which what is thought or spoken untruthfully might ever be true. When suffering from this defect, one betrays complete ignorance, in this case, not because they are non-believers, but because they have fallen into material error. This is what betrays their total ignorance of the simple thing they think themselves to be thinking or speaking about.

Everything said thus far should caution us in accepting Preller’s interpretation of *ST II-II*, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3. His is not the more obvious reading. I do not think it is even the

more plausible. If I am correct, our acceptance of the rest of Preller's reformulation should be held in check. If he is wrong here, which I think him to be, we ought to be cautious in accepting other aspects of his account that rest, at least in part, on his interpretation of *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3.

This is not to have answered every question, of course. An exhaustive answer would require a point-by-point response to the whole of Preller's account. This is beyond the scope of this work. Gestures can be made, however. These point us to other areas for inquiry, left to another day.

First, consider Preller's account of language and linguistic frameworks. That this is true or the same as St. Thomas's is not obvious. That language hermetically seals us within some empirical account of the world, from which we cannot successfully or significantly refer to a "meta-empirical" reality like God is unconvincing. Depending on what we mean by empirical, Preller's account could be either inadequate or false. The restrictions he places on language seems related to his inattentiveness to St. Thomas's metaphysics of being and participation, and in particular the role of act and potency as the more fundamental categories than cause and effect. An adequate response to Preller on these points, then, would involve a discussion of what counts as empirical, the metaphysics of being and participation, and the role of act and potency in articulating causality.

Second, and related to Preller's inattentiveness to St. Thomas's metaphysics, I would argue that his account of analogy is not that of St. Thomas. Treating analogy as merely linguistic (or meta-linguistic) reality is debatable. I tend to agree with those thinkers who affirm analogy as both a logical (or linguistic) and metaphysical principle. It

is not merely about our use of words. A further response to Preller, then, would require a full discussion of what analogy is and how it might affect our account of language about God and the proofs for God's existence.

Third, Preller's analysis of referential transparency and opacity is inadequate. His account of what is happening is imprecise. Though much more must be shown, it seems that Saul Kripke's analysis of transparency and opacity is more applicable. He states,

If Romans worshipped Caligula, and Caligula was a mere mortal, then the Romans did worship a mere mortal. Perhaps they didn't think that he was a mere mortal. They wouldn't have worshipped him if they had thought he was a mere mortal. But still they after all worshipped a mere mortal.⁵

As Kripke notes, "the substitutivity of identity applies in this case."⁶ Substituting "a mere mortal" for Caligula, however, does not negate what the Romans have actually done, namely, worshipped a being (material object) who is a mere mortal. In the case of Brown or Aristotle, we might say,

If Brown or Aristotle demonstrated the existence of the first principle of the world, and that being is the God of Christianity, then they demonstrated the existence of the God of Christianity. Perhaps they did not think that the first principle of the world was the God of Christianity. But still they demonstrated the existence of the God of Christianity.

Again, the substitutivity of identity applies. Substituting "the God of Christianity" for the first principle demonstrated does not negate what Brown or Aristotle have actually done, namely, demonstrated the existence of the being (material object) who is the God of Christianity. Following Kripke, I would argue that the demonstrative knowledge of Brown or Aristotle is not vulnerable to referential opacity in the way that Preller suggests (following Quine). If rearticulated, and following Kripke, Preller's recourse to referential

⁵ Saul Kripke, *Reference and Existence: The John Locke Lectures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 68-69.

⁶ Kripke, 68.

opacity, as well as the Barthian rejection, misses the mark. Brown or Aristotle have demonstrated something true of the first principle of the world, who is also the God of Christianity. As true their assent is not such that it falls under the limitations of the Aristotelian axiom.

Fourth, Preller's account of the *quinque viae* is one-sided. His claim that the first two ways, in particular, are proofs from natural philosophy and not metaphysics is debatable, if not implausible. He overemphasizes the point of departure. Even though St. Thomas begins with what is most manifest, beginning here ought not preclude us from following him beyond it. His introduction of the distinction of act and potency are clear indicators that what he has in mind is a metaphysical proof. Act and potency are principles of being qua being. His use of a particular illustration—in this case, fire and wood—cannot negate this move.

Also, we must be careful not to overemphasize the role of causality in the proofs. Though each of the five ways deals with cause and effect, cause and effect are not, as far as I can tell, most fundamental. Cause and effect illustrate the more fundamental relationship between act and potency. This is helpful for recognizing that the conclusion of the ways is not merely the First Cause. This does not name God essentially. He is not essentially First Cause. But the First Cause is essentially Pure Act. Further, consider the end of each. The conclusion is not "God." This name is an imposition at the end. An analysis of the success or failure of the five ways should not be done in terms whether someone has proven "God," but whether Pure Act is the God of Christianity. Preller's interpretation seems lacking in this way.⁷

⁷ This discussion would also need to respond to O'Callaghan's claim that the proofs only arrive at *a* god and not *the* God. This attention to the definiteness of the article is important. I would argue, however, that

Additionally, Preller's concern about the lack of pure passivity in the being of the world seems incorrect. He is right to say that created things have a certain dynamism for action by virtue of their natural form. In this way, they are not purely passive with respect to agency. They are true secondary agents in the world. This position neglects, however, the distinction between *esse* and essence in St. Thomas. Even though created things have a certain dynamism for action as the kinds of things they are, they are, for St. Thomas, purely passive with respect to the act of existing. No created thing exists of itself but must receive being from another. With respect to *esse*, which makes something an actual thing in the being of the world, created things depend on God entirely. In the case of *esse*, then, with which the *quinque viae* are concerned, created things are wholly passive to the *esse* it receives from the God who is Pure Act.

Fifth, another area for consideration is the relationship between St. Thomas's accounts of unbelief in the *Summa theologiae* and his commentaries on Romans and John. The extent to which all pagans are included in the sin of unbelief is deserving of more discussion. While I take that the interpretation offered above accounts for much of this, there is more work to be done. Is it possible that St. Thomas developed on this issue? This is a possibility, but one that could not be thoroughly considered here. To what extent the pagan qua pagan suffers from the sin of unbelief in Romans, in particular, warrants further consideration.

These concerns are worthy of discussion. They are, nevertheless, beyond the scope of this dissertation. This work has shown, however, that Preller's "reformulation" of St. Thomas leaves much to be desired. His account of *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 2, ad 3 is

the proofs, insofar as they conclude to Pure Act, conclude to a definite being. Pure Act supplies its own definiteness. As we discussed above, there cannot be many. That Pure Act is *the* God is self-evident (in the strict sense) for St. Thomas. Of course, much more would need to be done in order to show this.

incorrect. As such, it cannot be marshalled as evidence that St. Thomas denied that pre-Christian pagan philosophers did not and could not know the existence of the one true God. They are neither the *infideles* who suffer from a defect in *credere*, because theirs is an act of *scire*, nor do they qua pagan suffer from the *defectus cognitionis* by which we must deny of them knowledge of God *totaliter*. If a pre-Christian pagan philosopher is ignorant of the one true God by an act of *scire* it is not because they are pagan but because, as Aristotle states, “He who thinks about things otherwise than as they are, is wrong.”⁸ In this case, the philosopher who thinks or speaks about the simple God with untruths, is wrong...and ignorantly so.

⁸ *Metaphysics* 9, 1051b3 4.

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