2021

William of Auxerre and Thomas Aquinas on Simultaneous Faith and Knowledge

Jacob Joseph Andrews

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss

Part of the Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons

Recommended Citation
https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss/3835

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact ecommons@luc.edu.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License.
Copyright © 2021 Jacob Joseph Andrews
LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

WILLAIM OF AUXERRE AND THOMAS AQUINAS
ON SIMULTANEOUS FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN PHILOSOPHY

BY
JACOB JOSEPH ANDREWS
CHICAGO, IL
MAY 2021
Copyright by Jacob Joseph Andrews, 2021
All rights reserved.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank my directors, Blake Dutton and Peter Hartman, for their work polishing and refining this project and training me in scholarly virtue. The combination of their approaches to the project and to the academic life afforded me rich examples to follow while teaching me how to develop my own identity as a scholar. I also thank Dr. Dutton for giving me my first introduction to medieval philosophy while an undergraduate at Loyola.

I thank Paul Moser for serving on the dissertation committee, for bringing contemporary insight into my historical project, and for reminding me of the reality behind the ideas here discussed. I thank the other members of my proposal committee, Kristen Irwin and Harry Gensler, for their advice and encouragement during the formative period of this project. I also thank Richard Taylor at Marquette for pushing me through several rigorous courses on Aquinas and the Arabs, and for the wealth of encouragement, guidance, and professional connections (and cookie recipes) he has offered me since; and Andrea Robiglio at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven for helping shape my first project on William of Auxerre.

The earliest roots of this dissertation lie in my childhood love of Latin. I thank my grade school Latin teachers who first inspired it, including Mrs. Sonkin at Decatur Classical School and others whose names I have forgotten; Chester Tylinski at Northside College Preparatory High School, who rescued it from teenage apathy; Jacqueline Long at Loyola, who strengthened and sharpened it; and the members of SLUCHI, who helped bring it into the 13th century.
This dissertation could not have been completed without the time and focus afforded by financial support. I thank Loyola’s Graduate School and Department of Philosophy for the Teaching Fellowship and Crown Fellowship that enabled me to complete this work.

I thank my father for giving me my first and finest model of a scholar who loves both the life of the mind and the life of service; my brothers for being my first intellectual sparring partners; and my mother for ensuring that the sparring remained (mostly) intellectual.

I thank my wife, Abby, for her unwavering confidence in me, for lending me her joy whenever mine waned, and for supporting me financially, emotionally, and nutritionally during these long years. I thank my son, Ivan, who, lying in a hospital bed, “strengthened and increased” both my faith in Jesus and my resolve to complete this project; and who, rising as on eagle’s wings and landing face-first on our living room couch, has been an oasis of living water at the end of each workday. I thank our second child, due in June, for giving me something to do when this is all over.

Above all I thank the God who, whenever I forget the truth behind and beyond thought, by nudging me with joy or shouting to me with suffering makes me able to say: \textit{iam non propter haec credo, sed quia ipse vidi}.
For Abby, Ivan, and Junebug.
God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS iii

LIST OF FIGURES viii

INTRODUCTION: IN WHICH WE EXPLAIN THE QUESTION
  0a Epistemic Priority: The Theoretical Background 1
  0b Epistemic Priority in Gregory and Anselm 12
  0c Epistemic Priority in William of Auxerre and Thomas Aquinas 21

CHAPTER ONE: IN WHICH THOMAS AQUINAS IS SHOWN TO BE A KNOWLEDGE-PRIORITARIAN
  1a Aquinas’ Philosophy of Faith 34
  1b Faith, Knowledge, and the Will 44

CHAPTER TWO: IN WHICH WILLIAM OF AUXERRE IS SHOWN TO BE A FAITH-PRIORITARIAN
  2a The Avicennian Proofs for God’s Existence 59
  2b Natural and Theological Reasoning 69
  2c The Philosopher-Convert 86

CHAPTER THREE: IN WHICH WILLIAM’S VIEW OF FAITH AS VISION IS EXPLAINED
  3a Formed and Unformed Faith 96
  3b Spiritual Sensation 104
  3c Faith as Vision 116

CHAPTER FOUR: IN WHICH WILLIAM’S VIEW OF FAITH AS ASSENT IS EXPLAINED
  4a The Act of Faith 144
  4b From Vision to Assent 152
  4c Having and Relying 167

BIBLIOGRAPHY 182

VITA 187
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Graph of Aquinas’ species of assent. 46
Figure 2. Flowchart of Aquinas’ species of assent. 47
Figure 3. William’s zoo of cognitions, stage 1. 128
Figure 4. William’s zoo of cognitions, stage 2. 130
Figure 5. William’s zoo of cognitions, stage 3. 131
Figure 6. William’s complete zoo of cognitions. 132
Figure 7. The actualization of faith. 146
Figure 8. The actualization of faith, again. 153
Figure 9. Diagram of double mirror cognition. 156
This dissertation explores William of Auxerre and Thomas Aquinas on the question of whether the same thing can be known through a demonstrative argument and believed by faith. In this introduction, we will do three things. First, we will introduce some foundational epistemic ideas needed to frame this issue in a precise way. Second, we will see how and why this issue was considered important in the Middle Ages. Third, we will see how William and Aquinas handled the question, and in doing so lay out the structure of the dissertation.

0a Epistemic Priority: The Theoretical Background

Suppose John is an astronomer who knows how to calculate the date of an eclipse. On October 31st, he calculates that an eclipse will occur on November 1st. His calculation is absolutely certain: he knows the proposition, “November 1st is the day of an eclipse” (N). He goes to bed, and the next day, November 1st, he sees the eclipse. At this point, he has access to two grounds or bases for believing N: his astronomical calculations and his own vision. Does John now believe N because of his calculations, because of his vision, or both?
John also has a friend, Alan, who is not an astronomer. On October 31st, John tells Alan that an eclipse is going to occur the next day. Alan believes N, not because he can prove it himself, but because he trusts John. But that night, John teaches Alan how to calculate the eclipse for himself. Alan learns so well that he can be absolutely certain, on the basis of his own calculations, that the eclipse will happen the next day. Does Alan still believe N because of his trust in John, because of his own calculations, or both?

Some distinctions will help us puzzle out exactly what is going on in these examples, so that we can pinpoint the question at hand in this dissertation. In the above examples we’re talking about cases of believing, i.e., assenting to propositions. One can believe occurrently (as when I am actually thinking, “Yes, God does exist”) or dispositionally, such that “I believe that God exists” is true whether or not I am consciously thinking about God (for example, when I am doing the dishes or thinking about teaching my son to read). Call the first an act of believing and the second a habit of believing. For the most part, we’ll be talking about habits of believing in this dissertation, unless otherwise specified.

Acts and habits of believing are psychological qualities that presuppose (at least) three things: something believed, that on the basis of which it is believed, and the relation that holds between those two. Take, for example, John’s act/habit of believing, on October 31st, that there will be an eclipse on November 1st. First, there is the proposition that he believes, namely, “November 1st is the date of an eclipse” (N). Second, there is the basis on which he believes N, that is, his calculation (μ). Third, there is a basing relation that holds between the two: μ somehow grounds or causes John’s (disposition to) assent to N: r(μN).

1 Thus, for any agent s, proposition A, and basis α, r(αA) = the basing relation that holds between the basis α and the proposition A when s assents to A. It might be more precise to say that the relation is between the basis and the
habitually because of \( \mu \), that means he is disposed to form the basing relation between \( N \) and \( \mu \): in other words, when he considers the proposition “November 1\textsuperscript{st} is the date of an eclipse,” he is disposed to affirm this proposition because of his calculation. I borrow the concept of basing relations from contemporary analytic epistemology,\(^2\) but we will see that it is a useful tool for understanding medieval epistemology as well. The precise nature of the basing relation (causal, counterfactual, doxastic, etc.) is a major topic of debate within analytic epistemology.

It is important to distinguish the basing relation from conjunction of the basis and the proposition because simultaneously believing a proposition and having a basis for believing that proposition doesn’t guarantee the existence of the corresponding basing relation. For example, suppose that Ted is a geologist who possesses ample scientific evidence (\( \varepsilon \)) that the earth is 4.5 billion years old (\( B \)). But he is also a follower of Ancientism, a religion whose core dogma is that the earth is 4.5 billion years old. So devout is he in his faith that he believes that the earth is 4.5 billion years old, not because of scientific evidence (which he knows just as well as any geologist), but because of the authority of the Ancientist scriptures.\(^3\) In this case, Ted believes \( B \), and possesses the basis \( \varepsilon \), but does not have the basing relation \( r(B\varepsilon) \).\(^4\) So we see that it is act/habit of assent, not the basis and the proposition; but construing it the way I have keeps the formalization as simple as possible.

\(^2\) For an overview of epistemic bases and the basing relation in contemporary analytic philosophy, a good place to start is Keith Allen Korcz’ entry “The Epistemic Basing Relation” in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Ian Evans’ article “The Problem of the Basing Relation” (Synthese 2013) surveys current controversies on the basing relation and offers a different perspective than that of Korcz. My dissertation contributes to this literature by showing that there was an analogous discussion, covering the same phenomena and using similar terms, in the Middle Ages.

\(^3\) We can see that this is the case by considering a counterfactual: if new evidence were to emerge proving that the earth is only 1 billion years old, Ted would nonetheless continue to believe that it is 4.5 billion years old.

\(^4\) This is similar to Keith Lehrer’s case of the gypsy lawyer, cited in Korcz 1997.
possible to have a basis and believe a proposition that could potentially be based on it without having the corresponding basing relation.

The presence or absence of certain epistemic bases or basing relations is important not only within the sphere of epistemology. It can have moral implications: it can make someone’s act or habit of believing good or bad, praiseworthy or blameworthy, meritorious or demeritorious. Suppose Posthumus loves and trusts his fiancée Imogen. He believes that Imogen is faithful to him on the basis of his trust in her. His friend, Iachimo, wagers that he can seduce Imogen. Posthumus accepts the wager. Iachimo attempts and fails to seduce Imogen. At this point Posthumus has two bases for believing that Imogen is faithful to him (F): his trust in her arising from their relationship (ζ), and the “experimental” evidence arising from Iachimo’s attempt (η). Does he believe F because of his relationship with his fiancée (r(Fζ)), or because of the experiment (r(Fη))? Could he believe because of both bases simultaneously? Does he have control over this? And is it morally relevant which grounds he bases his belief on? Is he morally praiseworthy if, by great mental discipline and marital counseling, he comes to have r(Fζ) and not r(Fη)? Is he morally blameworthy if he has r(Fη)? The fact that we can even consider such questions shows that epistemic bases and basing relations can have moral implications: there are morally good and morally bad bases for beliefs, and, by extension, morally good or bad basing relations.

To summarize: believing is affirming (or being disposed to affirm) a proposition as true. One can believe either actually (occasionally) or habitually (dispositionally). Believing is a psychological quality that presupposes at least three things: a proposition believed, the basis on which it is believed, and the basing relation. The presence or absence of basing relations, moreover, can have moral implications.
Now let’s return to the opening thought experiments. In the case of John, we can consider John’s epistemic status in two instances:

1. On October 31\textsuperscript{st}, when he has calculated that an eclipse will occur on November 1\textsuperscript{st};
2. On November 1\textsuperscript{st}, when he actually sees the eclipse for himself.

In both cases his act/habit of believing is the same: he affirms (or is disposed to affirm) the truth of the proposition “November 1\textsuperscript{st} is the date of an eclipse.” The proposition believed is, of course, the same: in either case, it is \( N = \text{“November 1\textsuperscript{st} is the date of an eclipse.”} \) But, the experiment stipulates, the bases to which he has access in each instance differs. On October 31\textsuperscript{st}, he has access to only one basis for believing \( N \): his calculation (\( \mu \)). On November 1\textsuperscript{st}, he retains access to \( \mu \) but, in addition, acquires access to another basis: his vision of the eclipse (\( \beta \)). This is stipulated by the experiment.

So we know everything we need to know about the act/habit of believing, the proposition believed, and the bases. What remains is the basing relation. When a new basis is acquired, the possibility arises of a new basing relation. On October 31\textsuperscript{st}, John only had access to \( \mu \), and so could only form the basing relation \( r(N\mu) \). The only way he could believe that an eclipse will occur is his calculation, and his calculation is a reliable way of coming to know this proposition; so, given that he believes \( N \), it is obvious that he believes \( N \) on the basis of \( \mu \). But on November 1\textsuperscript{st}, John has access to another basing relation, \( \beta \), yielding a new possible basing relation, \( r(N\beta) \).

Now, we already determined above that believing a proposition and having a basis for believing that proposition does not guarantee the existence of the corresponding basing relation: just

---

\footnote{5}{This assumes that acts/habits of believing are individuated solely by the propositions believed, which may not turn out to be true. They may also be individuated by the bases. But there, again, the difference hinges on the bases and basing relations, as our analysis already indicates.}

\footnote{6}{We’ll stipulate that he doesn’t have any other bases for beliefs, whether reasonable (like the word of another astronomer) or unreasonable (his desire to spite a rival astronomer who doesn’t believe \( N \)).}
because John believes that November 1<sup>st</sup> is the date of an eclipse and sees an eclipse on November 1<sup>st</sup> does not guarantee that John believes the former on the basis of the latter. And the presence of two bases for a single proposition makes this especially uncertain. We asked above, “Does John now believe N because of his calculations, because of his vision, or both?” We know now that this is a question about the basing relations that he has access to on November 1<sup>st</sup>. Put precisely, we are asking, “On November 1<sup>st</sup>, does John believe N on the basis of his calculations, on the basis of his seeing the eclipse, or on both bases?” Or, “Does John have r(N<sub>μ</sub>), r(N<sub>β</sub>), or both?”

First, let’s tackle the “both” option. Is it possible for John to have r(N<sub>μ</sub>) and r(N<sub>β</sub>) at the same time? In other words, can John simply believe on both bases at once? If so, then there’s no puzzle: he believes that November 1<sup>st</sup> is the day of an eclipse because he so calculated, and he believes it because he can see the eclipse happening.

But what if we think that he can’t have both basing relations at the same time? We might have any number of reasons for thinking so: perhaps we have a problem with epistemic overdetermination, or we think that an act of belief can only be actualized in one way at a time (and hence one can only be disposed to an act in one way at a time), etc. And in any case, both of our authors, Thomas Aquinas and William of Auxerre, think that you can only believe on one basis at a time, at least in the case of faith and demonstrative knowledge. For that reason, we won’t spend much time on the “both” option; maybe it’s possible, but we’re going to focus on the possibilities our authors considered. So suppose we deny that John can have both basing

---

7 This will be seen in Chapter One (for Aquinas) and Chapter Two (for William). In Chapter One we will see that Aquinas thinks that the sort of certitude conveyed by demonstrative knowledge makes faith impossible. In Chapter Two we will see that William, by contrast, thinks that the reverse is true.
relations at the same time. In that case, how do we determine whether he has $r(N\mu)$ or $r(N\beta)$?

Assuming that it isn’t simply random, there are two possibilities:

1. **Basing Voluntarism (BV).** Which basing relation forms is directly subject to John’s will: he can simply choose to believe on the basis of $\mu$ or $\beta$.

2. **Basing Involuntarism (BI).** Which basing relation forms is not directly subject to John’s will.

   Some feature of $\mu$ or $\beta$ dictates which one forms.\(^8\)

   BV gets at our intuition that our beliefs must be under our control because we can be responsible for them: we can be praised for having the right beliefs and blamed for having the wrong ones. Otherwise, racist or sexist beliefs (for example) would not be morally reprehensible.

   And if Posthumus’ believing in Imogen’s faithfulness because of his relationship with her and not because of Iachimo’s machinations is praiseworthy, it must be under his control to believe on the basis of the former and not the latter.

   On the other hand, BI gets at our intuition that our beliefs are not *directly* under our control. It is widely accepted that the propositional content of our beliefs is not directly up to us:

---

\(^8\) Blake Dutton pointed out to me another possible form of involuntarism, in which the basing relation that forms is based on some feature of the epistemic agent’s psychology rather than the strength of the bases. For example, suppose someone is born with a mental quirk that compels them to generally distrust the results of math equations, and also has another that makes him put absolute trust in anything written in navy blue. The nature of these two quirks is such that whenever they are in conflict, the latter wins. Suppose they come across a piece of paper in which “1+1=2” is printed in navy blue. They believe the proposition, not because it is mathematically self-evident, but because it is written in navy blue. In this case they involuntarily assent to the proposition, not because of the nature of the basis (“being written in navy blue” seems a rather poor basis, objectively speaking), but because of a feature of their psychology.

   This is certainly a conceivable situation. Probably there is a tendency today to think that a lot of human belief works roughly this way, with various “quirks” developing in our mind due to evolution, upbringing, etc. But, as with the “both” or double-basing possibility, I don’t see any sign that William of Auxerre or Thomas Aquinas thought that our psychology could run counter to the objective features of bases in this way. At least, neither of them ever bring up a case where psychological and epistemic orders are in conflict in the way described by the “quirk” example just given. Indeed, they both seem to have taken it for granted that the epistemic bases that exert the most psychological force on us are also the ones that are objectively most reliable: for both thinkers a demonstrative argument, for example, both is an objectively better basis for belief than testimony and also compels us to belief to a greater degree than testimony (on this topic see Chapter One for Aquinas, and Chapter Three for William). So we won’t be able to consider Dutton’s interesting suggestion in this paper.
we can’t simply choose to believe this or that. At best, we can indirectly influence it by (for example) looking into some evidence while ignoring other evidence. I am proposing that the same is true of bases and basing relations: which bases ground our belief is not directly under our control (even if in certain cases we can indirectly influence them).9

The goal of this paper isn’t to establish, in the abstract, whether basing voluntarism or basing involuntarism is true, but to explain the debate in which Thomas Aquinas and William of Auxerre took part. As we will see, neither of them held to basing voluntarism (indeed, I don’t think either of them even considered it) so we will assume, for their sake, that basing involuntarism is true.

Back to John the astronomer. Granted that BI is true and John can’t have r(Nμ) and r(Nβ) at the same time, we now have to ask: which of the two does he have? Does he (actually or dispositionally) believe N because of his calculation or because of his vision? There are two options:

1. **He believes N because of β (i.e., vision).** Although previously he had r(Nμ), once he acquires β, that basing relation is destroyed and the new basing relation r(Nβ) takes its place.

2. **He believes N because of μ (i.e., calculation).** Although he now has β—he can see the eclipse—the preexisting basing relation r(Nμ) blocks the basing relation r(Nβ) from forming.10

Both options have some intuitive weight. To see why, consider the notion of **epistemic priority.** We can consider epistemic priority relations both between bases and between basing relations:

---

9 Indeed, one could claim that it is precisely the difficulty involved in *indirect* epistemological transformation that accounts for its praiseworthiness in cases like Posthumus’ (or cases of, e.g., overcoming racial bias).

10 A third possible option, that he alternates between believing N because of β and because of μ, won’t be considered, because characterizing it would be rather complicated, and neither of our authors consider anything like this.
Epistemic Priority (bases). For any two bases \(\alpha\) and \(\gamma\) that can ground the same proposition \(P\) and which the agent \(s\) has access to, \(\alpha\) is epistemically prior\(^1\) to \(\gamma\) iff whenever \(s\) believes \(P\) and \(s\) has no other bases for \(P\), \(s\) has \(r(P\alpha)\) and not \(r(P\gamma)\).

Epistemic Priority (basing relations). For any two bases \(\alpha\) and \(\gamma\) that can ground the same proposition \(P\) and which the agent \(s\) has access to, \(r(P\alpha)\) is epistemically prior to \(r(P\gamma)\) iff whenever \(s\) believes \(P\) and \(s\) has no other bases for \(P\), \(s\) has \(r(P\alpha)\) and not \(r(P\gamma)\).

The concept of epistemic priority identifies what the “feature” discussed under BI is. And whether we favor option 1 or option 2 as an answer to the thought experiment about John depends on what we think of the relative epistemic priority of vision and mathematical calculation. Vision is commonly taken to be an extremely strong epistemic basis:\(^1\) “Seeing is believing.” So one might naturally suppose that vision has epistemic priority over calculation. When you can see something for yourself, basing relations involving weaker bases than vision fail to form, or are annihilated if already formed. On the other hand, one might think that mathematical calculations are stronger than vision.\(^1\) The precision of mathematics makes this

---

\(^1\) Does this mean “epistemically prior to \(s\)” or “epistemically prior for anyone?” This is another area that William and Aquinas don’t consider: they both seem to have a rather determinist view of basing psychology, where epistemic priority is simply based on the objective strength of different bases, without any influence from individual psychology. Aquinas’ discussion of the distinction between faith, opinion, and knowledge (see Chapter One) speaks in general terms: the criteria for what counts as evident or non-evident is the same for everyone, with no hint of exceptions or alterations for individuals. William, too, in SA 3.12.4 (see Chapter Two) argues in the same way: faith is always epistemically stronger than knowledge, with no hint of exceptions. So we’re going to assume that “epistemically prior” = “epistemically prior absolutely.”

\(^1\) I am using “strong” to mean “having epistemic priority,” such that “\(x\) is stronger than \(y\)” = “\(x\) has epistemic priority over \(y\).”

\(^1\) Blake Dutton pointed out to me the case of the sun’s appearing quite small in the sky, while we know through mathematical calculation that it is quite large. Here calculation has priority over vision.
idea quite convincing, after all: even two people who disagree about what they saw might still agree about the area of a triangle.\textsuperscript{14}

Alan is in a similar situation with regard to the proposition “an eclipse will occur on November 1\textsuperscript{st}” (N), his actually seeing the eclipse (β), and his trusting John’s authority as an astronomer (π). On October 31\textsuperscript{st}, Alan believes N because of π: that is, he not only believes N and has access to π, but also has the relation r(Nπ) (and the associated habit of believing). On November 1\textsuperscript{st}, he acquires a new basis for believing N, namely β. So we have a similar question as we did for John: now that Alan has access to both β and π, can he have both r(Nβ) and r(Nπ) at the same time, and if not, which does he have? Let’s assume, as we did before, that he can’t have both, and that he can’t just choose which basing relation to have. In that case, there are two options:

1. **Alan believes N because of β (i.e., vision).** Although previously he had r(Nπ), once he acquires β, that basing relation is destroyed and the new basing relation r(Nβ) takes its place.\textsuperscript{15}

2. **Alan believes N because of π (i.e., testimony).** Although he now has β—he can see the eclipse—the preexisting basing relation r(Nπ) blocks the basing relation r(Nβ) from forming.

Our question is like that asked about John: of r(Nβ) and r(Nπ), which has greater epistemic priority? But in this case, it is most intuitive to suppose that authority has a lower level

\textsuperscript{14} This is all on the hypothesis that you can’t have two basing relations at once. You could deny this and say that vision-beliefs and math-beliefs have \textit{equal} epistemic priority. This also assumes that epistemic priority is a feature of basis-types: \textit{sense-knowledge} has a certain level of epistemic priority, \textit{belief on the basis of whimsy} another, etc. Someone might say that epistemic priority has to do with the epistemic agent: a basis that has high priority for me might have low priority for you. But both William and Aquinas deny that you can have two basing relations, or at least that you can’t have the basing relation involved in faith and the basing relation involved in demonstrative knowledge at the same time (if they think this is possible for other combinations of basing relations that is outside the focus of this dissertation). I prove this for Aquinas in Chapter One and for William in Chapter Two.

\textsuperscript{15} Note that this does not mean that he lacks π, only that he lacks r(Nπ). He is perfectly aware that John’s authority is sufficient to ground belief in N, but he does not actually believe N because of John’s authority.
of epistemic strength than mathematical calculation. So perhaps this example is easier: Alan no longer believes N because of his trust in John, but because he sees that N is true for himself. Now, he hasn’t lost his old basis, π: in other words, he hasn’t stopped trusting John as an astronomical authority. So on November 1st he has a basis (π, his trust in John on matters of astronomy), and believes a proposition that could be based on that basis (N, his belief that November 1st is the day of an eclipse), but does not have the corresponding basing relation: he has N and π, but not r(Nπ). The basis and his believing the proposition have survived the eclipse, but the basing relation has perished. Of course, one could find a reason to take the alternate position: perhaps he can believe only because of his trust all the while seeing the eclipse. I am not deciding on the relative priority of various bases here; I am merely tracking intuitions and laying out some paradigmatic questions of epistemic priority.

To summarize this section: Acts/habits of believing can be analyzed in terms of the proposition believed, the basis on which it is believed, and the basing relation between the two. Some bases have epistemic priority over other bases, meaning that if they can both ground the same belief, then when someone has access to both, the stronger one forms a basing relation and the weaker one does not. So when someone has access to two bases for the same proposition, questions of epistemic priority arise. Moreover, basing one’s belief on a certain basis can be morally praiseworthy or blameworthy. So questions of epistemic priority can have moral implications.

---

16 For example, if John were to inform Alan of another eclipse occurring on November 2nd, Alan would believe him before he checked the math.
0b. Epistemic Priority in Gregory and Anselm

Suppose George is a Christian. On February 29th, he believes that God exists. He does not know an argument for this claim: he simply has faith (whether actual or dispositional) that it is true. On March 1st, George discovers a sound proof of God’s existence (assume, for the sake of argument, that there is such a proof). He sees that the argument is valid and that the premises are true, and he understands that this necessitates the conclusion. At this point, does George have faith that God exists?

This new thought experiment can be analyzed in the same way as the ones we explored earlier. Say that \(G = \text{“God exists,”} \) \(\alpha = \text{the theistic proof, and} \) \(\sigma = \text{“God’s witness through faith,”} \) that is, whatever it is on the basis of which one has Christian faith that some proposition is true. If the basing relation \(r(G\sigma)\) holds for George, he has faith that God exists. If the basing relation \(r(G\alpha)\) holds for George, he has demonstrative knowledge that God exists. We can consider George’s epistemic state in two instances:

1. On February 29th, George believes \(G\), has access to \(\sigma\), and has the basing relation \(r(G\sigma)\).
2. On March 1st, George believes \(G\) and has access to both \(\sigma\) and \(\alpha\). He has either \(r(G\alpha)\), \(r(G\sigma)\), or both, but it is not clear which.

---

17 I use “God exists” as an example of the propositional object of faith, first because there is a strong tradition of proofs that God exists (as opposed to proofs of the Trinity or the Incarnation, although attempts have been made), second because it is the example William of Auxerre uses in *Summa Aurea* 3.12.4, a key passage for this dissertation. (But how could you trust God’s authority before you believe that He exists? Aquinas gives an interesting answer in *De Veritate* 14.9 ad 9.)

18 The term, “God’s witness through faith” is left undefined on purpose, because Aquinas and William disagree on what it is. It simply is an \(x\), where \(x\) is that on the basis of which one forms a faith basing-relation. Both Aquinas and William think that faith is assent on some unique basis (not the same basis as is operative in the case of scientific knowledge, belief on human authority, etc.), but they disagree on what exactly that basis is. Particularly, they disagree on whether it can be characterized as a species of belief on the basis of authority. So I can’t specify something like “God’s authority” when talking about the faith-basis. I chose a general word like “witness” that’s vague enough to accommodate both their views. Sometimes we must be vague in our terminology in order to be precise in our exegesis.
On February 29th George had only one basis for believing N, namely God’s witness through faith (σ), and the basing relation r(Gσ). But on March 1st, he acquires another basis, the proof (α). We have no reason to think he lost σ; but does he still have r(Gσ)? Does he still believe that God exists by the faith-basis, or does he now believe on the basis of the proof? Assuming he can’t do both and he can’t just choose, there are two possibilities:

1. **George believes G because of α (i.e., a proof).** Although previously he had r(Gσ), once he acquires α, that basing relation is destroyed and the new basing relation r(Gσ) takes its place. He no longer has faith that God exists: rather, he knows that God exists.

2. **George believes G because of σ (i.e., God’s witness through faith).** Although he now has α, the preexisting basing relation r(Gσ) blocks the basing relation r(Gα) from forming: although he knows how to prove that God exists, he does not, in the strictest sense, know that God exists, but has faith that God exists.

At first glance, option 1 seems the natural choice. Intuitively it seems that r(Gα) has epistemic priority over r(Gσ). The idea is something like this: faith, on one common view, means trusting the authority of another, namely God. In that case the faith-basis is God’s authority. But authority is always (so we reason) a weaker basis than an actual proof: belief on the basis of a proof has epistemic priority over belief on the basis of authority. That means that a proof-basis always overpowers an authority-basis, causing it to fail to form its basing relation. So if faith is based on authority (as seems intuitively true), and authority is always epistemically weaker than

---

19 This problem can be restated for any article of faith and an argument proving it, of course.
proof, then we must go with option 1. So the argument goes—and this, as we will see in Chapter One, is Aquinas’ argument.20

But option 1 generates a theological dilemma that does not come up for John, Alan, and the eclipse. According to longstanding Christian tradition, faith has a moral dimension. It is a praiseworthy thing to believe things on the authority of God (the Church, the Bible, etc.)—indeed, so praiseworthy as to contribute toward meriting eternal life. One can plausibly infer that it is morally blameworthy to lose such meritorious believing. But learning proofs for Christian doctrines results in losing faith, at least with respect to those particular doctrines for which one learns a proof. So it seems that learning proofs for Christian doctrines is blameworthy for Christians to do. On the other hand, according to longstanding Christian tradition, it is praiseworthy to discover reasons and proofs for what one believes as a Christian: “faith seeking understanding” is held up as an ideal, as is being “always ready to give an answer for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15). It seems, then, that learning proofs of Christian doctrines is both praiseworthy and blameworthy, both meritorious and demeritorious. But this is a contradiction.

Pope Gregory the Great appears to grip the more pessimistic horn of the dilemma in a late 6th century sermon (In Evang. 26, PL 76, p. 1197):

At the first reading of this Gospel passage [John 20:19-31], a question confronts one’s mind: how was the Lord’s body a real body after the Resurrection if it could go through closed doors to the disciples? But we must bear in mind that if God’s working is fully grasped by reason, it cannot be marveled at, nor does faith have merit if human reason furnishes it with proof.21

---

20 Someone might respond to this argument by saying that, although human authority is always epistemically weaker than demonstrative proofs, divine authority is not. Neither Aquinas nor William take up this option.

21 Gregory the Great, In Evang. 26 (Patrologia Latina 76, p. 1197). “Prima lectionis huius evangelicae quaestio animum pulsat, quomodo post resurrectionem corpus dominicum verum fuit, quod clausis ianuis ad discipulos ingredi potuit. Sed scendum nobis est quod divina operatio si ratione compraehenditur, non est admirabilis; nec fides habet meritum, cui humana ratio praebet experimentum.”
As we will shortly see, precisely how to interpret the Pope’s brief remark became a controversial question.\(^{22}\) But taken at face value, Gregory seems to be saying that meritorious faith—the kind of belief that counts for salvation—requires the lack of proofs given by human reason. We could call Gregory (on this interpretation) a knowledge-prioritarian: he holds that someone who has a proof for a given proposition cannot believe that proposition by faith, but instead knows the proposition to be true. Most likely he takes this position for just the reasons outlined above: the basis of faith is God’s authority, which is a weaker basis than demonstrative knowledge (as we will see in a moment, this is just how Aquinas understands Gregory). Gregory also draws the expected consequence: trusting God for what one does not know is morally praiseworthy, whereas believing something because of a rational proof is not. So you can’t have meritorious faith if you possess a proof for the faith: you might believe all the right things, but your belief “does not have merit,” because it’s not faith, but knowledge. Now, the Bible and Christian tradition are quite clear that the faith is needed for salvation. But this implies that proofs for the faith threaten one’s salvation.

This authoritative passage from Pope Gregory was frequently cited by 12\(^{th}\) and 13\(^{th}\) authors, and was taken as an authoritative statement on the issue. But a bit earlier, in the 11\(^{th}\) century, Anselm of Canterbury seems to have been blissfully unaware of the Pope’s remark. Anselm initiated the scholastic project of “faith seeking understanding” (\textit{Fides Quaerens Intellectum}, the original title of Anselm’s \textit{Proslogion}) by arguing that it is spiritually beneficial

\(^{22}\) I have not found any philosophical or theological literature that deals deeply with Pope Gregory’s view of the relationship between faith and reason or even on this passage in particular. This is a gap in the literature that it may be an interesting task to fill, since this passage is quoted by William, Aquinas, and other medieval authors. Peter Abelard quotes it in \textit{Collationes} II (p. 90) in the mouth of his pagan philosopher character, who uses it to attack the Christian character. It was sufficiently well-known to show up in vernacular texts: in his \textit{Testament of Love}, Thomas Usk (d. 1388) says (Part 2, line 59) that “These reasons and suche other if they enduce men in loves servyce trewe to believe of parfyte blysse, yet to ful faihte in credence of deserte fully mowe they nat suffyse, sithen faith hath no meryte of mede whan mannes reason sheweth experyence in doyng.”
for Christians to use rational arguments to understand what they believe. Anselm’s project was
enormously influential: “faith seeking understanding” is often taken to be a summary motto of
High Medieval thought in general. Anselm jump-started rational inquiry into Christian doctrine
as both a scientific program and a spiritual practice, and the tension between Anselm’s optimism
and Gregory’s reserve about rational proofs characterizes the discussion of faith and reason by
later Scholastics, including William of Auxerre and Thomas Aquinas, so we’ll set the two stars
of the show in their proper context by spending some time with Anselm.

The opening sentence of Chapter 2 of the *Proslogion* gives a good summary of Anselm’s
project of “faith seeking understanding.” There, he says: “O Lord, You who grant understanding
to faith, grant that I may understand, as far as You know is useful, that You are as we believe,
and that You are that which we believe.” 23 Anselm’s goal, in this work as in others, is to use
reason to prove that what Christians hold by faith is actually true. In the immediate context of the
*Proslogion* Anselm aims to show that God exists (he attempts this with his famous ontological
argument) and that God is as Christians believe: both merciful and just, both omniscient and
impassible, and so on (this takes up most of the rest of the *Proslogion*). And he is even more
ambitious than that, attempting to prove that God is triune (in the *Monologion* and *Proslogion*)
and that He would become incarnate to save the human race (in the *Cur Deus Homo*), two “no
fly zones” for many Christian philosophers, who may be comfortable proving God’s existence,
but not His Triune or Incarnate nature.

What is the “understanding” that faith seeks, and that Anselm prays for? In the
*Monologion*, after giving arguments that God is three Persons, Anselm says that the doctrine

---

23 Anselm, *Proslogion* 2. “Ergo Domine, qui das fidei intellectum, da mihi, ut, quantum scis expedire, intelligam,
quia es sicut credimus, et hoc es quod credimus.”
“transcend[s] all keenness of human understanding.” Rather than “trying to explain how it [i.e.,
the Triune God] is so...it ought to suffice...if by reasoning one reaches knowledge that the thing
most certainly exists, even if his understanding cannot fathom how it thus exists” (*Monologion*
64). If we distinguish between knowing that a proposition is true and knowing what causes it to
be true (in later terminology, *quia* knowledge and *propter quid* knowledge), Anselm’s
“understanding” involves knowledge in the first category rather than the second:24 although this
kind of knowledge certainly does not totally capture Anselm’s concept of *intellectus*, it is an
important aspect of it.25 Even if the human mind cannot fully comprehend, for example, *how*
God is a Trinity (i.e., what in God’s nature entails that He is a Trinity), Anselm evidently thinks
that it can arrive, by reason alone, at certain knowledge *that* God is a Trinity (i.e., it can make
valid inferences on the basis of indubitable premises that lead to the conclusion that God is a
Trinity). The Proslogion 2 passage cited above agrees: “O Lord...grant that I may
understand...*that* You are as we believe.” Anselm’s goal, at least in part, is knowledge that
certain propositions about God are true. Such knowledge about God involves learning a great
deal about God’s nature, but the reason Anselm is able to learn new things about God’s nature is
that he is able to know, using reason unaided by authority, that certain propositions about God

24 This is important to keep in mind, since in ordinary English “understanding” tends to be used for the second
category, and “knowledge” for the first. But “faith seeking understanding” is such a widespread translation of *fides
quaerens intellectum* that it’s difficult to use any other English word to translate *intellectus* in Anselm.

25 And I am not saying that *quia* understanding is all that is involved in Anselm’s conception of *intellectus*, but only
that one of the important things he was looking for is propositional understanding. David Brown connects the term
*intellectus* to Augustine and the mystical tradition more generally, which sees *intellectus* as a spiritual state reached
by the faithful rather than something in opposition to faith (Brown 399). Still, for Anselm, this spiritual state at least
involves, although it is not *exhausted* by, knowledge *that* God exists, is Triune, etc.

Also, it may be that Anselm’s view of *intellectus* could theoretically include understanding how God is a
Trinity (how Jesus is incarnate, etc.). There’s nothing to suggest that Anselm didn’t *want* that kind of knowledge.
However, he is clear that in this life we can’t successfully acquire it (at least in the case of the Trinity). My point is
that the *intellectus* that Anselm sought and claimed to have acquired is or includes knowledge *that* God is a Trinity
(that Jesus is God incarnate, etc.).
are true. This is what Anselm’s project added to traditional theology: knowledge by natural reason alone that certain propositions about God are true.\textsuperscript{26}

Anselm is, moreover, very ambitious in the scope of doctrines he thinks he can prove, and never gives any indication that there are any doctrines it would be inappropriate to prove. In Anselm’s \textit{Monologion} and \textit{Proslogion} he proves that God exists and that He is a Trinity. \textit{Cur Deus Homo} he proves that God had to become incarnate, die, and rise from the dead in order to atone for the sins of mankind. If Anselm thought that any doctrine was inaccessible to understanding, it probably would have been the Trinity or the Incarnation. Anselm, therefore, seems to have had no problem with proving all of Christian doctrine.\textsuperscript{27}

Unfortunately for Anselm, his project looks to be squarely opposed to what Gregory says about faith and reason. Gregory thinks that arguments make meritorious faith impossible.

\textsuperscript{26} Visser and Williams (pp. 194ff.) give a very similar reading of the \textit{Monologion} on the basis of other texts in the Anselmian corpus. They appeal to Anselm’s distinction between knowing something “properly” and knowing it “through some likeness.” We only know God in the latter sense, which means that “even though we can reach true conclusions about him, we never gain a proper grasp of his essence” (ibid. 194).

\textsuperscript{27} In the past, it has been controversial whether Anselm actually meant his proofs for the Trinity and the Incarnation to be philosophical proofs that are plausible apart from special revelation. Since he says that they are, I prefer to take him at his word. Thomas Williams, no small authority on Anselm, concurs with this: in his and Sandra Visser’s book \textit{Anselm}, they say that the \textit{Monologion “includ[es] arguments that clearly seem to be intended as philosophical proofs that God is triune”} (p. 15, emphasis original), and on the basis of several passages from Anselm’s work concludes that the evidence that Anselm intended his proofs for God, the Trinity, and the Incarnation to be independent of theological authority is “overwhelming” (ibid.). Visser and Williams conclude that “the reluctance of some commentators to take Anselm at his word must rest entirely on external considerations,” and probably comes from an anachronistic importing of Aquinas’ concerns in this area into Anselm. As an example of “some commentators” they cite William E. Mann, who says that Anselm only means to show that the doctrine of the Trinity is “free from contradiction” and “All Makes Sense,” but not that it is “true (for then it would not be a mystery)” (Mann 257).

I think Visser and Williams are right on their reading of Anselm, but I wouldn’t call the reaction of “some commentators” who disagree with Visser, Williams, and myself “anachronistic” exactly, if by “anachronistic” they mean “importing the later ideas of Thomas Aquinas into Anselm” (Williams repeats the claim of anachronism in his chapter in the volume on \textit{Medieval Philosophy of Religion} published in 2013, p. 74). Although their concerns are misplaced as regards Anselm particularly, still, as shown above, such concerns about the relation between faith and proof go back much earlier than Aquinas or Anselm, back at least to Gregory the Great. \textit{Contra} Visser and Williams (pp. 15-16), you do not need to have an “Aristotelian epistemology” rooted in physical sensation to appreciate the possibility of a conflict between faith and reason. Why Anselm did not engage with Gregory’s text is another, interesting question (though the answer may be more historical than philosophical—perhaps he didn’t have the text!).
Anselm thinks that he had arguments for essential Christian doctrine and yet also had meritorious faith (or at least never suspects that he does not). Now, Anselm was aware of the concern that rational inquiry is destructive of faith—this is the subject of his letter On the Incarnation of the Word. But he never engaged with Gregory’s claim as such, instead dealing with complaints from his contemporaries that rational inquiry leads to heresy. His response is that faith is necessary for understanding: one cannot do rational theology without falling into error unless one first believes Christian dogma by faith: “one who has not believed will not understand” (On the Incarnation of the Word 1; see Isaiah 7:9).  

28 Is this consistent with Anselm’s claim that he produced arguments that could convince Jews and pagans sola ratione? This is a difficult question that we unfortunately cannot settle here, as this is not a dissertation about Anselm. One possible resolution is this: Anselm is saying that there are rational arguments that are, in themselves, convincing to unbelievers. But the sinfulness of the human heart precludes people from accepting the conclusions of those arguments unless they are already willing to adopt the Christian faith: their corrupt will blocks their clear understanding. If they are not willing to accept the Faith, they will persist stubbornly in irrational belief. This is one way to resolve the apparent contradiction between the De Verbi Incarnatione and the Cur Deus Homo.

Of course, I do not have time to defend that resolution here, or even decide whether I should defend it. That said, I have not yet found a satisfying solution to this problem in the literature. Visser and Williams argue that, for Anselm, “faith…is not simply an epistemic attitude but a spiritual discipline marked by an obedient will,” enabling one to “experience” the truth of the Faith (20). Elsewhere, Williams is even stronger, saying that that “faith for Anselm is more a volitional state than an epistemic state: it is love for God and a drive to act as God wills” (Williams, SEP entry for ‘Anselm’). The idea seems to be that, for Anselm, since faith is a volitional state more than an epistemic one, epistemic criteria (like bases and basing relations) do not determine whether or not you have faith. This solution certainly picks out what the faithful Christian has that the pagan lacks: a certain volitional attitude toward God. But it does not, in itself, resolve the question of conversion: what happens when that pagan reads and is convinced by Anselm’s argument? The mere claim that faith is not an epistemic state does not solve the problem.

For one thing, in the passage Williams (ibid.) cites in support of this view, Monologion 78, Anselm never says that faith is not a volitional state, but that faith requires love for God (and in Monologion 76 he indicates that faith also requires believing certain propositions about God). Second, even if faith is not a kind of propositional belief, it still might be relevant to propositional beliefs, such that it is vulnerable to arguments like DO. For example, my attitude of anger towards a car salesman who cheated me is a volitional state. But it does depend on certain propositional beliefs (“the salesman cheated me”) and it can be annihilated when I acquire other, new beliefs (“the salesman did not cheat me”). Faith in God, even if a pure volitional state, might depend on certain epistemic states, such as believing that God exists: “one cannot love or hope for what one does not believe” (Monologion 76). And that leaves open the question of whether such a volitional state could be determined by certain epistemic states (such as believing certain things about God on the basis of God’s witness) or negated by certain epistemic states (such as believing certain things about God on the basis of an argument). And then we are back at Gregory’s problem.

Visser and Williams, in their book Anselm cited above, hint at another possible solution (Visser and Williams 21ff.). They say that, according to Anselm, although “no unbeliever can achieve such discovery” —that is, the discovery of the arguments for Christian doctrine that Anselm gave—an unbeliever who is “patient, honest, and moderately intelligent…can follow and appreciate the demonstration or defense of the reason of faith” (ibid. 24). The idea seems to be that, although only a Christian could come up with a proof for the Trinity, a non-Christian can see that the proof is sound. This is an interesting idea, but still does not solve the problem. Suppose a non-Christian
answer Gregory’s concern. According to Gregory (under the common-sense interpretation we have been following), even coming to the right conclusions by means of reason is destructive of faith. One can be entirely orthodox in their propositional beliefs, and yet still not have faith, because they fail to form the proper basing relation.

Anselm, to my knowledge, displays no awareness of Gregory the Great’s claim that “faith has no merit if human reason furnishes it with proof.” I suppose he did not have that text available to him. But suppose a 12th or 13th century writer, who knew Gregory’s sermon, were to look at Anselm’s work. He would probably find much to be concerned about! After all, Gregory reads the proof Anselm came up with and is convinced. What happens then? Do they have faith? Can they have faith? We are back at the same problem again.

Gavin Ortlund (p. 15) makes the valuable point that when Anselm says he is proceeding sola ratione, he is contrasting ratio with theological authority rather than personal faith; this is a great insight but still does not solve the problem at hand. He also says that, for Anselm, “believing in God entails striving unto the divine being,” which is “impossible apart from faith,” and thus faith is a “prerequisite” to “rational meditation on God” (p. 26). Like Williams’ “volitional state” answer, this does not really solve the problem, and for the same reason. Even if we can differentiate the Christian’s approach to philosophical argument from the pagan’s, this is only a satisfying conclusion if we assume that no pagan ever becomes a Christian or vice versa—a very bad assumption indeed. If it is possible for a pagan to be convinced of the truth of Christianity because of philosophical argument, then at once Gregory raises his question: has the convert in question emptied his belief of merit?

McIntyre (p. 25) acknowledges that if Anselm’s sola ratione method were meant to “exclude faith,” then Anselm would indeed “believe that all these intricacies of theology proper…lie available to naked reason, apart from faith.” But since Anselm sees “rational meditation as an expression of, rather than an alternative to, faith,” he is free of this danger. This is certainly right, but how we get there is precisely the question: how can Anselm define faith in a way that allows rational proof to express it without overriding it, as is Gregory’s concern? McIntyre reflects William’s view when he says that, for Anselm, faith is necessary because “believing in God entails striving unto the divine being” (p. 26), but again this needs further explanation. McIntyre also claims that the Monologion presupposes faith in its reasoning, but this is patently false. The one “distinctively Christian” doctrine McIntyre cites as presupposed in the Monologion is “God’s uniquely self-sufficient eternal happiness” (p. 26). For one thing, I cannot see where Anselm presupposes this in the Monologion. Second, even if he does, it is hardly a uniquely Christian doctrine.

At least one commentator has simply concluded that Anselm contradicts himself. M.J. Charlesworth says that there are two sides to Anselm’s thought: one which makes him a “rationalist” for whom “the mysteries of faith” are “rationally demonstrable,” another which makes him a “quasi-fideist, maintaining that nothing can be known about God save on the basis of faith” (Charlesworth 36-37). Others have seen this as a major problem in Anselm that is difficult to solve, although they have come short of saying that he contradicts himself. John McIntyre sees the problem represented “in parvo” in the Cur Deus Homo, where Anselm seems to both affirm in the work’s Commendatio that “you shall not understand unless you have believed” and to claim in the Praefatio that his arguments proceed “by logically necessary steps” apart from faith (McIntyre 3-4). Ortlund gives an excellent overview of the literature here (pp. 12-13), and quotes Eileen Sweeney, who calls this question “the problem of Anselm” (Sweeney 1) and says that Anselm appears, to modern interpreters, to be “a study in contradictions” (ibid. 2). I do not know the answer to this puzzle, but I would prefer to save admission of contradiction as an absolute last resort.
says that you can’t have the virtue of faith if reason furnishes your belief with proof. In that case, Anselm can’t have faith in any claim for which he possesses a proof. But Anselm purports to have proven all core Christian beliefs by reason. So it seems that Anselm does not have faith at all: by proving Christianity, Anselm has ceased to be a Christian.

**0c. Epistemic Priority in William of Auxerre and Thomas Aquinas**

The question of the epistemic priority of faith and knowledge, then, is not just an interesting philosophical puzzle. Rather, it strikes at the heart of the whole Scholastic enterprise, built on the Anselmian assumption that rational inquiry into Christian doctrine is at least permissible and probably beneficial for the believer. Gregory’s claim, taken as authoritative by the scholastics, poses a major challenge to this view. This is the problem of the compatibility of faith and reason as it existed in the Middle Ages, and as William of Auxerre and St. Thomas Aquinas encountered it in the 13th century. The issue was not whether religious belief was justified or warranted. The modern concept of deontological justification, after all, did not exist. If you were to ask whether Christians ought to have Christian beliefs, I’m sure every Christian thinker would say that they should. Neither was there a question of whether things like God’s existence or the Incarnation could be rationally proven. Some doctrines could, maybe some couldn’t, and that was all right. The concern wasn’t over what happens when you can’t prove what you believe, but what happens when you can. The remainder of this dissertation will concern how William and Aquinas handled this issue.

Both William of Auxerre and Thomas Aquinas cite the authoritative passage from Pope Gregory when they are discussing whether it is possible to know (scire) and believe (credere) the same proposition. For Aquinas, this comes up in his commentary on Boethius’ *De Trinitate*, section 1.2.1, on “whether it is permissible to investigate divine things through argumentation.”
The fifth objection invokes Pope Gregory’s famous dictum, and Aquinas’ reply contains something surprising:

As Gregory says in the homily on the Octave of Easter, “Faith does not have merit if human reason furnishes it with proof.” But it is bad to empty faith of merit. Therefore, it is not permitted to examine the things of faith with reasoning...

In response to the fifth objection: There are two kinds of human reasoning. First there is demonstrative reasoning, which forces the intellect to consent. You can’t have this sort of reasoning with regard to the things of faith, but you can have it with regard to refuting claims that the faith is impossible: even if the things of faith can’t be demonstrated, they still cannot be demonstratively disproven. But if this kind of reasoning were used to prove the things that are of faith, faith would be emptied of merit, because in that case assenting to the things of faith would not be voluntary, but necessary.

On the other hand, persuasive reasoning, taken from various likenesses induced about the things of faith, does not empty faith of merit. For it does not make the things of faith apparent, since there occurs no reduction to first principles seen by the intellect. Again, it does not empty faith of merit, because it does not force the intellect to consent, so the assent remains voluntary. 29

Aquinas, being Aquinas, wants to show that it is permissible for Christians to apply natural reason to argue for their faith. To do this he has to deal with Gregory, who seems to say that rational inquiry empties faith of merit. So he has this objector cite Gregory against his view. Aquinas’ response, surprisingly, concedes the main part of the objection: if you could demonstrate everything that is “of faith,” then indeed “faith would be emptied of merit.” Fortunately, however, in Aquinas’ view, we just can’t prove everything that is “of faith.” There are, in fact, two kinds of Christian belief, two “of faith” categories, as Aquinas clarifies.

---

29 Aquinas, In Boethii de Trin. 1.2.1. “Praeterea, sicut dicit Gregorius in homilia octavae Paschae, Fides non habet meritum, cui humana ratio praebeat experimentum. Sed malum est meritum fidei evacuare. Ergo non licet rationibus de his quae sunt fidei perscrutari....

Ad quintum dicendum quod duplex est humana ratio. Una demonstrativa cogens intellectum ad consensum, et talis ratio non potest haberis de his quae fidei sunt, sed potest haberis ad evacuandum ea quae fidei esse impossibilem asserunt. Quamvis enim ea quae sunt fidei demonstrari non possint, non tamen possunt demonstrative improbari. Si autem talis ratio ad probanda ea quae sunt fidei induceretur, evacuatetur meritum fidei, quia iam assentire his non esset voluntarium sed necessarium.

Ratio autem persuasoria summpta ex aliquidus similitudinibus ad ea quae sunt fidei indutca non evacuat fidei rationem; quia non facit ea esse apparentia, cum non fiat resolutio in prima pricipia quae intellectu videntur. Nec iterum meritum fidei evacuat, quia non cogit intellectum ad consensum, unde assensus remanet voluntarius.”
Articles of faith are unprovable: they transcend human reason and must be accepted on God’s authority. This includes things like the Trinity and the Incarnation (exactly what Anselm claimed to have proven!). You can give persuasive arguments for these doctrines or respond to objections, but you can never prove them. Preambles, however, like the existence and unicity of God, can be proven. What this means, in effect, is that no matter how much of the Christian faith you prove, there will always be something left over that you cannot prove but must take on faith. Faith, then, is preserved from being wholly emptied of merit.

Aquinas’ distinction between the articles of faith and the preambles of faith is well-known. The passage above illuminates one way this distinction is important to Aquinas’ religious epistemology. On one hand, it is simply a fact, on Aquinas’ view, that some Christian doctrines are unprovable and so much be taken on faith. But in addition to this, if Aquinas did not posit some doctrine that is unknowable, his view would entail that rational argument could threaten to “empty faith of merit.” Suppose that every Christian doctrine were provable—in Aquinas’ terms, all doctrines were “preambles.” Then suppose someone, like Anselm, proved every Christian doctrine. In that case, Anselm would have no basing relation, and hence no act or habit of belief, grounded in God’s witness through faith. And since Aquinas conceives of faith as a habit, this would mean that Anselm would not have the habit or virtue of faith.

Of course, Aquinas doesn’t think that doctrines like the Trinity and the Incarnation can be proven—but he concedes if they could, then if you knew a demonstrative proof for them you

---

30 See, e.g., ST 1.2.2 ad 1 and 2/2.2.10 ad 2.

31 This is not his only reason for positing this distinction—perhaps it is not even his primary reason. But it is a sufficient reason for doing so: in the context of Aquinas’ system, he needs the distinction between preambles and articles in order to preserve the merit of faith. Whether or not this was, historically, his reason for positing that distinction is a different question.
couldn’t believe them by faith. In fact, you couldn’t have faith at all. Even if all Christian doctrine were provable, it would be necessary for Christians not to know those proofs, and so Aquinas would have to agree that philosophical inquiry is dangerous for Christians. The only way for Aquinas to avoid this is to maintain that some Christian doctrines are not provable.

Chapter One of this dissertation will be devoted to Aquinas. William of Auxerre is the star of the show, but since Aquinas gives a sophisticated articulation of the consensus view of Gregory and the knowledge-priorititarian view of faith and arguments, we will use him as our foil, contrasting his view with that of William in order to show how unique William’s position is. The goal of the chapter is to show that Thomas Aquinas is a knowledge-prioritarian. That is, he thinks that demonstrative knowledge has priority over faith, such that if someone simultaneously has God’s witness through faith that a proposition is true and a demonstrative argument proving that proposition, then they have demonstrative knowledge, and not faith, that the proposition is true. In section 1a we will establish what Aquinas means by “faith.” We will look at a passage in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* where Aquinas gives a philosophical argument that attaining beatitude requires a supernaturally-endowed habit of believing propositions on the basis of divine authority—in other words, the virtue of faith. In short, Aquinas thinks that attaining our ultimate end requires trusting in God concerning things that transcend our ability to know—and he thinks that this can be shown to be true apart from Revelation. In section 1b we will see how Aquinas’ philosophical view of faith, combined with other aspects of his epistemology, entails knowledge-prioritarianism. Aquinas thinks that faith is a habit of trust in God’s authority, and since on his view bases involving authority are epistemically weaker than demonstrative

---

32 Interestingly, this means that “There is at least one article of faith” is itself a preamble of faith. Aquinas never says this explicitly, but it follows from his reasoning.
arguments, it is impossible to have that habit of trust with regard to a proposition that you already know: the basing relation simply fails to form, or is destroyed if previously formed. This establishes Aquinas as a knowledge-prioritarian.

**William of Auxerre** (1156-1231) brings up the same problem as Aquinas, with a different answer, in the Prologue to the *Summa Aurea*. Here he appropriately gives his justification for the entire work: he is about to give proofs for Christian doctrines, so he needs to show that this is permissible.

*Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence [argumentum] of what does not appear* (Hebrews 11:1). For just as with true love God is loved for His own sake and above all else, so by faith one assents to the First Truth for Its own sake and above all else. Therefore, nothing is more certain than faith...

**[Objection.]** Therefore the professors, and even the saints, seem to have acted perversely by trying to prove the faith or the articles of faith with human arguments, since faith, according to the Apostle [Heb. 11:1] is what proves, not what is proven— a premise [argumentum], not a conclusion. They even seem to have emptied faith of merit, since Blessed Gregory says, “Faith does not have merit if human reason furnishes it with proof.” But these people try to furnish faith with proof, and so they seem to empty faith of merit....

**[Reply.]** But when someone has true faith and arguments by which the Faith can be proven, such a person does not rely on the First Truth because of those arguments, but rather assents to the arguments because they agree with the First Truth and attest to It...But if faith were to rely on human arguments alone, it would not have merit, for then what Blessed Gregory said would apply (“faith does not have merit,” etc.). But since the truly faithful person relies on the First Truth above all, faith is not a conclusion, but a premise [argumentum], as the Apostle says.³³

³³ William of Auxerre, *Summa Aurea* Prologue, ll. 1-14,42-29,46-2. “Fides est substantia rerum sperandarum, argumentum non apparentium. Sicut enim vera dilectione diligitur Deus propter seipsum super omnia, ita fide acquiescitur primae veritati super omnia propter se; ideo nihil certius fide...

Magistri ergo immo sancti perverse videntur agere, cum rationibus humanis nituntur probare fidem vel articulos fidei, cum fides secundum Apostolum sit tanquam probans non probatum, argumentum non conclusio.

Videntur etiam evacuare meritorum fidei, quia dicit beatus Gregorius: ‘Fides non habet meritorum cui humana ratio praebet experimentum.’ Ipsi vero nituntur praebere experimentum fidei et ita videntur evacuare meritorum fidei....

Cum autem habet quis veram fidem et rationes quibus ostendi possit fides, ipse non ininitur primae veritati propter illas rationes, sed potius acquiescit illis rationibus quia consentiunt prime veritati et ei attestantur...Si autem fides initteretur solum rationibus humanis, non habet meritorum, quia tunc habet locum quod dicit beatus Gregorius: ‘Fides non habet meritorum’ etc. Sed quia vere fidelis ininitur prime veritati super omnia, ideo fides non est ei conclusio, sed argumentum, sicut dicit Apostolus.”
The objection is almost identical to the one from Aquinas. You can’t have meritorious faith if you have rational arguments for the articles of faith (i.e., the objector assumes knowledge-prioritarianism); it’s bad not to have meritorious faith; therefore, it’s bad to have rational arguments for the articles of faith. But William’s response is very different from that of Aquinas. Rather than conceding the principle that knowledge has epistemic priority over faith, William claims the opposite: it is perfectly possible to have both “true faith and arguments by which the Faith can be proven.” You can have the basing relation involved in faith and the basis of demonstrative knowledge at the same time. This, in turn, entails that you can have both bases (God’s witness through faith and a demonstrative argument) at the same time. Gregory, on William’s reading, is not a knowledge-prioritarian: the Pope’s problem is not with merely “having” arguments for the faith, but about “relying” on them: that is, his problem is not with having a demonstrative basis, but a demonstrative knowledge basing relation. Even when the faithful “has” arguments (i.e., has a demonstrative basis), he still “assents to the First Truth [i.e., has a faith basing relation] for Its own sake and above all else,” and that is what makes belief meritorious.

William’s response to Gregory raises as many questions as it answers, but the contrast with Aquinas is clear: Aquinas thinks that knowing a proof for a proposition makes believing that proposition by faith impossible, while William thinks that it does not. In Chapters Two, Three, and Four of the dissertation I will show that, and how, William is a faith-prioritarian. That is, he thinks that faith has priority over demonstrative knowledge: if someone simultaneously has God’s witness through faith that a proposition is true and a demonstrative argument proving that proposition, then they have faith, and not demonstrative knowledge, that the proposition is true. We will show that William’s peculiar view of the faith-basis as involving
seeing God spiritually rather than merely trusting in God’s authority is what makes it possible for him to take this position.

In Chapter Two we will prove that William of Auxerre is a faith-prioritarian. In section 2a we will show that William gave a natural proof for at least one Christian belief (“God exists”). In section 2b we will refute a rival interpretation of William, according to which he did not think it was possible to give demonstrative proofs of Christian doctrine. In section 2c we will show that William thinks that someone who is able to prove that God exists is capable of simultaneously believing in God’s existence by faith. Indeed, they must do this in order to have the virtue of faith—a clear point of contrast with Aquinas, for whom it is perfectly fine to not believe that God exists by faith, as long as you believe in other things, like the Incarnation, by faith.

In Chapter Two we show that William is a faith-prioritarian. But if, with Aquinas, he holds to three plausible claims, namely that (a) epistemically stronger bases block weaker ones from forming their basing relation, (b) testimony is epistemically weaker than demonstration, and (c) faith is based in testimony, then he must instead accept knowledge-prioritarianism. Since William in fact rejects knowledge-prioritarianism in favor of faith-prioritarianism, he must reject one of these three claims. As it happens, he rejects (c): he does not think faith is based on testimony, but an intellectual or spiritual vision of God. In Chapter Three and Four we will show how this position allows him to be a faith-prioritarian.

In Chapter Three we will explain William’s doctrine of faith as spiritual vision. In section 3a we will discuss William’s use of the term “faith” (fides). The term has several different meanings for William, so we need to identify which one is the one he is using in the Summa Aurea Prologue and other relevant passages. We will show that the sense in which he is
using the term “faith” shows that he is referring to the same phenomenon as Aquinas. In section 3b we will discuss William’s views of knowledge and sense-perception. William posits a strong parallelism between the intellectual and sensitive powers of the soul, such that the speculative intellect is an immaterial sense power, “the organ of spiritual sight.” Human perfection involves the gradual enhancements of the intellectual powers, including the speculative intellect, through the theological virtues. Faith, then, occupies the same position in William’s anthropology as it does in Aquinas’: it is a God-given perfection of the speculative intellect that conduces to beatitude. In section 3c we will show that faith, as the theological virtue of the intellect, is a habit of spiritual vision: specifically, of seeing God in the mirror of creatures.

But William’s conception of faith as vision raises two questions. First, what does seeing God have to do with assenting to propositions (the articles of faith)? Second, how does faith-as-vision enable you to assent meritoriously even when you have a natural demonstration? In Chapter Four we will show how William’s doctrine of faith as spiritual vision relates to the propositional aspect of faith. In section 4a we will show how William sees faith as the habit of two distinct acts: an act of vision and an act of propositional assent. In section 4b we will see how the act of vision leads to the act of propositional assent. In section 4c we will see how this kind of belief can coexist with the possession of demonstrative arguments. The vision of God by faith is an even more compelling grounds for faith than a demonstrative argument, and so faith has epistemic priority over knowledge. But this only cancels out the basing relation between the proposition believed and the demonstrative argument; it does not eliminate the demonstrative argument itself. The faithful, then, can learn and remember arguments for the articles of faith, without “knowing” them, that is, without basing their belief on the arguments. This concludes
our explanation of why William holds to faith-prioritarianism, an unusual position in the Middle Ages and today.
CHAPTER ONE

IN WHICH THOMAS AQUINAS IS SHOWN TO BE A KNOWLEDGE-PRIORITARIAN

In Chapter One I show that Thomas Aquinas is a knowledge-prioritarian. That is, he thinks that demonstrative knowledge has priority over faith: if someone simultaneously has God’s witness through faith that a proposition is true and a demonstrative argument proving that proposition, then they have demonstrative knowledge, and not faith, that the proposition is true. I also show that Aquinas’ knowledge-prioritarianism follows from his account of the theological virtue of faith, and that his account of the virtue of faith is rooted in his views on human beatitude and cognition.

In his commentary on Boethius’ De Trinitate, section 1.2.1, Thomas Aquinas considers whether it is “it is permissible to investigate divine things through natural reason.” The fifth objection invokes Pope Gregory:

As Gregory says in the homily on the Octave of Easter, “Faith does not have merit if human reason furnishes it with proof.” But it is bad to empty faith of merit. Therefore, it is not permitted to examine the things of faith with reasoning...

In response to the fifth objection: There are two kinds of human reasoning. First, there is demonstrative reasoning, which forces the intellect to consent. You can’t have this sort of reasoning with regard to the things of faith, but you can have it with regard to refuting claims that the Faith is impossible. For even if the things of faith cannot be demonstrated, they still cannot be demonstratively disproven. But if this kind of reasoning were used to prove the things that are of faith, faith would be emptied of merit, because in that case assenting to the things of faith would not be voluntary, but necessary.

On the other hand, persuasive reasoning, taken from various likenesses of the things of faith, does not empty faith of merit. For it does not make the things of faith
apparent, since there occurs no reduction to first principles seen by the intellect. Again, it does not empty faith of merit, because it does not force the intellect to consent, so the assent remains voluntary.¹

Here Aquinas is not just saying that, as a matter of fact, there are some Christian beliefs that cannot be demonstratively proven by natural human reason but can only be argued for persuasively—no one would dispute that Aquinas thinks this, and very few would disagree with him. Instead, he makes an even stronger claim: that for faith to be meritorious—for one’s believing to arise from the virtue of faith at all—there must be some essential Christian beliefs that are not proven and are not self-evident.² It is a requirement of Aquinas’ religious epistemology that the Christian believer not have demonstrative knowledge of at least some Christian doctrine. If the believer were to acquire demonstrative knowledge of all Christian doctrine, she would no longer have faith and no longer be in a state of grace.³ This entails, of

---

¹ Aquinas, In Boethii De Trinitate 1.2.1. “Praeterea, sicut dicit Gregorius in homilia octavae Paschae, Fides non habet meritum, cui humana ratio praebet experimentum. Sed malum est meritum fidei evacuare. Ergo non licet rationibus de his quae sunt fidei perscrutari... Ad quintum dicendum quod duplex est humana ratio. Una demonstrativa cogens intellectum ad consensum, et talis ratio non potest haberi de his quae fidei sunt, sed potest haberi ad evacuandum ea quae fidem esse impossibilem asserunt. Quamvis enim ea quae sunt fidei demonstrari non possint, non tamen possunt demonstrative improbari. Si autem talis ratio ad probanda ea quae sunt fidei inducetur, evacuaretur meritum fidei, quia iam assentire his non esset voluntarium, sed necessarium

Ratio autem persuasoria sumpta ex aliquibus similitudinibus ad ea quae sunt fidei inducta non evacuat fidei rationem; quia non facit ea esse apparentia, cum non fiat resoluto in prima principia quae intellectu videntur. Nec iterum meritum fidei evacuat, quia non cogit intellectum ad consensum, unde assensus remanet voluntarius.”

² It has long been recognized that Aquinas’ distinction between the preambles and articles of faith is necessary for his clean distinction between the sciences of theology and philosophy: Dougherty, e.g., says (p. 167) that “the solution Aquinas offers to the problem of separating the theological from the philosophical sciences appears to require the premise that articles of faith are precisely not self-evident.” I am emphasizing a different side of Aquinas: the distinction between articles and preambles (where the former are not evident but the latter are either self-evident or demonstrable) is necessary not just for the distinction between theology and philosophy as sciences, but also for Aquinas’ count of the faith and salvation of the individual Christian. I would add, too, that the latter issue is older in the historical record than the former: Gregory’s remarks discussed earlier in this dissertation are older than Christian Aristotelian concerns about the division of the sciences.

³ Fortunately, such knowledge is impossible in this life according to Aquinas. Yet it is dangerous to even try to prove those items of Christian belief that surpass human reason, for as Aquinas says in the same passage, even attempting to gain complete comprehension of the faith constitutes the sin of presumption: Aquinas, In Boeth. De Trinitate 1.2.1. “Ad secundum dicendum quod perscrutari est quasi ad finem scrutari. Hoc autem illicitum et
course, the classic Thomistic division of Christian belief into the articles of faith and the preambles of faith. Although he does not explicitly draw the distinction in the present text, he makes it early in the *Summa Theologiae* (1.2.2), saying that “God’s existence and similar claims that can be known by natural reason to be true of God (see Rom. 1) are not articles of faith, but preambles to the articles.”

4 Just as grace presupposes nature, faith presupposes certain truths that can be proven by natural reason. But precisely because they can be so proven, they are not

praesumptuosum est, ut aliquis sic scrutetur divina quasi ad finem comprehensionis perversurus.”

As Dougherty notes, there are a few places where Aquinas says that the articles of faith are self-evident to the faithful: *In I Sent ProI. 1.3 ad 2*, where he says that they are *per se noti habenti fidei* (“known *per se* to those who have faith”); in *ST* 1/2.100.1 ad 3, where he says that the first general principles of the natural law are *per se nota rationi humanae, vel per naturam vel per fidei*; and in *ST* 1/2.100.4. ad 1, where he says that belief in God is *per se notum* for the faithful. Dougherty attempts to find a way for Aquinas to say that the articles of faith are self-evident, but I find his solution hard to follow. He says that although the articles of faith are not *per se nota* with respect to human nature (human beings in their natural state cannot know them), they are *per se nota* to “a particular subset of human beings” (Dougherty 175). Who comprises this subset of human beings? The only possibility Dougherty discusses is that of the blessed in heaven (*ibid.* 173). It’s true that, for Aquinas, the blessed in heaven know the articles of faith. But they don’t have faith, precisely because they know them: in the words of the *In Sent.* passage cited above, they are *not habentes fidei*. So Dougherty’s explanation fails to explain what Aquinas means by saying that the articles of faith are *per se nota* to the faithful and does not provide a challenge to the standard reading of Aquinas on this issue.

I think that Dougherty is making too much of a loose use of language on Aquinas’ part. In all three of the passages cited above “known” translates *noti* rather than a more precise word like *scitii*, which would refer precisely to scientific knowledge. And to my knowledge Aquinas never says that faith is *scientia* or that the articles of faith are *scita* (unlike William of Auxerre who, as we’ll see in Chapter Three, says both that the articles of faith are *per se nota* and that faith is *scientia*). And in the passages above, Aquinas has other goals than showing that the faithful have *scientia* of the articles. In the passage from the Sentences commentary, he is showing how theology has first principles that are legitimate first principles even if they don’t seem to be such to unbelievers. In the two passages from the Summa Theologicae, he is showing that the Ten Commandments are reducible to the fundamental precepts of natural law and that the need for worshipping God is as obvious to the faithful as the fundamental precepts of natural law are to everyone else. In all these cases Aquinas can make his point by saying that the articles of faith are *per se nota* in a loose sense: the faithful have full confidence that they’re true without any doubt and without any need for further evidence. He doesn’t need to say that they are known *per se* in a strong, scientific sense: they are not *per se scita*.

So, given that, as Dougherty acknowledges, “in his formal treatments of faith Aquinas emphasizes the role of the will” and hence denies that the articles of faith are known (scitum) (see Dougherty 167-168), I think it’s best to take the handful of passages Dougherty cites as instances of loose language rather than clues to an alternative interpretation of Aquinas.

---

4 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1.2.2. “Deum esse, et alia huiusmodi quae per rationem naturalem nota possunt esse de Deo, ut dicitur Rom. I, non sunt articuli fidei, sed praemacula ad articulos.”
articles of faith, which by definition are unprovable.\(^5\) Within Aquinas’ religious epistemology, unprovable articles of faith solve an important problem: they ensure that philosophy is not a threat to the merit of faith.\(^6\)

Obviously, Aquinas does not make these claims out of any suspicion of or antagonism toward the use of reason in matters of faith. However, his knowledge-prioritarianism entails that he distinguish the articles of faith from the preambles of faith, carving out a special class of beliefs which one must not attempt to prove.\(^7\) Attempting to understand Aquinas on this issue will serve to introduce us to the question of whether the same thing can be simultaneously known by demonstration and believed by faith as it was discussed in the Middle Ages.

In section 1a we will look at the role that faith plays in the perfection of the human person. Aquinas thinks that the process of attaining ultimate beatitude must involve voluntary assent to propositions that cannot be naturally known and that this assent must be caused by divine grace. To argue for this claim, Aquinas lays out an “apprenticeship” model of beatification, whereby God leads us to intellectual perfection in the same way as an earthly

\(^5\) We will see later that this distinction is not universally held among other scholastics. William of Auxerre holds that even provable claims like “God exists” can be articles of faith, and we will see that his religious epistemology has no need for the distinction between articles and preambles.

\(^6\) I am not arguing that this is the sole or even primary reason why Aquinas distinguishes between articles and preambles of faith. I am merely saying that such a distinction is a necessary consequence of his view of faith and merit, such that even if he had no other reason for positing such a distinction, he would still (if intellectually consistent) have posited it merely on the basis of his view of faith and merit described in this chapter.

\(^7\) Of course, he also has other reasons for thinking that the articles of faith cannot be demonstrated. For example, he thinks that the Trinity cannot be demonstrated because the Persons act in total unity in creation, and so the existence of the divine Persons cannot be inferred from creatures (see ST 1.31.2). Again, I am not claiming that Aquinas’ knowledge-prioritarianism is his sole or primary motivation for distinguishing the articles of faith from the preambles of faith. Indeed, I make no claims about Aquinas’ personal motivations whatsoever, and within his system of thought there are other intellectual motivations for making such a distinction. It is even possible (though I doubt it) that he was not even consciously aware that his view on faith and knowledge makes the distinction between articles and preambles necessary. I do claim that Aquinas’ knowledge-prioritarianism does indeed make the distinction between articles and preambles necessary. And I think In Boeth. de Trin. 1.2.1 ad 5 offers pretty good evidence that Aquinas was aware that his knowledge-prioritarianism made the distinction necessary.
teacher does: by propounding to us propositions that transcend our understanding, in order that later on we will be able to grasp them for ourselves.

In section 1b we will see how Aquinas’ account of faith, combined with certain epistemological views that he holds, entails knowledge-prioritarianism. Aquinas rejects doxastic voluntarism with regard to demonstrative knowledge: knowing is not subject to the will. But one’s belief must be subject to free will in order to be meritorious. Since faith essentially involves merit, a disposition to believe on the basis of faith is incompatible with a disposition to believe on the basis of a demonstration: the same thing cannot be at once known and believed. Moreover, Aquinas’ doxastic involuntarism entails that someone who possesses a demonstrative basis for a proposition automatically forms a basing relation between a demonstration and the proposition, and thus a disposition to believe on the basis of a demonstration. And since the same thing cannot be known demonstratively and believed by faith, it becomes impossible for them to believe that proposition by faith. Aquinas, then, is a knowledge-prioritarian.

1a Aquinas’ Philosophy of Faith

In this section I will argue that, according to Aquinas, it can be proved by natural reason alone that, in order to attain ultimate beatitude, human beings must be empowered by God to assent by free will to propositions for which they lack demonstrative knowledge. First, we will show that Aquinas thinks that one must be guided to ultimate happiness freely, and not by coercion. This requires some cognition of one’s ultimate end. Second, we will show that Aquinas has an “apprenticeship” model of beatification, whereby God leads a person to ultimate happiness gradually, analogously to the way a teacher turns a student into a competent practitioner of the teacher’s discipline. An earthly student begins by accepting her teacher’s claims on the teacher’s
authority, and only later comes to know them for herself. Likewise, someone being led to ultimate happiness by God begins by accepting what God teaches her merely on God’s authority, and only when fully beatified (in the next life) comes to know them for herself. Third, we will show that Aquinas thinks that all of this can be known by natural reason alone.

Aquinas’ discussion of faith in both the *Summa Contra Gentiles* and the *Summa Theologiae* is oriented around human beings’ ultimate end or purpose, something that Aquinas thinks can be known naturally, even if it cannot be obtained naturally. The ultimate purpose of our existence is to know God directly. Aquinas argues for this claim in *ST* 1/2.2.8, on whether human beings’ ultimate happiness can consist in anything created. He answers negatively, and his argument goes something like this:

1. One’s ultimate happiness (*beatitudo*) is that in which one’s desires are fulfilled.
2. What fulfills human desires is the universal good.
3. Therefore, human beings’ ultimate happiness must involve attaining the universal good. (1,2)
4. No creature is the universal good.
5. No creature constitutes human beings’ ultimate happiness. (3,4)

Ultimate happiness (*beatitudo*) consists in someone’s desires or “appetite” being entirely fulfilled. But human beings desire not just particular, created goods, but “the universal good.” Aquinas concludes from this that the human appetite is fulfilled only by the “universal good” or

---

8 Aquinas, then, sees faith as a form of belief on the basis of authoritative testimony. Space does not permit us to discuss Aquinas’ view of testimony in detail, nor do we need to in order to prove the main point of this dissertation. But for an excellent essay on Aquinas’ view of testimony, which situates it among historical and current views, see Siebert, “Aquinas on Testimonial Justification: Faith and Opinion.”
God, rather than any finite good. To make his point, he draws an analogy with the intellect. Just as the intellect is not determined to particulars but has “universal truth” as its object, the will is not determined to created goods but desires what is universally or absolutely good. Such a desire can’t be fulfilled by any created thing, since they’re all mere finite, particular goods: it can only be fulfilled by God. How is it fulfilled by God? Since man is an intellectual being, his desires are fulfilled by seeing, i.e. directly knowing and contemplating, the Divine Essence for himself.

Further, reaching this end of seeing God requires divine help, and this help involves our cognition. In SCG 3.147, Aquinas argues that this perfect end is not something anyone can achieve on their own: we require divine help. Then, in Summa Contra Gentiles 3.152, a passage which we will return to throughout section 1a, he argues that this divine help has a necessary cognitive element: it involves our beliefs.

---

9 Aquinas, ST 1/2.2.8. “Beatitudo enim est bonum perfectum, quod totaliter quietat appetitum, alioquin non esset ultimus finis, si adhuc restaret aliquid appetendum. Obiectum autem voluntatis, quae est appetitus humanus, est universale bonum; sicut obiectum intellectus est universale verum.”

10 I have some difficulty understanding exactly what Aquinas is saying here, though his general point is pretty clear. Does Aquinas really think our intellect can apprehend any truth? Certainly there are things about God we don’t know. On the other hand, if we take universale verum to mean “abstract truth,” then we must take universale bonum to mean “abstract good.” But God is not an abstract good. In that case, Aquinas’ argument from analogy fails. I am not sure how to solve the dilemma here, but fortunately my task is not to defend Aquinas, but to explain him. The general thrust of his argument is quite clear: just as the intellect is not determined to particular created truths but has an infinite capacity for knowledge, the will is not determined to particular created goods but has an infinite capacity for fulfillment.

11 Aquinas, ST 1/2.3.8. “Respondeo dicendum quod ultima et perfecta beatitudo non potest esse nisi in visione divinae essentiae…Ad perfectam igitur beatitudinem requiritur quod intellectus pertingat ad ipsam essentiam primae causae. Et sic perfectionem suam habebit per unionem ad Deum sicut ad obiectum, in quo solo beatitudo hominis consistit, ut supra dictum est.”

12 Aquinas, SCG 3.147. “Sed ulterius ultimus finis hominis in quadam veritatis cognitione constitutus est quae naturre faculatatem ipsius excedit: ut scilicet ipsam primam veritatem videat in seipsa, sicut supra ostensum est…Si igitur homo ordinatur in finem qui eius facultatem naturalem excedat, necesse est ei aliquod auxilium divinitus adhiberi supernaturale, per quod tendat in finem.”
The fact that divine grace causes charity in us makes it necessary that faith is also caused in us by grace. For the movement by which we are directed by grace to our ultimate end is voluntary, not violent, as was proven above. But there can only be a voluntary movement toward something if one is aware of it. Therefore, cognition of our ultimate end must be provided to us by grace, so that we can be led to it willingly. But this awareness cannot be by way of open vision in this life, as was proven above. Therefore, it must be cognition by faith.

Moreover, whenever a being engages in cognition, the kind of cognition involved follows upon the being’s proper nature. Therefore angels, humans, and brute animals have different kinds of cognition, corresponding to their different natures, as is obvious from the foregoing. But so that humans can attain their ultimate end, another perfection, above their proper nature, is added—in other words, grace (as we showed). Therefore, above natural cognition that humans have, another kind of cognition must be imparted to them which goes beyond natural reason. And this is the cognition of faith, which has to do with things that are not seen by natural reason.

Also, whenever something is moved by some agent toward what is proper to that agent, the thing moved must initially be imperfectly subject to the impressions of the agent as if to something alien, not belonging to it; until at the end of the movement the impressions do become proper to it. For example, when wood is heated by fire, at first the heat is not proper to the wood, but foreign to its nature. But at the end, when the wood itself is alight, the heat becomes proper and connatural to it. Likewise, when someone is taught by a teacher, necessarily at first he receives the teacher’s ideas not as understanding them for himself, but on trust, as if they stood above his capacity. But at the end, when he becomes educated, he can understand them. As is clear from what we said earlier, we are directed to our ultimate end by the help of divine grace. But our ultimate end is the manifest vision of the First Truth in Himself, as was shown above. Therefore, it is necessary that before arriving at that end the human intellect be subjected to God by way of trust, brought about by divine grace.  

13 Aquinas, SCG 3.152. “Ex hoc autem quod divina gratia caritatem in nobis causat, necessarium est quod etiam in nobis fides per gratiam causetur. Motus enim quo per gratiam in ultimum finem dirigimur, est voluntarius, non violentus, ut supra ostensum est. Voluntarius autem motus in aliquid esse non potest nisi sit cognitum. Oportet igitur quod per gratiam in nobis cognitio ultimi finis praestituatur, ad hoc quod voluntarie dirigamur in ipsum. Haec autem cognitio non potest esse secundum apertam visionem in statu isto, ut supra probatum est. Oportet igitur quod sit cognitio per fidem. Amplius. In quolibet cognoscente modus cognitionis consequitur modum propriae naturae: unde alius modus cognitionis est Angeli, hominis, et bruti animalis, secundum quod eorum naturae diversae sunt, ut ex praemissis patet. Sed homini, ad consequendum ultimum finem, additur aliqua perfectio super propriam naturam, scilicet gratia, ut ostensum est. Oportet igitur quod etiam super cognitionem naturalem hominis, addatur in eo aliqua cognitio quae rationem naturalem excedat. Et haec est cognitio fidei, quae est de his quaestat per rationem naturalem. Item. Quandocumque ab aliquo agente movetur aliquid ab id quod est proprium illi agenti, oportet quod a principio ipsum mobile subdatur impressionibus agentis imperfecte, quasi alienis et non propriis sibi, quosque fiant ei propriæ in termino motus: sicut lignum ab igne primo calefit, et ille calor non est proprius ligno, sed praeter naturam ipsius; in fine autem, quando iam lignum ignitum est, fit ei calor proprius et connaturalis. Et similiter, cum aliquis a magistro docetur, oportet quod a principio conceptiones magistri recipiat non quasi eas per se intelligens, sed per modum credulitatis, quasi supra suam capacitatem existentes: in fine autem, quando iam edoctus fuerit, eas poterit intelligere. Sicut autem ex dictis patet, auxilio divinae gratiae dirigimur in ultimum finem. Ultimus autem
In, *SCG* 3.152, Aquinas is showing that this divine help leading us toward beatitude involves cognition. He argues in the following way:

1. Our movement toward our perfect end is voluntary.
2. Voluntary movement toward an end involves cognition of that end.
3. Therefore, our movement toward our perfect end involves cognition of our perfect end.

First, let’s look at premise 1: **Our movement toward our perfect end is voluntary.** In *SCG* 3.152, Aquinas says that “the movement by which we are directed by grace to our ultimate end is voluntary, not violent.” For “man is ordered to his end by his will,” whose object is the good. An act of the will is necessary for a rational being to achieve its end. Without the consent of the will, whatever it achieved could not, by definition, be its end. Further, “man reaches his ultimate end by acts of the virtues, for happiness is given as the reward of virtue.” But acts of virtue cannot be coerced; therefore we cannot reach our ultimate end without our will.¹⁴ Both arguments for premise 1 proceed from human nature: given that we are rational beings with intellects and wills who are capable of developing virtue, we must reach our end in just this way (otherwise, it would be like an irrational animal that could achieve its end merely by nutrition, without sensation).

---


Item. Homo pervenit ad ultimum suum finem per actus virtutum: felicitas enim virtutis praemium ponitur. Actus autem coacti non sunt actus virtutum: nam in virtute praecipuum est electio, quae sine voluntario esse non potest, cui violentum contrarium est. Non igitur divinitus homo cogitur ad recte agendum.”
Second, we have premise 2: **Voluntary movement toward an end involves cognition of that end.** Aquinas doesn’t argue for this claim, but it seems pretty straightforward: to want something, you have to have some awareness of it. If I have never heard of a certain dish available at a restaurant, I can’t go to the restaurant to order that dish. So, in order to voluntarily have the perfect end as a goal in life, you have to know something about it.

The next question is: Given that some kind of cognition of our perfect end is necessary, what kind of cognition must this be? Aquinas says that the required cognition “can’t be along the lines of open vision in this life, so it must be by faith.”15 He seems to have a disjunction like the following in mind:

1. The cognition of our perfect end required for achieving it comes either by open vision in this life or by faith.
2. The cognition of our perfect end required for achieving it does not come by open vision in this life.
3. Therefore, the cognition of our perfect end required for achieving it comes by faith.

We will begin with premise 2: **The cognition of our perfect end required for achieving it does not come by open vision in this life.** It is not too hard to see why someone should endorse premise 2: it illustrates something that is not true of goals in general, but is certainly true of *cognitive* goals. Generally speaking, cognizing something does not entail actually having it: my awareness of hamburgers does not entail my actually having a hamburger. Not even a complete scientific understanding of what a hamburger is would entail having a hamburger. However, a sufficient understanding of the Pythagorean theorem—an “open vision” of it, if you

---

15 Aquinas, *SCG* 3.152. “Haec autem cognitio non potest esse secundum apertam visionem in statu isto, ut supra probatum est. Oportet igitur quod sit cognitio per fidem.”
will—does entail (indeed, just is) possessing the Pythagorean theorem. This is because the Pythagorean theorem is not something external that can be gotten by non-intellectual means, but is an intelligible object. So, although understanding a material object does not entail possessing the object, understanding the intelligible object does.

Aquinas, as we saw, thinks that God is an intelligible object, and that our perfect end is God, grasped directly by our intellect. But that means that when we say that achieving our perfect end requires cognition of it (i.e., of God), we have to be very careful about what kind of cognition we are talking about. It can’t be the kind of full, complete, direct cognition involved in the Beatific Vision—for in that case, rather than moving toward our end, we would already have achieved it. Even worse, in that case our achieving the end would not be voluntary: we would simply have no choice but to see God, for, as Aquinas will later put it, “choice has to do with the things that lead to the end, not to the ultimate end.” We do not choose our ultimate end; rather, we choose the means to that end. This explains why Aquinas is careful to specify that the cognition in question in SCG 3.152 is not itself the Beatific Vision. We must be aware of our ultimate end intellectually without actually achieving that end—without having what he calls “open vision” of that end. Premise 2, then, is quite plausible.

The more troubling premise is the first: The cognition of our perfect end required for achieving it comes either by open vision in this life or by faith. Given that the required cognition isn’t by open vision, Aquinas concludes that it must be by faith, that is, by cognition

---

16 We talk this way about intelligible objects all the time: “Do you have French?” “Yes, but I have a poor grasp of calculus.”

17 Aquinas, SCG 4.95. “Ex quo apparet quod talis immobilitas voluntatis libero arbitrio non repugnat, cuius actus est eligere: electio enim est eorum quae sunt ad finem, non autem ultimi finis.”
supernaturally given by God’s grace. But this leaves out a third option: knowledge by natural reason. It is perfectly possible, after all, to know by natural reason that our ultimate end is the Beatific Vision. Aquinas showed how this is so by giving philosophical arguments for this claim that do not rely on Revelation in the very book of *Summa Contra Gentiles* under discussion. In *SCG* 3.37 he argued that humanity’s ultimate end consists in the contemplation of God, in 3.52-53 that we cannot achieve this end naturally, and in 3.147 that we need special help from God in order to achieve this end. All of this, Aquinas thinks, can be shown using natural demonstration: someone without faith could understand and assent to Aquinas’ arguments. So Aquinas thinks it is possible to attain awareness of one’s perfect end by reason alone. This means that premise 1 in Aquinas’ argument must be modified to make premise 1 plausible, and an additional premise added for the argument to be valid (modifications italicized):

1. The cognition of our perfect and required for achieving it comes either by open vision in this life, by faith, or by natural reason.
2. The cognition of our perfect end required for achieving it does not come by open vision in this life.
3. The cognition of our perfect end required for achieving it does not come by natural reason.
4. Therefore, the cognition of our perfect end required for achieving it comes by faith.

We have preserved the argument’s validity, and premise 1 now seems more likely to be true. Moreover, although this isn’t the way Aquinas presented the argument initially, he seems to be aware of the need for this fuller version of it, because in the next section of *SCG* 3.152 he gives two arguments for the claim that the kind of cognition needed to achieve our perfect end
does not come by natural reason. I will call these the **mode argument** and the **apprenticeship argument**. We will treat the first briefly and then spend more time on the second.

First there is the **mode argument**. Aquinas states that “in every cognizer, the mode of cognition follows from the mode of its proper nature.” That’s why angels, humans, and irrational animals all have different kinds of cognitions (angels through a kind of direct apprehension, humans through composing, dividing, and ratiocination, and animals through sensation and imagination). Now, when humans are led by God to their perfect end, they receive “a sort of perfection above their proper nature.” In a way, they receive an enhancement to their nature. And, since a given nature leads to a certain mode of cognition, Aquinas thinks that an enhancement to nature must lead to a new, enhanced mode of cognition. So, being led to our perfect end requires a new kind of cognition that is not natural knowledge but is not open vision either. According to Aquinas, this is faith.

Second there is the **apprenticeship argument**. In short, Aquinas thinks that our journey toward beatitude involves a process like that of a student or apprentice learning a discipline or a skill from their master. Although we all begin with some kind of natural awareness of God (just as a math student begins with a rudimentary awareness of numbers, and a carpenter’s apprentice with rudimentary gross and fine motor skills), the transition from that natural awareness to the Beatific Vision must be *(a)* gradual rather than sudden, involving stages between natural awareness and open vision; and *(b)* guided by a Teacher, i.e. God. Aquinas claims there that whenever something is moved by an agent toward what is proper to that agent, the thing that is moved begins the movement imperfectly: it has to be gradually conditioned to the movement to which the agent is subjecting it. Aquinas gives the analogy of wood being heated by fire (first the
wood steams, then it is scorched, then it has flames on its surface, then the wood itself is aglow all the way through). Another useful analogy, used by Aquinas in other contexts, is that of a saw cutting into wood. Anyone who has sawn wood by hand knows that there is considerable skill involved in starting a cut properly. Even the sharpest blade, if presented to the board with no preparation, will skip and scratch all over the wood (and maybe your arm). So you start by holding the blade at the proper angle to the board and bracing it with the nail of your thumb so it doesn’t shift. You scrape the blade’s teeth backward on the board a couple times to create a shallow divot in which the blade can rest. When the wood is stubborn, you pre-cut the divot with a knife and a chisel. Your first cuts are careful and tentative: the saw does not want to move the way you want it to. But if you persevere, eventually the saw gets in a groove (literally), and once it’s a quarter inch or so in the wood, you can move it almost effortlessly. A well-maintained, high-quality saw in the hands of a skilled sawyer will virtually cut the board itself: it feels less like a tool and more like an extension of your arm. The object of motion has been assimilated to the activity of the agent—but only at the end of a gradual process. The saw begins its movement in an imperfect way that does not entirely fit the activity of the agent, and ends as a virtual organ of the agent. Aquinas also gives the example of a student learning from his teacher: first he takes the teacher’s claims on authority, gradually learns more about the claims, and then finally understands them himself. This, of course, is not merely an analogy: faith, for Aquinas, actually is belief on the basis of a teacher’s authority, the difference being that the authority involved is not a human teacher, but God.¹⁸

¹⁸ John Jenkins, in his book *Knowledge and Faith in Thomas Aquinas* has shown at length to what degree Aquinas thinks this principle applies to faith, and I am indebted to him for the “apprenticeship” reading of Aquinas. In the first several chapters of his book, Jenkins shows how Aquinas’ conception of theology as a scientific discipline is based on the “notion of apprenticeship” found in his reading of the *Posterior Analytics*, in which the student accepts
For Aquinas, therefore, mere awareness of what humanity’s perfect end is, even awareness that reaching that end requires divine help, is not sufficient. We may begin with a notion like that, but a gradual attainment of more specific beliefs about that end is necessary: we believe what the Teacher says on the Teacher’s authority in order to, eventually, become like the Teacher.

1b Faith, Knowledge, and the Will

In this section I will show that Aquinas’ philosophical view of faith, combined with certain epistemological doctrines that he holds, entails knowledge-prioritarianism. That is, Aquinas thinks, for purely philosophical reasons, that if someone simultaneously has God’s witness through faith that a proposition is true and a demonstrative argument proving that proposition, then they have demonstrative knowledge, and not faith, that the proposition is true. This makes it necessary for him to hold that there is at least one article of faith, that is, one proposition which must be believed in order to reach one’s ultimate end and which cannot be known but must be believed on God’s authority. Otherwise, it would be possible to know all essential Christian principles on the authority of the teacher in order to eventually come to know them in the way that the teacher knows them. Faith, then, and the science of sacred doctrine that takes faith as its starting point, is the beginning of becoming like God intellectually, a process which ends in the Beatific Vision (see Jenkins 77 for a summary of his view). Just as the student of mathematics shares a little in the knowledge of the mathematician, faith is a limited participation in divine knowledge, such that “the believer relies on God not only for what he believes, but also, in some sense, for the manner or mode in which these propositions are known” (Jenkins 220). And in fact, as Jenkins points out, the science of sacred doctrine, and therefore the cognition of faith, has several features reminiscent of God’s knowledge. Faith gives us cognition of contingent, particular truths (such as the world’s being created in time), just as God (unlike humans) has scientific knowledge of contingent particulars (Jenkins 74; see ST 1.46.2). Sacred doctrine and faith deal with diverse topics covered in diverse human sciences, all considered under one ratio, just as God knows both Himself and all creatures by a single act (Jenkins 75; see ST 1.1.3). Sacred doctrine is both speculative and practical, just as God’s knowledge combines both speculative knowledge of Himself and practical knowledge of His creative action (Jenkins 75; see ST 1.1.4). Faith is an initial, rudimentary sharing in the kind of cognition we will have when we see God face to face. As we saw in SCG 3.152, reaching our perfect end requires God acting upon us to make us like Himself, like how a mathematician makes his student into a mathematician, and a woodworker makes his apprentice into a woodworker. It is necessary, then, for attaining our perfect end, that God act upon us to make us like Him in our knowledge, by giving us an awareness that God is our ultimate end, an awareness that begins imperfectly but becomes gradually clearer, until we reach perfect knowledge of God in the Beatific Vision.
doctrines, making it impossible to believe any of them by faith and therefore impossible to reach one’s ultimate end. This would make philosophy dangerous to one’s salvation, a conclusion Aquinas does not want to support.

First, we must show that, for Aquinas, it is impossible to simultaneously believe by faith and know demonstrably the same proposition. In *Summa Theologiae* 2/2.1.4, Aquinas explains the difference between knowledge, faith, and opinion. The question at hand is whether the object of faith is something “seen” (*obiectum fidei sit aliquid visum*). This is Aquinas’ response:

“Faith” implies the assent of the intellect to what is believed. But the intellect can assent to something in one of two ways. In the first way, it is moved by the object itself. This happens either because the object is cognized (*cognitum*) through itself; as clearly happens in the case of first principles, of which there is understanding (*intellectus*); or because the object is cognized (*cognitum*) through something else, as clearly happens in the case of conclusions, of which we have knowledge (*scientia*). In the second way, the intellect assents to something not because it is sufficiently moved by its own object, but because it turns voluntarily (*voluntarie*) to one side more than the other, through a sort of choice (*electionem*). Now, if this happens with doubt and fear of the other side, it’s called opinion (*opinio*). But if it happens with certitude, without such fear, it’s called faith (*fides*).

Things are said to be “seen” when they move our intellect or sense through themselves toward cognition of them. Clearly, then, neither faith nor opinion can concern what is seen by either the senses or the intellect.

---

19 This is far from a controversial claim about Aquinas. Dougherty acknowledges that according to Aquinas “it is not possible for one to believe and know the same truth simultaneously” (Dougherty 167—and this in an essay purporting to show that there is a sense in which the articles of faith are self-evident according to Aquinas!). Di Ceglie (p. 135) also says that “demonstration and faith [are] mutually exclusive with respect to the same object” according to Aquinas. However, Di Ceglie also claims (pp. 142ff.) that there is a sense in which Aquinas thinks that there is a sense in which the same thing can be known and believed according to Aquinas (his is the only dissenting voice I have found in the literature). But his support for this claim is quite weak. His justification is found in *ST* 2/2.2.10 ad 2, where Aquinas says that *rationes demonstrativae ad ea quae sunt fidei, praeambula tamen ad articulos...non diminuunt rationem caritatis*. Di Ceglie draws from this the idea that someone who has faith and love for God and also proves certain beliefs that he holds (such as God’s existence) does not have less faith or less merit. Rather, the fact that they desire to know everything they can about God only proves their love for him more. But here Aquinas specifically says that he is talking about the preambles of faith, not the articles of faith. And Aquinas is quite clear, as we will see in this section of the chapter, that once you have a proof for a preamble of faith, you no longer believe it by faith. So Di Ceglie’s claim does not hold water, and the traditional interpretation of Aquinas on this score is still the correct one.

20 Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 2/2.1.4. “Fides importat assensum intellectus ad id quod creditur. Assentit autem alciui intellectus dupliciter. Uno modo, quia ad hoc movetur ab ipso objecto, quod est vel per seipsum cognitum, sicut patet in principiis primis, quorum est intellectus; vel est per aliud cognitum, sicut patet de conclusionibus,
Faith involves the assent of the intellect. But the intellect assents in different ways, so Aquinas gives us a taxonomy of different kinds of intellectual assent. He seems to have propositional belief in mind in all cases; at the very least, there are propositional beliefs that fit into every category he gives, and both Aquinas’ question and ours concerns propositional beliefs, so we will interpret what he says as if this is what he had in mind. Here are two charts, each covering the same material in a different way, that will help orient the reader:

Figure 1. Graph of Aquinas’ species of assent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>object seen directly</th>
<th>object seen indirectly</th>
<th>voluntary</th>
<th>certain</th>
<th>Doubtful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>intellectus</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>scientia</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fides</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>opinio</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

quarum est scientia. Alio modo intellectus assentit alicui non quia sufficienter moveatur ab objecto proprio, sed per quandam electionem voluntarie declinans in unam partem magis quam in aliam. Et si quidem hoc fit cum dubitatione et formidine alterius partis, erit opinio, si autem fit cum certitudine absque tali formidine, erit fides. Illa autem videri dicuntur quae per seipsa movent intellectum nostrum vel sensum ad sui cognitionem. Unde manifestum est quod nec fides nec opinio potest esse de visis aut secundum sensum aut secundum intellectum.”
Figure 2. Flowchart of Aquinas’ species of assent.

The first division of kinds of assent has to do with how the intellect is moved toward its object: either it is sufficiently moved by the object itself, or it is not. Each of these, in turn, are divided into two sub-types of assent. When the intellect is sufficiently moved by its object, this can happen either directly through the object of cognition itself, or indirectly through something else that is cognized. That is, the object of assent and the object of cognition can either be the same or different. The former is called understanding (intellectus), the latter knowledge (scientia). When the intellect is not sufficiently moved by its object, a sort of choice (quandam electionem) to believe must be made. This choice can either involve doubt or fear that the negation of the proposition believed could be true, or be without such doubt and fear. The former is called opinion (opinio), the latter faith (fides).

---

21 On Aquinas’ view, then, faith excludes doubt: faith, unlike opinion but like knowledge, is certain. A little later, in ST 2/2.4.8, Aquinas clarifies the sense in which faith is certain. He says that there are two kinds of certainty: certainty with regard to the subject and certainty with regard to the cause. Certainty with regard to the subject refers to the degree to which one’s “intellect attains to” the object. In this sense, demonstrative knowledge is more certain than faith, because the intellect does not fully attain to the object of faith: it is not evident to the intellect, which is why the will has to step in. Certainty with regard to the cause seems to refer to the cause of one’s assent: since the assent of faith is caused by God Himself, while the assent of knowledge is caused by mere human reason, faith is more certain in in this sense. In De Veritate 14.1 ad 7 Aquinas clarifies that this second kind of certitude refers to the
Let’s take the first category first. When the intellect is moved by the object itself, the object itself provides a sufficient basis for the intellect’s believing it. One way this happens is when the object itself is directly apprehended. This happens in the case of first principles: when I consider the proposition, “A whole is greater than its parts,” that proposition provides all the reason I need to believe it. This is direct intellectual apprehension or intellectus “understanding.”

The other way this happens is when one proposition is deduced from propositions known in the first way. The intellect assents to the conclusions of the deductive argument through the premises, which it cognizes directly. This is inference from first principles or scientia “knowledge.” In ST 2/1.5, Aquinas seems to conflate these two categories in terms of what is “seen (visum) or known (scitum).” So we can give a general Thomistic definition of demonstrative knowledge: “For any intellectual being a and any proposition P, a knows P iff a validly deduces P from what a’s intellect directly apprehends.”

This definition as written defines the act of demonstrative knowledge. It defines the habit as well, mutatis mutandis, since habits “are defined by their proper act in relation to their proper object.”23 The habit of knowledge in a is the disposition for a to be moved to believe P by what a’s intellect apprehends. The definition also specifies the kind of basis and basing relation “firmness of adherence,” and says that because the First Truth (i.e. God) is “a stronger cause than the light of reason” it causes our intellect to assent more firmly to the articles of faith than it does even to self-evident first principles.

22 In De Veritate 14.1 Aquinas gives a slightly different taxonomy. There he does not say that opinio necessarily involves a choice or an act of the will, but simply says that opinio occurs when the intellect is somewhat moved toward belief in a proposition, but not decisively. This seems to mean that when the intellect is not moved to believe P, and yet has stronger evidence for P than for ~P, the intellect believes P without the command of the will, but in a hesitating way. He also mentions the condition of one who doubts (dubitantis dispositio), who does not accept either the proposition in question or its negation. Since the subject of our dissertation is faith and not opinio, this does not affect our analysis in a relevant way.

23 ST 2/2.4.1. “Cum habitus cognoscantur per actus et actus per obiecta, fides, cum sit habitus quidam, debet definiri per proprium actum in comparatione ad proprium obiectum.”
involved in such belief: when $a$ has demonstrative knowledge of $P$, $a$’s belief that $P$ is based either in $P$ itself or another proposition which is its own basis, from which $P$ is deductively proven (or another proposition which is known on the basis of a third, which is its own basis, or…etc.). In this case, the intellect has in itself everything it needs to believe the proposition in question: it is moved by what it “sees” or apprehends. Indeed, it is moved to the object of assent immediately, with no act of the will involved.\(^{24}\) In *De Veritate* 14.1, Aquinas says that when the intellect is moved to assent without reservation, this happens either because of the intelligible object or because of the will, without leaving room for any middle or mixed position.\(^{25}\) The two categories are mutually exclusive: when assent happens because of the intelligible object, then—as in the cases we are currently describing—it does not happen because of the will. Aquinas, then, is a doxastic involuntarist with regard to *scientia*,\(^{26}\) and in this case, at least, he denies that

\(^{24}\) Note that Aquinas’ distinction between knowledge and lesser forms of propositional assent has more to do with psychological causation than epistemological justification. Eleonore Stump (*Aquinas* 366) states that Aquinas has a roughly modern conception of justification, and then says that it is puzzling that faith, for Aquinas, seems unjustified. If by *scientia* Aquinas means “justified true belief,” then this is indeed a puzzle. But this conception of knowledge appears nowhere in Aquinas. Aquinas is not saying that “knowing $P$” entails being justified, warranted, or within one’s rights in believing $P$. He is saying that “knowing $P$” means being caused to believe $P$ in a certain way, such that one could not believe otherwise. Once this is understood, the puzzle about whether faith is justified disappears, because it’s simply not what Aquinas is talking about. It’s hard to guess at what kind of theory of justification or warrant Aquinas would have developed had he been introduced to the concepts, but I don’t see anything in Aquinas’ thought to preclude the idea that we can be justified in believing all sorts of things for which we do not have *scientia*. As Jenkins puts it (p. 179), “Suppose a student has a teacher who has consistently proven to be trustworthy and competent, and that teacher tells the student that Gödel’s theorem is true. It would certainly seem this student then has sufficient evidence to believe Gödel’s theorem is true, even though he does not have *scientia* until he has worked through and fully grasped the proof.” So Stump’s complicated explanation of the justification of faith seems unnecessary and a bit anachronistic.

\(^{25}\) Aquinas, *De Veritate* 14.1. “Quandoque vero intellectus possibilis determinatur ad hoc quod totaliter adhaereat uni parti; sed hoc est quandoque ab intelligibili, quandoque a voluntate.”

\(^{26}\) Aquinas’ doxastic (in)voluntarism does not really speak to the debate over whether Aquinas is a libertarian or compatibilist with regard to free will. Aquinas does not say that it is essential to faith (or opinion) that the one believing could have chosen not to believe, nor does he deny it. What he says in the passages we are studying is that in the case of knowledge, the intellect is determined to believe by the knowledge-producing basis, without the command of the will; and in the case of faith and opinion, the intellect is not determined to believe, but requires the command of the will. The issue is not whether the principle of alternate possibilities holds, but which power of the
you can believe on the basis of two bases at the same time. Faith, as noted above, intrinsically involves an act of the will: for any proposition P, in order to assent to P by faith, your will must cause your assent to P. But if you have demonstrative knowledge of P, your will does not cause your assent to P: rather, P is so evident to you that your intellect assents to it without an input for the will. There is nothing left for the will to do in that case. Thus, if you were to simultaneously know P and have faith that P, your will would simultaneously be causing and not causing your assent to P, which is impossible. It is not surprising, then, that in *ST* 2/2.1.5, in the very next article after the one we have been studying, when Aquinas considers the question of whether the same thing can be known demonstratively and believed by faith, he does little more than cite *ST* 2/2.1.4 and simply say that this is impossible (*impossibile est quod ab eodem idem sit scitum et creditum*) because it would mean that the same object is “seen” and “unseen”—in other words, the same object is apprehended and assented to by the intellect without the will and with the will, so that the will both is and is not involved in the act of assent. His only qualification is that the same proposition—namely, a preamble of faith such as “God exists,” as opposed to an article of faith properly speaking—can be believed by faith by one person and known demonstratively by another.

It is impossible, then, to have simultaneous faith and demonstrative knowledge with regard to the same proposition, either habitually or actually. By extension, it is impossible to have both kinds of basing-relations. In that case, what happens when you have both bases? What

---

27 Maybe he thinks there are other cases where you can have coexisting basing relations, e.g. two instances of *opinion* for the same proposition. He doesn’t discuss this, and it isn’t relevant to this dissertation.
if you have the “faith-basis” and a demonstrative basis for the same proposition? Since you can’t have both basing relations even when you have both bases, which basing relation actually forms?

Here is an example case. George is a Christian who believes that God exists (G) on the basis of God as the object of faith (σ), even though he has no proof for G. The basing relation r(Gσ) obtains for George. But one day, he opens the *Summa Theologiae* and reads the First Way. He understands it perfectly and sees that it is (let’s suppose) a sound demonstration of God’s existence. At this point he has a new basis for believing G: a demonstrative argument, δ. We know that, according to Aquinas, George can’t have both basing relations r(Gδ) and r(Gσ). This would entail having both habits of assent—faith and knowledge—for the same proposition, which in turn would entail simultaneously seeing and not seeing G, which is a contradiction.

There are, then, only two possibilities:

1. Upon acquiring δ, George does not form any new basing relation, but continues to have r(Gσ). He believes by faith that God exists but does not know demonstratively that God exists, even though he has δ. This is the faith-prioritarian view.

2. Upon acquiring δ, George forms the new basing relation r(Gδ), and his old basing relation, r(Gσ), perishes, even though he still has σ (i.e., he still has God’s witness that G). This is the knowledge-prioritarian view.

In *ST 2/2.1.4*, Aquinas makes it clear that the reason knowledge habits are incompatible with faith habits is because of the peculiar causal power of knowledge-generating sources: it is because the object is cognized through itself or through first principles—in other words, through demonstrative bases—that entail that the intellect necessarily assents to the object of knowledge. This is why in *In Boeth. de Trin. 1.2.1*, as we saw in the beginning of this chapter, Aquinas
actually says that a demonstrative basis “forces” assent (cogit intellectum ad consensum): it produces the corresponding basing relation necessarily, without the involvement of the will. It blocks the motion of the will, and hence blocks the formation of a faith basing-relation, which requires an act of the will. Aquinas, therefore, looking at the case of George, would go with option 2: once George learns the First Way, he no longer has faith that God exists.\(^{28}\) As Aquinas puts it, “neither faith nor opinion can concern what is seen by either the senses or the intellect.”\(^{29}\) Aquinas, then, is a knowledge-prioritarian: he thinks that someone who has both God’s witness that a claim (such as “God exists”) is true and a demonstrative argument for the same claim ends up with knowledge, and not faith, that that claim is true. This is because the claim is “seen” intellectually, and whatever is seen cannot be believed.\(^{30}\)

Aquinas’ knowledge-prioritarianism necessitates his distinction between the articles and preambles of faith.\(^{31}\) This distinction is a well-known hallmark of Thomistic thought (see, e.g., Summa Theologiae 2/2.2.10 ad 2). Articles of faith are intrinsically “unseen,” unprovable claims: the Trinity and the Incarnation are the most obvious. Preambles of faith are not properly

\(^{28}\) We can also consider the case of Mirror George, who starts by knowing the First Way but not having the faith-basis, but who later acquires it. Aquinas would say that Mirror George simply keeps his old demonstrative basing relation and fails to form the faith basing relation. Of course, he would believe other things—such as “God is a Trinity”—on the basis of trust in God. But he would so believe that God exists. He would not have faith that God exists. If a rationalist non-Christian philosopher such as Avicenna were to convert to Christianity, they would presumably be in precisely this position, and as we shall see in later chapters, this is the case that William of Auxerre considers when tackling the utrum idem sit scitum et creditum question.

\(^{29}\) Aquinas, ST 2/2.1.4. “Nec fides nec opinio potest esse de visis aut secundum sensum aut secundum intellectum.”

\(^{30}\) Eleonore Stump (Aquinas 361) puts it this way: “A person who acquires faith forms an assent to a group of propositions under the influence of a volition which has the effect of moving the intellect to an assent it otherwise would not have formed.” Stump has rightly discerned a counterfactual element in Aquinas’ view of faith. If the intellect would have assented to a proposition without a volition (namely, because the proposition is “seen” via a demonstrative argument), then there is no belief in that proposition by faith, because there is no volition.

\(^{31}\) Other aspects of his thought could entail this distinction as well. I am not saying that this is the only reason he posits the distinction, only that even if he had no other reason, his knowledge-prioritarianism alone would require it.
speaking part of the faith, but are claims that underlie or are implicit in the articles of faith: for example, that there is one God. Articles of faith fall under Gregory’s ban on reasoning: Christians may not prove them. But it is perfectly permissible to prove the preambles of faith. It is easy to see why Aquinas’ knowledge-prioritarianism entails this view. Clearly—at least, clearly enough for a medieval thinker like Aquinas—there are Christian beliefs that can be proven by reason: “God exists,” for example. But if every Christian belief could be proven in this way, it would be possible to believe all of them by natural reason, and thus be unable to have the virtue of faith. But this would make it impossible to be saved. If this situation were possible, then too much philosophy, too much rational inquiry into the Faith, would threaten one’s salvation. Aquinas is not willing to accept this consequence, and so he posits a set of Christian beliefs that cannot be proven: the articles of faith.

---

32 I am not saying that one must consciously believe the preambles of faith before one believes the articles of faith. After all, if the SCG is any indication, there are a lot of things about the Christian faith that can be proven by natural reason—the existence of the three theological virtues and the nine orders of angels, for example—that not every convert believes before being baptized. On my reading of Aquinas, the preambles are preambulatory to faith in a theoretical sense: they are logically presupposed by the articles of faith (e.g., the claim “There are three Persons in the Godhead” is true only if the claim “God exists” is true). John Hick reads Aquinas differently: on his view, the preambles are preambulatory in a practical sense: they are what actually lead a person to believe in the articles of faith, because they entail that the articles are true (Hick 16-17). They are, in fact, what justify belief in the articles of faith. This leads to the inevitable question: are the preambles themselves “rationally compelling, so that anyone who examines them and who is not prejudiced against the truth must acknowledge them,” or does “some degree of faith [enter] into their acceptance?” Here, Hick says, Aquinas is caught in a dilemma (Hick 17ff.). On one hand, in order for us to rationally believe a proposition on God’s authority (i.e., by faith), we must be able to prove that God does, in fact, propound that proposition for our belief— in other words, we must be able to prove the preambles of faith (ibid. 18). On the other hand, it is the non-compulsory character of faith that makes it a virtue, and such proof seems to make it compulsory (ibid. 19-20). If the preambles entail the articles, the any proof of the preambles is a proof of the articles. So Aquinas seems to hold that the articles of faith both can and cannot be proven. The solution to this dilemma is the same as the one for Stump’s Aquinas: once we see that Aquinas is not talking about justification in the modern sense at all, the problem disappears.
CHAPTER TWO

IN WHICH WILLIAM OF AUXERRE IS SHOWN TO BE A FAITH-PRIORITARIAN

The goal of this dissertation is to explain William of Auxerre’s faith-prioritarianism. This is the view that faith has priority over demonstrative knowledge: if someone simultaneously has God’s witness through faith that a proposition is true and a demonstrative argument proving that proposition, then they have faith, and not demonstrative knowledge, that the proposition is true. In Chapter One, we showed that Thomas Aquinas was a knowledge-prioritarian. Aquinas’ position, more typical of the Middle Ages than William’s, serves as a helpful contrast with William’s faith-prioritarianism.

It remains in the last three chapters of the dissertation to discuss William of Auxerre’s view. First, in Chapter Two, I will show that William was a faith-prioritarian, by giving evidence that he both proposed philosophical arguments for certain items of Christian belief and claimed that it is necessary for Christians to believe in those very same articles by faith. Throughout this
dissertation I will be using “philosophical arguments” to refer to arguments that do not rely on special divine revelation for any of their premises.¹ Second, in Chapters Three and Four, I will show how William is a faith-prioritarian: that is, how his account of faith as an intellectual virtue producing knowledge makes it possible for him to hold that it is possible to believe something by faith while knowing a proof for it.²

In the Prologue to the Summa Aurea, William considers whether it is permissible to “prove” (probare, ostendere) the articles of faith with “arguments” (rationes), and the context he

¹ William often simply refers to these as “arguments” (rationes), or says that they are the arguments belonging to the “philosophers” (philosophi). Occasionally he calls them “natural arguments” (rationes naturales; e.g. SA Prologue p. 17, 3.12.4 p. 208), but he typically uses this term to mean something very different, as we will discover later in this chapter. I will follow his more usual usage by reserving the term “natural argument” to refer to a particular kind of non-revelatory argument, and not for non-revelatory arguments in general. The reader will also remember that by “having a demonstrative argument for P” or “having a demonstration for P” we mean that one knows a set of propositions that entail P and is aware that those propositions entail P, such that, in Aquinas’ words, one “sees” P through that set of propositions. Neither Aquinas nor William say much about the latter “awareness” requirement: neither seem to consider, for example, a scenario where someone knows a set of propositions entailing P but is not aware that they entail P. They both seem to assume that this awareness is going on whenever someone knows and considers the premises of the argument. We should also note at the outset that by “article of faith” William means something slightly different, and more vague, than Aquinas. Aquinas, as we saw, distinguishes carefully between “preambles of faith,” which can be proven, and “articles of faith” which assume the preambles of faith but which cannot themselves be proven. Thus Christian beliefs like “There is one God” are not actually articles of faith, but preambles. William, on the other hand, does not have a concept of “preambles of faith.” He defines articles of faith as propositions which are (a) about God, (b) in God, and (c) intrinsically and directly generative of fear and love of God (SA 3.12.7.1, p. 216). “Tria exiguntur ad hoc quod aliquid sit articulus, scilicet quod sit de Deo et in Deo, et quod in nobis secundum se et directe generet timorem Dei vel amorem, quoniam per timorem Dei vitamus malum, per amorem facimus bonum; in quibus duobus consistit perfecta iustitia quam facit in nobis fides.” This allows William to adopt a broader and even less precise conception of the articles of faith than Aquinas, as is evidenced in the following passages:

In the Prologue (p. 17 ll. 51-53), he identifies as an article of faith the fact that “the Son of God…was humble, meek, and patient.” “Incipit autem ab articulis magis propinquis sensui, ut quod Filius Dei factus es homo et quod fuit humilis, mansuetus, et patiens et huiusmodi.”

In 1.7.3 (p. 119 ll. 32-37), when arguing that a certain obscure argument about the Trinity cannot be settled with certainty, he seems to identify “the Faith” (apparently being used in the sense of the articles of faith) with “Holy Scripture.” “Cum enim a Sacra Scriptura non habeamus determinatum de notionibus, ideo licet Magistris opinari, sed non licet eis asserere. Si enim quis asserat aliquid de Deo quod non sit determinatum in Sacra Scriptura vel quod non sequatur directe ex fide, mortaliter peccat, quia se constituit supra Deum.” If he means that any claim in the Bible can count as an article of faith, this expands the scope of the articles of faith considerably. Compare Aquinas’ position (Summa Theologiae 2/2.1.6 ad 2) that certain claims in the Bible do not count as articles of faith.

In 3.12.1 (p. 199, ll. 67-72), he says that one of the articles of faith is that “God is the rewarder of all goods”—certainly not an exclusively Christian claim. “Sicut enim hoc pricipium, ‘Omne totum est maius sua parte,’ habet aliquantum illuminationem per modum nature illuminantis intellectum, ita hoc pricipium, ‘Deus est remunerator omnium bonorum,’ et alii articuli habent in se illuminationem per modum gratie, qua Deus illuminat intellectum.”
makes it clear that he is referring to philosophical arguments not based in revelation. He is considering, in other words, precisely the same question as Aquinas did in his commentary on Boethius’ *De Trinitate*. The objection raised is almost identical, but the response is quite different:

> Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence [argumentum] of what does not appear (Hebrews 11:1). For just as with true love God is loved for His own sake and above all else, so by faith one assents to the First Truth for Its own sake and above all else. Therefore, nothing is more certain than faith...

>[Objection.]

Therefore the professors, and even the saints, seem to have acted perversely by trying to prove the faith or the articles of faith with human arguments, since faith, according to the Apostle [Heb. 11:1] is what proves, not what is proven- a premise [argumentum], not a conclusion. They even seem to have emptied faith of merit, since Blessed Gregory says, “Faith does not have merit if human reason furnishes it with proof.” But these people try to furnish faith with proof, and so they seem to empty faith of merit....

>[Reply.]

When someone has true faith and arguments by which the faith can be proven, such a person does not rely on the First Truth because of those arguments, but rather assents to the arguments because they agree with the First Truth and attest to It...But if faith were to rely on human arguments alone, it would not have merit, for then what Blessed Gregory said would apply (“faith does not have merit,” etc.). But since the truly faithful person relies on the First Truth above all, faith is not a conclusion, but a premise [argumentum], as the Apostle says.\(^3\)

The objection, like that in Aquinas’ question, is derived from Pope Gregory the Great. Gregory says that “faith does not have merit if human reason furnishes it with proof.” The objector interprets Gregory to mean that if someone knows an argument proving an article of faith, then their belief in that article is meritless (and therefore not from the virtue of faith—

---

\(^3\) SA Prologue (pp. 15ff., ll. 1-4, 7-10, 42-46). “‘Fides est substantia rerum sperandarum, argumentum non apparentium.’ Sicut enim vera dilectione diligitur Deus propter seipsum super omnia, ita fide acquiescitur Primae Veritati super omnia propter se; ideo nihil certius fide...

Magistri ergo immo sancti perverse videntur agere, cum rationibus humanis nituntur probare fidem vel articulos fidei, cum fides secundum Apostolum sit tanquam probans non probatum, argumentum non conclusio. Videntur etiam evacuare meritum fidei, quia dicit beatus Gregorius: ‘Fides non habet meritum cui humana ratio praebet experimentum.’ Ipsi vero nituntur praebere experimentum fidei et ita videntur evacuare meritum fidei....

Cum autem habet quibis ostendi possit fides, ipse non ininititur Primae Veritati propter illas rationes, sed potius acquisit illis rationibus quia consentiunt Primae Veritati et ei attestantur...Si autem fides ininitetur solum rationibus humanis, non haberet meritum, quia tunc habet locum quod dicit beatus Gregorius (‘Fides non habet meritum,’ etc.). Sed quia vere fidelis ininititur Primae Veritati super omnia, ideo fides non est ei conclusio, sed argumentum, sicut dicit Apostolus.”
Gregory, on this reading, is a knowledge-prioritarian. But those who develop arguments for the faith develop just such arguments. Therefore, they empty their own faith of merit. Therefore, one should not use arguments to prove the faith.\(^4\)

Aquinas fielded this objection by acknowledging the general point—yes, knowing an argument proving a proposition makes it impossible to have faith in that proposition. If there’s a contest between faith and knowledge, knowledge always wins. But Aquinas made a distinction between two kinds of propositions believed on faith: *articles* of faith and *preambles* of faith. Preambles of faith can be proven without the aid of revelation, but articles cannot: they transcend human understanding and must be simply accepted on God’s authority. So, even though Gregory is right that meritorious belief cannot coexist with proof, searching for proofs does not threaten one’s salvation, since there will always be something to believe that cannot be proven.

In the light of Aquinas’ answer, William’s is quite alarming! Instead of separating off a special class of propositions that cannot be proven but must be believed, William states simply that one can have both “true faith and arguments by which the Faith can be proven,” and that this poses no threat to one’s merit and one’s salvation—as long as one believes the proposition in question because of “the First Truth” (i.e., God), and not the arguments alone. If one were to believe on the basis of the arguments alone and not the First Truth, then one’s belief would be meritless. William, then, interprets Gregory not as saying that merely possessing arguments for the articles of faith renders belief in them meritless, but rather *relying* on them—that is, forming the corresponding basing relation between the arguments and the article. This is what it means to “furnish faith with proof.”

---

\(^4\) The assumption, of course, is that if something empties faith of merit, it should not be done—not an unreasonable assumption.
In Chapter Two we will show that the view William is expressing here is faith-prioritarianism. This will be done in three movements. First, we need to show that the rationes being referred to are indeed demonstrative philosophical arguments. In section 2a, then, I will show that William gave (what he took to be) demonstrative, rational arguments for an item of Christian belief, the existence of God. At least one of his arguments for God’s existence is taken from Avicenna. After giving these arguments, in section 2b we will look at passages that give us reason to think that William did not actually take these arguments to be demonstrative philosophical arguments. In particular, William says that when discussing divine matters we should use theological reasoning, not reasoning proper to natural things. We will show that this does not denote an epistemological distinction between revealed and non-revealed truths, but a metaphysical distinction between reasoning proper to two classes of things: God and creatures. Hence it does not cast any doubt on William’s belief that his arguments for God are demonstrative philosophical arguments. Now that the major objection to my reading of William has been dealt with, in the section 2c we will look at Summa Aurea 3.12.4, where William says that someone who has a demonstrative arguments for God’s existence can additionally and simultaneously believe in these claims by faith, in which case they do not have demonstrative knowledge of them. Indeed, according to William, in order to have true, meritorious faith, one must believe such a claim by faith rather than know it, whether or not one also has an argument for it. In William’s view, then, if you have access to a faith-basis and a knowledge-basis simultaneously, you come out with faith, and not knowledge. This shows that William is a faith-prioritarian.
The first step to proving that William of Auxerre was a faith-prioritarian is to show that he thought that at least some of the articles of faith can be proven by reason. Faith-prioritarianism entails that for any article of faith A,\(^5\) someone who knows a philosophical argument proving A can also believe A by faith. If William did not think that anyone knows a philosophical argument for any article of faith, then even if he endorsed faith-prioritarianism in theory, it would be an entirely otiose part of his thought. Therefore, our purpose is to show that there was at least one proposition—“God exists”—that William thought could be both believed by faith and proven via philosophical arguments, by which I mean arguments whose premises can be shown to be true apart from supernatural revelation. I will show not that the argument is sound, but merely that it is a valid argument, that its premises are grounded in reason unaided by revelation, and that they are plausible enough that one could imagine someone thinking them true (i.e., they aren’t crazy). I will formalize the first argument to see how its premises are grounded, look at the texts around it, and consider the historical sources of the argument. All of this is meant to show that William’s arguments do not rely on revelation for the soundness of their premises and that William did not mean them to do so.

William’s major work, the *Summa Aurea*, is divided into four books, which are then divided into treatises (*tractatus*), with various chapters (*capituli*), articles (*articuli*), questions (*questiones*), etc. underneath them, rather sporadically. Treatise 1 of Book 1 of the *Summa Aurea* is appropriately given the title: “Here it is proven that God exists” (*Hic probatur quod Deus est*). In the opening to *SA 1.1*, William says that the first thing we ought to do in a work like the

\(^5\) Here and elsewhere we are using “article of faith” in a broad sense, to denote an essential item of Christian belief, as we used the term in the Introduction to the dissertation. We are not using “article of faith” in the technical Thomistic sense, contrasting with the “preambles of faith,” as we did in Chapter One.
*Summa Aurea* is show (*ostendere*), using arguments (*rationibus*), that God exists, by which he means that “a Principle of things” (*principium rerum*) exists. The “philosophers” have proven (*probaverunt*) this in several ways. Several features of this short preface to *SA* 1.1 are noteworthy. First, William clearly uses *ostendo* “show” interchangeably with *probo* “prove.” Indeed, he switches between these two terms throughout the treatises on the existence and triune nature of God. Any attempt to claim that William thinks that God’s existence can be somehow shown (*ostensum*) but not proven (*probatum*) using non-revelatory arguments is short-stalled by the fact that there is no way to differentiate between his uses of *ostendo* and *probo* in the opening treatises of the *Summa Aurea*. Second, one proves (*ostendit, probat*) a claim using arguments or *rationes*. Third, he ascribes his proofs to “the philosophers” (*philosophi*), a term which William uses to mean non-Christian, pagan philosophers. After this opening, he gives a causal argument for God’s existence:

First, we ought to show that God exists- that is, that a principle of things exists- using arguments. The philosophers have proven this in several ways.

First, [the philosophers have proven this] through the relationship between cause and effect. They observed that certain things are causes, while others are effects. But

---

6 Although William may have been a philosopher in the modern sense, he would not have considered himself a *philosophus*. See, e.g. the following passages:

1.8.5 (p. 137, ll. 108-109). “Iudaei et gentiles philosophi bene concedunt istam: ille qui est a nullo creavit caelum et terram; ergo ille qui est inascibilis, creavit caelum et terram.”

1.10.3 (pp. 208-209, ll. 84-91). “Dicimus quod virginem parere ante incarnationem fuit possibile possibilitate increata, sicut et mundum fore antequam mundus esset fuit verum veritate increata et possibile possibilitate increata; veritati enim increate respondet possibilitas increata. Sed de hac non cognoverunt philosophi; unde iudicabant illud impossibile quod Deus ostendit se posse faciendo illud, et ita stultam ostendet illam sapientiam. Unde in illa auctoritate Augustini intelligitur impossibile secundum quid, id est secundum opinionem philosophorum.”

2.10.6.2 (p. 305, ll. 43-46). “Philosophi Veritatis Primae cognitionem habentes legi et doctrine atque magisterio eiusdem se subicere reusaverunt, quia 'cum Deum cognovisset,’ etc. (ad Romanos 1).”

2.11.2.2.2 (p. 333, ll. 120-125). “Est duplex cognitione Dei, una per modum naturae quam habuerunt philosophi, qui ductur rationis proprie in eius notitiam pervenerunt, quia sicut dicit Tullius: «Vox omnium est vox naturae», et Deus esse est vox omnium, et ita est vox naturae. Altera autem est per modum voluntatis, sicut cognitione qua per fidem ipsum cognoscimus.”

3.12.4 (p. 208, ll. 65-66). “Accidentalis autem cognitione Dei est triplex, quoniam est quaedam quae acquiritur per naturales rationes, qualem habuerunt philosophi.”

3.12.8.1 (p. 233, ll. 3-4). “Quaeritur ergo utrum philosophi cognoverunt tres personas vel aliquam illarum.”
every effect, insofar as it is an effect, requires something else in order to exist. That other thing, in turn, requires something else; so either (a) there will be an infinite regress, (b) there will be a circle, or (c) something uncaused will be reached.

(b) A circle cannot exist in any way among particular things. That would entail that a single thing is both prior and posterior to another within the same order, which is unintelligible.

(a) What if there is an infinite regress, without ever arriving at anything uncaused? We will disprove this as follows. The set of effects is, as a whole, caused, whether it is finite or infinite. Therefore, it requires something outside of itself in order to exist. This something is either an effect or not. If it is an effect, then it is part of the set of effects, and thus not outside of the set of effects.

(c) Therefore, the only option is to say that the thing from which the set of effects derives existence is not itself an effect. Therefore, the cause [of the effects] exists self-sufficiently. And so there is a first principle of things. It follows from this that a first principle of all things— that is, God—exists.

The Damascene’s proof is similar although phrased differently. Whatever exists, is either causable or uncausal. If it is causable, then it comes from something that is either causable or uncausal, and so on as before.

The basic line of William’s first theistic argument is fairly intuitive: there exist some things that are caused; everything caused requires a cause; therefore, there must be a first cause.

But before reaching that conclusion, he considers two alternatives: a causal circle and an infinite regress. Neither of these possibilities require a first cause. If these two alternatives plus Williams’ conclusion form a true exhaustive disjunct, then if he can disprove both of the two

---

7 Ergo causa est sibi sufficiens ad esse. The critical edition reads ibi, giving sibi as a variant reading. I have gone with sibi as more plausible fitting the context, but the argument is not greatly affected either way. Reading ibi would render something like: “Therefore, there is a cause sufficient for existence,” where sufficiens ad esse means ambiguously either “sufficient for its own existence,” or “sufficient to bring others into existence.”

8 SA 1.1 (pp. 21-22, ll. 4-23). “Primo debemus ostendere Deum esse rationibus, id est principium rerum esse. Quod philosophi probaverunt multipliciter. Primo per habitudinem causae ad causatum. Viderunt enim quod rerum quaedam causae sunt, quaedam causata. Omne autem causatum in quantum causatum indiget alio ut sit. Item illud alius aliquid indiget; et sic erit in infinitum procedere, vel erit ibi circulus, vel pervenietur ad aliquid quod non erit causatum. Circulus autem non potest aliquid modo esse in rebus singularibus, quoniam oportet aliquid esse primum et posterius alius secundum ordinem eundem, quod non est intelligibile. Si dicatur quod erit processus in infinitum et non potest perveniri ad aliquid quod non sit causatum, improbabimus hoc modo: quia universitas causatorum tota causata est, sive sit finita sive infinita; ergo indiget extra se aliquid ut sit. Illud aut est causatum aut non. Si est causatum, ergo est de universitate causatorum; non ergo est extra universitatem causatorum. Relinquitur ergo quod non sit causatum illud, inde universitas causatorum habet esse; ergo causa est sibi sufficiens ad esse. Et ita primum principium omnium rerum est. Ex quo sequitur primum principium omnium rerum sive Deum esse. Similis ergo probatio est Damasceni in aliis terminis. Quicquid est, aut est causabile aut incausabile. Si causabile, ergo ab alio quod est causabile vel incausabile; et inde ut prius.”
alternatives, then he has given a sound, deductive argument proving the existence of a First Cause.

The first alternative is the **Causal Circle**. This alternative posits that all caused beings are arranged in a circle. For instance, if there are three caused beings in the world, under this possibility \( a \) causes \( b \), \( b \) causes \( c \), and finally, \( c \) causes \( a \), closing the circle. Each effect has a cause, and each cause is itself caused, and so no uncaused First Cause need be posited. William refutes the Causal Circle alternative by simply claiming that it entails the absurd conclusion that one individual thing is both prior and posterior to another “in the same order.”

The second alternative is the **Infinite Regress**. This alternative posits that all caused beings are arranged in a straight causal line, not a circle, but that line has no upward limit: each being has a cause, and its cause has a cause, and so on *ad infinitum*. In other words, there is an infinite regress of causes.

At this point it would be easy to simply claim that an infinite regress is self-evidently absurd, as he did with the circle. But instead of denying the possibility of an infinite number of beings, he aims to show that even if there is an infinite number of beings in the causal chain, there still would be a first, uncaused cause. In other words, even if an infinite downward procession of effects is possible, an infinite upward regression of causes is not possible.

William argues for this claim as follows. Take the whole set, the *universitas*, of effects-everything that has a cause. Even if this set has infinite number of members, the set itself is, like its members, caused: all contingent beings, taken together, are as contingent as a whole, no matter how many more contingent beings you add into the mix. But everything that is caused can’t exist unless it is brought into existence by a cause outside of itself. Therefore, the whole set of caused beings requires a cause outside of itself in order to exist. That cause is either an
uncaused cause or is itself an effect. If that cause is an effect, then it is a member of the set of all effects. But in that case, it would not be outside of the set of all effects. But the cause of the set of all effects must be outside that set. Therefore, the cause of the set of all effects cannot itself be an effect. Therefore, the cause of the set of all effects must be an uncaused cause. So, no matter how long the chain of effects is, even if it is infinite, it still requires an uncaused first cause. So, no matter which way you turn, it turns out that an uncaused first cause exists.

We can formalize William’s argument as follows (unproven premises are marked with the letter A):

1. Some things are effects. (A)
2. Every effect requires a cause outside of itself. (A)
3. If some things are effects, and every effect requires a cause outside of itself, then either (a) there is a causal circle, (b) there is no upper limit to the causal chain, or (c) an uncaused first cause exists. (A)
4. Either (a) there is a causal circle, (b) there is no upper limit to the causal chain, or (c) an uncaused first cause exists. (1,2,3)
5. If there is a causal circle, then one thing is prior and posterior to another within the same causal order. (True by definition)
6. Nothing is prior and posterior to another within the same causal order. (A)
7. There is not a causal circle. (5,6)
8. If there is no upper limit to the causal chain, there is no cause that is not an effect. (True by definition)
9. The set of all effects (whether infinite or finite) is itself an effect. (A)
10. The set of all effects requires a cause outside of itself. (2,9)
11. If the cause of the set of all effects is an effect, it is not outside of the set of all effects. (True by definition)

12. The cause of the set of all effects is not an effect. (10,11)

13. There is an upper limit to the causal chain. (8,12)


This argument is a philosophical argument for God’s existence. In my formalization above I identified five premises (1,2,3,6,9) which do not rely on other premises and which William seems to take as self-evident or at least proven elsewhere. None of them seem to rely on revelation. William does not claim that they do, and there is no evidence in the text that he thinks that they do. Indeed, it is difficult to see what the Bible or Church tradition would have to say about claims like “Nothing is prior and posterior to another within the same causal order” (premise 6). Further, all of the assumed premises are also decently plausible: few would deny the existence of causes and effects (premise 1), the impossibility of self-causation seems self-evident to many (premise 2), and so on.

Premise 9 is the most contestable claim in the argument, so if someone wanted to show that the argument did not fit my “plausible enough” criterion, then this is likely where they would push.⁹ So it’s worth taking a moment to see why premise 9 is difficult and why William might think it true. The problem with premise 9 is that it is not necessary that a set have the same features as its members: the set of all equilateral triangles, for example, is not itself an equilateral triangle. But in the specific metaphysical context of causation premise 9 is quite plausible: as Avicenna argues in another place (Najat Ilahiyat 2.4-5), the existence of a set of beings subsists

⁹ Anecdotally, when I present the argument orally, this is usually the premise that people balk at.
through its members, and so a set of beings is always an effect, never an uncaused cause.\textsuperscript{10} Also, both Avicenna (\textit{Metaphysics of the Healing} 1.7.1-13) and William (SA 1.2, pp. 24-25) argue that the necessary being or uncaused cause cannot have parts.\textsuperscript{11} Avicenna infers from this (\textit{Najat Ilahiyyat} 2.12) that, since the set of all effects does have parts (i.e. the effects), it cannot be the necessary being.\textsuperscript{12}

I conclude, then, that (1) William’s first argument for God’s existence is a philosophical argument: it does not rely on any premises provided by divine revelation, but rests only on principles that are intuitively plausible or arise from observation of the world; (2) William was aware that it was a philosophical argument and proposed it as such.

Not only is the first argument a philosophical argument, and not only did William know that it was, but he was telling the truth that “the philosophers”—non-Christian thinkers such as Avicenna—had used this argument: this argument was taken from Avicenna. William does not mention Avicenna in connection with the argument. In fact, the only source he mentions in connection with the argument is a Christian one, John of Damascus. So the claim that William’s first theistic argument was taken from a “philosopher” like Avicenna rather than from a theologian has to be argued for.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{10} This seems to mean that the cause of the set is the members of the set, rather than something outside the set. This doesn’t affect the validity of William’s argument: since the members of the set are effects, we still need to ask what \textit{their} cause is. Since they are the cause of the set, it can’t be the set. So we still need to posit a cause outside the set of effects.

\textsuperscript{11} Adamson (pp. 179-181) deals with Avicenna’s arguments for divine simplicity in detail.

\textsuperscript{12} Jon McGinnis 2011, p. 73, alerted me to these arguments.

\textsuperscript{13} In Ex Theologicis Rationibus: Faith and Reason in William of Auxerre (pp. 15-26), I presented the case that William took his first theistic argument from Avicenna. Neither the source apparatus of the critical edition nor any other writing on William explicitly connects Avicenna with the first argument. Walter Henry Principe (p. 19) mentions Avicenna as a source for William’s theistic arguments in general, but does not mention the first argument explicitly and does not build a case that it comes from Avicenna. I take it, then, that the argument in Andrews 2015 that William’s first argument is Avicennian is original. Here I do not reproduce that work, but outline my findings.
The sign that the argument is Avicennian is the *universitas* reasoning refuting the infinite regress option. Rather than simply dismissing an infinite regress as absurd, or arguing that an intermediate efficient cause requires a first efficient cause,\(^{14}\) William argues that even if a causal series is infinite, there must be an uncaused, first cause, because the set of infinite caused causes will itself be caused. This reasoning is not found in John Damascene’s causal argument for God; the Damascene simply assumes that an infinite regress is impossible (*On the Orthodox Faith* 1.3). Gundissalinus (*On the Procession of the World*, p. 53) also has a causal argument for God’s existence, but again simply assumes that an infinite regress is impossible. Anselm’s causal argument in *Monologion* 3 is similar to William’s in that he argues from “everything that exists” (*cuncta quae sunt*) to the existence of a first cause. But Anselm is not arguing that everything that exists taken as an *universitas* requires a cause, but rather that all created things individually have the same causal source.

When we turn to Avicenna, however, the resemblance is striking. Here I will quote the *Shifa Illahiyat* or *Metaphysics of the Healing*, from the Latin translation with which William would have been familiar (8.1, ll. 17-48\(^{15}\)):

> If we posit a cause, and a cause for it, and a cause for its cause, it will not be possible for each cause to have a cause on to infinity. For if an effect and its cause and the cause of its cause are considered individually in relation to each other, the cause of the cause will certainly be the absolute first cause of both of the others, and the two others would have a relation of ‘being caused’ to it, though they would differ in that one

---

\(^{14}\) As Aquinas does in the Second Way, *Summa Theologiae* 1.2.3. For treatments of the Second Way, see Davies pp. 38-40 and McQueen in the Bibliography.

\(^{15}\) The precise nature and location of Avicenna’s argument for God’s existence in the *Metaphysics of the Healing* has been the subject of dispute for some time. In his 2016 article, Daniel De Haan surveys the views in the literature: that the argument is found in *Metaphysics of the Healing* 1.6-7, that 1.6-7 is not an argument but merely a conceptual analysis of necessary being, that 1.6-7 provides the premises to an argument that is scattered throughout the entire book, that there is no argument for God’s existence at all in the work, and that the argument is actually found in *Metaphysics of the Healing* 8.1, the passage I translate here. The latter is De Haan’s view, which I adopt here.
of them is an effect through a mediating cause while the other is an immediate effect, which was not the case in the first or in the middle. For the middle, which is the proximate cause of the effect, is the cause of only one thing, while the final effect is the cause of nothing. Therefore each of the three has its own property, but the property of the last effect is this: that it is not the cause of some other thing; and the property of the other extreme is this: that it is the cause of everything other than it; but the property of the middle is that it is the cause of one extreme and the effect of the other extreme...

And it will be similar if it is ordered as an infinite plurality without an extreme, because that whole infinity will have the property of intermediacy, according to which, if you take any aggregate of these causes, that aggregate will be a cause of the effect that follows, and it will be caused by the first cause, since whatever is part of that aggregate is an effect of that on which the entire aggregate depends. Whatever’s existence depends on an effect is itself an effect…Thus it is impossible for there to be any aggregate of causes which does not include an uncaused cause and a first cause.\(^\text{16}\)

Although his language is not exactly the same, the logic is: no matter how many intermediate causes you posit, the whole aggregate of intermediate causes will require a cause.

The resemblance between Avicenna’s argument and William’s is even clearer if we look at the version of the argument given in Avicenna’s *Najat*:

Undoubtedly there is existence, and all existence is either necessary or possible...There cannot be for anything that is possible in itself a cause that is itself possible *ad infinitum*...[Since the possible beings exist] all together, and none is a necessarily existing being, then either the totality...whether finite or infinite, exists necessarily through itself or possibly through itself. If, on the one hand, the totality exists necessarily through itself...[this] is absurd. On the other hand, if the totality is something existing possibly in itself, then the totality needs for existence something that provides existence, which will be either external or internal to the totality.

If it is something internal to it...anything that is sufficient to necessitate itself is

\(^{16}\) Avicenna, Liber de Philosophia Prima. "Si posuerimus causatum et posuerimus eius causam et suae causae causam, non tamen erit possibile unicuique causae esse causam in infinitum. Causatum enim et eius causa et causa suae causae, si considerentur singula secundum comparationem sui ad invicem, profecto causa causae erit prima causa absolute duorum aliorum, et duo alia habebunt comparationem causationis ad illam, quamvis different in hoc quod unum eorum est causatum mediante aliquo et alterum est causatum nullo mediante, quod non fuit sic in primo nec in medio; medium enim quod est causa proxima causati est causa unius rei tantum; causatum vero ultimum nullius rei est causa. Unumquodque igitur horum trium habet proprietatem, sed proprietas ultimi causati est haec quod ipsum non est causa aliquo rei; et proprietas alterius ultimi est haec quod ipsum est causa omni alii a se; proprietas vero medii est quod ipsum est causa unius extremi et est causatum alterius extremiti. ...

Similiter etiam fiet si ordinetur multitudo infinita cuius non inventatur extremum, quia totum illud infinitum erit secundum proprietatem medii de quo, si quantumcumque collectionem accipieris, illa erit causa esse causati alterius quod sequitur, et erit causata primae, eo quod, quicquid est de illa collectione, causatum est eius a quo pendet esse totius collectionis. Cuius autem esse pendet a causato, causatum est....Unde non potest esse collectio causarum aliquarum in qua non sit causa non causata et causa prima."
something existing necessarily, but it was assumed not to exist necessarily, so this is a contradiction.

The remaining option is that what gives existence to the totality is external to it but it cannot be a possible cause, since we included every cause existing possibly in this totality. So since the cause is external to it, it also is something existing necessarily in itself.17

Here the progression of thought mirrors William’s argument quite nicely, the major difference being that William does not use the concepts of necessity and possibility (but the Shifa version of the argument does not use these concepts, either). But there is a problem: William did not have access to the Najat. It was never translated into Latin.18 The strong resemblance of William’s argument to the Najat argument may point to an oral transmission of this expression of Avicenna’s argument, but this is not certain. In any case, no more proximate source for the universitas argument can be found, so the most likely conclusion is that Avicenna (either through the Shifa or an oral transmission of the Najat argument, or both) is William’s source for this argument.

In conclusion, then, we have shown that William’s first argument for God’s existence was meant to be a philosophical argument yielding knowledge that God exists. We have shown this in three ways. First, the logic of the argument itself suggests this. Second, there is convincing textual evidence that William thought that the argument was this kind of argument, i.e. he did not invoke divine revelation as justification for any of the premises, nor can divine revelation be plausibly assumed as the justification for any of them. Third, historical contextualization of the argument shows that its ultimate and proximate source was a non-Christian philosophus, again proving that the argument was meant to be a philosophical

---


18 On this see Janssens 522ff.
argument that would be convincing to anyone, whether they had access to divine revelation or not.\textsuperscript{19}

2b Natural and Theological Reasoning

In section 2a, we argued that William is comfortable giving philosophical arguments—that is, arguments that do not derive their premises from revelation—for at least some articles of faith. However, there are passages in the \textit{Summa Aurea} that can be used to argue for the opposite conclusion: that William did not mean his arguments to be demonstrative, at least not outside of the context of faith. In this section we will refute this conclusion by examining the passages in question.

The basic issue is that, although William commends the use of “arguments” or “reasoning” (\textit{rationes}) to show that Christian doctrine is true, he also distinguishes between two kinds of reasoning: “reasoning proper to natural things” and “theological reasoning.” And he says that in the \textit{Summa Aurea} he is using theological reasoning, not reasoning proper to natural

\textsuperscript{19} After the first, Avicennian argument, William gives several more arguments for God. All of them are philosophical arguments that do not rely on Revelation. The second argument is a rephrasing of the first. The third argument is taken from Boethius (\textit{Consolation} 3 prosa 10), and the fourth is Anselm’s ontological argument from the \textit{Proslogion}. Surprisingly, William also attempts to prove, using philosophical reasoning, that God is a Trinity. He argues for the generation of the Son in \textit{SA} 1.3.1 (p. 26, ll. 8-22), using a pastiche of passages from Augustine: “Beatus Augustinus probat generationem Filii aeternam sic: Pater ab aeterno aut voluit generare Filium sibi aequalem et potuit, aut potuit et non voluit, aut nec potuit nec voluit. Et si potuit et non voluit, invidus fuit; si voluit et non potuit, impotens fuit; si autem non voluit nec potuit, impotens et invidus fuit; si autem et potuit et voluit (et constat quod scivit) sequitur quod genuit Filium aequalem sibi.

Quod autem Pater voluerit generare Filium aequalem sibi, probatur sic. Ad summam avaritiam pertinet nihil de bonis suis velle communicare; ergo ad summam bonitatem pertinet vel liberalitatem omnia bona sua velle communicare. Sed Pater est ab aeterno summæ liberalitatis. Ergo ab aeterno voluit communicare alii suæ maiestatis plenitudinem. Sed communicare alii suæ maiestatis plenitudinem est genus suum dare, et hoc est generare Filium aequalem sibi. Ergo Pater ab aeterno voluit generare Filium aequalem sibi cui communicaret omnes divitias maiestatis suæ, sicut ipse Filius dicit in Evangelio: Omnia mea tua sunt et tua mea sunt. Aliter enim in eo non esset summæ liberalitas, si aliquid sibi reservaret quod aliæ non communicaret.

Quod autem potuit, sic probatur: Quia homo infirmus potest hoc, scilicet generare filium aequalem sibi, et hoc est in eo laudabile et perfectionis naturalis signum; ergo multo fortius omnipotens hoc ab aeterno potuit.”
things. He also says that reasoning proper to natural things leads to heresy and should be avoided by Christians.  

When William distinguishes between “reasoning proper to natural things” and “theological reasoning,” what distinction does he mean to draw? There are two possible readings of William’s distinction:

1. The Epistemic Reading. On the epistemic reading, the difference between “theological reasoning” and “reasoning proper to natural things” has to do with the way humans come to know the premises: the former begins with premises taken from divine revelation, whereas the later utilizes premises taken from philosophy, i.e. premises not taken from divine revelation, but discovered by the unaided human intellect. In other words, the distinction corresponds to the Thomistic distinction between philosophy and sacra doctrina or theology. You can’t argue for the Trinity using premises derived from philosophy, but only premises taken from divine revelation. Trying to understand God’s nature purely on the basis of the former leads to false conclusions about God.

2. The Metaphysical Reading. On this reading, the difference between “theological reasoning” and “reasoning proper to natural things” has to do with the beings under discussion: there are claims that are true of God that simply are not true of created things, so applying things you learn from nature to God without controlling for the metaphysical difference between God and nature results in false conclusions about God. On this reading, the difference between the two kinds of reasoning is less like the distinction between philosophy and theology and more like the distinction between metaphysics and physics, or physics and ethics.

---

20 We will examine the passages where these claims occur shortly. The point now is to briefly introduce the issue before diving into the texts.
On the epistemic reading, William may allow that human reason unaided by revelation is perfectly reliable when investigating creatures, but he would maintain that it is entirely unreliable when investigating divine matters. There are no philosophical arguments proving any articles of faith, only theological (i.e., revelation-based) arguments. This would, of course negate my interpretation of William in section 2a. On the epistemological reading, the difference between theological and natural reasoning has to do with how one comes to know the premises of the arguments one uses. If this reading is correct, our faith-prioritarian reading of William is threatened, because there simply are no demonstrative arguments that could coexist with faith.21

On the other hand, the metaphysical reading of the distinction does not threaten our faith-prioritarian reading of William. If “theological reasoning” denotes not arguments utilizing premises derived from revelation, but arguments using premises that can appropriately applied to God, then it is still an open question whether those premises can be discovered using human reason unaided by revelation or not. If some of them can, then we have no reason to doubt that William intended his theistic and Trinitarian proofs to be philosophical arguments.22

---

21 William could, in this case, be a hypothetical faith-prioritarian, but this would be a position of no consequence.

22 I have not found the metaphysical reading of William’s distinction proposed anywhere in the secondary literature. Indeed, I have not found it even considered. Roland Teske highlights William of Auvergne’s openness to philosophy by contrasting him with our William: he says that William of Auxerre opened the Summa Aurea with “warnings against natural reasoning in matters divine” (Teske in William of Auvergne 54). Teske seems to assume that the distinction between theological and natural reasoning maps on to the distinction between revealed theology and non-revealed philosophy, and so seems to assume the epistemological reading. Ottaviano does not directly discuss this issue to my knowledge. Most importantly, Boyd Taylor Coolman, in his book Knowing God by Experience: The Spiritual Senses in the Theology of William of Auxerre, casts doubt on the idea that reasoning about theological matters can yield necessary, demonstrative arguments at all in William’s view. He adopts the epistemological reading: arguments based on theological reasoning, according to Coolman, are convincing only to the faithful, those who have received divine revelation (see Coolman 187-9). They do not belong to the beginning of faith, but rather presuppose it (see Coolman 211). A “contrasting view…would attempt ‘to prove the faith or the articles of faith’” using philosophy—and according to Coolman, William identifies this view as “perverse” (ibid.). The fact that Coolman, perhaps the top living authority on William of Auxerre, would disagree with my reading of William in 2a gives me sufficient reason to spend time refuting the reading of William which Coolman adopts.

It’s worth noting that Coolman’s view that William thinks philosophical reasoning is “perverse” is based on what appears to be misreading of the Summa Aurea. Coolman takes the statement in the Summa Aurea Prologue that those who prove the Faith “act perversely” (perverse agere) to be part of William’s own view. But this is actually an
The metaphysical reading, I contend, is the correct reading of William’s distinction between natural and theological reasoning. I will prove this first by looking at his criticism of Arius and Sabellius in the Prologue, and second by looking at the two other places where he explains the distinction: the end of 1.3 and section 3.26. These are the three major passages where William distinguishes between theological reasoning and reasoning proper to natural things, and where, at first blush, he may seem to be saying that philosophical proofs of Christian doctrine are impossible. I will show that this is not what he is saying.

The **first passage** we will look at the *Summa Aurea* Prologue. After showing that *rationes* ought to be used in theology,23 William now proceeds to show exactly what kind of *rationes* ought to be used. He says that, given that we are going to prove divine things using *rationes* we need to use theological *rationes* appropriate to the matter at hand, as opposed to those appropriate to “natural” things. In fact, the use of natural reasoning is precisely what led the great arch-heretics, Arius and Sabellius, into error: they applied reasoning appropriate to natural things to divine things, as if they were equating nature to her Creator.24

---

23 *SA* Prologue (pp. 15-16, ll. 15-22). “Triplici ratione ostenditur fides. — Prima est quia rationes naturales in fidelibus augmentant fidem et confirmant…Secunda ratio est defensio fidei contra hereticos. — Tertia est promotio simplicium ad nostram fidem.”

24 *SA* Prologue (p. 18, ll. 1-5). “Volentes autem ostendere rationibus res divinas, ex convenientibus rationibus procedemus, non ex eis quae sunt propriae rerum naturalium. Ideo enim decepti fuerunt haeretici, quia rationes proprias rerum naturalium volebant applicare rebus divinis, quasi volentes adaequare naturam suo Creatori.”
What, precisely, was the error that Arius and Sabellius\textsuperscript{25} made? How do their arguments constitute reasoning proper to natural things, as opposed to the theological reasoning that orthodox Christians ought to use? Analyzing the arguments William attributes to Arius and Sabellius help cast light on this issue. Arius observed that among natural things multiple individuals have multiple natures, as, for example, different men each have their own humanity and multiple donkeys have each their own donkeyness. So he applied this rule (\textit{regulam}) to divine things. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct individuals, and so they each must have their own distinct nature. And the Father has the nature of deity. Since there can be only one instance of deity (unlike donkeyness, which can be multiply instantiated), the Son cannot have deity, but must have some other nature. Thus, Arius concluded, the Son of God is not God, but has some other nature. He came to this conclusion because he was deceived by an imagination-based (\textit{fantastica}) comparison with natural things.\textsuperscript{26} Sabellius made the same kind of error in the opposite direction. It’s generally true that each thing has its own nature. Now, there is only one instance of deity. So, since the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have the same nature, they must also be the same individual.\textsuperscript{27} Sabellius confused the persons, and Arius separated the natures, but their error was the same in root: applying reasoning appropriate to

\textsuperscript{25} By “Arius” and “Sabellius” I mean “Arius and Sabellius as represented by William,” and not the historical figures.

\textsuperscript{26} \textit{SA Prologue} (p. 18, ll. 6-14). “Sic deceptus fuit Arius. Cum enim in rebus naturalibus generaliter verum sit quod plurium plures sint naturae, ut plurium hominum plures humanitates et plurium asinorum plures asinitates, voluit Arius applicare hanc regulam rebus divinis sic: Pater et Filius et Spiritus Sanctus sunt plures; ergo plures sunt eorum naturae; sed Pater habet deitatem et una sola est deitas; ergo Filius non habet deitatem sed alicui naturam quam sit deitas. Et ex hoc sequitur quod Filius Dei non sit Deus, sed creatura ipsa; quod ipse concessit deceptus fantastica similitudine rerum naturalium.”

\textsuperscript{27} \textit{SA Prologue} (pp. 18-19, ll. 15-19). “Eodem modo Sabellius deceptus fuit. Cum enim verum generaliter in rebus sit quia una natura unius solius est; sed deitas est unica natura; ergo unius solius est; sed ipsa est Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti; ergo sicut Pater et Filius et Spiritus Sanctus sunt unum, ita sunt unus.”
natural things to divine things, that is, taking a principle that is true of creatures and assuming that it is true of God.

By formalizing Arius’ and Sabellius’ arguments, we can see precisely where they went wrong and thus where they engaged in reasoning proper to natural things.

*Arius’ argument*

A1. All individuals have their own instance of their nature.
A2. There is only one instance of deity.
A3. There is only one individual having deity. (A1, A2)
A4. The Father has deity.
A5. The Son and Holy Spirit are not the same individual as the Father.
A6. The Son and Holy Spirit do not have deity. (A4, A5)

*Sabellius’ Argument*

S1. All individuals have their own instance of their nature.
S2. There is only one instance of deity.
S3. There is only one individual having deity. (S1, S2)
S4. The Father has deity.
S5. The Son and the Holy Spirit have deity.
S6. The Son and the Holy Spirit are the same individual as the Father. (S4, S5)

The assumed premises are A1-A2, A4-A5 and S1-S2, S4-S5. A1-S4 and S1-S4 are identical. In fact, the only premise that Arius and Sabellius disagree on is A5/S5, generating their opposite conclusions. But both A5 and S5 would be accepted by Trinitarians, so that is not where the heretics went wrong. A2/S2 and A4/S4 would also be accepted by Trinitarians. The only questionable premise is A1/S1, and this is precisely the premise that Trinitarians must reject as
true for creatures but false for God. The faulty premise is the same in both arguments: the principle that all individuals have their own instance of their nature. In other words, Arius and Sabellius made the exact same intellectual error. Neither of their distinctive premises (A5 and S5) are false; but because of their identical error about individuals and natures, they could not see that A5 and S5 are compatible. The conjunction (A5 & S5) involves no contradiction as such; it is when either of them is combined with the rest of the premises of the argument, including the faulty premise A1/S1, that they become incompatible with one another.

Arius and Sabellius, then, made an identical error in reasoning: as William puts it, “Sabellius was deceived in the same way” as Arius. Both saw that among natural things, every individual has its own individual instance of its nature (*in rebus naturalibus generaliter verum sit quod plurium plures sint nature*). The question, then, is how Arius and Sabellius came to apply the faulty premise A1/S1 to God. It may be that they should have seen that the Bible teaches that A1/S1 is true of creatures of false of God, although it is hard to pinpoint a place where it does so. But William indicates that their error is more philosophical. He says that if the heretics had kept in mind that divine things infinitely exceed (*in infinitum excedere*) natural things, they wouldn’t have tried to apply reasoning proper to natural things to God, for “the learned discusses each thing as its nature requires.” Thus, philosophers reason perfectly legitimately from their own principles thus:

P1. Socrates is a man.

P2. Plato is a man.

P3. Cicero is a man.

P4. Socrates, Plato, and Cicero are three men. (P1,P2,P3)

Theologians, however, legitimately reason from their principles in the following way:
T1. The Father is God.

T2. The Son is God.

T3. The Holy Spirit is God.

T4. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God. (T1,T2,T3)

The difference in inferences arises from the distinct properties of the beings under discussion: the humanities in Socrates, Plato, and Cicero are distinct, while the divinity in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are the same.28

All of this appears to indicate that the metaphysical reading of William’s distinction is correct. But the proponent of the epistemological reading could reply that even if the difference is ultimately founded in metaphysical differences (as it obviously is), the way we apprehend those metaphysical differences corresponds to the distinction between reason and revelation. Human reason works on the basis of creatures, and so when it tries to make conclusions about God, it errs in the way Arius and Sabellius did.

One way to answer this objection is to appeal to William’s later Trinitarian arguments. If you can give a philosophical argument proving that there are three individuals who possess a numerically identical divine nature, then you have falsified A1/S1 by philosophical means, without the aid of revelation. But this is circular: we will have assumed that William’s arguments for God and the Trinity are philosophical arguments in order to prove that he thinks such things...

28 SA Prologue, p. 19. “Si autem considerassent heretici res divinas in infinitum excedere res naturales, nunquam proprias rationes rerum naturalium applicare voluissent rebus divinis, quoniam sicut dicit Boetius, ‘Eruditi hominis est de unaquaque re, prout exigit eius natura, sermonem habere.’ Unde dicit in libro De Trinitate quod philosophi ex propriis rationibus sic argumentantur: Socrates est homo, Plato est homo, Cicer est homo; ergo Socrates, Plato, Cicer sunt tres homines. Theologi autem ex propriis rationibus sic argumentantur: Pater est Deus, Filius est Deus, Spiritus Sanctus est Deus; ergo Pater et Filius et Spiritus Sanctus sunt unus Deus. Haec autem differentia illusionem procedit ex diversis proprietatibus rerum de quibus fit sermo. Quoniam enim alia est humanitas qua Socrates est homo, alia qua Plato est homo, etc., ideo philosophi pluraliter inferunt. Sed quia prorsus eadem est divinitas qua Pater est Deus et qua Filius est Deus et qua Spiritus Sanctus est Deus, ideo theologi singulariter inferunt.”
can be proved through such arguments. On the other hand, those arguments in themselves, taken apart from the context of natural vs. theological reasoning, certainly look like philosophical arguments: A1/S2 certainly looks like a claim that you’d find in a philosophical treatise rather than in the Bible. So if we can show that when William discusses the distinction between natural and theological reasoning he describes it as a metaphysical distinction rather than an epistemological one, then we will have every reason to read those arguments as philosophical. There is no reason to read his Trinitarian arguments in terms of the epistemological reading of the distinction between natural and theological reasoning if William himself never countenances that reading. Rather than reasoning in a circle, we will have shown how William’s view of philosophical knowledge of God (expressed in his distinction between natural and theological reasoning) and his Trinitarian theology mutually reinforce one another. This will add even more plausibility to the metaphysical reasoning.

And in this regard we are in luck, for in the second passage we will look at, from SA 1.5, William actually explicitly discusses the relation between natural and theological reasoning and his Trinitarian arguments. After giving his proofs for the generation of the Son, the procession of the Holy Spirit, and the precise number of Persons in the Godhead being not more or less than three, William fields a global objection to all of these arguments. The objection claims that William’s arguments for the Trinity are worthless (nullae) because they rely on reasoning proper to natural things: they begin with facts about created thing and try to make inferences about God on that basis. Such reasoning is illegitimate when applied to God. It led previous thinkers into
heresy, and also it leads to patently absurd inferences (like inferring that, because creatures are colored, God must also be colored).  

William responds by claiming that there are two kinds of principles we can use in arguments about God:

In proofs of this kind we proceed from things that correspond both to natural things and divine things, and sometimes we proceed from what is proper [to divine things], for example, “God is omnipotent, therefore he can do such-and-such…Since God is the efficient, formal, and final cause of all things (I mean “formal” in the sense of an exemplar), what is true of these causes among natural things can be transferred to God. But since He is not a material cause, what pertains to a material cause cannot be transferred to God. Thus He is not said to be colored, since this is on the part of matter. He is also not called forgetful, since this is in the soul on the part of the material intellect.

Therefore, when we make arguments about God, we actually use two different kinds of principles. Sometimes we use principles that agree with both natural and divine things, and sometimes we use principles that are proper to divine things, for example that God is omnipotent. The heretics went wrong because they tried to use a third, inappropriate, kind:

29 SA 1.3.4 (p. 34, ll. 69-74) “Sed videtur quod praedictae probationes nullae sint. Fiunt enim per adaptationem rerum naturalium ad res divinas. Propter hoc erraverunt haeretici, et haec via superius reprobata est. Item, si bene sequitur: homo carnalis potest generare; ergo Deus Pater potest generare; eadem ratione bene sequitur: homo est albus; ergo Deus est albus; quod manifeste falsum est.”

30 SA 1.3.4 (p. 34, ll. 81-91). “In huiusmodi probationibus, procedemus ex eis que conveniunt tam rebus naturalibus quam divinis; aliando ex propriis procedemos, sicut cum dicitur: Deus est omnipotens, ergo potest hoc facere. Haeretici autem decerti fuerunt, quia ex propriis rerum naturalium processerunt ad res divinas. Sciendum enim quod Deus est causa efficiens omnium et formalis et finalis: formalis dico per modum exemplaris; unde quae conveniunt istis causis in rebus naturalibus possunt transseri ad Deum. Sed cum non sit causa materialis, ea que pertinent ad causam materialem non possunt dici de Deo; unde non dicitur coloratus; hoc enim est ex parte materiae; nec obliviosus: hoc enim est in anima ex parte intellectus materialis.”

31 One might ask how, if our knowledge is acquired through the senses, we can acquire any knowledge of things proper to God at all. Indeed, William says later that “in the present time God does not illuminate our intellect to see Him in Himself, but only in the mirror of creatures” (SA 1.4.1, p. 39 ll. 92-94). It is not surprising, then, that the first several treatises of Book 1 of the Summa Aurea, directly after the theistic and Trinitarian proofs, discuss divine language: how it is possible for human beings to talk about God at all. Roughly, he thinks we know God through his effects on creatures as well as through conceptual negation. For example, in SA 1.4.2 (p. 41ff.) he argues that “He That Is” (qui est) or “Being Not From Another” (ens non ab alio) is the principal name of God (he thinks the two are equivalent). This is a tricky case for William, because it doesn’t seem to be derived from creatures: all creatures derive their existence from another. William’s solution is that, because ens non ab alio is a negation, it still involves
principles proper to natural things. William’s category of “theological reasoning,” therefore, divides into two subcategories. First, there is properly theological reasoning, which applies only to God. Second, there is reasoning that applies both to God and creatures. When we look at creatures, we sometimes discover truths that apply just as well to God. We can then use those discoveries to reason about God without any error. This would not be true on the epistemological reading, and so this passage confirms the metaphysical reading of William’s distinction.

This reading is confirmed further by the examples of properly theological rationes and “common rationes” that William chooses to use. As an example of a properly theological ratio William uses God’s omnipotence: from the premise “God is omnipotent,” we can draw the conclusion, “God can do x,” for some particular x (Deus est omnipotens, ergo potest hoc facere, p. 35). This is a fact about God that is true of God and not any other being. It’s also not particularly unique to Christianity, and William gives no indication that he sees this as something that can only be known by revelation. So even properly theological rationes aren’t necessarily principles that can only be discovered by divine revelation.

As examples of a common ratio and a properly natural ratio, William takes the four Aristotelian causes. He claims that God is an efficient cause, a formal (i.e. exemplar) cause, and a final cause, but not a material cause. Whatever is true of the first three causes in natural things can be transferred to God. But God is in no way a material cause, and so what pertains to material causes cannot be said of God, which is why we can’t say, for example, that God is colored or forgetful. This shows us not only that we can speak of God using concepts derived

the knowledge of creatures. The idea seems to be that to know that God is not-\(x\), you have to know \(x\). So to know that God is being not from another, you have to be familiar with being that is from another, i.e. with creatures. In this case, we have a claim that is theological in the proper sense—“God is being not from another”—but we understand that premise by means of creatures, by way of negation.
from philosophy and not from revelation, but that we can use very precise philosophical ideas, derived from the study of the world and not from revelation, to talk about God, without falling into erroneous natural reasoning.

In conclusion, then, William’s distinction between *naturales rationes* and *theologicae rationes* does not track an epistemological distinction, but a metaphysical one: what makes *naturales rationes* inappropriate is not that they aren’t part of revealed religion, but that they simply don’t apply to God. When William explains what he means by the distinction between natural and theological reasoning, he does not mention revelation or any epistemic sources at all, but only contrasts the kinds of beings involved in the different kinds of reasoning. Also, there are *rationes* that are genuinely theological but common to God and creatures, and these can be used perfectly well with regard to God. So William gives us no reason to think that the epistemological reading is correct, and plenty of reason to think that the metaphysical reading is correct.

The metaphysical reading of William’s distinction between natural and theological reading is reinforced by the third passage we will look at, SA 3.26. Here he explains the same distinction again, but this time in terms of distinct mental faculties. I will show that in this passage, too, although William seems at first glance to be saying that philosophical arguments are unreliable and not to be used by Christians, a closer examination reveals that he is making the same distinction between kinds of being rather than kinds of evidence that he did in the Prologue and in the defense of his Trinitarian proofs.

In Treatise 3.26 of the *Summa Aurea*, the topic of discussion is whether it is a mortal sin to believe a heretical preacher when you think he is not a heretic (for example, you hear Arius preaching and think it’s Athanasius). William argues that it is. His answer, in short, is that, by
God’s grace, every faithful Christian has sufficient ability to identify false doctrine. If the heretic’s preaching is false, the Christian can identify it as such. If it is true, the Christian believes it, not because of the preacher, but on the basis of his own faith. The details of his solution need not concern us. What is interesting for our purposes is that, in order to prove his conclusion, he lays out “five ways in which something can be asserted about God” (pp. 504-505).32

The first way is “synderesis, which says that God is one,” and is a sort of innate knowledge of God that all people have.33 We will say more about it later. The second two are “faith” and “Sacred Scripture.”34 The first three ways—synderesis, faith, and Scripture—have a “firmness” (firitatem) which allows us to assert things about God with certainty. The fourth and fifth ways, however—the “way of imagination (fantasia)” and “external preaching or miracles,” respectively—are not so firm. One should not rely on (innitendum) the fourth or fifth ways or even agree with (consciendum) their deliverances unless the first three ways lead to the same conclusion. And someone who believes something about God on the basis of either of the last two ways sins mortally, since he presumes to make a claim about God on the basis of human cleverness.35

---

32 SA 3.26, pp. 504-505 (ll. 55-56). “Ad evidentiam solutionis istorum notandum quod quinque sunt viae in quibus aliquid asseritur de Deo.”

33 ibid., ll. 56-58. “Prima est per synderesim, synderesis enim dictat quod unus est Deus, retributor bonorum et punitor malorum.”

34 ibid., ll. 58-60. “Secunda via est per fidem, quia per fide asserimus Deum esse trinum et unum, et multa alia. Tertia est via per Sacram Scripturam.”

35 ibid., ll. 61-73. “Quarta via est per fantasiam, id est per rationes probabiles naturales per quas asserimus aliquid de Deo; et ille quandoque sunt verae, quandoque falsae, non enim se habet semper in Deo sicut in naturalibus; propter hoc via ista dicitur per fantasiam, quia fantasiam quandoque est vera, quandoque falsa. Quinta via est per exteriorum praedicationem vel per miracula, quoniam per praedicationem, quam audivimus, asservimus aliquid de Deo. Sed quarta via et quinta similes sunt, quoniam non est eis innitendum nec consentiendum, nisi firmitatem, habeant vel a synderesi, vel a fide, vel a Sacra Scriptura, qui enim per naturales rationes asserit aliquid de Deo, quod non est ei
The fourth way, the way of *fantasia*, is the way of “probable natural arguments,” while the first three ways comprise divine revelation (faith and Scripture) and a limited natural awareness of God (synderesis). Remember that the epistemic reading of William says that, according to William, all philosophical arguments are natural arguments (in the technical senses in which we are using those terms). Since assertions about God made exclusively on the basis of *fantasia* are merely probable and may not licitly be asserted as certain, then on this reading it follows that for William all philosophical arguments not based in Christian revelation are merely probable, may be true or false, and may not be asserted with certainty.

Fortunately, the epistemic reading of this passage can be shown to be clearly wrong. First, not all philosophical arguments (that is, not all arguments that do not rely on revelation) fall under the way of *fantasia*. Second, the philosophical arguments that William gives in the *Summa Aurea* fall under the way of *synderesis* and so are certain.

Not all philosophical arguments fall under the way of *fantasia*. This much should be certain from our discussion of the Prologue, for in 3.26 William says that it is *naturales rationes* that are merely probable, while in the Prologue and at the end of 1.3 William clarifies that *naturales rationes* are inapplicable to God for metaphysical reasons, while *theologicae rationes* (including both strictly theological *rationes* and *rationes* common to God and creatures) are applicable to God and can be the premises for a non-revelatory, philosophical argument. As William says in 3.26 (p. 505), “things are not always the same for God as for natural things” (*non enim se habet semper in Deo sicut in naturalibus*), implying that they sometimes are (generating common *rationes*). If William’s arguments in *SA* 1.1-3 make use of theological reasoning rather than reasoning proper to natural things, then they can’t fall under *fantasia*.

certum nec per synderesim, nec per fidem, nec per Sacram Scripturam, peccat mortaliter, quia praesumit humano ingenio tantum asserere aliquid de Deo.”
Where, then, do such philosophical arguments—the arguments for God’s existence and attributes that he uses in SA 1.1-3—fall in William’s fivefold schema? They fall under synderesis. “Synderesis” is a term with many meanings in medieval thought, but most commonly it refers to the power of understanding practical or moral first principles, the first principle of the natural moral law. William, however, uses the term in a much wider sense. In Book Two, Treatise Six, William explains that synderesis is simply “higher reason.” and throughout his discussion it becomes quite clear that synderesis is, for William, simply another term for the intellect (as opposed to, e.g., the will or imagination), encompassing understanding of both theoretical and practical principles. He uses the terms interchangeably: for example, when, disputing about synderesis, he invokes Aristotle to say that “the intellect is always true, and the imagination sometimes true and sometimes false.”

William goes on to distinguish two “ways” (vias) that synderesis can follow, a higher and a lower (SA 2.10.6.1, pp. 301-302):

It seems to us, without precluding a better answer, that the synderesis is the superior part of reason and that it sometimes sins; for the sin of Arius and Sabellius consisted in this. But take note that [reason] has two ways. There is one by which it begins from the First Form and regulates itself according to what it sees in It…And if man were to follow this way, he would never sin…

But reason has another way, when it begins its discernment from sensible things. Following this way it can be deceived by apparent definitions [rationes] of sensible things, as was Arius, who wanted to measure eternal things by natural reasoning. Therefore, synderesis in the first way detects that we are erring by desire or anger or by

36 See, e.g., Faucher and Roques pp. 6, 21; and Aquinas, De Veritate 16.1.

37 SA 2.10.6 (pp. 297-8, ll. 1-2). “Cum dictum sit quod liberum arbitrium est ratio, primo quaeitur utrum ratio peccet, et praeipue utrum ratio superior sive synderesis peccet.”

38 SA 2.10.6.1 (p. 298, ll. 7-8). “Dicit Aristoteles quod intellectus semper est verus, fantasia quandoque vera, quandoque falsa.”

39 The double entendre on ratio is hard to capture in English: ratio can be an argument or item of reasoning, but it can also be a rule or measurement. Arius wanted to measure God by the yardstick of Creation.
being deceived by something that resembles reasoning. For when the lower reason is deceived by error, if the synderesis consults the First Form, at once it corrects the lower part of reason. So we say that reason can correct itself with regard to the different ways.\textsuperscript{40}

Both kinds of reason involve grasping first principles. The higher reason grasps first principles in God through a kind of Augustinian illumination, while the lower reason derives first principles from sensible things in Aristotelian fashion. The higher reason “sees God” and in God sees the principles of natural law and fundamental philosophical principles. It cannot err. The lower reason infers principles from sensible things, and thus can be deceived. But the synderesis is always capable of correcting the lower reason, even on non-moral issues such as God’s nature. As long as the lower reason’s formation of principles from sensible things is regulated by the higher reason, it does not err. When the lower reason fails to be regulated by the higher, error results, not just on moral issues, but even on abstract questions about God’s nature. So when William says that “the superior reason…sometimes sins,” he means that the intellect, taken as a single mental faculty, sometimes sins, when it follows its “lower way” rather than its “higher way.”\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{40} SA 2.10.6.1 (pp. 301-302, ll. 95-98, 104-105, 110-117). “Nobis videtur sine praeiudicio quod synderesis est superior pars rationis, et ipsa aliquando peccat. In ea enim fuit peccatum Arii et Sabelli. Sed notandum quod duas habet vias: unam qua incipit a prima forma et secundum quod in ea videt, regit se…Et si homo hanc viam sequetur, nunquam peccaret…Habet ratio aliam viam, cum incipit discretionem suam a sensilibus, et secundum hanc viam potest decipi per rationes sensibilium apparentes, ut Arius volens per rationes naturales aeterna metiri. Synderesis ergo quantum ad primam viam sentit nos errare vel cupiditate vel furore vel rationis similitudine deceptos. Cum enim ratio inferior per errorem decipitur, si synderesis consulat primam formam, statim corrigit inferiorum partem rationis, et dicimus quod ratio corrigit se ipsam quantum ad diversas vias.”

\textsuperscript{41} William’s view of understanding can be fruitfully compared to that of a later scholastic, Henry of Ghent. Henry combined Augustinian illumination theory and Aristotelian abstraction theory to account for human understanding. Although we are able to form concepts of essences by receiving input from the senses, unless divine illumination acts on our minds somehow, we cannot really understand the truth of things. Exactly what Henry means by this is unclear (see Pickavé and Pasnau in the Bibliography for two competing views), but the general idea is quite close to William: sense-perception plays a role in understanding, but it must be somehow corrected, refined, or regulated by a non-empirical, inner intellectual light.
William’s discussion of higher and lower reason explains why the way of *fantasia* from 3.26 is unreliable. The lower way of reason is precisely the way of *fantasia*: it involves the intellect or synderesis taking cues from the imagination (*fantasia*), rather than the other way around. It is not that using the powers of sense-perception and imagination to think about God always leads to falsehood. Rather, the problem comes in when the lower reason advances claims about God without consulting the higher reason. The constant refrain, from the Prologue to 1.3 to 2.10 and 3.26, of “Arius and Sabellius,” whose error resulted from the use of “*naturales rationes*,” indicates that the errors about individuation of natures in the Prologue are rooted in the way of *fantasia* in 3.26, which in turn involves the lower reason’s learning natural principles from the imagination or *fantasia* which do not actually apply to God. The arch-heretics erred by failing to consult their inner metaphysician, not by failing to consult Scripture.\(^{42}\) And yet this is a moral failing just as much as it would have been if they had not taken heed to the Bible.

This also explains how the way of synderesis can involve philosophical arguments using premises derived from sense-perception without falling into the way of *fantasia*. Put simply, our mind has sufficient innate illumination that it can look through our metaphysical ideas derived from sensation and sift out the false ones. This involves the cooperation of the higher and lower reason, the lower forming principles on the basis of observation of the world, the higher correcting any errors in the principled formed by the lower. So (good) philosophical arguments are not non-necessary arguments following the way of *fantasia*, even though the power of *fantasia* or imagination is involved in forming such arguments. In fact, if they follow the way of synderesis, they are certain, for when it follows the higher way, synderesis never errs.

\(^{42}\) By the way, I am not endorsing William’s view of Arius and Sabellius as historical figures. It’s a clever use of the two arch-heretics, but probably anachronistic, and much too neat.
In conclusion, the arguments that William dismisses as merely “probable” and uncertain are not the arguments he uses to prove God’s existence, attributes, and Triune nature. The “probable” or imaginative arguments make use of *rationes propriae rebus naturalibus*, that is, reasoning that is appropriate only to natural things and not to God. Examples of these are the arguments of Arius and Sabellius given in the Prologue. The premises of their arguments are not true about God, and so lead to false, heretical conclusions. Arguments that make use of *theologicae rationes*, on the other hand, are deliverances of the higher synderesis, or of the lower synderesis as governed by the higher, and may be asserted with certainty. This is the way of synderesis of 3.26, and such are the arguments of the *philosophi* for God’s existence, attributes, and tripersonality in SA 1.1-3. The thesis of section 2a, then, is firmly established, and the opposing view refuted: William did think that some of the articles of faith can be proven by reason unaided by Revelation.

2c The Philosopher-Convert

The aim of Chapter Two, which we will accomplish in the following section, is to show that William of Auxerre is a faith-prioritarian: he holds that *(a)* it is impossible to simultaneously believe a proposition by faith and know it through demonstrative reasoning, and *(b)* faith has priority over demonstrative knowledge: that is, having faith that a proposition is true makes it impossible to know that proposition, even if you know a demonstrative argument proving it. In section 2a, we showed that William thinks that some of the articles of faith can be demonstrated through philosophical arguments. In section 2b, we dealt with an objection to this claim based on William’s distinction between theological reasoning and reasoning proper to natural things. Our purpose in section 2c is to accomplish the aim of the chapter by showing that William thought that even when someone can demonstrate an article of faith, they can also believe it by faith, in
which case they do not have demonstrative knowledge of it. The article in question will be “God exists.”

In *Summa Aurea* 3.12.4, William considers the question “Whether the same thing can be known and believed” (*Utrum idem sit scitum et creditum*), and it becomes clear as the discussion goes on that by “known” he means “known by philosophical argument,” and by “believed” he means “believed by faith.” Aquinas, we saw in Chapter One, considers this question in *ST* 2/2.1.4-5. In one respect, William’s position is like Aquinas’: he says that it is impossible to believe a proposition by faith and simultaneously have demonstrative knowledge of it. William’s objector poses an interesting thought experiment. He observes that non-Christian philosophers came to a knowledge of God by studying creatures, that is, through philosophical arguments. But suppose some such philosopher came to Christian faith. Obviously he wouldn’t suddenly forget the arguments he had before he became a believer. So clearly someone can believe and know the same thing at the same time.

This scenario can easily be analyzed in terms of the vocabulary we developed in the Introduction to this dissertation. Say we have a non-Christian philosopher, Avicenna, who knows on October 31st that God exists on the basis of a demonstrative argument. On November 1st, he becomes a Christian, and acquires a new basis for belief, the “First Truth” (i.e., God as

---

43 Remember that we are using “article of faith” in the broad, Auxerrian sense, not the restricted, Thomistic sense.

44 He even calls this knowledge *scientia* (see next fn.), and it is a notable point in favor of the interpretation of William expressed in section 2b that William does not dispute this label.

45 *SA* 3.12.4 (p. 206, ll. 7-12). “Item, philosophi venerunt in cognitionem Dei per creaturas; et sic habuerunt scientiam de Deo per naturales rationes, quoniam Apostolus dicit: *Invisibilia Dei per ea quae facta sunt* etc. Sit ergo quod aliquis talis veniat ad fidel. Constat quod quando venit ad fidel, non obliviscitur rationes quibus sciebat Deum esse prius; ergo adhuc scit Deum esse; ergo idem scit et credit.”

Note here that William uses *naturales rationes* to refer to what we have been calling “philosophical arguments,” and not to refer to what he usually calls “natural arguments,” i.e. argument that proceeds via the way of imagination. It’s pretty clear what he means, but his terminology is terribly inconsistent.
apprehended by faith). Now Avicenna has two bases for the same proposition (“God exists” = G), a demonstrative argument (α) and the First Truth (σ). In William’s terms from the Prologue, he “has” (habere) both bases, so we have to ask on which one he “relies” (innititur). In our terms: which of the two possible basing relations successfully forms for Avicenna, r(Gα) or r(Gσ)? William considers two contrary positions before giving his own:46

1. Both basing relations, r(Gα) and r(Gσ), form. Since Avicenna is a Christian, he has the habit of faith, i.e. of relying on the First Truth for his belief in the articles of faith. But acquiring faith didn’t make him magically forget the proof for G. Since he knows a proof for G, he obviously has demonstrative knowledge of G. So on November 1st, Avicenna has both faith and knowledge of G: both basing relations form.47

2. r(Gα) forms, but r(Gσ) either ceases or never was present at all.48 “God exists” is not, properly speaking, an article of faith, so on November 1st, Avicenna knows demonstrably that God exists, but does not have faith that God exists.49

46 He also, very briefly, considers another position: God’s existence simply can’t be proven. But he doesn’t give it much air time, and we have already seen that he disagrees. Here is what he says, dealing with the objection in the voice of another objector rather than his own. SA 3.12.4 (p. 207, ll. 19-27): “Forte dicet quod per talen non potest probari prima causa, id est per creaturas, quoniam talis effectus nimir est remotus a sua causa, quoniam non convenit cum ea in genere vel specie, differentia, vel proprio, vel accidente. — Contra. Habet causa cognosci per suum effectum et in quantum causa. Ergo quod magis est causa, magis habet cognosci per suum effectum. Sed Deus est maxime causa creaturarum; ergo maxime habet cognosci per creaturas; ergo Deum esse scitum est per effectum creaturarum; et fide non excludit talen scientiam; ergo idem est creditum et scitum.”

47 SA 3.12.4 (p. 206, ll. 7-12). “Item, philosophi venerunt in cognitionem Dei per creaturas; et sic habuerunt scientiam de Deo per naturales rationes, quoniam Apostolus dicit: Invisibilia Dei per ea que facta sunt, etc. Sit ergo quod aliquis talis veniat ad fidem. Constat quod quando venit ad fidem, non obliviscitur rationes quibus sciebat Deum esse prius; ergo adhuc scit Deum esse; ergo idem scit et credit.”

48 This doesn’t mean Avicenna can’t have faith, because he can still have a basing relation involving σ with regard to other propositions, like “God is a Trinity.”

49 SA 3.12.4 (p. 207, ll. 28-33). “Tullius dicit quod ‘vox omnium est vox nature.’ Sed Deum esse est vox omnium; ergo Deum esse est naturaliter scitum ab omnibus; ergo ipsum credere non est meritorium, quia naturalia non sunt laudabilia vel vituperabilia; ergo Deum esse non est articulus fidei; ergo in hoc casu non est idem scitum et creditum, quia Deum esse non cadit sub fide. Quod concedunt quidam hac ratione.”
Neither of these are, strictly speaking, Aquinas’ position, but both have a key feature in common with it: both assume that if you possess a demonstrative, philosophical basis for “God exists,” then you automatically know that God exists. The first position assumes that simply because Avicenna has the basis $a$, he must obviously have the basing relation $r(\alpha)$. The second position is based on the idea that God’s existence is “naturally known [scitum] by everyone,” so faith never really grounds belief in $G$ at all and Avicenna has $r(\alpha)$ by default. The second objector is a kind of knowledge-prioritarian, although of a slightly different kind than Aquinas.

William, in his reply, rejects both the inclusive view of the first objector and the knowledge-prioritarian view of the second objector. To do so, he catalogs three “acquired” (accidentalis) means of being aware that God exists (note also that in this passage he uses the term “natural arguments” for what we are calling “philosophical arguments”):

- There are three kinds of acquired cognition God. One kind is obtained through natural arguments, such as the philosophers had.
- Another kind relies on the testimony of Scripture or miracles, and this is unformed faith.
- The third kind is gracious [faith], which comes by illumination, when the True Light illuminates the soul to see it and other spiritual things. This cognition is gracious faith, which says in the human heart, “Now I believe, not because of a natural argument, but because of what I see.” For when such a cognition comes, the soul assents to the First Truth for Its own sake and above all else. When such a cognition comes, all other acquired cognitions perish, both as act and as habit. Granted, some claim that they do not perish as habit, but only as act. But this is false, for the same apprehension belongs to all the accidental cognitions by which God is cognized. And when this apprehension comes to the soul, faith, as if it were faster, blocks the motion of the other acquired cognitions, if

---

50 The second is quite close. Like Aquinas, the second objector denies that “God exists” is an article of faith. But while Aquinas thinks that this is because God’s existence can be proven and hence belief in it deprived of merit, this objector thinks that it is not an article because everyone (Christian or not) knows it intuitively, so whether or not you can prove it, you don’t get any special credit for assenting to it.

51 The second objector could alternatively be interpreted to be saying that Avicenna has a different demonstrative basis for believing that God exists: an intuitive grasp of God’s existence as a first principle. This does not affect my interpretation of the passage much.
they were there. And so when faith comes, man is no longer capable of believing through arguments or testimony like before. And thus all other acquired cognitions perish, both as act and as habit.  

The first kind of acquired cognition of God is knowledge through philosophical arguments. The second kind is belief on the basis of testimony. Notably, William labels this “unformed faith,” a theological term for non-meritorious religious belief. We will see in Chapter Three that this is not faith in the true sense for William. The third kind is the theological virtue of faith that comes from God and earns merit before Him. William says that this way of believing is “faster” than the others, and “blocks” them. William holds, as Aquinas does, to a principle of epistemic priority. “The same apprehension” belongs to all three ways: this seems to mean that only one of them can bring about the “motion” or act of belief at a time. One cannot form multiple basing relations at once. And so, when one basing relation is stronger than another, it blocks the latter from forming, even when the latter’s corresponding basis is present. The third kind of cognition is evidently the strongest. So when the faith-basis—“the First Truth” or “reliance on the First Truth”—is present to the soul, faith “blocks” the basing relations of demonstrative knowledge or testimony from forming: “all other acquired cognitions of God perish.” This refutes both alternative positions: contra position 1, faith and knowledge cannot

52 SA 3.12.4 (pp. 208-209, ll. 65-83). “Accidentalis autem cognitio Dei est triplex, quoniam est quaedam quae acquiritur per naturales rationes, qualem habuerunt philosophi. Est alia quae innititur testimoniis Scripturarum vel miraculorum, et haec est fides informis. Tertia est gratuita, que fit per illuminationem, quando lux vera illuminat animam ad videndum se et alia spiritualia; et talis cognitione est fides gratuita, que dicit in corde hominis iam non propter rationem naturalem credo, sed propter illud quod video, quoniam tali cognitione adveniente, assentit anima prime veritati propter se et super omnia. Tali cognitione adveniente, perempt omnes aliae cognitiones accidentales, et quantum ad actum, et ad habitum, licet quidam dicant quod non perceunt quantum ad habitum, sed tantum quantum ad actum. Sed hoc est falsum, quoniam eadem est apprehensio omnium cognitionum accidentalium quibus cognoscitur Deus; et cum illa apprehensio venit in anima, fides tanquam velocior preoccuparet motus aliarum cognitionum accidentalium, si ibi essent; et ita cum fides adest, iam non habilis est homo ad credendum per rationes et per testimonia sicut prius; et ideo perceunt ille aliae cognitiones accidentales, et quantum ad actum, et quantum ad habitum.”
coexist, but one has to push the other out; \textit{contra} position 2, it is faith that pushes out knowledge, not the other way around.

So on William’s view, on November 1st Avicenna does not know that God exists, but believes it: he does not have $r(G\alpha)$, but $r(G\sigma)$. What of his demonstration, then? Does he simply forget the argument? This seems to fly in the face of the experience of many people who have come to faith after believing some aspects of the faith through argument. William, fortunately, denies this odd apparent consequence of his position. Immediately after the passage quoted above, he says:

And yet when faith comes, the arguments one had before are not forgotten. But those arguments do not generate faith in him, but strengthen and increase gracious faith, just as temporal benefits do not produce charity in a person, but strengthen and increase it with regard to its motion.\textsuperscript{53}

So when William says that the philosopher-convert does not “know” that God exists, this means that his belief that God exists is not based on a demonstrative argument. The philosopher-convert still has a demonstration of God’s existence. He knows how to prove that God exists, and is perfectly aware of that fact. But his belief is based on the First Truth rather than the demonstration: in the terms of the Prologue, he “relies on” (\textit{innititur}) the First Truth rather than an argument.

William’s discussion in 3.12.4 clarifies what he said in the Prologue, and shows that in the Prologue he is expressing a faith-prioritarian view. In the Prologue he discussed someone who has “both true faith and arguments by which the Faith can be proven.” Section 3.12.4 shows that this refers to someone who has the virtue of faith and also knows arguments by which

\textsuperscript{53}SA 3.12.4 (p. 209, ll. 83-87). “\textit{Tamen non obliviscitur, adveniente fide, rationes quas prius habebat, sed ille rationes non in eo generant fidem, sed fidem gratuitem confirmant et augmentant, sicut beneficia temporalia non faciunt caritatem in homine, sed confirmant eam et augmentant quantum ad suum motum.”
particular articles of faith (such as God’s existence or triune nature) can be proven. Such a person is capable of simultaneously believing those articles by faith and knowing how to demonstrably prove those same articles. The philosopher-convert’s belief in the articles of faith is not grounded in philosophical arguments, and so they produce neither an act nor habit of belief: the corresponding basing-relation fails to form, blocked by the faith-basis. But the philosopher is aware that the arguments could ground that belief, if he did not already have faith.

We have shown, then, that William is a faith-prioritarian: he thinks that (a) it is impossible to simultaneously believe a proposition by faith and know it through demonstrative reasoning, and (b) faith has priority over demonstrative knowledge: that is, having faith that a proposition is true makes it impossible to know that proposition, even if you know a demonstrative argument proving it. This position was hinted at in the Prologue and confirmed by SA 3.12.4. We have also dispelled the objection that William thinks that philosophical arguments for the articles of faith are less than demonstrative. On the contrary, he thinks that non-Christian philosophers had genuine knowledge of God’s existence through their arguments, even though if one of them were to become a Christian, they would cease to have knowledge and instead have faith that God exists. We have proven, therefore, that William is a faith-prioritarian.
CHAPTER THREE

IN WHICH WILLIAM’S VIEW OF FAITH AS VISION IS EXPLAINED

In Chapter One of this dissertation we showed that Thomas Aquinas is a knowledge-prioritarian. That is, he thinks that demonstrative knowledge has priority over faith: if someone simultaneously has God’s witness through faith that a proposition is true and a demonstrative argument proving that proposition, then they have demonstrative knowledge, and not faith, that the proposition is true. In Chapter Two, we showed that William of Auxerre is a faith-prioritarian. That is, he thinks that faith has priority over demonstrative knowledge: if someone simultaneously has God’s witness through faith that a proposition is true and a demonstrative argument proving that proposition, then they have faith, and not demonstrative knowledge, that the proposition is true. In Chapters Three and Four we will explain how William is a faith-prioritarian. And we need to do this, for at first glance Aquinas’ view seems more plausible. Aquinas’ knowledge-prioritarian can be characterized as proceeding from three plausible claims:

(a) epistemically stronger bases block weaker ones from forming their basing relation;

(b) testimony is epistemically weaker than demonstration;

(c) faith is based in testimony.
We saw that (c) was Aquinas’ view in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* passage studied in section 1a. We saw that (a) and (b) are his view in the *Summa Theologiae* passage studied in section 1b. In order for William’s faith-prioritarianism to be plausible, William must reject one of these claims. So which does he reject? As it turns out, he rejects (c).

William gives no sign of rejecting (a). As we saw in section 2c, in *SA* 3.12.4 William articulates the view that some epistemic bases are “faster” than others and “block” their “motion,” that is, stop their corresponding basing relation (and thus habit and act) from forming. He says, moreover, that when several bases have the same *consideratio* or *apprehensio*, they cannot all form an act/habit of belief at once.¹ One can naturally interpret this passage as articulating a very strong version of (a): whenever two bases have the same *apprehensio*, “the greater and faster one does not suffer the others to coexist with it,” i.e. forms its basing relation and makes the others unable to form their basing relation.

William never rejects (b) either, nor does he explicitly affirm it anywhere. Sadly, unlike Aquinas, he does not articulate a clear epistemology of testimony.² But if we read him rightly as accepting (a), then if he rejects (b) he would be committing himself to the view that testimony is a *stronger* basis than demonstration. He never denies this, but it certainly seems highly implausible.³

As it turns out, however, William clearly and decisively rejects (c). This emerges in the passage we just cited, *Summa Aurea* 3.12.4, where he differentiates “unformed faith,” which

---

¹ *SA* 3.12.4 (p. 209, ll. 87-91). “Sed omnes accidentales cognitiones Dei unicum habent considerationem; et ideo maior et velocior non patitur secum alias, ut dictum est. Per hoc patet solutio ad secundum et tertium objectum.”

² After all, as you are about to learn, William does not think that faith is a form of testimony, so he has no pressing need, as a theologian, to articulate an epistemology of testimony.

³ Perhaps one could say that the authority of *God* is a stronger basis than demonstration. But William never says this. Aquinas, as we can infer from what we found in Chapter One, would probably have to reject it.
relies on “the testimony of Scripture or miracles,” from “gratuitous” faith, which elsewhere he calls “formed faith” and “true faith” in contrast to unformed faith.

William, then, agrees with Aquinas on two major epistemic points. Both deny that faith and demonstrative knowledge can coexist with regard to the same proposition, and neither of them articulates a particularly radical view, for the Middle Ages, on the relative epistemic strength of demonstrative knowledge and testimony (Aquinas articulates a pedestrian view, and William never says anything about the issue). Where they differ is in their account of faith: Aquinas thinks that faith is based in testimony, and knowledge-prioritarianism follows from this view. William thinks that faith is not based in testimony, but something else: spiritual vision of God. Describing how the faithful see God, and how this generates assent to the articles of faith, will show us how William can adopt faith-prioritarianism despite the immediate intuitive appeal of knowledge-prioritarianism.

Chapters Three and Four, then, are dedicated to showing how William of Auxerre is a faith-prioritarian. In Chapter Three we will explain William’s view that faith is a habit of seeing God spiritually or intellectually. In Chapter Four we will show how this vision of God generates assent to the articles of faith: the habit of faith does double duty as a habit of vision and of assent to propositions.

In section 3a we will discuss William’s use of the term “faith” (fides). We will show that the sense of the term “faith” relevant to our discussion is “formed faith,” the theological virtue of spiritual vision, which William contrasts with “unformed faith,” which is belief on the basis of testimony. Aquinas also distinguishes between formed and unformed faith, but in a very different way which is not relevant to this dissertation.
in Aquinas: a habit of the speculative intellect infused by God, whose act involves assent to the core doctrines of Christianity. In section 3b we will discuss William’s views of knowledge, sense-perception, and ultimate happiness in general. William posits a strong parallelism between the intellectual and sensitive powers of the soul, such that the speculative intellect is an immaterial sense power, “the organ of spiritual sight.” True fulfillment, or beatitude, involves the perfection of the intellectual powers, including the speculative intellect, through the theological virtues. Faith is a vision of God, a partial perfection of the intellect that is a step toward the ultimate happiness found in the ultimate fulfillment of the direct vision of God, the Beatific Vision. To distinguish the vision of faith from the Beatific Vision, we’ll call it “inner vision” (this is because, as we’ll see later, faith involves seeing God in the human soul; for now, just accept the term as a label). Faith, then, occupies the same position in William’s anthropology as it does in Aquinas’: it is a God-given perfection of the speculative intellect that conduces to beatitude. But William’s view of faith as vision raises a difficult question: how is this inner vision to be distinguished from the Beatific Vision? We will spend much of section 3c examining William’s response to this question. Our exposition of William’s view of faith as inner vision in Chapter Three will prepare us for Chapter Four, where we will show how this habit of inner vision generates assent to the articles of faith.

3a Formed and Unformed Faith

“Faith” is a polysemic term within Christian theology. Comparing passages like Ephesians 2:8 and James 2:24 shows that, unless Paul and James contradict each other,⁵ “faith” is used in different senses even by the authors of Christian Scripture. This is dangerous to our thesis,

⁵ I will assume, for the sake of argument, with orthodox Christians including Thomas and William, that Paul and James can’t contradict each other.
because if William is using the term “faith” in a radically different sense than Aquinas is, their disagreement over the epistemic priority of faith and knowledge is merely verbal: they are equivocating on the term *fides*. Let’s remind ourselves of some key features of faith on Aquinas’ view. Faith is…

1. A habit of the speculative intellect (since its object is assenting to propositions as true).⁶
2. A habit that perfects the intellect, i.e. helps it fulfill its purpose.⁷ Faith, then, is a virtue.
3. A *theological* virtue, i.e. one that is not acquired naturally but infused by God’s grace.⁸
4. A prerequisite for meriting salvation and achieving ultimate beatitude,⁹ and therefore normative for all Christians: not the exclusive property of priests, monks, or nuns, but something that all Christians ought to have.¹⁰

If we can show that the conception of faith operative in passages of William’s *Summa Aurea* such as the Prologue and 3.12.4 shares these features, this will be enough to show that the disagreement between William and Aquinas is not purely verbal.

William, of course, recognized that the term “faith” has multiple meanings. In the opening to *Summa Aurea* 3.12, the Treatise on Faith, William gives five senses of *fides*: the unformed habit, the formed habit, the Beatific Vision, the act of faith, and the articles of faith.¹¹

---

⁶ *ST* 2/2.1.4.2. “*Credere autem est immediate actus intellectus, quia obiectum huius actus est verum, quod proprie pertinet ad intellectum. Et ideo necesse est quod fides, quae est proprium principium huius actus, sit in intellectu sicut in subiecto… Fides est in intellectu speculativo sicut in subiecto, ut manifeste patet ex fidei objecto.*”

⁷ *ST* 2/2.1.3. “*Fides est quaedam virtus perficiens intellectum.*”

⁸ *SCG* 3.152. “*Necessarium est quod etiam in nobis fides per gratiam causetur.*”

⁹ See *SCG* 3.152. “*Necessarium est quod etiam in nobis fides per gratiam causetur… Ultimus autem finis est manifesta visio primae veritatis in seipsa: ut supra ostensum est. Oportet igitur quod, antequam ad istum finem veniatur, intellectus hominis Deo subdatur per modum credulitatis, divina gratia hoc faciente.*”

¹⁰ See also Aquinas’ discussion of formed and unformed faith in *ST* 2/2.4.5.
He clarifies that the kind of faith that his treatise is about is the formed habit, the theological virtue of faith (#2 in the list above). This is the kind of faith that answers to Aquinas’ use of the term “faith” in the passages we studied in Chapter One.

The third through fifth senses “faith” do not, of course, answer to Aquinas’ usage of faith. Sense 3 is not conducive to the Beatific Vision because it just is the Beatific Vision, and senses 4-5 are not habits. So we will focus on first two senses, unformed faith and formed faith. For the sake of contrast we will begin with unformed faith. The first definition of “faith” that William identifies in SA 3.12.1 is “the unformed habit of belief, which Christians have while in mortal sin.” Unformed faith is assent to the articles of faith on the basis of evidence and authority. In SA 2.10.5.2, William gives a number of sources of unformed faith:

1. First, there is the testimony of “Scripture, that is, the Law and the Prophets.”
2. Second, there is “the goodness of God,” seen in the fact that the preaching of the Christian faith inspires fear and love of God better than anything else.
3. Third, there is the moral influence of Christianity: “the effect of faith” in “making men like God” by causing them to love their neighbor as themselves.


12 The most important secondary source for William’s distinction between formed and unformed faith is Carmelo Ottaviano’s *Guglielmo d’Auxerre: La Vita, Il Opere, Il Pensamiento*. Similarities and differences in my and Ottaviano’s account will be noted in footnotes.
d. And finally, there are miracles performed by the faithful, which provide evidence that they really are God’s people.¹³

In other words, unformed faith is belief generated by the sorts of things that ordinarily generate religious belief: historical evidence, sacred scripture, miraculous signs, and observation of the lives of the adherents of the religion. These are all reliable, epistemically respectable bases for belief in the truths of the Christian faith. But then William says this:

As long as the human heart assents to belief by these means, such belief is nothing but unformed faith, as long as it clings to testimonies and the evidence of miracles. But in order to truly and fully believe, one must cling to the First Truth alone, purely, nakedly, by requiring no external certification; which can only be done if the grace of faith shines forth.¹⁴

The testimony of Scripture, miraculous answers to prayer, and the moral witness of believers are all fairly common reasons cited for religious belief. But according to William, none of these can ground faith in the proper sense. They generate mere unformed faith, not the true virtue of formed faith. This last point must be borne carefully in mind: precisely what is ordinarily identified as sources and causes of religious belief are, according to William, not sufficient for faith in the proper sense.

What distinguishes unformed faith from formed faith?

---

¹³ SA 2.10.5.2 (p. 294-295, ll. 112-131). “Verbum fidei prope est cordi humano tribus de causis. i. Prima testimonium Scripture, legis scilicet et prophetarum…ii. Secunda causa est bonitas Dei, cuius, quia est optimus, est optima facere et optima adducere…iii. Tertia causa est effectus fidei qui multiplex est, quod fides facit homines similes Deo. Qui enim credit quod Deus dabit sibi tot et tanta bona, diligat ipsum super omnia; similiter qui credit quod omnes sumus fratres et filii Dei, statim diligat proximum sicut se et efficitur iustus et mansuetus et misericors; similiter qui credit quod corpus suum est templum Spiritus Sancti, statim efficitur castus. Alius est effectus, scilicet opera miraculorum que solis fidelibus privilegio fidei concessa sunt.”

¹⁴ SA 2.10.5.2 (p. 295, ll. 131-137). “Licet ergo tot modis prope sit verbum fidei ut credatur cordi humano, tamen dum per hos modos accedit cor humano ut credat, non est ilia credulitas nisi fidei informis, dum adhuc testimonii et miraculorum argumentis inhaeret; sed ut vere et plene credat, necesse habet soli Veritati Primae et pure et nude penitus inhaerere, nullam certitudinem extrinsecam requiringo. Quod non potest nisi gratia fidei illustretur.”
First, formed and unformed faith have different epistemic bases. Formed faith “clings to the First Truth alone, purely, nakedly,” while unformed faith relies on external evidence (see above, SA 2.10.5.2).

Second, the character of assent involved differs. What the various sources of unformed faith have in common is that although all of them are reasonable grounds for belief, none of them show with absolute certainty that the faith is true. Unformed faith, William concludes, is mere opinion (opinio), whereas formed faith counts as scientia or “knowledge,” and is in fact superior to natural knowledge (i.e., the sense in which we are using the term “knowledge” in this dissertation). He explicitly rejects a proto-Thomistic view whereby faith is a mode of assent midway between opinion and natural knowledge.\textsuperscript{15}

Third, unformed faith is not directly tied to salvation, to the attainment of beatitude. Unformed faith “is not a true virtue.”\textsuperscript{16} One can have unformed faith, even unformed faith in all the articles of faith, while being in mortal sin.\textsuperscript{17} Formed faith, by contrast, is a theological virtue, as noted above in the translation from SA 3.12. It is not virtuous because of what is believed (since someone with unformed faith can believe all the same things), but the way in which it is believed: by clinging nakedly to the First Truth rather than relying on external evidence.

Unformed faith comes off quite badly in the passages above! But William does not think that it is, in itself, a bad thing. In fact, unformed faith is “a kind of illumination preambulatory to

\textsuperscript{15} SA 3.12.2 (p. 201, ll. 47-48). “Fides est supra, non tantum supra opinionem, sed etiam supra scientiam, et supra etiam demonstrativam scientiam.”

\textsuperscript{16} SA 2.14.2 (p. 517, ll. 52-53). “Fides informis non est vera virtus.”

\textsuperscript{17} SA 3.42.1.2 (p. 795, ll. 48-50). “Habitus fidei bene potest esse informis, quia potest credere aliquis omnes articulos universaliter existens in peccato mortali.”
formed faith.” Since human beings in this life only come to know God through creatures, it makes sense that natural ways of believing like unformed faith and philosophical argument precede supernatural faith. However, William is quite clear that unformed faith ceases to be once the soul obtains the habit of formed faith. Although it is a habit of the intellect involving assent to certain propositions (criterion 1), it is not a virtue (criterion 2), it is not infused by God (criterion 3), and it is not meritorious (criterion 4).

The second kind of faith that William mentions in 3.12 is formed faith, “the formed habit of believing, which is properly speaking a virtue.” Formed faith differs from unformed faith first in its epistemic basis. Whereas the believing associated with unformed faith is based on external evidence, the believing associated with formed faith is based on an inner vision of God. William consistently describes the theological virtues, including faith, in sensual terms: “Faith says in the human heart, ‘Now I do not believe on account of natural reason, but because of what I see,’” for it is a spiritual light, an “illumination” of the soul by which we “see” God or “the First

---

18 SA 2.13.2 (p. 481, ll. 183-184). “Quoniam talis fides non innititur Primae Veritati sed argumentis, non est vera fides; est tamen aliqua illuminatio praeambula ad veram fiden, ut per illam illuminationem faciat homo quod in se est.”

19 A point frequently emphasized by William, e.g. in SA 2.17.2 (p. 576, ll. 206-207): “Oportet enim considerare creaturas que sunt via ad credendum Deum.”

20 Ottaviano says that unformed faith necessarily precedes formed faith (the ninth item on his list), but I do not think this is ever plainly stated by William. If we take unformed faith in the strict sense that excludes belief on the basis of natural reason, it is very likely false. On the other hand, if we stretch the notion of “unformed faith” to include not just belief on the basis of Revelation and miracles and on the basis of philosophical proof, but also more casual inferences from creation to God’s existence and the natural cognition of God that all human beings possess, then Ottaviano is right. But William nowhere defines “unformed faith,” in this way, and in the passage under discussion he explicitly contrasts unformed faith and natural knowledge of God.

21 SA 3.42.1.3 (p. 800, ll. 38-40, 43-44). “Fides informis non manet cum fide formata, ideo tantum lumen fidei formatae est, quod non patitur secum lumen virtutis informis...et ita eliminatur habitus credendi illis rationibus propter se.”

22 Boyd Taylor Coolman has aptly shown this in his 2004 book Knowing God by Experience.
Truth.” 23 “Faith is a certain vision or knowledge of eternal things.”24 God is perceived under formed faith as the “First Truth,” that is, as the source of all other truths, because He is the principle of existence.25

Formed faith, then, is not in the first place a habit of propositional belief, but a habit of spiritual perception which also generates propositional belief. It is also not a detached vision of God, but one bound up with affection for and delight in God. Hence, even though it is seated in the speculative intellect, it is a virtue.26 It is also the source of the other virtues necessary to attaining beatitude, hope and charity. In fact, William goes so far as to claim that hope and charity are not directly bestowed by God: only faith is directly caused by God in the soul, and the other two theological virtues are caused by faith.27 So once you have formed faith, you have all the theological virtues. In philosophical terms, the possession of formed faith is the single prerequisite achieving beatitude—a prerequisite that one cannot acquire for oneself but must receive from God. As William succinctly puts it, “Man is not justified by belief, but by faith, and since he can’t give himself faith, he can’t justify himself.”28

23 SA 3.12.4 (p. 208, ll. 68-71). “Tertia est gratuita, que fit per illuminationem, quando lux vera illuminat animam ad videndum se et alia spiritualia; et talis cognitio est fides gratuita, quae dicit in corde hominis iam non propter rationem naturalem credo, sed propter illud quod video.”

24 SA 3.7.3 (p. 223, l. 14). “Fides est quedam visio sive scientia quedam eternorum.”

25 This terminology is not unique to William. Aquinas uses it throughout his writings on faith. See, e.g., Summa Theologiae 2/2.1.1. “In fide, si consideremus formalem rationem objecti, nihil est aliud quam veritas prima, non enim fides de qua loquimur assentit alicui nisi quia est a Deo revelatum.”

26 SA 3.12.2 (p. 200, ll. 22-25). “Consistit enim in speculation Primae Veritatis et in aestimatione boni, quia dum intellectus per fidem speculatur Primam Veritatem, aestimatus eam sibi summe delectabilem et sibi summum bonum; et ideo movetur in illam, ut in ea delectetur et quiescat.”

27 SA 2.12.2.7 (p. 377, ll. 119-121). Fides est prima virtutum et causa, quia alias generat, et dignissima; per eam enim anima rationalis primo accedit ad Deum; et etiam prima cognitio est et maxima virtutum.”

28 SA 2.13.3 (p. 479, ll. 117-119). “Non per credere iustificatur homo, sed per fidem, et quoniam non potest dare sibi fidem, ideo non potest iustificare se.” Although William’s view of faith and salvation is not exactly like the Protestant doctrine of sola fide, it is difficult
But formed faith is not just a habit of vision. It is also a habit of belief on the basis of that inner vision of God. Through the vision of God associated with formed faith, the articles of faith become known *per se*. Thus the articles are able to serve as the first principles of an Aristotelian science: the science of theology. We will say more in Chapter Four on how formed faith generates knowledge of the articles of faith. For now, the important thing to note is that formed faith involves belief in all the articles of faith, that is, it has the same propositional content as unformed faith. They differ not in their content, but in their basis: the inner vision of God versus external evidence.

It is clear also that formed faith shares the four previously identified features with Aquinas’ conception of faith. It is a habit of the speculative intellect, a perfecting habit, a theological virtue, and a prerequisite for beatitude. Insofar, then, as Aquinas and William differ on the nature of this kind of faith, their disagreement over what the virtue of faith is, and hence their disagreement about the relative epistemic priority of faith and demonstrative arguments is not purely verbal, but quite substantial. Formed faith, then, is the kind of faith we will focus on, and following William’s own practice, we will often refer to formed faith simply as “faith”—assume that this means “formed faith” unless otherwise specified or obvious from context.

---

not to see the resemblance. He agrees with the Reformers that good works are the necessary consequence of being in a state of salvation rather than the necessary antecedent to it, and that all good works and virtues necessary for salvation are necessarily caused by faith, so that someone who has faith is necessarily bound for heaven. Not only that, but he thinks that since faith is the cause of all the other virtues, all other virtues and meritorious works are the effect—in Protestant terms, the “fruit”—of faith. The Anglican Reformed theologian and bishop John Davenant (1572-1641) cites William “Altissiodorensis” as an ally against Aquinas on the primacy of faith in his exposition of Colossians 1 (p. 68 in the English edition).

29 SA 3.12.1 (p. 199, ll. 59-62). “Quarto modo dicitur fides argumentum non apparentium propter articulos fidei, qui sunt principia fidei per se nota....Fides enim, quia soli veritati innititur, in ipsis articulis invenit causam quare credat eis, scilicet Deum.”
3b Spiritual Sensation

William thinks that faith is a habit of spiritual vision: the faithful do not merely believe things on God’s authority, but actually see God within themselves and see that the articles of faith are true. This is an unusual view in the Middle Ages and today (Aquinas, as we saw in Chapter One, explicitly rejects the view that the articles of faith are seen). In section 3b we will show how William’s unusual view of faith as inner vision fits with key features of his anthropology and his philosophy of mind. Our purpose is not to show that these features entail a certain doctrine of faith, but rather that they cohere with it: they help us understand why William adopts the view of faith that he does. They don’t necessitate that faith is inner vision, but they help explain why such an unusual view would be attractive and plausible to him. William’s overall philosophy of human nature illuminates his view of faith as inner vision.

The first point we want to establish is that William thinks that the ultimate purpose of human life is intellectual apprehension of God. Like Aquinas, William of Auxerre thinks that the ultimate end of a human being is intellectual.30 William defends the Aristotelian claim that “all men by nature desire to know” against concerns that this gives license to indulge in the sin of curiosity:

Virtue and knowledge [scientia]31 are perfections of the soul. But every perfection is of greater dignity than what it perfects. Therefore, when someone moves into scientia,

30 See, e.g., SA 2.11.2.2.2 (p. 332, ll. 74-77). “Perfectio sumitur a fine, ut apparat in differentiis specificis quae perfectiva sunt specierum. Rationale enim dicit aptitudinem ad actum ratiocinandi ad quem est homo, et propter quem ordinatus est ad ultimum finem, scilicet ad beatitudinem.”

31 Throughout this dissertation we have been using “knowledge” to refer to natural, demonstrative knowledge. In many places William uses the term in this way: for example, we saw that in SA 3.12.4, on “Whether the same thing can be known [scitum] and believed,” he uses scientia and the verb scire specifically to refer to natural, demonstrative knowledge, as opposed to the supernatural cognition of faith. In other places, however, he uses scientia to refer to knowledge in a broader sense: any certain cognition that perfects and delights the intellect, including faith. To avoid confusion, I will use the Latin term scientia rather than the usual English translation “knowledge” in this section when I am referring to “knowledge” in that second, more general sense.
he moves into something higher. Therefore, there is no fall in this case, since a fall only occurs when there is movement to what is below. But without a fall there is no sin (and so on as before).

Also, scientia is a certain delightful good, but not sensation. Therefore, it is spiritual, and naturally delightful to the intellect. Therefore, just as it is not a sin for sensation to naturally delight in its own delightful thing, neither is it a sin for the intellect to delight in scientia, since it delights in it naturally (and so on as before).

Also, virtue and scientia are the two perfections of the soul. But virtue in itself cannot be loved inordinately, since God and virtue are loved by the same act of delight, as Origen says. Therefore, neither can scientia be loved inordinately, although some particular virtue or knowledge can be loved inordinately, as in the case of the continent hypocrite. 32

Since scientia is a perfection of the soul, 33 acquiring more scientia is always better than not doing so, all else being equal. Scientia is intrinsically delightful and cannot be loved inordinately in itself. Therefore, it is not in itself a sin: rather, it is a natural object of the intellect’s delight. 34

---

32 SA 2.12.3.2, p. 384-385 (ll. 43-54). “Item virtus et scientia sunt perfectiones animae. Sed omnis perfectio dignior est eo quod perficitur; ergo cum quis movetur in scientiam, movetur in superius; ergo non est ibi casus, quia non est casus nisi ubi movetur in inferius. Sine casu autem non est peccatum; et inde ut prius.

Item scientia est bonum quoddam delectabile, sed non sensus; ergo spirituale est et delectabile intellectus naturaliter. Ergo sicut si sensus naturaliter delectetur in suo delectabili non est peccatum, ita nec si intellectus in scientia, cum naturaliter in ea delectetur; et inde ut prius.

Item virtus et scientia sunt duae perfectiones animae; at virtus ex se libidinose non potest diligi, quia eadem dilectione diligitur Deus et virtus, ut dictit Origenes; ergo nec scientia a similii, licet aliqua virtus vel scientia possit diligi ex libidine, ut hypocrita continentiam.

33 For this see the opening to the Treatise on the Virtues, SA 3.11 (p. 171, ll. 1-15). “Beatus Augustinus sic diffinit virtutem: ‘Virtus est bona qualitas mentis qua recte vivitur, qua nemo male utitur, quam Deus in nobis sine nobis operatur.’ ‘Qualitas’ ponitur tamquam genus; ‘bona’ ponitur ad differentiam malarum qualitatum sive malarum habituum, ut prodigalitatis et avaritiae...’Qua recte vivitur’ dicitur ad differentiam scientiae. Scientia enim recte intelligimus, virtute recte vivimus, quoniam cum sit duplex intellectus, speculativus et practicus, speculativi intellectus, in quo est scientia finis, est verum, practici vero intellectus, in quo est virtus finis, est bonum et operatio. Et ideo hec differentia est inter scientiam et virtutem, quod per scientiam vere intelligimus, per virtutem autem bene sive recte vivimus.

34 How, then, does William understand the sin of curiosity? In essence, he claims that curiosity is not a radix, a root of sin. Since knowledge, like virtue, is a natural good, it’s not wrong to delight in knowledge, unless out of “inappropriate desire” or libido. An inappropriate desire for virtue would obtain in the case of the continent hypocrite—presumably this refers to a “Pharisee” who does good deeds for the sake of others’ approval rather than for the sake of God. William doesn’t give a concrete example of the sin of curiosity, but you could imagine similar cases to the continent hypocrite: for example, someone who teaches philosophy merely for the fame and wealth involved rather than for the sake of acquiring knowledge. Furthermore, although it is not wrong to acquire knowledge of creatures as a means of acquiring knowledge of God, with the accompanying delight that comes with natural knowledge, it is a sin to delight in natural things as one’s ultimate end, rather than as means to the
As noted in William’s second argument above, scientia, like virtue, is bound up with delight for William. Delectatio or pleasure is a sign of perfection. An intrinsically delightful operation is a sign that one has reached one’s end.\textsuperscript{35} Scientia, the perfection of the speculative intellect, involves perceiving, and delighting in, the immaterial beauty of truth.

The final perfection of the intellect, however, is not found in scientia of any created thing, but scientia or vision of God Himself:

The operation of the intellect strives toward a specific end, in the acquisition of which it delights and rests; and this end is the First Truth. For if the intellect draws delight from considering that the diameter is incommensurate with the side, so much the more will it delight in the cognition of the First Truth.

Also, there is delight in the vision of a beautiful sensible. Therefore there is delight in the vision of a beautiful intelligible. Therefore, the intellect has its own delight in its own end and perfection.\textsuperscript{36}

For William, our ultimate end is found in the use of the speculative intellect to see God. The operation of the intellect is naturally inclined toward the end of resting in and delighting in the First Truth. Our intellect has a natural, limited delight in knowing natural truths, such as mathematical truth; so much more, then, will it delight in seeing the First Truth Himself. The purpose of our intellect, and its perfection in scientia, is exclusively the vision of God.\textsuperscript{37}

\footnotesize

\textsuperscript{35} As it is for Aristotle: see \textit{Nicomachean Ethics} 7.11, for example.

\textsuperscript{36} SA 3.36.1 (pp. 684-5, ll. 37-42). “Item, operatio intellectus tendit ad aliquem finem, in cuius adeptione delectatur et quiescit, et iste finis est prima Veritas, si enim delectatur intellectus ex eo, quod considerat quod diameter costae est asimeter, multo fortius delectabitur in cognitione Primae Veritatis.

Item, delectatio est in visione pulcri sensiblis; ergo delectatio est in visione pulcri intelligibilis; ergo intellectus habet delectationem suam in fine suo et perfectione.”

\textsuperscript{37} Notably, William does not say that understanding the quiddities of material things, or natural philosophical knowledge in general, could be a possible end or source of fulfillment for human beings. In fact, he explicitly denies it. In SA 3.12.2 (pp. 200-201) he considers how faith can be a virtue even though it is seated in the speculative intellect, not the practical intellect. He says that faith is a virtue because faith involves not just speculatio or contemplation of God, but aestimatio or recognition of God’s goodness, which triggers the desire of the will. But
The second point we want to make is that William believes in a strong parallelism between sensory and intellectual powers, such that he routinely describes intellectual activity as vision, and seems to mean something more than metaphorical by this. The idea that our ultimate end is the perfection of our intellect in seeing God is not an unusual view among medieval thinkers. And it is not unusual to explain intellectual processes by analogies with sensory processes, especially vision. What is unusual, however, is the seriousness with which William takes the analogy between physical vision and intellectual activity, to the point that it all but ceases to be an analogy for him. The thesis of Boyd Taylor Coolman’s book *Knowing God by Experience* is that “the doctrine of the spiritual senses is central to William’s conception of human knowledge of God, especially so in the next life, but in the present life too. So crucial is this doctrine for William that it consummates his account of Christian theology and the

faith is the only perfection of the theoretical intellect that ought to work this way.

Aquinas, as we saw in Chapter One, says that human beings have two ends: a natural, imperfect end; and a supernatural, perfect end. Our natural end involves understanding the essences of physical things: basically, doing philosophy. Our supernatural end involves understanding God’s essence. Mark Jordan (p. 234) claims that in Aquinas’ view “philosophy was incapable of providing happiness,” but he must mean the happiness that comes from reaching our supernatural end specifically, and not our natural end. The texts that he cites in support of his claim (*In Boeth. De Trin. 3.3 and 6.4, SCG 3.148, Compendium Theologiae 1.104, and ST 1/2.3.6*) all speak to this point, and do not deny than an imperfect, natural happiness is possible in this life, or that we have a natural end that is distinct from our supernatural end.

William never makes such a distinction. In fact, he explicitly says that if someone delights in the knowledge of creatures, as a sort of end, then he commits adultery against God. So William is far from saying that natural, philosophical knowledge constitutes an end or fulfillment for human beings. But here William seems to contradict himself. Earlier he said that the intellect delights in geometrical truths, and didn’t seem to think there was anything wrong with that. But now he says that it is a sin for the intellect to delight in anything but God!

Fortunately this contradiction can be solved, in two steps. First, we can use a distinction William uses elsewhere between kinds of love (dilectio). He says that there is a perfectly morally acceptable natural love by which one truly loves creatures (such as one’s parents), but not as one’s ultimate end. Inordinate, sinful love involves loving creatures precisely as one’s ultimate end (see *SA 2.11.2.1*, p. 323). Applying this analogously to intellectual delight, we can say that there are two ways of delighting in created intellectual truths. First, there is a natural delight, a sort of reflexive joy the intellect feels in discovering the truth. This does not involve delighting in those truths as one’s ultimate end: the geomaterician enjoys geometry, but he does not necessarily think geometry is the purpose of his life. If he delights in geometry in this way, then he is treating geometry like God, and thus committing the sin of intellectual adultery. Second, we can note that, as we will discover later in Chapter Three, William thinks that we reach direct knowledge of God by means of indirect knowledge of God through creatures. So there seems to be a way in which knowledge of creatures can be delighted in as a means to knowing God.
knowledge of God” (Coolman 3). William’s doctrine of the spiritual senses is “capillary—pervasive, yet easily overlooked due to its subtle dispersion throughout” (ibid.). Coolman proved his thesis well in his book. But the claim must be taken farther than Coolman took it: William’s theology of the spiritual senses is not just a religious or mystical doctrine, but is rooted in his philosophical power parallelism. It is not just that he thinks that God is spiritually sensed, but that all intellectual activities can be characterized in sensory terms. Since faith is the theological virtue of the intellect, this means that faith, too, and even our cognition of the articles of faith, can be characterized in sensory, visual terms—a view which Aquinas explicitly rejects, but William happily adopts because of his strong power parallelism. In what follows we will educe several texts that show just how seriously William is willing to take this parallelism.

It is commonplace in the Middle Ages to posit an intellect and will as the immaterial counterparts of the sense powers (including the five senses, imagination, memory, etc.) and the material concupiscible power or powers (which have to do with physical desires for food, sex, etc.). In fact, William often refers to the intellect as the “spiritual sense” and “spiritual vision” and even to the will as the “human concupiscible power,” as opposed to the “brute concupiscible power.” Often he simply calls the will “the concupiscible power.” But William’s parallelism between the material and immaterial powers is more fine-grained than that: even sub-powers of the lower powers sometimes have parallels in the higher powers. This shows how seriously he takes the project of making the immaterial intellectual powers parallel to the material sense powers.

38 See, e.g., SA 2.2.1 (p. 35, ll. 97-100): “Sed vis concupiscibilis se habet ad diligendum Deum principaliter et per se, set ad diligendum creaturam nec principaliter nec per se; ergo magis se habet ad diligendum Deum quam ad diligendum aliquam creaturam.” This could not possibly refer to the material concupiscible power.

See also SA 2.14.1 (pp. 512-513, pp. 67-71): “Anima enim ligatur carni per sensum, imaginationem et ceteras vires brutales, non per intellectum. Ergo intellectus in commixtione ad carnem non trahit maculam. Eadem ratione nec vis concupiscibilis humana, nec vis irascibilis humana, quorum operationes sunt abstractae a sensibus.”
First and most uniquely to William, there are the twin estimative powers. William adopts from Avicenna’s thought the estimative power, a power of the brain by which an animal perceives not just sensible particulars, but qualities that determine the animal’s attitude and hence behavior toward the object of the senses, such as enmity and friendliness. The estimative power also activates the material concupiscible power, which in lower animals results in action. William, taking his cue from Avicenna, frequently draws analogies from the animal world: when a sheep perceives a wolf, it not only perceives the wolf, but the wolf’s enmity towards it. This impels the sheep to action: it runs away from the wolf, but not if he thinks that the wolf is a sheepdog and therefore friendly. A dog sees a bone, judges it to be good, and immediately goes and gets it.

But William departs from Avicenna when he claims there are two estimative powers: a lower, material-sensory estimative power, which animals have; and a higher “estimation of reason,” which only humans have, which apprehends what is good and delightful in the objects of the intellect, most of all in God. In fact, he straightforwardly infers the existence of the rational estimative power from the existence of the brute estimative power. This rational estimative power is a sub-power of the speculative intellect. So seriously does William take his


40 SA 3.38.2 (p. 721, ll. 120-125). “Et quod ita sit, probatur per simile sumptum a brutis animalibus, quia ovis non fugit lupum, nisi quia aestimat eum sibi nocivum, si enim aestimaret de lupo quod esset canis, non fugeret, eodem modo nullum animal brutum appetit aliquid naturaliter, nisi prius aestimet illud amicabile sibi.”

41 SA 3.38.2 (p. 723, ll. 200-204). “Item, aestimatio, qua aliquis aestimat per fideum Deum esse summum bonum sive summe delectabile, generativa est desiderii illius boni, quod patet per simile in brutis animalibus, cum enim canis aestimat os sibi delectabile sive amicabile, statim movetur ad illud et illa aestimatio brutalis immediate generat desiderium brutale.”

42 SA 3.38.2 (p. 721, ll. 124-127). “Cum ergo in brutis ita sit, quod in illis generet appetitum et fugam, a simili ita est in rationalibus, quod aestimatio rationis generabit appetitum rationalem et fugam rationalem; sed constat quod aestimatio boni fidei est.”
project of modeling the immaterial intellectual powers on the material sensory powers that he
even divides the intellect into sub-powers in a way that parallels the sensory powers.

William also applies his power parallelism to other aspects of the intellect. The intellect
also has an array of powers that William explicitly compares to the material powers of memory
and imagination.\textsuperscript{43} The imaginative power is divided into the recollecting imagination, the
assimilating imagination, and the fabricating imagination (the details need not concern us). The
intellect, therefore, is likewise divided into the recollecting and assimilating intelligence.\textsuperscript{44}
William thinks that if our physical sense powers (including brain powers such as the
imagination) have certain sub-powers, our intellectual powers must have equivalent sub-powers,
absent some compelling reason to think otherwise. He is confident enough in this to make
immediate inferences from the structure of the physical senses (such as the imagination) to the
structure of the immaterial senses (such as the intellect). This shows that the parallelism between
intellectual and sensory powers is not just an illustrative metaphor: he seems to think he can
actually can draw reliable inferences from one set of powers to the other.

Even when the parallelism between the intellectual and sensory powers is broken, this
only illustrates how seriously William takes the doctrine. In \textit{SA} 4.18.3.3, when discussing the
number of the “spiritual” or immaterial senses, he says there is only one (the intellect) rather than
five (as in the case of the physical senses). As it turns out, there are several distinct spiritual

\textsuperscript{43} \textit{SA} 3.37.3 (pp. 707-708, ll. 109-117). “Sicut multiplex est imaginatio, ita multiplex est intelligantia. Est autem
imaginatio recolens, qua imaginatur illud, quod prius fuit in sensu nostro et quod scimus fuisse in sensu nostro; et est
imaginatio assimilans, qua imaginamur illud, quod non fuit in sensu, sed cuius simile fuit, sicut imaginor Herculem
per aliquem similem ei, qui fuit in sensu nostro; et est imaginatio confingens, qua imaginor chimeram. Similiter est
intelligentia recolens, et est intelligentia assimilans, et secundum hanc intelligentiam intelligit anima angelum, per
hoc quod intelligit se, quae est similis angelo.”

\textsuperscript{44} Curiously, he does not mention the fabricating intelligence, but it is not necessary for his argument (which has to
do with how we know about angels), and he does not deny its existence.
sense operations that William thinks correspond to the five physical senses. These correspond to different objects of spiritual sensation of God (God’s goodness versus His majesty for example) and different ways of apprehending those objects (through another versus for yourself; as they are in God versus as they benefit creatures). 45 But all of these operations are operations of one spiritual sense, the intellect. The reason is that the intellect is in potentiality to every intelligible (i.e., every spiritual sensible), whereas the physical sense powers are in potentiality only to specific kinds of sensibles. 46 Thus the parallelism between the brute sense power and the rational intellect is extremely fine-grained, and when a parallel is absent (as in the case of the five material vs. single intellectual sense), William explains why. Otherwise, he assumes that the material and immaterial powers and sub-powers run in parallel, and that he can infer from the existence of one to the existence of the other.

The intellect is the power of the soul that William treats in the most detail, so it is not surprising that we find the most fine-grained distinctions and parallels there. But the will, or “human concupiscible power,” receives similar, though sketchier, treatment. The brute concupiscible power has a sub-power called “sensuality,” which puts into play immediate, 45 Here William is following a long tradition in Christian spirituality (as Coolman’s book shows), and particularly the spirituality of Anselm, who describes spiritual experience in sensual terms: see Proslogion 16 and Brown (esp. p. 400), who argues that the aesthetic dimension of Anselm’s epistemology is too often neglected but provides a key to understanding his view of the relation between faith and reason.

46 SA 4.18.3.3 (pp. 514-15, ll. 70-90). “Dicimus quod sensus spiritualis, licet sit unus in essentia, habet tamen diversas operationes et diversas delectationes, sicut videre album et videre nigrum diverse sunt visiones, et sicut tactus, cum sit unus sensus, habet tamen cognoscere multas contrarietates ut calidum, frigidum, siccum, leve, ponderosum etc. Et sicut sensus interior, ut dicit Augustinus, in libro de libero arbitrio, — quem sensum interiorem vocat Aristoteles sensum communem, — omnia sensata habet cognoscere, sic sensus spiritualis, cum sit unus, omnia sensata spiritualia habet cognoscere. Quilibet tamen sensus spiritualis multas habet operationes, ut patet in visum spirituali: videmus bonitatem Dei, maiestatem Dei et alias virtutes exemplares quae in Deo sunt, et diversas sunt istae visiones. Ab eodem sensu et audimus spiritualiter et gustamus etc. Cum enim bonitatem, maiestatem Dei, omnipotentiam et sic de aliis cognoscimus ab alici, tunc audimus spiritualiter que Iesus dicit; eodem possimus cognoscere per nos; et hoc est videre spiritualiter. Item, cum cognoscimus quod ab his diffunduntur bona super creaturas, odoramur spiritualiter; et cum illa meditarum, masticamus spiritualiter; et cum illis cognitis inflammamur ad amorem Dei, tunc tangimus Deum spiritualiter. Tangimus enim calorem Dei. Similiter cum sentimus nos levatos supra nos, tangimus levitatem Dei.”
instinctive emotional reactions. Likewise, the will has a similar sub-power, the “rational sensuality,” the “lower part of the concupiscible power,” which governs the will’s desire for temporal things as opposed to eternal things. It is the “first motion” of the will, by which we will things reflexively before consulting the judgement of reason.\(^47\)

Finally, along with the rational sense power (the intellect) and a rational concupiscible power (the will), William posits a rational irascible power.\(^48\) Just as the material irascible power enables one to overcome difficulties in attaining what you desire by the material concupiscible power, the immaterial irascible power is ordered toward “removing impediments on the way that leads to the good” apprehended by the intellect (through the estimative power) and desired by the will.\(^49\) As the “rational power is ordered to the true in general, by whatever truth it is true,” and the “concupiscible [power] toward the delightful, by whatever delight it is delightful,” likewise “the irascible power is ordered toward the high or the glorious, by whatever height it is high.”\(^50\)

Although William does not argue for the principle of strong power parallelism, when the parallelism is broken in the case of the number of the senses, his argument is careful and intricate

\(^{47}\) **SA** 3.11.3.4 (p. 192, ll. 36-48). “Ad secundo obiectum dicimus quod cum dicitur: primi motus sunt in sensualitate, ibi accipitur sensualitas non pro brutali, sed pro sensualitate humana. Est enim **duplex sensualitas: brutalis**, quae movetur per modum nature, et est irrationalis, nec subest libero arbitrio, qua concupiscimus comedere vel coire velimus nolimus; in hac nec est virtus nec est vitium. **Est etiam sensualitas humana**, quaest est inferior pars vis **concupiscibilis**. Vis enim concupiscibilis humana habet duas partes: superiorem, qua concupiscit eterna, et inferiorem, qua concupiscit temporalia; et secundum utramque partem movetur voluntarie; et ideo in ea est peccatum, et in ea sunt primis motus quibus indebito modo concupiscimus temporalia ante iudicium rationis. Per hoc patet solutio ad secundo obiectum, quoniam primi motus sunt in sensualitate; sed illa non est communis nobis cum brutis.”

\(^{48}\) Aquinas explicitly denies that there is a rational irascible power. See **ST** 1.82.5.

\(^{49}\) **SA** 3.14 (p. 251, ll. 95-98). “Vis enim intellectiva proprie est ad verum; vis concupiscibilis proprie est ad bonum; vis irascibilis proprie est ad removendum impedimenta viae quae ducit ad bonum, nec est ad bonum nisi exspectando se perventuram ad ipsum quasi per bella.”

\(^{50}\) **SA** 3.36.1 (p. 687, ll. 105-108). “Vis rationabilis est ad verum generaliter, quacumque veritate sit verum; vis irascibilis ad altum vel gloriosum, quacumque altitudine sit altum; concupiscibilis ad delectabile, quacumque delectatione sit delectabile.”
(his discussion of the number of the spiritual vs. corporeal senses numbers eleven pages in the critical edition). He seems to take it as a fundamental principle that spiritual and immaterial powers run parallel unless there is a very good reason to think otherwise. One motivation for this may come from his view that the human soul is ordered toward the Beatific Vision and not toward any other end (such as understanding material quiddities). As Coolman argues throughout his book, William is very explicit that the Beatific Vision is to be thought of in spiritual-sensory terms. Since Beatific Vision is something like physical vision, and all other objects of the intellectual powers are apprehended so as to serve as a way of reaching the Beatific Vision, it is not surprising that William conceives of the whole human intellectual apparatus as a collection of immaterial sense powers, structurally analogous to the physical sense powers.

When we see how William applies his power parallelism to the intellect in particular, we begin to see how this is important for his doctrine of faith. The intellect, in William’s terms, is “the spiritual organ of sight” (spirituale organum videndi; SA 3.42.2.2, p. 805). Its most important object is God Himself, perceived directly in the Beatific Vision. But the intellect reaches this highest vision gradually, by seeing other, lesser things. Unlike Aquinas, who characterizes the intellect’s journey to beatitude in primarily propositional terms—one begins, like a student, by believing what your Teacher tells you, and only later see it for yourself—on William’s view it is vision all the way down (and up). You begin with a rudimentary, dim vision of God in creatures. This seeing God in creatures is increasingly perfected until you reach the direct, Beatific Vision of God. William identifies several stages on this path: faith (fides), understanding (intellectus), and wisdom (sapientia). William’s view of perfection, then, is gradual in the sense that faith is the beginning of a process that culminates in the Beatific Vision, and that there are stages of perfection between faith and the Beatific Vision. Faith is the initial
gift of grace from God that enables you to see Him in an obscure way. William expresses this view of things in the first few pages of the *Summa Aurea*, in the Prologue:

> When someone has true faith and arguments by which the faith can be proven, such a person does not rely on the First Truth because of those arguments, but rather assents to the arguments because they agree with the First Truth and attest to It. This is signified by the Samaritan people in John 4, by whom are signified those who believe rightly. When they see Jesus by true faith, they say to the Samaritan woman— that is, to human reason—*Now we believe, not because of you, but because we have seen him for ourselves* [John 4:42]. And the greater faith is in someone, the more quickly and clearly does the soul see not just that what it believes is the case, but how and why it is, which is to understand. Hence Isaiah [7:9] says, *Unless you believe, you will not understand*, because the mind, without the light of faith, cannot see divine things more clearly.\(^51\)

“To understand” (*intelligere*) is a technical term for William: it refers to spiritual gift of *intellectus* or understanding, which enables someone to work out philosophical arguments for Christian doctrines as well as deduce new conclusions from the articles of faith (see SA 3.34.1, pp. 649-650). But *intellectus* is not just an intellectual talent: it is a spiritual gift bestowed by God, as much mystical and experiential as scientific, a deeper way of seeing God than faith alone.

The next stage is wisdom or *sapientia*, by which one “knows by experience what God is like” (*qualis sit Deus*, SA 1.4.1, p. 41), an even more intimate knowing than mere faith or rational understanding and a foretaste of the Beatific Vision. This process of progressively more intense sensation of God begins with faith: as William puts it in the passage quoted above, without the initial gift of faith, it is impossible “to see divine things more clearly.” The point I

\(^{51}\)SA Prologue (p. 16, ll. 26-39). “Cum autem habet quis veram fidem et rationes quibus ostendi possit fides, ipse non innititur Primae Veritati propter illas rationes, sed potius acquiescit illis rationibus quia consentiunt Primae Veritati et ei attestantur. Quod significatum est per Samaritanos, Ioann. 4, per quos significatur recte credentes qui, videntes Iesum per veram fidem dicit Samaritane, id est rationi humane: *iam non propter te credimus, sed quia ipsi vidimus*. Quanto autem maior est in aliquo fides, tanto citius et clarius videt huiusmodi rationes, quoniam fides mentis est illuminatio ad Deum videndum et res divinas. Et quanto magis illuminatur, tanto clarius videt anima non tantum quod ita est ut credit, sed quomodo ita est et quare ita est ut credit; quod est intelligere. Unde dicit Ysaias vii: *Nisi credideritis non intelligetis*, quia mens sine lumine fidei clarius videre non potest res divinas.”
want to draw out is that the different stages in the process all involve spiritual experience characterized in sensual, visual terms.

Here is an analogy that might help us understand William’s view. In Chapter One, I said that Aquinas has an “apprenticeship” model of human perfection, in which one moves from acceptance of propositions on authority in this life to direct vision of their truth in the life to come through seeing the divine essence directly. We could say, by way of contrast, that William has a “workmanship” model of perfection. The faithful, in this case, is not the student, but the work of art itself: God, like a craftsman detailing a sculpture or a painter proceeding from a sketch to a complete painting, increases our power of spiritual sight until we can see Him directly. The emphasis is not on learning propositions on authority in order to eventually get to know them for ourselves (as on the apprenticeship model), but on the transformation of raw material (the human person) into the perfected being it was intended to be. This helps illuminate why William emphasizes the continuity between faith and the Beatific Vision, even characterizing faith as vision.

Further, William thinks that this gradual perfection is intrinsic to human nature:

We happily concede that in the present we see God…Just as the vision of an owl is related to this visible Sun, so is our intellect, at present, to the Intelligible Sun…This weakness is not a punishment, but a partial imperfection of the intellect, for the intellect ought to acquire the best perfection through merits, which, when it has, it will see God face to face.52

52 SA 3.37.3 (pp. 705-706, ll. 44-59). “Bene concedimus quod in praesenti videmus Deum…Sicut visus noctuae se habet ad istum solem visibilem, sic intellectus noster modo ad solem intelligibilem…Haec impotentia non est poena, sed imperfectio intellectus in parte, perfectionem enim optimam debet acquirere intellectus per merita, quam cum habebit, videbit Deum facie ad faciem.”
Our intellects are naturally too weak to see God, but they were created in order to acquire that ability. To begin the journey to our natural end, we need supernatural help—and this comes through the virtue of faith, by which we begin to see God.

We interpreted William as saying that the transition from faith to the Beatific Vision is a gradual one: the inner vision of faith and the Beatific Vision are not utterly different things, but are the lowest and highest points along a progression of similar states. Our transition from faith in this life to direct vision in the life to come does not involve a sudden replacement of one cognitive state with another of an entirely different class, but rather the gradual clarification of our seeing God until it is no longer obscure and mediated by creatures, but direct and unmediated. Now, when I say “gradually,” I do not necessarily mean that there is a continuous or even perfectly incremental progression from the most basic infusion of faith to the Beatific Vision, or that the difference between faith and the Beatific Vision can be expressed in merely quantitative terms. Presumably the process is not entirely continuous. There must be a qualitative and quantitative break between the highest or best way of seeing God in creatures and the Beatific Vision. And William marks out clear stages in that progression—the stages where one can exercise the gifts of intellectus and sapientia—that are importantly different from anything that preceded them. William makes it clear that there is a gradual progression from faith to the Beatific Vision, but does not definitively say whether that progression is continuous, incremental, or something else; so the answer to that question is beside the point.

### 3c Faith as Vision

But the conception of faith as a vision of God at the beginning, not the end, of our journey to beatitude raises serious problems. In what way do the faithful see God? Many Christians claim to have the virtue of faith (and we can charitably assume they do), but very few would claim, in so
many words, to have seen God. In fact, the Bible says that *No one has seen God* (John 1:18).

More specifically: How is the inner vision of faith to be distinguished from the final vision of God, the Beatific Vision? There is an empirical difficulty here: since we can assume that most ordinary Christians have faith, either faith is not the Beatific Vision or the Beatific Vision isn’t all it’s cracked up to be. There is also a logical difficulty: if faith is the beginning of a process that ends in the Beatific Vision, it cannot itself be the Beatific Vision. William is aware of this difficulty, but unfortunately his remarks are themselves quite difficult and need unraveling. A reader looking for a rigorous defense of William’s view will be disappointed; it will be enough to show that he does attempt to answer the question, and that his answer can be construed in a way that is not implausible.

In section 3c, then, we will consider in what sense exactly faith is a vision of God. First, we will see how William distinguishes faith from the Beatific Vision. The Beatific Vision is a direct, unmediated vision of God, while faith is an “improper” vision of God “in the mirror of creatures.” This is a hard saying; if William means that faith is not really a vision of God at all, but that this is merely a metaphor, then the whole thesis of this chapter is doomed. So, before we ask how God is seen by faith, we need to show that God really is seen by faith according to William. Second, we will consider how exactly faith involves seeing God in the mirror of creatures. This might distinguish faith from the Beatific Vision, but it seems to conflate faith with philosophical knowledge of God. We will find that faith involves seeing God, not by deduction from external creatures, but through an internal creature: the soul itself, reformed by grace. We will close by considering the plausibility of William’s view.

I have argued thus far that, for William, faith involves seeing God. There is at least one passage where William seems to concede the opposite: that when faith is said to be a vision of
God, this is not said “properly” (proprie). In colloquial English, he might have said that faith is not technically a vision of God. If this passage is interpreted to mean that faith is only metaphorically a vision of God, and not really, then either the thesis of Chapter Three, and of this whole dissertation, is doomed, or William massively contradicts himself. Moreover, we can’t discuss how the faithful see God if we still have not answered whether the faithful see God. So it is the latter question we will tackle first: I will show now that William does not mean to say that faith is not really a vision of God, but merely that it is a vision of a qualitatively different, and inferior, kind compared to the Beatific Vision.

In SA 3.42.2.2.1 (pp. 804-5), William considers whether faith will cease to exist in the life to come. William thinks that it will. He puts an objection to himself, however, which capitalizes on the idea that faith is a kind of vision. The objector argues that since faith is a vision of God, and the Beatific Vision is a vision of God, we need to determine what distinguishes them, and whether that distinguishing factor makes them different in species. The distinguishing factor, according to the objector, is that faith is “obscure” and “through a medium” while the Beatific Vision is “clear” and “not through a medium.” But in the case of physical vision, this sort of difference does not make for a specific difference (only, it is implied, a numerical difference). So, by parity of reasoning, what distinguishes faith from the Beatific Vision does not make them specifically distinct.53

53 SA 3.42.2.2.1 (p. 804, ll. 10-18). “Item, visio albi secundum quod album, est eiusdem speciei, sive sit per medium, sive non, sive clare videatur, sive obscure; ergo pari ratione eadem visio Dei, secundum quod Deus, est eiusdem speciei, sive videatur Deus per medium, sive non, sive videatur clare, sive obscure; sed fidei visio non est nisi visio Dei per medium et obscure, visio patrie est visio Dei sine medio et clare; ergo visio fidei et visio faciei sive patrie sunt eiusdem speciei; ergo eiusdem essentiae; ergo una non excludit aliam, immo, una manente secundum essentiam, alia manet; ergo visio fidei sive fides manebit in patria secundum essentiam.”
William answers the question in a different way: “faith will be annihilated individually and specifically, but not generically.”⁵⁴ He agrees with the objector that faith is a vision of God through a medium and obscurely, while the Beatific Vision is a vision of God without a medium and clearly. But he disagrees in that he thinks that faith and the Beatific Vision belong to the same genus—cognition or vision of God—but are not specifically identical. Hence, when faith is replaced with the Beatific Vision, faith will no longer exist, although something in the same genus will. So faith is distinct in species from the Beatific Vision, but the same in genus: it is not the same kind of vision of God, but belongs to the general category of vision of God.

Why does William think that faith and the Beatific Vision differ in species? His surprising answer comes with his reply to the objection:

Faith is not properly a vision of God, but is a sort of cognition or conjecturation. For the intellect is said to see a thing in the proper sense, as Augustine says commenting on Paul’s rapture in 2 Corinthians. For a thing is seen in the proper sense either through a species of its species, as when things absent are seen, which according to Augustine generate a cognition of themselves in the soul; or else through their own presence, as when the intellect understands itself, or when someone who has faith sees the faith in their own heart, as Augustine says. Therefore, since in the vision of faith God is not seen through a proper species of his species, nor through His very own presence, clearly faith is not, in the proper sense, a vision of God. That’s why it says in Exodus that Man shall not see me and live, and in John, No one has ever seen God.

Therefore, we say that the vision of faith and face-to-face vision do not belong to the same species. Nor is the analogy given applicable. For even given the controversial view that seeing a white thing without a mirror and in a mirror are specifically identical, the analogy doesn’t apply, because a mirror reflecting an image in itself transmits the image to the instrument of seeing, whereas a creature, which is “the mirror of the Trinity,” does not transmit a proper species or image of God in the spiritual organ of seeing, but only makes it think and conjecture about God, acting like a far-off mirror. Hence the Apostle says expressly, We see now through a mirror in an enigma, because it

⁵⁴ SA 3.42.2.1.1 (pp. 804-5, ll. 26-29). “Quamvis fides evacuetur secundum essentiam, non tamen secundum totam essentiam; evacabitur quidem secundum essentiam speciei, non secundum essentiam generis, quia manebit in quantum cognitio, licet evacuetur in quantum speculum seu enigma; ipsa autem generat caritatem, in quantum cognitio, et secundum hoc manebit sicut caritas. Dicimus ergo quod fides evacabitur secundum numerum et secundum speciem, sed non secundum genus, spes vero evacabitur secundum numerum et secundum speciem et secundum genus, quoniam nulla futura expectatio remanebit.”
is known through a far-off mirror.  

William says here that faith is not, properly-speaking, a vision of God, despite having claimed that faith is indeed a vision of God in numerous other places in the *Summa Aurea*. There seems to be a major contradiction here! In the rest of this section I will show that once this passage is properly understood, it can be shown to be consistent with the rest of what William says about faith. The view that emerges is as follows. Faith is indeed a vision of God: the faithful see God. But we must, like any good scholastic, make a distinction. Faith is not a vision of God in the strict sense of an apprehension of God unmediated by anything that is not God, as the Beatific Vision is. But this is not particularly unique to faith: *all* cognition or vision of God in this life is mediated by creatures. The lower form of such “improper” vision is cognition through external creatures, which is what the philosophers had. The higher form is cognition through the soul itself as it is transformed into an image of the Trinity: as the soul becomes more like God, we are more and more able to see God by knowing our own souls in a way unmediated by the material senses. This is faith: seeing God in the soul transformed by grace. This is not a vision of God in the strict sense of unmediated vision or vision through a species, but it is a vision of God in an extended, analogous sense. Now that we know what interpretation of William we are arguing for, let us examine the passage above in detail.

---

55 *SA* 3.42.2.1 (p. 805, ll. 34-54). “Ad aliud dicimus quod fides non est proprie visio Dei, sed est quaedam cognitio vel coniecturatio, ‘intellectus enim dicitur videre res proprie,’ sicut dicit Augustinus, super secundam ad Corinthios, ubi agit de raptu Pauli, videtur enim res proprie vel per speciem sue speciei, sicut videntur res absentes, quae, secundum Augustinum, ‘generant cognitionem sui in anima,’ vel secundum suam ipsis presentiam, sicut intellectus se intelligit, sicut qui habet fidem, videt eam in corde suo, sicut dicit Augustinus; cum ergo non videatur Deus visione fidei aut per propriam speciem suae speciei aut per suam ipsis presenciam, patet quod fides non est proprie visio Dei, unde in Exodo: *Non videbit me homo, et vivet*, et lohannes: *Deum nemo vidit unquam*. Dicimus ergo quod fidei visio et visio faciei non sunt eiusdem speciei, nec est simile quod inducitur pro simili, quia, dato hoc, quod tamen habet calumniam, quod eiusdem sit visio albi sine speculo et visio eiusdem speculo, non tamen simile est, quia speculum imaginem sibi resultantem in ipso transmittit ad instrumentum videndi, sed creatura, que est speculum trinitatis, non transmittit speciem vel imaginem propriam Dei in spirituale organum videndi, sed solum facit cogitare et coniecturare de Deo tanquam speculum longinquum, unde signanter dixit Apostolus: *Videmus nunc per speculum in aenigmate, quia scitum per speculum longinquum.*”
William contrasts faith with the Beatific Vision by saying that the Beatific Vision is a direct vision of God, whereas faith is somehow mediated. Identifying exactly what mediates faith is what creates the problem for William. William says that there are two ways that a thing can be seen in the proper sense. It can be seen by its own, immediate presence in the soul, which is how the human intellect is aware of itself and its qualities and, presumably, how God will be seen by the soul in the life to come. Or it can be seen through “a species of its species.” William seems to be using species in both senses of the term, a sort of double entendre: “a species (cognitive vehicle) of its species (kind).” William’s claim is easy to understand in terms of physical vision. When I see something green, it’s not that the green thing is actually, physically in my eyes or brain. Rather, I see it by means of something transmitted from the green thing, through the air, and into my eyes. That something, on the standard scholastic view which William here adopts, is a visible species, a cognitive vehicle, or as Pasnau puts it (After Certainty p. 71), the “causal intermediary” between the object perceived and my perception of it. The visible species “green” is the means by which I see the green object some distance from me.56

56 William says that Augustine makes the same distinction when commenting on the Apostle Paul’s rapture. William appears to be referring to the Literal Meaning of Genesis Book 12 (see 12.6.15 and 12.11.22ff. in that book). But the distinction Augustine makes there is slightly different. Augustine discusses three kinds of vision: bodily, spiritual, and intellectual. Bodily vision refers to direct, physical vision of material things, spiritual to our ability to remember and imagine material things in our mind’s eye, and intellectual to perception of things that have no bodily image: concepts like “love” or beings like God. Bodily and intellectual apprehension are direct, without a medium, while spiritual perception happens through a medium (I perceive my childhood home through the medium of my memory-image of that home). William has made some major modifications to Augustine’s schema:
1. As we’ll see in a moment in his discussion of our perception of angels, he has made room for spiritual perception through a medium, which Augustine explicitly says is not possible.
2. He conflates bodily vision and spiritual vision, identifying both of them as vision through a species, whereas Augustine would say that bodily vision is direct vision.
3. More fundamentally, he has shifted the meaning of species from an appearance in our mind to what Pasnau calls a “causal intermediary” involved in perception.

For more on Augustine’s schema see Németh 352ff, who expounds Augustine in the same way as I have. On pp. 353ff. Németh explains the eschatological and mystical dimensions of Augustine’s epistemological reading of Paul: Paul’s progress through the “three heavens” mirrors successively higher forms of perception, beginning with bodily things and ending with perceiving things that are not at all bodily, ultimately God. It is worth noting that, although William has fundamentally altered Augustine’s schema, he has kept the eschatological and mystical tone:
How is the visible species “green” able to enable my eyes to see greenness? It must be “a species of its species”—that is, it must correspond in some specific way to the green object—it is a visible species of green, not of red or white or black—that I am able to see the green object.\(^{57}\) Because it is somehow “of the species” of green, it is able to transmit the proper information from the green object to my eyes. In other words, the (perceptual) species by which I perceive the object of perception corresponds in some way to the (logical, classificatory) species of the object of perception: it is “a species of its species” or “a proper species.” The same thing happens in immaterial vision: I can think about cats, even though there are no actual cats in my mind, because I possess the appropriate cognitive vehicle: an intelligible species of cats that corresponds to actual cats in some specific way.\(^{58}\)

So we have two ways of properly seeing anything at all: direct presence and a proper species. Can faith, as a vision of God, fit into either of these categories? William thinks that it one begins by perceiving through the senses, sees God through a medium by faith, and then finally sees God directly in the Beatific Vision.

\(^{57}\) I can’t say that it is because the visible species is green. Although William never addresses this question, we can tentatively assume that he held to the common view that the species by which one perceives are not, themselves, perceived. A visible species of green, then, does not look green. It does not look like anything at all, and if it had a color that color would be invisible—a contradiction in terms.

\(^{58}\) William is not clear on what, exactly, it means for something to be a “species of its species.” There is no discussion of William’s view of species in the secondary literature, although there is plentiful discussion of species in other medieval authors that may illuminate William’s view. Brower & Brower-Toland, interpreting Aquinas, highlight the “intentional or representational” nature of a species (p. 198): it is about something else, and this aboutness is what makes the object of cognition present to the perceiver’s mind. Clearly something like this is true for William as well. But what is it that makes the species about its object? Adriaenssen (p. 325) identifies two contrasting tendencies that 13\(^{th}\) century writers gravitated toward: the “Causality” view, whereby a species is about its object because it was caused by its object and not by anything else; and the “Similarity” view, whereby a species is about its object because it somehow resembles its object. William’s “species of its species” language seems to push him toward the Similarity view: the species (cognitive vehicle) either belongs to the same species (logical class) as its object, or corresponds to the species (logical class) in some more complex way. The latter seems more sensible although less informative. At least, it is strange to suppose that the (invisible) species of green literally is an instance of the color green, or that the (non-living) species of moose literally is a moose. But William does not say much about this question; his view may not be quite this subtle.
cannot. Obviously it does not fit into direct presence, because then it would be the Beatific Vision, the “face-to-face vision” of God (visio faciei). But it can’t fit into the “proper species” category either, because God is far too different from creatures for a creature transmit a proper perceptible species of God. In SA 1.4.3 he says that “God does not have a single image, but many, because he is not like a single determinate nature,” implying that there is no creature that can represent the divine nature in the determinate way required for a “species of its species.”

William’s thought in SA 3.42.2.1, then, is probably something like this. A proper perceptible species (PPS) of God is either created or not. If not, it is God, and so God is cognized by direct presence, not by a PPS. But it is impossible for it to be created, because every creature has a determinate nature, but no determinate nature can be a PPS of that which does not have a determinate nature. Therefore, there can be no PPS of God. God, therefore, cannot be seen through a PPS. The argument, then, SA 3.42.2.1 is as follows:

1. All proper vision is either by immediate presence or by a proper species.
2. There is no proper species of God.
3. All proper vision of God is by immediate presence. (1,2)
4. The vision of God by immediate presence is the Beatific Vision.
5. Faith is not the Beatific Vision.
6. The vision of God by faith is not by immediate presence (4,5).
7. The vision of God by faith is not a proper vision. (1,3,6)

What are we do to with this argument? When William says that faith is not a proper vision of God, he might mean one of two things:

59 SA 1.4.3 (p. 44, ll. 31-33). “Deus non habet unam solam imaginem sed multas, quia non est sicut una natura determinata, sicut dicit Aristoteles de intellectu humano, quod non est una natura determinata, sed capax est cuiuslibet.”
1. “Vision” is used metaphorically. Faith is not really a vision of God at all. When we call it a vision, we mean it only metaphorically. Perhaps faith is a logical inference to God’s existence from some supernatural effect in the soul. Or perhaps it is merely belief in certain propositions about God. But it is not really a vision of God.

2. “Vision” is used analogously. Faith is really a vision of God, but in an extended or analogous sense. Although faith is not direct apprehension of God, it is a way in which something can be truly seen, but obscurely. It is inferior to proper vision, but that doesn’t mean it is not vision at all.

Option 1 is the easier position to understand, to be sure, and in that sense more plausible. But William clearly intends option 2. He is not denying that faith is a vision of God, only that it is a vision of a certain kind. He thinks it is possible to genuinely see or sense something without apprehending it directly.

First, when he is not trying to distinguish faith from the Beatific Vision, William is happy to say that faith is a vision of God, even in the midst of claiming that it is an improperly mediated or otherwise imperfect vision. We saw earlier that William says plainly that “in the present we see God,” although through the “veil of creatures” and not “face to face.” Interpreting 3.42.2.2.1 along the lines of option 1 would involve implicating William in a massive contradiction. It may give us a reasonable interpretation of this one passage, but would probably involve some inventive interpretations of numerous other passages in the Summa Aurea.

Second, in SA 3.42.2.2.1, the passage where he denies that faith is a proper vision, he still includes it in the same genus as the Beatific Vision. It would be odd for him to claim this if he did not think it was a vision of God in any sense. Why maintain that faith is preserved in any sense in the life to come? Why not just say that it is completely annihilated, in species and in
genus? (After all, in SA 3.42.2.2.1, he does say that the third theological virtue, hope, is annihilated both in species and in genus.)

Third, in SA 2.7.1, William asks whether prophecy is a virtue. The question is, essentially, how to distinguish prophecy from faith: if faith is a vision of God and counts as a virtue, and prophecy is a vision of God, then why doesn’t prophecy count as a virtue? If William thought that faith is not really a vision of God, then when asked to distinguish faith from prophecy, he could have just said that faith isn’t a proper vision of God, while prophecy is, and left things at that. Instead, he gives a rather complicated answer that I don’t entirely understand: it is not the “openness” of prophetic vision that keeps it from being a virtue, but rather that the prophet “relied altogether on the appearance and on the certitude of the vision itself, and not on the First Truth,” whereas the faithful “relies more on the thing seen for its own sake than on the vision itself.”

Fourth, William gives another example of cognition that seems to be both improper cognition and real scientia: God’s knowledge of evil. In SA 1.9.1 (p. 177), William says that God cognizes evil “by an exemplar—not by its proper exemplar, but through the exemplar of its opposite, just as blindness is cognized.” God truly knows evil, but not because of the presence of evil in God, nor by means of some “species of evil” in God. He knows it by an exemplar, but

---

60 SA 2.7.1 (p. 145, ll. 90-101). “Apertio visionis non prohibebat illam visionem esse virtutem, sed alid hoc, scilicet quod ipse videns, id est propheta innitetur ex toto apertioni et certitudini ipsius visionis et non Primae Veritati sive rei vise propter Primam Veritatem; propter istam eandem rationem visio sensibilis colorati non est virtus, quia in huius visione videns magis acquisiscit visioni quam viso. Sed in visione quae virtus est magis innititur videns rei vise propter se quam propter visionem. Sicut autem est de visione quae non est virtus, sic est de credulitate qua quis diligens magistrum suum ex affectu et credens ipsum esse summum in facultate sua, cum audit ab eo aliquid quod per se est dignum fide, magis credit illi rei propter hoc quod magister suus dicit eam quam propter ipsius rei veritatem.”

61 SA 1.9.1 (p. 179, ll. 52-56). “Dicimus quod malum cognoscitur per exemplar, sed non per proprium exemplar, sed per exemplar sui oppositii: sicut caecitas cognoscitur per suam oppositionem, scilicet per hoc quod visus deficit ubi debet esse. Cognoscitur ergo secundum hoc malum sive malitia non propter exemplaritatem suam, sed per exemplaritatem suae oppositionis.”
not a proper exemplar. So if we can say that God truly knows evil by an improper vehicle of cognition, we can say that by faith one truly sees God, especially given that on William’s view knowledge is vision.

Fifth, the issue of how a God whose properties include aseity, simplicity, and utter uniqueness and who says of Himself that *Man shall not see my face and live* (Exodus 33:20) could be perceived or known by other beings is a puzzle for all proponents of classical or Biblical theism. So it’s not a special issue for William’s epistemology. By analogy, if physical substances are not composed of matter and form, then swaths of William’s natural philosophy are invalidated. But in that case you should take up your argument with Aristotle, not William.

So be it, then: let’s run with option 2. What does it mean for faith to be a vision in an improper (analogous, extended, whatever) sense? What in the world is improper vision? In the passage from *SA* 3.42.2.2.1 quoted above, William referenced several different kinds of cognitive vehicles or things that can serve as means by which other things are cognized as well as several different kinds of cognitive acts. He mentioned “species of [the object’s] species,” but also two kinds of “mirrors,” “near” mirrors and “far-off” mirrors. He contrasts “vision in the proper sense” with mere “conjecturation.” Sorting out what all these terms mean will push us a long way toward understanding what William means when he says that faith is a vision of God.

Let’s start with the kinds of vision we already know: direct vision and species. We saw in *SA* 3.42.2.2.1 that William thinks that something can be seen properly in one of two ways: either through “their very own presence,” or through “a species of its species.” The soul knows itself and its own states through its very own presence to itself and will know God in this way in the Beatific Vision. At this point, our map of William’s zoo of cognitions looks like this:
But in this passage William references other kinds of cognition whose identities are more obscure. He talks about cognition by “mirrors,” differentiating between mirrors that “transmit the image to the instrument of seeing” and “far-off” mirrors, that merely “make [one] think and conjecturate.” At least in the second case we are not just talking about physical mirrors: the soul, William says, is “the mirror of the Trinity.” So we need to know what “mirrors” are, and what “conjecturation” is.\textsuperscript{62}

Earlier in \textit{SA} 3, William mentioned mirrors in a way that might help us. In \textit{SA} 3.37.3 (p. 705) he says that there are two kinds of “images” that cause vision: familiar images and external images.\textsuperscript{63} The first is a “familiar image,” the “passion of the soul” and “similitude of a thing” referred to in the opening of Aristotle’s \textit{On Interpretation}, which the object of cognition (says William) “generates in the soul when it is apprehended.” This is the standard scholastic doctrine of sensible or intelligible species: causal intermediaries that are not perceived in themselves, but generate cognitions in the mind. This seems to correspond to the “species of its species” of \textit{SA} 3.42.2.2.1. The second kind of image is an “external image, like a mirror.” He doesn’t explain...

---

\textsuperscript{62} I have intentionally translated the term with a bogus English word: the term “conjecture” may be misleading, because at this point we don’t know what William means by \textit{coniecturo, coniecturatio}.

\textsuperscript{63} \textit{SA} 3.37.3 (p. 705, ll. 19-24). “Duplex est imago rei, scilicet familiaris et extranea, liceat sic loqui; familiaris est, quam generat res apprehensa in animo auditoris sive apprehendentis; et haec est passio animae et similitudo rei, ut habitur in libro \textit{Periarmeneias}; imago extranea est sicut speculum, et sic creatura est imago creatoris; per imaginem enim extraneam potest videri Deus.”
exactly what he means by this, but he gives an example: that a creature is the image of its Creator in this second sense, and that “God can be seen through an external image.” These “mirrors” or “external images” can bring about “vision,” that is, they can serve as cognitive vehicles similarly to sensible/intelligible species, even if they are not, metaphysically-speaking, sensible/intelligible species: not all creatures are sensible/intelligible species, and yet creatures can serve as mirrors by which God is seen.

In the context of 13th century thought, William is making a very interesting claim about perception. It is a commonplace view of the time that, along with the things that we perceive in the world around us, there is another class of beings: sensible and intelligible species, which are not themselves cognized, but are the means by which we cognize the world around us. So we can roughly divide everything into two categories: (A) ordinary things, which can serve as the objects of cognition; and (B) species, which are the vehicles of cognition, themselves uncognized (except, perhaps, by daring philosophers). William accepts this picture of things, but adds an interesting twist: these categories may be metaphysically distinct, but they are not functionally distinct. That is, something that belongs to category (A)—an ordinary thing one would encounter out in the world, and maybe even cognize by means of a species—can serve as a cognitive vehicle. In other words, it can act as if it belongs to category (B).

So it seems that, besides direct cognition, there are two kinds of mediate cognition: by a species in the technical sense, and by a mirror. So now we have to add another kind of cognition to our zoo:
It’s not yet clear how cognition by a mirror relates to proper vision. If vision by a mirror is in every way like vision by a species, then vision by a mirror is a kind of proper vision. But we haven’t shown that that is true.

The answer turns out to be both yes and no. You’ll remember that in SA 3.42.2.2.1, William said that, rather than being seen properly, God is seen by faith as in a “far-off mirror” *(speculum longinquum)*. William returns to this theme just nine pages later, in SA 3.42.2.3 (p. 814). Here he distinguishes between two kinds of mirrors: “near” *(propinquum)* and “far” *(remotum)*. Take a case where A cognizes B by means of C, where C is a mirror, that is, a creature that is not itself a perceptible species but can function like one. If C belongs to the

---

64 It is clear from the context that the *speculum remotum* of SA 3.42.2.3 is identical to the *speculum longinquum* of SA 3.42.2.2.1, the passage on the Beatific Vision we looked at above.

65 SA 3.42.2.3 (p. 814, ll. 49-67), “Ad secundum dicimus quod duplex est speculum, propinquum, scilicet et remotum. Propinquum speculum dicimus, quando per rem alicuius speciei cognoscitur res eiusdem speciei, sicut anima se ipsam cognoscens per intellectum assimilantem cognoscit animas, cognoscit et angelos et omnes incorporales substantias, sicut dicit Augustinus, similiter videns anima perfectiones suas presentes per intellectum assimilantem cognoscit easdem in angelis, per huiusmodi speculum cognoscit res humanas scientia, et intellectus res divinas; et propter hoc, quia cessabit talis modus videndi in futuro, dicimus quod quantum ad modum destructur tam scientia quam intellectus, in futuro enim videbimus Deum sicut et cognoscemus angelos in suis propriis speciebus, nullo obstante, sicut mali angeli ante peccatum cognoscebant creaturas in speculo eternitatis et in propriis speciebus, sicut et modo video aliquod corpus mediante suo proprio colore. Remotum speculum est, quando aliquid videtur per alius, quod neque eiusdem speciei neque eiusdem generis est cum ipso, sicut videmus Deum per speculum creature, sic est fides per speculum; visio autem per tale speculum substantialiter est ex parte, et non visio per speculum propinquum; et ita patet quod secus est de fide, et secus de scientia vel intellectu.”
same species or genus as B, then C is a “near mirror” for A. For example, the soul itself can function as a “near mirror” by which it cognizes or sees angels. This is because angels are “of the same species” as the soul, and so the soul functions as a cognitive vehicle—a “species of its species”—of an angel. William seems to be saying that near mirrors can produce cognition or vision, in the proper sense, of their objects, even though they are not themselves metaphysical species in a metaphysical sense: he is extending the “species of its species” category to include such cases:

Figure 5. William’s zoo of cognitions, stage 3.

On the other hand, there are also cases where C does not belong to the same species or genus as B, but still serves as a cognitive vehicle for A’s seeing B. This is what happens when “we see God in the mirror of creatures.” And “in this sense faith is a mirror.” He never qualifies, as he does in 3.42.2.1, the claim that “we see God” through faith. But in both passages he says

---

66 William doesn’t specify that this is because the angel and the soul are in the same genus, not species in the technical sense, but it seems to be implied in what he is saying. First, he common element between the two is “incorporeal substance,” which is clearly a genus and not a most specific species like soul or angel. Second, “incorporeal substance” is obviously a subaltern genus under “substance,” and so may reasonably be called a “species” as per the terminology of Porphyry’s Isagoge. Third, he does imply later in the paragraph that identity in either species or genus is sufficient for functioning as a proper perceptible species.
that this vision comes through a “far-off mirror” (*speculum longinquum* or *speculum remotum*).

This is, then, the non-proper vision he described in 3.42.2.1.2: a vision by means of something that is not a metaphysical species, nor does it belong to the same species as its object, but which can still serve as a cognitive vehicle.

Here, for reference, is our complete zoo of cognitions:

Figure 6. William’s complete zoo of cognitions.

In sum: something can be cognized either directly (the soul’s knowledge of itself; the soul’s knowledge of God in the Beatific Vision), or mediately. The intermediary can either be a perceptible species or a mirror. A mirror is something that is not ontologically a perceptible

---

Note that when William says that A can serve as a cognitive mirror for B, such that when A is seen B is also seen, he does not say that B is seen in all its individuality. For example, my soul can serve as a cognitive vehicle for seeing an angel, because both my soul and an angel are in the genus of incorporeal substances. But all that means is that I can have some idea of what angels are (i.e., what genus the fall under). It doesn’t mean that I can know anything about particular angels. So, by looking at my soul, I can know something about Gabriel and Michael (viz. that they are incorporeal substances), but I can’t know anything about what distinguishes Gabriel from Michael. Similarly, when I know Donald Trump, I also “see” Joe Biden in the sense that I “see” or intellectually understand the humanity in which Joe Biden participates. That doesn’t mean that I am aware of Joe Biden in his individuality.
species or cognitive vehicle, but functions like one. There are, in turn, two kinds of mirrors: near and far. A near mirror is able to function like a perceptible species because it belongs to the same species or genus as the object of cognition, and so counts as proper vision, like direct vision and vision through an ontological species. A far mirror does not belong to the same species or genus, but is still able to function as a cognitive vehicle, resulting in improper vision.68

What William is saying in SA 3.42.2.1, in light of the passages we just studied, is that God is seen by the faithful, but improperly, by means of a far-off mirror: some created thing that is (obviously) not of the same species of God, but is still able to function somehow as a cognitive vehicle for seeing God. Two questions remain for us to answer. First, what is the creature that serves such an exalted purpose? Second, what is the character of this “improper” vision? Granted that the weight of the Summa Aurea seems to be against the idea that we see God only metaphorically, what can it possibly mean to really see God, but not properly?

First question first. The creature that serves as the improper species or cognitive vehicle by which God is seen is the soul itself. In SA 3.42.2.1, as we saw, William says that the creature that transmits cognition of God to the soul is the “mirror of the Trinity” (speculum Trinitatis). But the creature that specially reflects the Trinity is the human soul reformed by grace.69 Human beings are made in God’s image because (as Augustine famously notes in the De Trinitate) they have three intellectual powers: the spiritual sense or intellect, the spiritual

---

68 Williamson’s view, by the way, seems to push him very far in the direction of a Similarity view of species-representation (see Adriaenssen 325). If species represent their objects because of a similarity they bear to them, it makes sense that other things, not metaphysically species but still bearing similarity-relations to other things, would be able to play a similar role in cognition.

69 SA 2.24.1 (p. 700, ll. 104-109). “Nobis videtur quod eadem ratione potest distinguere triplex meritum secundum tres personas, quoniam in anima sunt tres vires per quas anima est ymago Dei, in quibus site sunt virtutes quibus assimilamur tribus personis, scilicet fides, spes, caritas: fide per cognitionem Filio, spe per fortitudinem Patri, caritate per dilectionem Spiritui Sancto. Et ex eis erit triplex meritum quod tribus personis respondet per appropriationem.”
irascible power, and the spiritual concupiscible power or will. When each of these powers are perfected by their corresponding theological virtue, the human person as a whole becomes like the Trinity: “Faith, hope, and charity are a sort of created trinity in the soul, by which the soul is made like the uncreated Trinity.” So soul’s being made like the Trinity, combined with its natural power of self-perception, gives it the ability or habit of faith: of seeing God through His effects on the soul.

In fact, William seems to think not only that faith is a vision of God, but that it is a better, clearer vision of God than seeing God by natural means—that is, in external creatures by doing philosophy. The transition from the initial gift of faith, through understanding and wisdom, up to the Beatific Vision, is described by William as a transition from obscure to clear vision. Natural knowledge, as we saw in the SA Prologue, can serve as a kind of preparation for faith: philosophical arguments bring people to Christian faith. But that means that natural knowledge occupies an even lower place in the obscure-to-clear progression than faith does: it is the weakest way of seeing God. “The vision of the philosophers, and all natural vision, is like the vision of

70 SA 3.42.2.2.2 (p. 806, ll. 19-22). “Fides, spes, caritas sunt quaedam trinitas creat a in anima, per quam assimilatur anima Trinitati increatae in hoc quod, sicut Filius procedit a Patre et Spiritus Sanctus ab utroque, ita spes generatur a fide, et caritas a fide et spe.”

71 There is a striking passage in SA 3.12.4 (p. 208, ll. 68-69) where William says that when someone has formed faith, “the true light illuminates the soul to see It and other spiritual things” (lux vera illuminat animam ad videndum se et alia spiritualia). The phrase “see It,” videndum se, is grammatically ambiguous: the reflexive pronoun se could refer either to the soul or to the True Light. The latter translation is most plausible (hence my capitalizing of “It”), but given William’s view that the soul is the cognitive vehicle by which we see God, perhaps this ambiguity was intentional.

72 Comparing the vision of faith and philosophical argument might seem like comparing apples and oranges. But for William they are both kinds of intellectual sight: just as one sees God through the soul as a medium, one sees the conclusion of an argument through the premises. See, for instance, the citation in the footnote just below this one, where William says that pagan philosophers had a “vision” of God, albeit one much more obscure even than that of faith. They are probably very different kinds of vision, but that doesn’t mean they can’t be compared, any more than I can compare the experience of seeing a picture of Rome or reading a book about Rome with actually being there.
the owl, which only sees in darkness.” This makes sense: because the soul is more intimately aware of God’s work within it than His work outside it, the soul is, for itself, a better, clearer cognitive vehicle for seeing God than any external creatures, by which pagan philosophers saw God extremely dimly. So, the improper vision of God in faith, rather than being particularly obscure or dim way of seeing God, is actually a better, clearer way of seeing God than any other available in this life, except for those that follow upon faith (i.e. the gifts of understanding and wisdom).

So the first question is answered: the “far-off mirror” by which we see God in faith is the reformed soul. Now for the second question: what, exactly, is this “far-off” cognition like? We’ll start by proposing, and then rejecting, a wrong view of the matter. Perhaps William is saying that the soul, looking at itself, its powers reformed by grace, sees that it is structurally similar to the Three Persons of the Trinity. Perhaps it even infers from this that God is a Trinity.

In any case, it learns a lot about God through the Trinity, and so can be said, in a very loose

---

73 SA 2.6.1 (p. 127, ll. 86-87). “Visus enim philosophorum et omnis visus naturalis est sicut visus noctuae, quae non videt nisi in obscuritate.”

74 William’s account of faith is essentially a philosophical exposition of Augustinian spirituality. Our ultimate goal is immediate vision of God. But all knowledge or vision of God in this life is mediated through creatures. This mediated vision leads us toward immediate vision: we begin by seeing God through creatures external to us, as the philosophers did through arguments for God’s existence and attributes and as those with unformed faith do through Scripture and miracles; we progress from that to turning inward and seeing God within us, as those with true, formed faith do; our inner vision of God is progressively purified by good deeds and theological learning and enhanced by mystical contemplation; and finally, in the life to come, God makes us able to see Him as He is in Himself.

Bonaventure expresses a similar view in his *Itinerarium or Journey of the Mind to God*, charting the transition from seeing God in “external mirror” of the world to “internal mirror” of our souls: *Itinerarium* 2.13, “Per haec lumina exterius data ad speculum mentis nostrae in quo relucunt divina, disponimus ad reintrandum.” And the middle two chapters of *Itinerarium* describe seeing God in the human soul as through a mirror. *Itinerarium* 4.7, “Ex his autem duobus gradibus mediis, per quos ingredimur ad contemplandum Deum intra nos tanquam in speculis imaginum creatarum...”

75 It’s also worth noting that, as Visser and Williams point out (p. 195), Anselm uses almost the exact same reasoning, although in less technical terms, to explain how it is possible to achieve rational knowledge of the Trinity despite God’s transcending our intellects. Anselm says that, although we can’t know God directly, we can know him “in an enigma” (*in aenigmatu*), with the mind, made in God’s image, serving as “a mirror in itself.” William’s innovation is to take Anselm’s model for philosophical knowledge and apply it to supernatural cognition by faith.
sense, to “see” God in itself. It is rather like coming across a letter that is written in the style of a friend of yours, mentions things only that friend could know, and concluding that your friend wrote the letter. Just as a philosopher infers God’s existence and many of its attributes from external creatures, the faithful is able to infer even more facts about God from the internal creature, the soul itself. The faithful, on this view, is a super-philosopher: a philosopher with access to many more facts about God than a non-Christian philosopher.

This view may draw support from William’s statement in 3.42.2.2.1 that the cognitive act produced by a far-off mirror is *coniecturatio*, which we have been calling by the dummy word “conjecturation.” But suppose we translate the term as “conjecture,” or more precisely, “inference.” In that case, it’s easy to explain what William means when he says that the far-off mirror makes the soul *coniecturare*: it enables the soul to make a conscious, logical inference from its own structure to the nature of the Triune God.

This view, however, has two major problems. First, it is unnecessary. William does not explicitly say that faith involves making a conscious logical inference from the structure of the soul to the Persons of the Trinity. He does not even say that the faithful even realize that their soul is structurally like the Trinity. Such realization is not necessary: as we saw in our analysis of William’s “cognitive zoo” above, a far-off mirror (like the soul) functions similarly to a visible or intelligible species. And, as is well known, the standard medieval view is that such species, although enabling the cognition of their objects, are not themselves cognized. As Pasnau points out (*Theories of Cognition* p. 18), “not all representations need be themselves apprehended…The following situation is perfectly conceivable: X represents Y to A, and A thereby perceives Y, without A’s perceiving X.”
Here is an analogy. Suppose I am driving and see a semi-truck tailgating me in my rearview mirror. Because the pattern of light reflecting off the mirror into my eyes bears a structural similarity to the arrangement of matter making up the truck, I can see the truck in the mirror: the mirror and the light reflected off of it serve as a cognitive vehicle by which I see the truck. But this does not mean that I consciously observe the pattern of light reflected off the mirror, infer that it must be caused by an object behind me with a similar arrangement of matter, and then infer from that that there is a truck or truck-like object behind me. Although I could do that if I chose to, I certainly don’t have time to do that while I’m being tailgated by a semi: in the moment, the only thing I consciously see is the truck itself.

Likewise, it is perfectly possible for the reformed soul to be sufficiently like God to serve as a cognitive vehicle for seeing God, and for one to actually see God through one’s soul, without actually thinking about the fact that it is the soul by which one sees God, that the soul is structurally like the Trinity, or anything like that. William puts no such high-level cognitive requirements on faith.

Second, besides being unnecessary, this view yields an unrealistic view of faith. Although calling it “vision” is odd, it is not too strange to suppose that faith is, in essence, some kind of rudimentary perception of God. Many Christians claim to have felt God’s presence. Many claim to believe what they do because they “know God,” because of their “personal relationship with Jesus Christ,” and so forth. No Christian that I have ever met or heard of has said that they looked within themselves, saw that their soul was structurally similar to the Trinity, and believed all the rest of the Creed because of that.

Similarly, although it’s hard to see exactly how seeing God could lead to knowledge of the articles of faith, we can at least gesture toward a solution (as we will in Chapter Four). After
all, we get all kinds of propositional beliefs from sensation. But how in the world could knowledge of the mere fact that God is a Trinity lead to knowledge of things like Jesus’ Virgin Birth?

Moreover, this view seems to reverse William’s view of the relation between faith-as-vision and faith-as-propositional-knowledge. We will see in Chapter Four that, on William’s view, faith is first a habit of vision, and is a habit of propositional belief only on the basis of the vision of God. But this interpretation puts propositional belief first: the soul sees that it is structurally like the Trinity, and on that basis can be said to see God.

Finally, there is a major textual obstacle to this view: in SA 2.10.5.2, William explicitly denies that one can arrive at faith through a logical inference, because it is possible to believe something through an argument and still not rely on the First Truth. So when he says that faith involves coniecturatio, he cannot mean that faith involves conscious logical inference from the nature of the soul to the nature of God.

One clue to the meaning of coniecturatio can be found in the use of the term in the Latin translation of al-Haytham’s Kitab al-Manaṣīr or De Aspectibus. In De Aspectibus 6.2.2 the Latin al-Haytham uses the term coniecturatio to refer to how, when someone sees something of a type they’ve seen before, they immediately recognize that the same kind of thing in front of them: they make an inference or coniecturatio from the shapes and colors they see to the actual object in front of them. This helps us understand what William could mean by coniecturatio. Take al-

\[\text{SA 2.10.5.2, pp. 294-296, ll. 95-98, 142-145}.\] Objection: “Nam fiat iste sillogismus, scilicet omne dictum a Prima Veritate est verum, hoc scilicet: Filium Dei esse hominem est dictum a Prima Veritate; ergo hoc est verum.”

Reply: “Ad secundum dicimus quod sic ratiocinando potest aliquis adhuc remainere in fide informi, quia quod Prima Veritas dicat hoc, id est quod ille qui hoc dixit sit Prima Veritas, credet forsitan per aliquid aliud a Prima Veritate.”

Interestingly, al-Haytham’s usage of coniecturatio occurs in a discussion of how physical mirrors work. De Aspectibus 2.2: “Et quemadehumum in directione rerum praefixarum et cognitarum ad alia fit collatio, et inde oritur
Haytham’s use of the term for physical vision. A dog is in front of me, and I see it. In a sense, I have made an inference from seeing a certain combination of shapes and colors to seeing a dog. But obviously al-Haytham does not mean that I see shapes and colors and then argue to myself (consciously or unconsciously) that there must be a dog there. I see the shapes and colors, and on that basis I truly see a dog. I do not consciously infer anything at all: in William’s terms, what I see simply “makes [me] conjecturate.”

Another example may bring us nearer to William’s point about faith. Suppose I read a letter from a friend describing the loss of his mother. My friend is an eloquent writer, and as I read it, their grief is conveyed to me. Obviously I am not perceiving my friend’s inner emotional states directly, but neither am I merely deducing from their use of language that they are sad. I am truly perceiving their sadness by means of a perceptual inference and not a logical one. I am perceiving my friend’s sadness—not properly (I am not literally looking at his or her soul), but truly (it is a mistake to assume that “improper” means “metaphorical” or “false”). When the soul is reformed into the image of the Trinity by grace, it does not make a logical inference, “I have become X; only God can cause X; therefore, God exists.” Its perception of God’s effects is a true perception of God. Perceiving one’s own reformed soul reveals God to you by His actions: by these “interior, hidden, and more worthy effects” one “know[s] through experience what God is like”.

78 Nor am I merely both feeling sad and recognizing that my friend is also sad. This is phenomenologically quite distinct from sharing in someone else’s sadness.

79 SA 1.4.1 (pp. 40-41, ll. 119-128)). “Mystica vero theologia, quae dicitur mystica, id est occulta, nominat Deum per id quod in occulto de Deo sentit per intellectualem visionem sive contemplationem, ut cum vocat Deum suavem, dilectum et huiusmodi. Utroque tamen per creaturas nominatur…in mystica vero per interiores et occultos et
Suppose Catullus wrote a poem that exquisitely expresses the grief of lost love. I read the poem and am filled with grief. I have not made an inference from the poem’s grief to my own. The poem, obviously, is not grieving: the poem itself has no emotional states at all. And yet, by perceiving the poem’s power to evoke such emotion, I am truly perceiving the poem. I have not even made an inference from the author’s grief to my own, for even if Catullus himself, uncharacteristically, felt nothing at all while writing it, nevertheless I know the poem through my grief at reading it. In fact, I know the poem better than someone who read it and did not feel anything at all. I know the poem through its effects on me. In the same way, even though the theological virtues are not God and God has nothing in him that is specifically or generically identical to the theological virtues, it is reasonable to suppose the development of the virtues in the soul could be a way of seeing God. (This does not prove that William’s view of faith is correct, but it does show that it is not crazy.)

If this is what William means by connecturatio—and since he expressly denies that faith involves conscious logical inference, it’s hard to see what else he could mean—then it is easier to see how he can say in 3.42.2.1 that faith is not, properly speaking, a vision of God, and yet claim elsewhere in the Summa Aurea that we do see God by faith. He never once says that vision through a far mirror is not vision—in fact, in 3.42.2.3 he says that “we see God” through the “far mirror” described in 3.42.2.1. It seems, then, that William thinks that faith is a genuine vision of God, albeit in an analogous sense to proper vision: not a direct vision of a thing’s essence, but an intimate perception of the thing’s effects. On the other hand, it is not a mere logical inference

digniores effectus quos anima a Dei contemplatione supra se recipit, et talaria nomina imponit anima per donum sapientiae, cuius maxime et proprie est cognoscere experimento quals sit Deus.”

In this specific passage, William is talking about the gift of sapientia. But this is the highest enhancement of faith, and what he says about sapientia applies to faith as well.

80 Perhaps I know it even better than the author himself did.
from the thing’s effects, but a perception of the thing through its effects. This is why faith belongs to the same genus as the Beatific Vision, but not the same species (and if it were not a vision of God at all, it is hard to see how it could belong to the same genus).

Faith’s being vision in an improper or analogous sense clarifies the role of faith in beatitude. In 3.37.3 (p. 705), as we saw above, William affirms that we see God through creatures, and that the purpose of this weak vision of God is to lead us to direct vision of God. In this life we see God only as mediated by creatures and as limited by the weakness of our intellect. Nevertheless we do see God. Even pagan philosophers truly knew God through creatures (albeit in a highly deficient way), and he even refers to this knowledge as vision. If knowing the proposition “God exists” as the conclusion of a demonstration is a kind of vision of God, then *a fortiori* knowing God by experience must be. Faith, then, is truly a vision of God. It is not the end of our intellect, but the means to its end of seeing God directly. The imperfection of faith determines both its end and the means to that end. Its end is the Beatific Vision; the means to that end are acquiring merits and coming to know God through creatures.

William’s doctrine of improper vision is probably the hardest pill to swallow in his religious epistemology. And he is woefully unclear about what exactly it involves. Still, I think he has identified a real phenomenon. When reading a poem or a love letter (or when feeling the shock of an earthquake five floors up) we really do seem to be perceiving something distant from us by means of causal intermediaries. This is not direct apprehension, but it is no mere logical inference, either. Although William’s (and my) explanations of this are too vague to be the final word, I am not convinced that the idea is worth discarding. And anyway, the question of how a transcendent God can be perceived at all is a thorny philosophical problem for just about anyone. It’s not surprising that the answer to the problem would be a difficult one, and if this difficult
idea helps us solve that problem, it’s worth keeping. I think I have shown sufficiently that
William thinks that faith is a genuine vision of God, albeit not a “proper” one; that William, at
least, thinks that this is a perfectly intelligible idea; and that William is not crazy in thinking it
was true. And that is all that I needed to prove in this chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR

IN WHICH WILLIAM’S VIEW OF FAITH AS ASSENT IS EXPLAINED

In Chapter Three, we discussed how, on William’s view, faith has a dual aspect: it is both a habit of vision and a habit of propositional assent. In that chapter, we focused on the former aspect, considering in what sense William can say that faith is a vision of God. In this chapter we will focus on the other aspect of faith: faith as a habit of propositional assent. The goal of Chapter Four is to show that according to William, belief by faith has epistemic priority over demonstrative knowledge, because the articles of faith are known *per se* and immediately by the faithful, and therefore form a basing relation more readily than a demonstrative argument.

If, as we showed in Chapter Three, William of Auxerre thinks that faith is vision, this raises a major question: what does seeing God have to do with believing certain propositions? How do we move from seeing God in the soul to believing, for example, that God is a Trinity or that Jesus came back to life after dying? In Chapter Four we will explain how the faithful assent to the articles of faith.
In section 4a, we will consider how the habit of faith, with its dual aspect, is actualized in the first place. William distinguishes between two ways a habit can be possessed: as a *proximate* habit and as a *remote* habit. Someone who has a proximate habit of faith can bring that habit into act whenever they want. But someone who has a remote habit cannot: remote habits require external factors to become actual. These external factors are intrinsically propositional in character: they are things like preaching and the words of Scripture. His discussion of proximate and remote habits helps us understand the relationship between the visionary, experiential aspect of faith and more formal aspects of Christian religion such as assent to the articles of faith.

In section 4b, we will ask how the act of faith as vision leads to propositional knowledge. William doesn't give a complete answer to this question, but he gives us two important clues. First, his discussion of angelic and prophetic cognition gives us important resources for understanding his view of faith. William follows the very common medieval view that angels and prophets see God as a “mirror” (*speculum*) by which they see creatures: by seeing God, they see that statements about creatures are true, just as one can see something behind them by looking in a mirror. William indicates that something similar happens in the case of faith. Second, William’s discussion of external triggers not only explains how the habit of faith is actualized at all, but also how that single habit can be actualized in different ways, such that one assents to different distinct propositions. This enables William to say that when one sees God by

---

1 It may seem strange to say that a single disposition can issue in two, qualitatively different acts. Probably a strict medieval Aristotelian, holding that habits are individuated by their acts, would agree: two acts mean two habits. William seems to hold that habits are not individuated by their acts: a single habit can have multiple acts distinct in kind. As an analogy, consider the case of memory. I remember that it was very windy on my son’s first birthday. This is a habit: when I think of his birthday, I am disposed to assent to the claim that it was windy on that day. But one could construe the actual habit existing in my mind not as a habit of calling up the proposition, but calling up sensory images stored in my brain of the date on the calendar, the wind, etc. Once I have seen those images, it triggers assent to the proposition “It was very windy on Ivan’s first birthday.” I’m not saying this is construal of memory is true for memory; but William seems to think intellectual habits work this way.
faith, one immediately assents, with absolute certainty, to truths about creatures contained in that vision.

In section 4c, we will show that this view of faith makes it possible to have faith that an article of faith is true all the while knowing how to prove that article. The vision of God by faith cancels out the basing relation between the proposition believed and a demonstrative argument, but does not eliminate the intellect’s mere awareness of the demonstrative argument. This shows how William can be a faith prioritarian without committing himself to the implausible view that the faithful simply ceases to know any demonstrative arguments he or she previously had.

4a The Act of Faith

We saw in Chapter Three that the habit of faith, for William, has a dual aspect: it is a habit of vision and also a habit of assenting to propositions. Since, as we also saw in Chapter Three, William sees propositional assent as fundamentally a kind of vision, this shouldn’t be too surprising: once you see God, you see that certain propositions about God are true. But what is the relation between these two aspects of faith? How can a single habit be the source of two distinct acts, vision and assent? In section 4a we will look at a passage of *Summa Aurea* that considers how the habit of faith is actualized. We will see that, for William, these two acts are closely related: the act of vision causes the act of assent. Because the faithful see God, they see that the articles are true.

The main place where William talks about the relation between the habit and the act of faith is in *SA* 4.5.4.3 (pp. 115-116), on whether baptized infants have the habit of faith. William wants to say that they do, even though they only put it into act when they’re older. The particular case of infant faith gives William a chance to comment on how the habit of faith is actualized in general. I’ll summarize his account first, and then we’ll go into the text where he lays this out.
The process goes something like this. First, God gives you the habit of faith by altering your soul so that it can act as a conduit for seeing God. But at first, this habit is merely a \textit{remote} habit: you can’t actualize it whenever you want.\footnote{So when William says that baptized babies have faith, he isn’t saying that babies already have some sort of religious experience. He is merely saying that they have the ability to do so, much like they have the ability to learn to talk. Also, he isn’t saying that they have the ability to have an experience at all as intense as the visions of mystics, much less the Beatific Vision. Remember that, for William, \textit{all} intellectual activity can be characterized as vision. Remember, too, that faith is an obscure, indirect vision of God. The faithful truly see God, but only obscurely and partially.} Second, an external teacher—a priest, godparent, or whatever—presents an article of faith to you. This triggers you to put your habit of faith into act: you look within your soul, and your soul acts as a mirror by which you see God. This vision further enables you to see that the article of faith being presented to you is true, and you assent to it. The trigger did not, strictly speaking, cause you to believe, but merely prompted you to put the habit of faith into act. The process looks like this:

\begin{figure}
\centering
\begin{tikzcd}
\text{Remote habit of faith} & \text{Trigger} & \text{Proximate habit of faith} & \text{Act of vision} & \text{Act of assent}
\end{tikzcd}
\caption{The actualization of faith.}
\end{figure}

Now that we have the big picture of William’s view on the matter, let’s look closely at the passage in question. In \textit{SA} 4.5.4.3 (pp. 115-116), William considers whether baptized babies, who can consciously believe none of the articles of faith, and uneducated lay Christians, who can consciously believe only some of them, have the virtue of formed faith.

The objector says that baptized babies cannot have faith. After all, the virtue of faith is a habit, and a habit is a disposition to perform a certain act. That means (according to the objector) that if you aren’t able to perform the act, then you don’t have the habit. Babies aren’t able to...
assent consciously to the articles of faith (a plausible claim: it’s not clear that babies can assent consciously to anything at all), so they don’t have the habit of faith. Moreover, the habit of faith gives you immediate, per se knowledge of the articles. But when someone comes of age, they don’t suddenly know the articles for themselves. Rather they require a teacher (a parent, priest, etc.). So obviously, they don’t yet have the habit of faith, since true faith believes on the basis of God alone, and not because of an external, human teacher. And so a fortiori they did not have faith when they were an infant.³

William begins his response to these objections by claiming that the baptized baby “does have faith as a habit,” distinguishing between two kinds of habits: “proximate” or “explicit” habits and “remote” or “implicit” habits. Further, a single habit can be possessed either remotely or proximately, or even both at the same time with regard to different acts: for example, an uneducated lay Christian might have a remote habit of belief toward only certain articles of faith (and, presumably, a proximate habit of belief toward others). The moment a baby grows up and develops rational capacities, it already has faith, but only “implicitly, remote from act.” But once the child has received “some explanation beforehand,” they will actually believe.⁴

---

³ SA 4.5.4.3 (pp. 114-115, ll. 46-62). “Item, non habet fidem in usu; hoc constat; nec in habitu. Ille enim dicitur habere fidem in habitu qui habilis est ad credendum in actu, id est, qui, cum cogitat de articulis, statim credit. Sed cum iste perveniat ad annos discretionis, si proponantur ei articuli fidei, dicet se ignorare illos; ergo secundum hoc non habet fidem in habitu nec in usu; ergo simpliciter non habet.

Item, sicut aliae scientiae habent sua principia et conclusiones suas, ita theologia habet sua principia et conclusiones suas. Et principia theologiae sunt articuli fidei. Fides enim argumentum est, non conclusio. Sed differentia est, quia principia aliarum scientiarum omnibus sunt per se nota; sed principia theologiae non sunt per se nota nisi fidelibus. Sed articuli fidei non sunt per se noti isti; ergo iste non est fidelis; ergo non habet fidem.

Si dicit quod articuli sunt ei per se noti, tamen indiget aliqua instructione; ergo secundum hoc, si credet articulos, per illam instructionem credet; ergo homini instruenti credet et non solum Deo; ergo non habet fidem. Fides enim soli Deo credit.”

⁴ SA 4.5.4.3, p. 115 (ll. 70-74). “Ad secundo objectum dicimus quod parvulus iste habet fidem in habitu. Sed est quidam habitus proinquus actui et quidam remotus, et quidam implicitus, quidam explicitus, sicut simplex vetula fidem habet implicitam de quibusdam articulis. Similiter iste, cum veniet ad annos discretionis, fidem habebit, sed in habitu implicito et remoto ab actu; sed aliqua prius explicatione credit in actu.”
What does William mean by his distinction between proximate and remote habits? A proximate habit is a habit that can be immediately brought into act. I have, for example, a proximate habit of raising my left arm. I can do it right now if I want to. A remote habit is a habit that cannot be brought into act right away, but needs some help to be brought into act. Here is an analogy. Take the following riddle from the “Riddles in the Dark” chapter of *The Hobbit*:

*Alive without breath,* 
*As cold as death,* 
*Never thirsty, ever drinking,* 
*All in mail never clinking.*

I am very bad at figuring out riddles for myself, but decent enough at recognizing why the answer is true once someone gives it to me. Before my friend tells me the answer, my awareness of the four lines constituted a remote habit for believing that the answer to the riddle is *fish*: my ability to educe the answer from the lines was hampered by my deficiency in original, independent thought about riddles. Once someone tells me that the answer to the riddle is “fish,” my remote habit is transformed into a proximate habit: whenever I hear the riddle, I see that the answer is “fish,” no help needed. I can see for myself, simply on the basis of the four lines, that the answer is *fish*. I don’t need the authority or testimony of my friend: if they turned out to be a pathological riddle-liar, I would still believe the answer is fish.\(^5\)

---

\(^5\) William’s distinction between proximate and remote habits is not unique to him, although the explicitness with which he draws the distinction and the way he uses it in the present context may be unusual. A helpful parallel to William’s idea of proximate and remote habits can be found in *Nicomachean Ethics* 7.3, where Aristotle says that a drunk person in one way knows something, and in another way does not know something. He knows something in the sense that if he were sober, he could recall it at will. But he can’t, because he’s drunk. Aquinas comments on this passage saying that the drunk man has a habit in one sense but lacks it in another sense. For “sometimes a habit is free, such that it can go forth into act at once when a person wishes. But sometimes a habit is bound, such that it cannot go forth into act.” (“Aliquando enim est habitus solutus, ut statim possit exire in actum cum homo voluerit. Aliquando autem est habitus ligatus ita quod non possit exire in actum.”) Aristotle’s discussion of the drunk’s having and lacking knowledge and Aquinas’ distinction between “free” (*solutus*) and “bound” (*ligatus*) habits both track William’s distinction between proximate and remote habits.
By way of contrast, it may help to note that William’s distinction between proximate and remote habits is not at all the same as Aristotle’s distinction between first and second potentiality. Aristotle, as is well-known, distinguished between first potentiality, which is the mere, general potentiality to do or be something, from second potentiality (also called first actuality), which is a more immediate ability to do something. For example, I am in first potentiality to speak Swahili: I have never learned to speak Swahili and could not do so even if ordered to, but I have the ability to learn Swahili and then subsequently put my learning into action (my dog, by contrast, is not in potentiality to speaking Swahili even in this sense). Suppose I go to Kenya and learn Swahili. In that case, I would be in second potentiality or first actuality to speaking Swahili: I am currently speaking English, but I have the ability to speak Swahili whenever I want to. Someone who does not know a language, but has the ability to learn it, is in first potentiality with regard to actually speaking that language. Someone who knows a language—who, in medieval terms, has the habit of the language—but is not actually speaking it at the moment is in second potentiality to actually speaking it. What a scholastic writer like William calls “habits” and “virtues” are kinds of second potentiality.

Now, it should be clear from William’s discussion of baptized babies that his distinction between remote and proximate habits does not correspond to the distinction between first and second potentiality. If it did, then the baptized baby would be in first potentiality to the act of faith (i.e., assenting to a proposition on the basis of God’s witness through faith) and the mature, adult Christian would be in second potentiality to this act. But the baptized baby is not in first potentiality: he already has a habit (i.e. a second potentiality) with regard to the act of faith. It is

---

6 For a helpful treatment of Aristotle’s distinction between first and second potentiality and between first and second actuality, see Burnyeat pp. 48-51.
the unbaptized baby who is in first potentiality to the act of faith: he doesn’t have the habit of
faith in any sense (although he could acquire it by being baptized). The baptized baby, then, is in
second potentiality with regard to faith. In fact, that is William’s whole point in this passage is
precisely that: a baptized baby does, in fact, have the habit or virtue or second potentiality of
faith.

What, then, is the difference between proximate and remote habits? Both proximate and
remote habits are, of course, habits: they are both instances of second potentiality. So what
William is positing is a distinction between two kinds of second potentiality. The first kind of
habit or second potentiality (the “remote” kind) is an ability that you possess but, due to some
internal impediment, cannot put into act at the moment. The second kind of habit or second
potentiality (the “proximate” kind) is an ability that you not only possess but can actually put
into act this very moment. So someone with a remote habit of speaking Swahili knows how to
speak Swahili, but is prevented from actually using that ability: perhaps they are sleeping, or
they suffered a brain injury causing them to accidentally speak German every time they try to
speak Swahili. Once they wake up (or once the brain injury is healed), their remote habit of
speaking Swahili becomes a proximate habit: they can actually speak Swahili—right now, if they
choose.7

7 William is not the first or the only philosopher to make this distinction. Aristotle hints at it in Nicomachean Ethics
7.3, as we saw in the last footnote. But John Philoponus (d. c. 570), commenting on De Anima 3, does more than
hint: he explicitly draws a distinction between two kinds of second potentiality which seems to track exactly
William’s distinction between proximate and remote habits (see Philoponus 4.39.10ff.). To explain the first kind of
second potentiality, he uses the example of a drunk geometer: someone who has the knowledge but cannot recall it
at will. The second kind of second potentiality he exemplifies with a geometer who is sober but not thinking about
geometry (suppose he is doing the dishes): his potentiality involves more actuality than the drunk geometer’s. John
Philoponus uses this distinction to argue that Aristotle’s potential intellect is not in first potentiality proper, but in
the first form of first potentiality: we are born with the habit of knowing everything there is to know, but are simply
unable to access that habit without some outside help. Philoponus’ Aristotle turns out to be a Platonic
recollectionist! As strange as this is as an interpretation of Aristotle, it turns out to be precisely the situation
William’s baptized baby is with regard to the articles of faith.

There seem to be no grounds for positing a historical connection between William and Philoponus, whose
Now that we understand the distinction between proximate and remote habits, let us see how William uses the distinction to refute the objection. William compares the case of the baptized infant with that of the “little old lady” (vetula) or uneducated lay Christian. Uneducated lay Christians who have the virtue of true, formed faith have a proximate habit of believing certain articles of faith (that God exists, that Jesus is the Son of God, etc.). In other words, they are capable of consciously affirming belief in them. But they have a remote habit of believing other articles of faith (he may have in mind things like the doctrine that Jesus has two wills, or more obscure details about the Trinity). This remote habit does not enable them to consciously affirm belief on those articles, but if someone were to inform them of those articles (suppose the bishop came to town and taught them), they would immediately see that they are true, and henceforth have a proximate habit of belief. Infants who have been baptized are in a similar situation to uneducated laypeople, but in a bigger way: they have only a remote habit of believing all the articles of faith, until they develop the intellectual capacity to believe them consciously and are taught them by their parents, godparents, etc. But this remote habit still counts as a virtuous habit of faith, and so infants have faith.

Now we see that for William, faith begins as a remote habit and requires something additional, which we’ve called a trigger, to become a proximate habit and then be brought into act. But what kind of act are we talking about? Remember that faith has two: vision and assent. Most of William’s discussion here centers on the propositional aspect of faith, that is, on faith considered as a habit of assent to propositions. It is easy to see why he would focus on this. Assent is, to some degree, externally observable: I can see someone reciting the Creed and

---

works were translated into Latin after William was already dead. But the theoretical connection between their philosophies of mind is illuminating.
presume that they actually believe what they’re saying. Since the objector’s attack focused on the idea that babies don’t put faith into act, it makes sense that William would focus on the act of faith that can be externally observed.

This focus on faith as a habit of assent makes it easy to miss the fact that William brings in the other side of faith—faith as vision—at a key point in the discussion we’ve been following. When explaining exactly what happens when an external teacher triggers an act of faith, he says that the teacher

….rouses him [i.e., the child], provoking him to return into his own heart, to see, and to compare what God placed in his soul by illuminating it through faith. This is why he believes the Interior Teacher alone, albeit when the external teacher reminds him to.8

William’s point is that external teachers are triggers, not bases, of belief. They do not ground your belief; they only provide an occasion for your habit of belief to be brought into act. When the baptized child believes in the Resurrection after his priest explains it to him, he technically does not believe the priest, but God. The priest only reminds him of the truth that God is teaching him internally, through faith.

But look carefully at the process William is outlining here. First, the teacher “rouses” the student by presenting “some explanation or exposition” (alia explication vel exposition) to him—that is, by communicating propositionally. Then, these propositions prompt the student to “return to his heart,” that is, to self-introspect, to look at his own soul. There he “sees”—we saw in Chapter Three that what he sees is God, by means of his soul reformed by grace. Next, he “compares” what he sees in his soul with the propositions the teacher has proposed to him, sees that they match, and assents to them. So the act of vision stands between the triggering of the

8 SA 4.5.4.3 (p. 116, ll. 88-91). “Sollicitat enim ipsum et incitat ut redeat ad cor et videat et conferat quae Deus posuit in anima sua, illuminando ipsum per fidem. Unde soli magistro interiori credit, sed ad rememorationem magistri exterioris.”
habit and the act of assent: first “the habit of seeing spiritually”\(^9\) is triggered, then an act of vision occurs, and then an act of assent occurs:

Figure 8. The actualization of faith, again.

Remote habit of faith $\rightarrow$ Trigger $\rightarrow$ Proximate habit of faith $\rightarrow$ Act of vision $\rightarrow$ Act of assent

Although the focus in 4.5.4.3 is on the propositional aspect of faith, William does not lose sight of the visual, experiential side of faith. And this passage shows that it is the latter aspect of faith that makes the former possible: the faithful, confronted with an article of faith, look within their own soul and see that there is a match between the proposition proposed to them by an external teacher and what God has placed in their soul. This causes them to assent to the proposition.\(^{10}\)

4b From Vision to Assent

So the habit of faith is spurred into action when external propositions (the articles of faith) prompt the faithful to look within themselves and see that what is proposed externally matches

---

\(^9\) SA 4.5.4.3 (p. 118, l. 98). “Fides est habitus videndi spiritualiter.”

\(^{10}\) William of Auxerre's view of the relation between the habitus of faith and belief in particular articles of faith might be compared to James of Viterbo's view of understanding in general. On James' view, our intellect has built into it, not just a power of understanding, but “aptitudes” (aptitudines) or “propensities” (idoneitates) toward certain objects of understanding. The intellect is, then, not completely passive, but has a measure of built-in actuality. Once properly stimulated by data from outside, that partial actuality blooms into full-fledged, actual understanding. William, similarly, thinks that having the habit of faith entails having a remote habit of belief in particular articles of faith. Data from outside (Scripture, the teaching of the Church, etc.) allows those remote habits to turn into immediate habits of belief and acts of belief. Both think that the intellect (either the natural intellect for James, or the intellect with the virtue of faith for William), before it acquires certain objects of understanding, is not completely passive, but “partly passive” and “partly active” (Côté 42) with respect to particular objects of understanding, requiring something from outside itself to turn this partial actuality into full actuality. James' view is more far-reaching than William's: James is an innatist about all the natural abilities of the will and the intellect (and even of matter; see Côté 24), while William holds a similar view about faith specifically.
the vision of God in the soul. But in what sense do they match? For certain articles of faith it
isn’t too hard to imagine how this works: it’s not difficult to imagine that seeing God could make
propositions like “God exists,” or perhaps even “God is a Trinity,” self-evident. But what about
propositions like “Jesus is the incarnate Son of God,” “Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate,”
“Jesus rose from the dead,” or “Jesus will return someday to judge the world?” To put it another
way: we’ve explained what happens when the habit of faith is put into act; but we’ve also seen
that the habit of faith has two acts. In section 4b we will consider how the first act of faith (the
act of vision) leads to the second act (the act of belief). First, we will consider how William’s
concept of God as a cognitive mirror helps us understand how faith brings about assent to the
articles of faith. Second, we will consider how his discussion of proximate and remote habits,
begun earlier, helps us further understand how the vision of faith can generate assent to different
articles of faith.

Unfortunately, William does not explain this process in the detailed way that he explains
how the habit of faith is actualized in the first place: there is no treatise or article in the Summa
Aurea that details how the faithful pass from seeing God by faith to seeing that the articles of
faith are true. But William does describe cases in which someone, by seeing God, sees that truths
about beings other than God are true. In this case God is used as a “mirror” (speculum). By
looking at a physical mirror, you can see other things than the mirror—i.e., the things reflected in
it. So, by looking at God, you can see other things than God—i.e., the things He made. William
thinks that this is how angels know about earthly creatures like you and me, and how prophets
know the future. This is a pretty ordinary view in William’s time; what is unusual is that, since
William sees faith as a habit of seeing God, the idea of God as a mirror can be applied to faith.
Before we go on, we need to clarify some terminology. In Chapter Three, we saw William say that the soul reformed by grace is a mirror by which God can be seen: a creature serves as a mirror for seeing God. But shortly we’ll see him say that God is a mirror by which creatures can be seen (i.e., by angels and prophets). In general, then, when William talks about (non-physical) “mirrors” he is talking about something which, when cognized, also serves as a means for cognizing something else. In general, we can say that, for William, a “mirror” is something that, when cognized, also serves as a means for cognizing something else. Now, in this section I am proposing that, for William, the faithful see the articles of faith in their vision of God by using God as a mirror. But they already see God through their soul as a mirror. That means that the articles of faith are cognized through a double mirror: first the faithful use their own soul as a mirror to see God; then they use God as a mirror to see the articles of faith:\footnote{Source of Nicene Creed art: https://mereinkling.net/2013/11/07/confusing-creeds/ Obviously I don’t mean to imply that William thought the soul or intellect was literally in the brain.} Figure 9. Diagram of double mirror cognition.
This diagram helps us understand what makes William (on my reading of his view) unusual for a medieval theologian. It’s not that he thinks that you can cognize created truths in God: that’s pretty normal for a 13th century theologian. What is strange is his view of faith as vision, and the “double mirror” model of cognition. But once you grant William’s unusual view that faith is a kind of vision of God, and that things can be cognized in a double mirror (a phenomenon with obvious physical analogues with two literal mirrors), ordinary medieval ideas about mirror cognition kick in.

Now we’re going to see how these ideas work in William’s thought by looking at the cases of mirror cognition he discusses in detail (God, angels, and prophets) and then considering how this could be applied to faith.

*God as Omnirepresentational Idea*

Early on in the *Summa Aurea* William establishes that God “the Son is the Word and Image of the Father, the rational mirror in which everything is seen; for he perfectly communicates the goodness of God the Father…in this mirror is seen not just God the Father, but all things, because the cause of all things—God’s goodness—is clearly seen.”

Using Neoplatonic imagery from Augustine, he says that pagan philosophers called the Son “Nous, the archetypical universe.” The idea is that since God is the total cause of everything that exists other than Himself, and effects can be cognized in their causes, all information about anything created is already contained in God. Elsewhere, William says that God is the “First Idea” or “Sign,” which unlike created ideas “is not restricted to a particular signification: rather,

---

12 SA 1.8.8.1 (p. 158, ll. 27-32). “Filius est Verbum et Ymago Dei Patris et Speculum rationale in quo videntur omnia; ipse enim perfecte loquitur bonitatem Dei Patris et in eo potest perfecte videri bonitas Patris, qui non invidet suam aequalitatem; visio vero ad sapientiam pertinet; nec tantum Pater in hoc speculo videntur, sed omnia ibi videntur, quia expresse videtur causa omnium, scilicet bonitas Dei.”

13 SA 1.8.8.1 (p. 157, l. 21-22). “…socium [Dei Patris] quem vocaverunt noun et mundum archetypum.”
everything that can be signified, with all their distinct features, is signified by the exact same
Sign.”

God, as the cause of everything, is the omnipresentational idea of everything, “the
single idea by which everything is represented.”

_Divine Cognition_

According to William, God is able to cognize creatures because of His own
omnipresentational nature. In _SA_ 1.9.1 (p. 177) he discusses how God’s knowledge is different
from ours. For humans, cognition works through assimilation: when I see red, my eye, in a sense,
becomes red. Likewise, when my mind understands the concept “tree,” it somehow becomes the
concept “tree”—my mind changes so that it somehow takes on tree-ness within itself. But God,
on William’s view, doesn’t know things the way we do, namely, by becoming like the thing
known. Actually, the reverse is the case: God knows things, not because He becomes like what is
known, but because what is known resembles Him. In William’s own words, “God knows
everything through the image of His own exemplarity.” So God knows everything there is to
know about creatures not through something external to Himself, but through His own being: not
because He has come to resemble creatures, but because all creatures resemble Him. God knows
who I am because I am a pale imitation of God. God knows that I am sitting in Buswell Library
because my sitting in a chair, my being located in Buswell, and, in short, all the accidental
features attached to me are also imitations of God. So God knows creatures, not by looking out at
creatures, but because He perfectly knows Himself, and through Himself, knows everything that

---

14 _SA_ 2.6.1 (p. 129, ll. 126-128). “Prima idea non est coartata circa aliquod signatum; sed omnia signabilia signant
secundum idem in omnibus diversitatibus.”

15 _SA_ 2.6.1 (p. 130, ll. 155-156). “…unam ideam qua omnia representantur.” In Thomistic terms, we might say that,
for William and unlike Aquinas, God is not infinite existence, but infinite essence!

16 _SA_ 1.4.1, p. 177, ll. 20-21. “Deus dicitur scire omnia quodam modo propter sue exemplaritatatis imaginem.”
resembles Him (i.e., everything else). If He knows creatures comprehensively in this way—including all the accidents attached to them—then it follows that He knows all propositions about creatures, as well. God then, knows everything there is to know about creatures by knowing Himself.

**Angelic and Prophetic Cognition**

Now suppose someone could see God in a way that resembles the way He sees Himself. If this is possible, then it seems perfectly plausible that they would then learn all kinds of things about things other than God in that vision. If God knows about creatures by knowing Himself, it seems plausible that someone who knows God could, in turn, know things about other creatures.

This is, in fact, how William thinks angelic and prophetic cognition works. Angels don’t see inferior created things directly, but rather cognize them “in the Word,” that is, in the Second Person of the Trinity, who is the “archetypal world” that preexisted the created world (SA 2.1.1, p. 11). He denies that this kind of cognition is in any way inferior to direct cognition of things (SA 2.6.1, p. 127): “To be cognized in the Word is to be cognized, full stop, because a thing is truly cognized in its own light and in its truest cause.” This sort of cognition is

---

17 The idea that God knows creatures by being their exemplar is quite common in the Middle Ages: see Paladini 2018 for a summary of the views of Thomas Aquinas, John Duns Scotus, and Peter Auriol. Aquinas sometimes explains God’s knowledge as being due to His causing the world to exist (efficient causality), and sometimes as being due to His being the model for the world (exemplar causality); see ST 1.14.5, where he seems to express both views at once. See Frost 2010 for an exposition of Scotus’ view, which explains divine knowledge in terms of God’s awareness of his will to bring this or that state of affairs into existence (but Frost argues that Scotus himself saw problems in this view, complicating his position). William also seems to vacillate between different versions of the view that God knows everything by knowing Himself: in the passage from SA 1.9.1 just quoted he says that it is because they resemble God, but in 1.8.8.1, quoted a little earlier, he says that the Son is the model of the universe because he is the image of God as cause. But he doesn’t seem to think the difference is terribly important: in 1.8.8.1 he comments that “whether Augustine is saying God knows through His essence or through [Himself as] cause, clearly God is said to know everything through the image of his exemplarity.” If per essentiam refers to the resemblance view of divine cognition, William thinks that both views reduce to his “exemplarity” view.

18 See Goris for a good overview of 13th century views of angelic cognition, and esp. pp. 163ff. for a discussion of angelic knowledge through seeing God.
sometimes extended to humans as well: prophets “see what they see in the mirror of eternity, like
the angels.”

This mirror knowledge extends not just to individual things, but to propositional
knowledge as well. He discusses at length how angels and prophets can know “future things”
(res futuras) in the mirror (SA 2.6.4.2, pp. 136ff), and clearly has future events in mind. He
considers whether the “propositions” (dicta) given in prophecies make future events “necessary”
(see SA 2.7.2.4, pp. 157ff., for this discussion). Christ, as a prophet, “predicted future
things…such as his death and resurrection,” i.e. that he would die and would rise again.

William uses an infinitive with a subject accusative, a way of expressing propositional
statements in indirect discourse in Latin equivalent to the English particle that, to describe what
prophets see in the mirror: “The prophet saw openly in the mirror that Christ would be born of a
Virgin.” Since God is the cause of states of affairs as well as individuals, it’s not surprising that
one could see the former in God as well as the latter.

However, we shouldn’t assume that, since God can see everything by looking at Himself,
an angel or a prophet who looks into the divine mirror is equally omniscient. In a version of
2.6.2.2 from a different textual tradition than the one used to form the critical edition of the
Summa Aurea (but preserved in an appendix), William says that since there is no unactualized
potency in God, He can see everything at once; but since angels have potency, they can’t see

\[19\] SA 2.7 (p. 142, l. 1). “Quoniam prophetae ea que vident, vident in speculo aeternitatis, sicut angeli, post
angelorum cognitionem agendum est de prophetia.”

\[20\] SA 2.6.4. (p. 137, ll. 27-40). “Christus prædicabat res futuras…ut passionem et resurrectionem suam.”

\[21\] SA 2.7.1 (p. 144, ll. 60-61). “Videbat propheta aperte in speculo Christum de Virgine nasciturum.”
The infinitive is a little hard to spot here: nasciturum is short for nasciturum esse, the future infinitive of nascor.
everything in the mirror at once.\footnote{SA 2.6.2.2 (appendix XVII) (p. 743, ll. 28ff). “Dicimus quod angeli non vident in Verbo omnia actu. Solus enim Deus, qui summe perfectus est, nihil habet potentia quod actu non habeat. Sed angelus, qui potestatem habet cognoscenti omnia, possibilitatem non habet cognoscenti haec acti, nec cognoscit nisi secundum quod tangitur sive illuminatur a prima luce.”} In the received text of the \textit{Summa Aurea}, he says that there are several limits to angelic and prophetic cognition in the mirror. Some angels have more perceptive vision and see more in the mirror than others.\footnote{SA 2.6.2.2 (p. 133, ll. 49). “Angeli...non vident in speculo nisi ea quae ipsorum iudicio subiecta sunt et quae pertinent ad eorum gloriam et salutem.”} Angels see what is relevant for the duties they perform for the faithful on earth,\footnote{SA 2.6.2.2 (p. 133, ll. 40-43). “Est tertia visio prophetalis, qua prophetae illuminati a Deo videbant ea quae volebat eis ostendere, secundum quod sciebat humano generi expedire.”} and what prophets see is similarly determined by what it would benefit the human race to know.\footnote{SA 2.6.2.2 (p. 133, ll. 60-62). “Ex hoc quod angelorum quidam perspicacius intuentur in speculo quam alii, contingit quod etiam quidam plura vident et alii pauciora.”} William lists several factors that limit what angels and prophets see in the mirror. He says that what is seen in the mirror is determined by a combination of three factors: the nature of the mirror itself (that is, its omnirepresentionality), the will of God, and the disposition of the one looking.\footnote{SA 2.6.2.1, p. 131, ll. 15-20. “Si autem quaeratur utrum secundum naturam speculi vel voluntatem ipsius vel etiam secundum naturam aut dispositionem videntis fiat huius visio dicimus quod secundum naturam speculi quod per naturam suam imago est, et etiam per voluntatem, quia ex mera liberalitate erit quod ipse dabit se ad videndum vel immediate vel etiam pro parte secundum dispositionem intuentis.”} God can simply decide to reveal himself in a certain way to one viewer and in a different way to another, causing them to form different (but obviously not contradictory) propositional beliefs.\footnote{The idea that God is a voluntary mirror, reflecting what it wants to its viewers, is not unique to William. Raymond Maloney says that it is particularly common in the Franciscan tradition to emphasize this feature (Maloney 64). John Duns Scotus, in particular, used it to solve a problem about Christ’s omniscience: the human Christ is God, so he should know everything; but he is also a finite creature, so he shouldn’t. Scotus answers that the human Christ can’t see everything at once because a “perfect attentiveness” is not possible for a finite mind. But he has \textit{habitual} knowledge of everything. Scotus articulates this by saying that the Word of God is a “voluntary mirror” with respect to the human Christ: he can reveal to the human Christ (i.e., to himself) whatever he wants for a particular situation (Maloney 66). In an earlier generation, Aquinas and Bonaventure used the idea of a voluntary mirror to discuss angelic communication. Angels can communicate their thoughts directly to one another: their minds are like mirrors directly}
intellectual ability look into the mirror of eternity, the more intelligent learns more in the vision than the other: in the alternate textual tradition mentioned above, SA 2.6.2.2 says that some things are reflected “faintly” from the “mirror of eternity,” and are read only by “more acute eyes.” Thus the angels of “clearer intelligence see more in the mirror of eternity, being more illuminated by the First Light: each is illuminated according to their own ability.”

This last point will be very important once we talk about faith.

Here is one last, very interesting point about mirror cognition: you can see God and see other things through God as a mirror without having the Beatific Vision. William is quite clear that the gift of prophecy is not the Beatific Vision: in fact, the gift of prophecy ceases to exist when the Beatific Vision comes (see SA 2.7.3, pp. 158ff.).

Faith as Vision in a Mirror

So William thinks that angels and prophets see truths about other created things in God: by seeing God, they see truths about what God has created and what God has done. This does not make them omniscient, but it does explain how they can know things that they have not experienced or observed. All of this is pretty normal medieval theology. But once we combine this idea with William’s view that faith is also a vision of God, we get an interesting possibility: perhaps faith, too, involves vision in the mirror of eternity. The idea is that since faith involves

---

28 SA 2.6.2.2 (appendix XVII) (p. 743, ll. 34-39). “Non quisquis in speculo aeternitatis legit, videt quicquid in eo resultat, quia aliquid est quod tenuier ibi resultat, hoc videtur ab oculis magis acutis. Eodem modo angeli, qui limpidiorem habent intelligentiam, magis vident in speculo aeternitatis, quia magis illuminatur ab ipsa prima luce, cum unusquisque illuminatur secundum propriam virtutem.”

I have amended quicquid to quisquis on line 34; quicquid is likely a scribal error due to the occurrence of another quicquid seven words later. I have also amended minus acutis to magis acutis on line 36 because minus does not make sense.
seeing God, when the faithful sees God, they can also see that certain claims about what God is and what He has done are true. These claims are, of course, the articles of faith.

Unfortunately, William does not give us a treatise where he explicitly lays out how the vision of God by faith leads to assent to the articles of faith. However, there are indications that he thinks cognition of the articles of faith works similarly to angelic and prophetic cognition in the mirror. As we saw in the passage on infant baptism discussed in 4a, he explicitly connects the two acts of faith: the act of vision leads to the act of assent. In SA 3.12.4, William says that the faithful believes the articles of faith “because of what they see.”

And in the treatise on “Whether the angels see everything in the Essential Mirror,” William says that the Church on earth is also “illuminated to see God in accordance with its position,” although it “sees in cloudy darkness, and to it many things are concealed which will be revealed then [i.e., in beatitude].”

This statement, in the context of a passage where, not just vision of God, but cognition of created things in speculo is being discussed, seems to indicate that William thinks that faith involves cognition in God as a mirror in a similar way to angelic and prophetic cognition.

There are differences, of course, between cognition by faith and angelic and prophetic cognition. The faithful on earth do not enjoy the Beatific Vision (although neither do prophets, and although presumably angels do, William never says that their seeing created truths in speculo is the same as their Beatific Vision). And, based on the passage just cited, William thinks that angels see more in God than the faithful on earth do: whereas the angels in glory see clearly, we see “in cloudy darkness.” Nevertheless, although he never states it explicitly, William

29 SA 3.12.4 (p. 208, ll. 70-71). “…fides gratuita, que dicit in corde hominis iam non propter rationem Naturalem credo, sed propter illud quod video.”

30 SA 2.6.3 (p. 134, ll. 88-91). “Ecclesia vero militans, etsi modo illuminetur ad videndum Deum pro modulo status sui, tamen videt ipsum in nube et caligine, et multa ei operta sunt quae tunc erunt ei aperta.”
appears to be thinking of the cognition of the articles of faith by the faithful as something like angels’ and prophets’ cognition of created truths in God as the mirror of eternity.

The primary weakness of this reading of William is, of course, that he never explicitly lays it out. So I offer it as the most likely Auxerrian understanding of the assent involved in faith rather than as a close exposition about what William said about that assent.

*Faith as aesthetic appreciation of God*

This view of faith also affords us a deeper understanding of what William says about faith in another passage: the article on infant faith that we looked at in section 4a, *SA* 4.5.4.3 (pp. 115-116). Applying the idea of faith as vision to what he says about the propositional side of faith, we can see how an Auxerrian view of faith might leverage the *aesthetic* nature of faith to explain how faith can yield assent to distinct propositions.

To review: at question in *SA* 4.5.4.3 is whether baptized infants have faith. The objector says they do not, because to have a habit you have to be able to put it into act; the act of faith is assent to certain propositions; and infants can’t assent to anything. William denies the first premise: you can have a habit as a *remote* habit, a habit that is possessed but is blocked from action by some impediment. In this case, the infant receives the habit of faith at baptism, but its undeveloped rational capacities block it from actually engaging in an act of faith (seeing God by faith and assenting to the articles of faith on that basis). Once the child comes of age, a priest or teacher will teach him the articles of faith. This will trigger the habit to engage: the child will look within him or herself, see what God has placed in his or her soul, see that it corresponds to what the teacher is proposing, and then assent to it.

But, the objector presses, this is still not the virtue of faith. If a lay Christian believes that Christ has two wills when the bishop tells her, then she is believing them on the bishop’s
authority. But faith, as William has repeatedly emphasized, is characterized by believing the articles of faith only because of God, and not because of any external authority. The layperson, then, does not really have faith, at least with respect to the article of faith she learned from the bishop. The baptized infant, meanwhile, when he comes of age, does not seem to have faith at all, because he believes all of the articles of faith on the authority of his parents, etc.

William answers this objection by drawing an analogy between natural first principles and the supernatural first principles of faith, i.e. the articles of faith. Natural first principles are known per se by everyone, but in different ways. Some natural principles are dignities, which one is aware of automatically. But some natural principles are suppositions, which require a story (confabulatio), that is some kind of explanation. Everyone knows suppositions innately—in a sense. But they have to be reminded of them by a teacher who explains the principle to them and makes them aware of what they already know. Many mathematical truths are like this: someone once showed me that 3+3=6, but my belief is not based on their teaching, because once they pointed it out to me, I could see it for myself. These external factors turn remote habits into proximate habits and hence bring them into act. Dignities don’t require a trigger to be brought into act: one is capable of consciously affirming them at any time. Suppositions do require a trigger: even if you have a habit of knowing a supposition, that habit cannot be brought into act without a trigger. Without a trigger, it remains a remote habit, not a proximate habit. But it is still

---

31We can compare this to Avicenna’s discussion of first principles in the *Metaphysics of the Healing* 1.4, where he says that the foundational concepts of being, thing, and one, out of which the principle of noncontradiction is built, cannot be proven, but can be established dialectically—in other words, through some discussion or explanation that does not prove the concepts, but causes the hearer to realize that they are true. It is not impossible that William has Avicenna in mind here, since he was aware of Avicenna and the *Metaphysics of the Healing* was available in Latin at the time. On the other hand, all of William’s borrowings from Avicenna are from Book 8 of the *Metaphysics of the Healing*, so it is possible that he read only that book, or only excerpts.
a habit. The trigger does not generate the habit, but only enables it to be brought into act by changing it from a remote to a proximate habit.

William then applies this analysis to the articles of faith. All the faithful know all the articles of faith; but you can know a given article of faith either in the manner of a dignity or in the manner of a supposition. If you know it in the manner of a dignity, then you don’t need an outside trigger. When I hear “On the third day [Jesus] rose from the dead” at church, I am triggered to affirm that proposition, but I didn’t need the trigger: I can consciously affirm it all on my own without an outside trigger. I know that article as a dignity. But a baptized child who has the virtue of faith but has never heard of the Resurrection is not in my position. He knows the article, but only as a supposition. He can’t consciously affirm the article right now, but (once he has reached the age of discretion) if he were to have it explained to him by his parent or priest, or were to hear it in the Creed, he would see that it is true and affirm it. William doesn’t necessarily think this assent will be instant: he says that the intellect has to be “practiced in the things of God” (exercitatos intellectus in eis quae Dei sunt) before the articles are known as dignities rather than suppositions. But the assent that eventually comes shows that the child already had the habit of faith.32

William’s distinction between sources and triggers of belief helps us understand how seeing God by faith gives rise to propositional belief in distinct articles of faith, and how external

32 SA 5.4.3 (pp. 115-116, ll. 76-91). “Ad istud quod obicitur, quod articuli fidei non sunt ei per se noti, dicimus quod sunt ei per se noti. Sed sciem quod quodam principia sunt dignitates, quendam suppositiones. Dignitates per se videntur sine aliqua confabulatione, suppositiones non sine aliqua levi expositione. Similiter articuli fidei quibusdam fidelibus sunt per se noti per modum dignitatis, videlicet eis qui habent exercitatos intellectus in eis quae Dei sunt, quibusdam fidelibus sunt per se noti per modum suppositionis; et illis alia explicatio facienda est ad hoc, ut credant in actu, quia adhuc tenebre peccati super faciem abyssi sunt.

Ad ultimum obiectum dicimus quod, licet fiat ei alia explicatio vel expositio ab anadocho sive patrino vel ab aliquo magistro exteriori, non tamen propter hoc credit homini, immo Deo soli. Magister enim exterior non facit nisi rememorationem. Sollicitat enim ipsum et incitat ut redeat ad cor et videat et conferat que Deus posuit in anima sua, illuminando ipsum per fidem. Unde soli magistro interiori credit, sed ad rememorationem magistri exterioris.”
authorities like the Bible and the Church are a necessary component in this process. The vision of God by faith is a sufficient basis for belief in all of the articles of faith, but the individual believer is not always aware of this. Outside triggers, such as the Bible and the Church, cause the believer to understand their vision of God in such a way that the vision itself grounds their beliefs.

This sort of thing happens in everyday life: a single object of experience can be understood in different ways, and propositional knowledge can actually augment the experience. Here is a commonplace example: I am looking at a puppy of a certain breed. I know what this breed looks like as an adult, but have never seen one as a puppy. Someone points out to me that the puppy is of such and such a breed. Once they point it out to me, I can see that it is of that breed. Their statement does not ground my belief. If it turned out that my informant is a pathological liar who only accidentally identified the dog correctly, I would still believe that the puppy was of such and such a breed—why? Because I can see the truth of that claim with my own eyes, now that the salient features of the puppy’s shape, coloring, etc. have been pointed out to me. My seeing the puppy was already, in itself, is sufficient to ground such a belief, but I needed an outside trigger to clarify and explain what I was seeing in such a way that the belief would actually be generated.

Here is another example. My mother-in-law’s favorite tea company went out of business, and she was no longer able to buy her black tea of choice. When helping her finish the last bit of it, I decided to figure out what kind of tea it was. I could tell by the shape and color of the leaves as well as the taste that it was Chinese, but not from Yunnan Province (I drink a lot of tea from Yunnan and I am very familiar with its appearance and taste). I attended to the taste more closely, and utilizing my knowledge of what regions of China typically export their black tea to
the West I realized that the tea was from Fujian Province. On my advice, she ordered some
Fujian black tea from a different company, and discovered that it tasted almost the same as the
tea she had bought from the first company. By considering what I knew about tea, I was able to
clarify my perception of the tea and hers in a new way, and even derive new propositional
knowledge from the sense-data gotten from tasting the tea, even though the object of experience
(the sense-data my tongue was giving me) did not change. Similarly, connoisseurs of wine report
how learning more about where wine comes from and how it is made enhances one’s experience
of it. In the same way, learning about God from the Bible and the Church brings clarity to one’s
vision of God, highlighting certain salient features of the vision such that it yields propositional
knowledge about God: when the teacher proposes a certain article to the child, the child looks
within himself and looks for something corresponding to that particular article. Faith then
becomes a proximate habit with regard to that particular article, although perhaps it is still a
remote habit for other articles that he hasn’t learn yet. Despite holding that faith is not
epistemically grounded in the Bible and the Church, William thinks that external teachers such
as these are vital to knowing the articles of faith.

We now have an outline of how the habit of faith generates knowledge of the articles of
faith. When God gives someone formed faith, he begins to change their soul to make it resemble
the Trinity. This allows the soul to be used as a means of indirectly seeing God. When the soul
uses its natural power of self-perception to look at itself, it sees that it has come to resemble the
Trinity and so sees God indirectly, with itself functioning analogously to a perceptible species.
Outside triggers such as the Bible and the Church clarify this vision of God in such a way that it
grounds belief in the articles of faith. Once pointed out to the believer, these articles are
perceived immediately to be true, and so one’s belief in them is propositional scientia.
4c Having and Relying

William’s and Aquinas’ discussions of epistemic priority are motivated by a concern to show that it is permissible for Christians to engage in rational inquiry concerning their faith, even if that inquiry leads to philosophical arguments proving certain aspects of their faith. It is easy to see how this works on Aquinas’ account. In order to have virtuous faith that $P$, you need to not know that $P$. If there weren’t a set of Christian beliefs that cannot be known by human reason, then it would be possible for someone to prove all Christian beliefs and, in doing so, become unable to have faith. These are the “articles of faith.” But Aquinas posits another set of beliefs, the “preambles of faith,” that have to do with Christian doctrine (e.g., “God exists”), but which can be proven. Rational inquiry into the Christian faith often results in proofs for the preambles of faith, but never in proofs for the articles of faith. So the virtue of faith is safeguarded from any danger that reason could hypothetically pose to it: anything reason can prove is perfectly permissible to prove, and anything else is unprovable anyway.

It is not yet clear, however, how William’s account of faith explains how rational inquiry into the faith can be permissible for Christians. He says that faith has epistemic priority over philosophical knowledge: when you have both God’s witness through faith that $P$ and a demonstrative argument whose conclusion is $P$, then you have faith, and not knowledge, that $P$. His view that faith is itself a form of scientia makes this sensible. But there is a problem here: William’s faith-prioritarianism entails that a Christian with virtuous faith cannot acquire knowledge of the articles of faith. Even if a pagan philosopher could know them through reason, the Christian cannot. Does this exclude Christians from rational inquiry into the faith? If so, there seems to be a major contradiction in his thought: he wants to say that it is possible and
permissible to demonstrate the articles of faith, but his own view of faith and human psychology makes it impossible.

To resolve this contradiction we will look at the two passages in the *Summa Aurea* where William approaches this question in the most detail: the Prologue and the Treatise on Faith (specifically *SA* 3.12.4). We already looked at these passages in section 2c, where we proved that William is a faith-prioritarian. Now that we have a deeper understanding of how his view works, it is good to return to them and apply that knowledge to our reading of these key passages.

*The situation: simultaneous bases*

Both the Prologue and 3.12.4 envision roughly the same situation: someone simultaneously has two bases for believing a single proposition, the First Truth and a demonstrative argument. In the Prologue, Williams says:

> When someone has true faith and arguments by which the Faith can be proven, such a person does not rely on the First Truth because of those arguments, but rather assents to the arguments because they agree with the First Truth and attest to It...But if faith were to rely on human arguments alone, it would not have merit, for then what Blessed Gregory said would apply (“faith does not have merit,” etc.). But since the truly faithful person relies on the First Truth above all, faith is not a conclusion, but a premise, as the Apostle says.33

The person in question “has” faith (i.e., the habit of faith) and “has” arguments that prove the Faith (i.e. the articles of faith).34 In that case they do not “rely on” the arguments, nor do they “rely on” the First Truth because of the arguments. In other words, the arguments are not their basis for believing: they do not believe the articles of faith because of the arguments. They do

33 *SA* Prologue (p. 16, ll. 26-41). “Cum autem habet quis veram fidem et rationes quibus ostendit possit fides, ipse non inmititur prime veritati propter illas rationes, sed potius acquiescit illis rationibus quia consentient Primae Veritati et ei attestantur...Si autem fides inmiteretur sobre rationibus humanis, non haberet meritum, quia tunc habet locum quod dictum beatum Gregorius: ‘Fides non habet meritum,’ etc. Sed quia vere fidelis inmititur Primae Veritati super omnia, ideo fides non est ei conclusio, sed argumentum, sic dicit Apostolus.”

34 See the opening for *SA* 3.12, discussed in section 3a of this dissertation, where William distinguishes the various senses of the term “faith.”
not judge the trustworthiness of the First Truth on the basis of the arguments: they do not say, “Well, what God reveals to me coheres with my own intellectual discoveries, so I conclude that He is reliable.” They merely “have” the arguments. So the person in question has two epistemic bases for believing the same propositions or set of propositions: the arguments and the First Truth.

In SA 3.12.4 we find a similar situation. The question is “Whether the same thing can be known and believed” (utrum idem sit scitum et creditum), and in this context this means “whether the same proposition can be the object of simultaneous natural demonstrative knowledge and supernatural faith.” The objector, arguing pro, proposes a thought experiment:

The philosophers came to an awareness of God through creatures. So they had knowledge of God, since Paul says that The invisible things of God are known through the things that are made. Suppose, then, that one of them came to faith. Obviously when he comes to faith, he won’t forget the arguments by which he formerly knew that God exists. Therefore, he still knows that God exists. Therefore, he knows and believes the same thing.

The philosopher-convert in question has access to two epistemic bases for believing the proposition “God exists”: an argument and the First Truth. So, the objector naturally concludes, they have both acts and both habits as well: they both know that God exists through natural demonstration and believe that God exists through faith.

---

35 As should already be obvious, William is not a Lockean!

36 SA 3.12.4 (p. 206, ll. 7-12). “Item, philosophi venerunt in cognitionem Dei per creaturas; et sic habuerunt scientiam de Deo per naturales rationes, quoniam Apostolus dicit: Invisibilia Dei per ea que facta sunt etc. Sit ergo quod aliquis talis veniat ad fidem. Constat quod quando venit ad fidem, non obliviscitur rationes quibus sciebat Deum esse prius; ergo adhuc scit Deum esse; ergo idem scit et credit.”

37 Technically he has more than two: he knows multiple arguments (rationes). But this is beside the point.
The result: faith, not knowledge

On our reading of the Prologue, “having an argument” \( (\text{habere rationem}) \) refers to possessing a demonstrative basis for a proposition, and “relying on an argument” \( (\text{inniti racioni}) \) refers to actually forming a basing relation between a demonstrative basis and the proposition it demonstrates. And so, on William’s view expressed in the Prologue, the faithful can have a demonstrative basis, but not a demonstrative basing relation. And we see the same view expressed, but more fully, in his refutation of the objection in SA 3.12.4:

Gracious [faith]…comes by illumination, when the True Light illuminates the soul to see itself and other spiritual things. This cognition is gracious faith, which says in the human heart, “Now I believe, not because of a natural argument, but because of what I see.” For when such a cognition comes, the soul assents to the First Truth for Its own sake and above all else. When such a cognition comes, all other accidental cognitions perish, both as act and as habit. Granted, some claim that they do not perish as habit, but only as act. But this is false, for the same apprehension belongs to all the accidental cognitions by which God is cognized. And when this apprehension comes to the soul, faith, as if it were faster, blocks the motion of the other accidental cognitions, if they were there. And so when faith comes, man is no longer capable of believing through arguments or testimony like before. And thus all other accidental cognitions perish, both as act and as habit…All acquired cognitions of God have the same consideration, so the greater and faster does not suffer others to coexist with it, as was said.\(^{38}\)

We saw in Chapter Two that William is expressing a faith-prioritarian view in this passage: faith is a “faster” habit than other forms of cognition, and “blocks” them from being put into act. In other words, when you have two bases for believing \( P \)—the faith-basis (i.e., the First

---

\(^{38}\) SA 3.12.4 (p. 65-91). “Accidentalis autem cognitio Dei est triplex, quoniam est quaedam quae acquiritur per naturales rationes, qualem habuerunt philosophi. Est alia que inmimitur testimoniis Scripturarum vel miraculorum, et haec est fides informis. Tertia est gratuita, quae fit per illuminationem, quando lux vera illuminat animam ad videndum se et alia spiritualia; et talis cognitio est fides gratuita, quae dicit in corde hominis iam non propter rationem naturalem credo, sed propter illud quod video, quoniam tali cognitio adveniente, assentit anima Primae Veritati propter se et super omnia. Tali cognitione adveniente, pereunt omnes aliae cognitiones accidentales, et quantum ad actum, et ad habitum, licet quidam dicant quod non pereunt quantum ad habitum; sed tantum quantum ad actum. Sed hoc est falsum, quoniam eadem est apprehensio omnium cognitionum accidentalium quibus cognoscitur Deus; et cum illa apprehensio venit in anima, fides tanquam velocior praecuparet motus aliarum cognitionum accidentalium, si ibi essent; et ita cum fides adest, iam non habilis est homo ad credendum per rationes et per testimonia sicut prius; et ideo pereunt ille aliae cognitiones accidentales, et quantum ad actum, et quantum ad habitum….Omnes accidentales cognitiones Dei unicam habent considerationem; et ideo maior et velocior non patitur secum alias, ut dictum est. Per hoc patet solutio ad secundo et tertio obiectum.”
Truth) and a demonstrative argument—it is the first that forms a basing relation and produces the act of belief, not the second. Now for someone like Aquinas, this would be baffling: how can mere faith be “faster” or have greater epistemic priority than demonstrative knowledge? But now that we know William’s account of faith from Chapter Three, we can give an answer to this. If faith were belief on the basis of testimony, it would not have greater epistemic priority than demonstrative knowledge, for either Aquinas or William. But it is not mere testimony: it is a vision of God as the First Truth. The believer, instead of relying on naturally-acquired demonstrative arguments, chooses to “deny his own intellect” and gaze upon the First Truth, in which the truth of all the articles of faith is evident. And it is very plausible that vision is a more compelling basis for belief than inference. The example of John in the Introduction to this dissertation illustrates this. John, you’ll remember, both knew how to calculate the date of an eclipse and saw an eclipse with his own eyes. It is plausible to suppose that when he sees the eclipse, although he might still remember his calculations, they are no longer his basis for believing: he can see the thing for himself. The vision “blocks the motion” of knowledge on the basis of calculation: it stops it from being actualized. The vision, in William’s terms, is “faster”: instead of going through the process of inferring from premises to a conclusion, John just sees, instantly, that an eclipse is happening. The faithful, likewise, when they consider a proposition like “God exists,” don’t need to go through a process of inference to see that the proposition is true: they just see it, right away, through their vision of God in faith.

39 The language of “denying one’s own intellect” makes William sound like a voluntarist with regard to the forming of basing relation: if you have to actively “deny your own intellect” in order to have faith, it sounds like you are choosing to form the faith basing relation rather than the demonstrative basing relation. But when William describes the process of assent, he comes off as quite deterministic: the faith-basis is simply faster, no exceptions noted! It is not clear how William resolves this problem. One way to do it would be to say that it is up to someone whether they acquire the faith-basis in the first place; but once they have it, a deterministic causal mechanism kicks in. There are extensive passages in the Summa Aurea discussion the relation between free will and grace that would be illuminating in this regard, and I mean to study them for a further project on William.
In addition, William argues further, since a habit is a disposition to act, since the believer is no longer able to actually believe on the basis of an argument, he is therefore not disposed to do so, and therefore does not have the habit of doing so either. You can’t have a habit without being able to put it into act. So the believer does not have knowledge of “God exists” either actually or dispositionally: neither as an act nor a habit.

*What about the basis?*

When William denies that “the same thing is known and believed,” he is using “known” in a very precise sense: an act or habit of assenting to a proposition based in a demonstrative argument whose conclusion is that proposition. The basing relation between the demonstration and the proposition it proves is cancelled out, replaced with the faith basing relation. It is specifically the basing relation, not the basis, that is eliminated. What, then, happens to the basis?

According to William, nothing: the basis remains, and its continued existence is evidenced by the causal power it exerts over the faithful. Immediately after the passage quoted above, William says:

> And yet when faith comes, the arguments one had before are not forgotten. But those arguments do not generate faith in them, but strengthen and increase gracious faith, just as temporal benefits do not produce charity in a person, but strengthen and increase it with regard to its motion.

After the philosopher acquires the virtue of faith, he no longer “knows” that God exists, in the sense that he does not believe that God exists because of a demonstration. But he “does not forget” the arguments on the basis of which he previously believed. The demonstrative basis

---

40 This means that by “know” he does not mean like “believe with certainty,” “have justified/warranted true belief,” “have a certainty-producing basis for belief,” etc. In a more general, common language sense William would certainly be willing to say that the believer knows that God exists, etc.

41 *SA 3.12.4* (p. 209, ll. 83-87). “Tamen non obliviscitur, adveniente fide, rationes quas prius habebat, sed ille rationes non in eo generant fidem, sed fidem gratuitam confirmant et augmentant, sicut beneficia temporalia non faciunt caritatem in homine, sed confirmant eam et augmentant quantum ad suum motum.”
remains, even after the demonstrative basing relation ceases to be. The continued psychological presence of the demonstration is evidenced by its psychological effects. It does not “generate faith”: it is not the basis for belief in the articles of faith, what accounts for the existence of the habit it does. But it does “strengthen and increase gracious faith.” The basis could not affect the mind of the believer in this way if the believer did not have access to it in some way.

This same view is expressed in the Prologue. We already saw that William assumes in the Prologue that it is possible to “have true faith and arguments by which the Faith is proven.” He explains his position with a Biblical reference:

This is signified by the Samaritans (John 4), by whom are signified those who believe rightly. Seeing Jesus by true faith, they said to the Samaritan woman (i.e., human reason): *Now we believe not because of you, but because we have seen Him for ourselves.*

In John 4, Jesus told the Samaritan woman details about her personal life that he could not have known naturally. This made her think that he was a prophet, and perhaps even the Messiah. She went into town and told her neighbors about him. This caused them to go and check him out, and they all believed in Jesus. The Samaritan woman was not the reason they believed Jesus: rather, it was because they saw him for themselves. She was, however, the reason they bothered to go and see Jesus in the first place: in William’s terminology from the

---

42 *SA* Prologue (p. 16, ll. 29-32). “Quod significatum est per Samaritanos, Ioan. iv, per quos significantur recte credentes qui, videntes Iesum per veram fidelidad dicunt Samaritanae, id est rationi humane: *iam non propter te credimus, sed quia ipsi vidimus.*”

43 The actual Biblical text (Greek, Latin, and English) says “heard,” not “seen.” The critical edition of the *Summa Aurea* supplies “<et audivimus>” as if the text as written were a mistake. But I think given William’s view of faith as vision, this alteration of the Biblical text is almost certainly either intentional or a very telling slip. Given that he alludes to the passage again in *SA* 3.12.4 and again uses *video* rather than *audio*, I think the former is more likely.
Prologue, she was the “motive cause” (*causa motiva*). So, even though she was not their basis for belief, she did exercise influence over their belief.\(^4^4\)

That this is a vital passage for William can be seen in the fact that besides quoting it in the Prologue, he also alludes to it in the passage from *SA* 3.12.4 quoted above. His abrupt shift in grammar (shifting to the first person for no apparent reason) is explained by the fact that he is alluding to the Biblical passage in question:

**Samaritans in John 4:42:**

iam non propter te credimus sed quia ipsi vidimus

**Faith in 3.12.4:**

iam non propter rationem naturalem credo sed propter illud quod video

On William’s allegorical reading of John 4, the townsfolk signify those who have the virtue of formed faith (“those who believe rightly”), and the woman symbolizes natural reason. And William’s remark in the 3.12.4 about strengthening a habit “with regard to its *motion*” helps us understand what William means by this remark. The term “motion” (*motus*) refers to the act of a habit. The possession of natural arguments does not directly influence the habit of faith: it does not determine whether or not you have the ability to look at the First Truth and see the truth of the articles of faith there. It does, however, influence the act of that habit: like the woman

---

\(^4^4\) One might point out that there is a disanalogy here. The Samaritan woman influenced the townspeople’s belief in a single, episodic incident. But she did not exercise influence on them over time. By contrast, evidence and arguments do not just influence faith in a single influence; rather, they continue to strengthen faith over time. I think this disanalogy can be resolved by considering what William means exactly by a *motive cause*. In 3.12.4, William says that arguments strengthen faith with regard to its *motus*—that is, with regard to its act. Arguments make it easier to put faith into act. William is not saying that arguments influence the habit of faith, but rather that in distinct episodic instants, they make it easier to perform the act of faith (i.e. assenting to the articles). So William thinks that arguments do strengthen faith in an episodic way, much like the Samaritan woman’s influence over the townspeople’s belief. The only difference is that arguments do this over and over again, over multiple episodes, whereas she did it only once.
attracting the townsfolk to Jesus with her tale of prophecy, natural arguments make it easier to see God by faith, even if they do not themselves ground belief.

It is not difficult to find analogues to this phenomenon in ordinary life. A smoker, trying to forget evidence against smoking, may be spurred to give it a second look after a friend he often stood outside with dies from lung cancer. Suppose this smoker is an extremely rational person. He knows that his friend dying to lung cancer is statistically insignificant and does not constitute any real evidence that smoking is bad for you. And since he is a rather rational guy, that event in itself would never convince him to give up smoking. But it does make him wonder. And it leads to him reading the evidence, coming to believe that smoking is bad for you, and eventually quitting. His friend dying is not his epistemic basis for believing that smoking is bad for you, nor is it his reason for quitting. But, in William’s terms, it was a vital motive cause. William thinks that, for the faithful, natural arguments occupy a position something like this. They do not ground belief, but they do motivate it. Even without their grounding belief, the believer still has access to them and is influenced by them.

Accessing the basis

William’s view, then, is as follows. It is impossible to have demonstrative knowledge and faith with regard to the same proposition at the same time because, even if you know a demonstrative argument for that proposition, faith always blocks the demonstrative basing relation from forming. Nevertheless, the believer does not lose access to the demonstrative basis: they know the argument that would have grounded their belief had they not had faith, and that argument can even make it easier to believe the proposition by faith.

But how does the believer have access to the demonstrative argument? If the demonstrative habit has perished, in what sense can I be said to know the demonstration? Is it
possible to know the premises and conclusion of an argument, that the premises entail the
collection, and that the premises are true, and yet not know the conclusion? If not, then
William’s claim that the believer “does not forget” arguments he knew before coming to faith is
highly suspect. And this is a claim he cannot give up: otherwise he would have to commit
himself to the absurd position that when someone acquires formed faith, they actually forget all
the reasons they previously had for believing any of the articles of faith. If Avicenna were to
become a Christian, for example, he would forget his proof of a Necessary Being. This also
implies that Christians such as Anselm and Aquinas (and William!) would be psychologically
incapable of remembering or understanding a theistic proof. All of this is quite absurd.

William never tackles this question head-on. But a close reading of SA 3.12.4 shows that
he doesn’t actually need to, because the objection is beside the point. There are two easy ways
for William to overcome this objection, both of which involve distinctions between kinds of
habits.

First, William could point out that the habit of believing on the basis of a demonstration
is not the same as the habit of considering the demonstration in itself. This is easy to illustrate
from ordinary examples. Take Alan from this dissertation’s Introduction. Alan trusts his
astronomer-friend John when he says that an eclipse is going to occur. But then Alan learns how
to calculate the date of the eclipse for himself. At this point (let’s plausibly suppose) Alan
believes that the eclipse is occurring, not on John’s authority, but because he can see it for
himself. But obviously this does not mean that he has forgotten that John is a reliable authority
on eclipses; that would be crazy. Alan obviously knows this, and even knows that, were he not to
have been able to see the eclipse for himself (say he was stuck indoors in a windowless room that
day), he would still believe that it is happening since John said so. But he doesn’t actually
believe for that reason. Alan does not have a habit of believing in the eclipse on John’s authority, but he does have a habit of considering John’s authority with regard to the eclipse.

Now apply this to the philosopher-convert from SA 3.12.4. At one point the philosopher-convert had a habit of believing that God exists because of a demonstration. Once they acquire formed faith, they lose the habit of believing that God exists because of a demonstration. But this doesn’t mean they lose the habit of remembering the demonstration itself. Remember that William is employing the term “knowledge” in a very precise way. To know a proposition is to have a habit of assenting to it on the basis of a natural demonstration. William says that when someone acquires formed faith, all knowledge-habits with regard to the articles of faith perish. But this says nothing about adjacent habits, such as habits of considering proofs.

The first way of defeating the objection is sufficient: not believing $S$ on the basis of $P$ is perfectly compatible with believing $S$, even if $P$ proves $S$. But William also has a second way to defeat this objection, not incompatible with the first: he can use his distinction between proximate and remote habits. In 4a, we saw that William distinguishes between two kinds of habits. Proximate habits are habits in the way we usually use the term: they are dispositions that are ready to be actualized. Remote habits cannot be brought into act, at least without some significant change in circumstances. For example, right now I possess a habit of doing arithmetic. I could do some arithmetic right now if I wanted to (I don’t). When I fall asleep (hopefully very soon), I will still possess that habit: it seems wrong to say that when I am sleeping, I do not know arithmetic.45 But I can’t do arithmetic in my sleep. William would say

---

45 Otherwise I would be daily acquiring, losing, and reacquiring that knowledge, as well as knowledge of my name, who my parents are, etc.—which seems *prima facie* absurd.
that when I am awake I have a *proximate* habit of arithmetic, and when I am asleep I have a *remote* habit of arithmetic.

With this distinction in mind, look again at William’s argument in *SA* 3.12.4 that when someone acquires formed faith, not only do all natural knowledge acts perish, but also all natural knowledge habits:

When this kind of cognition comes, all other acquired cognitions perish, both as act and as habit. Now, some people say that they do not perish as habit, but only as act. But this is false…Faith, as it were faster, blocks the motion of all other acquired cognitions (if there were any), and so when faith is present, man is no longer able to believe through arguments and through testimony like before. And so all other acquired cognitions perish, both as act and as habit.⁴⁶

William and his unnamed opponent both agree that natural knowledge perishes as act. William uses this as his basis for arguing that it also perishes as habit. If you can’t do something, you are not currently able (*iam habilis*) to do it. And someone who is not able (*habilis*) to do something does not have the habit (*habitum*) of doing it. Now, someone who has faith cannot actually assent to an article of faith on the basis of a demonstration: they cannot know an article of faith. Therefore, they are not able to do so. Therefore, they do not have the habit of doing so. But this is the habit of knowledge. Therefore, they do not have the habit of knowledge.

But note that this argument depends on the assumption that having a habit of doing something requires being able to do that thing. But this is the definition of a *proximate* habit. William elsewhere clarifies that it is perfectly possible to have a *remote* habit of doing something

---

⁴⁶ *SA* 3.12.4 (p. 208-209, ll. 73-82). “Tali cognitione adveniente, pereunt omnes aliae cognitiones accidentales, et quantum ad actum, et ad habitum, licet quidam dicant quod non pereunt quantum ad habitum, sed tantum quantum ad actum. Sed hoc est falsum, quoniam eadem est apprehensio omnium cognitionum accidentalium quibus cognoscitur Deus; et cum illa apprehensio venit in anima, fides tanquam velocior praecoccuparet motus aliarum cognitionum accidentalium, si ibi essent; et ita cum fides adest, iam non habilis est homo ad credendum per rationes et per testimonia sicut prius; et ideo pereunt ille aliae cognitiones accidentales, et quantum ad actum, et quantum ad habitum.”
without actually being able to do it. In SA 3.12.4, then, he is specifically talking about proximate habits, not remote habits.47

But this means that when William says that the habit of demonstrative knowledge perishes, he is not necessarily saying that it perishes altogether. It is perfectly consistent with the text to say that the habit of demonstrative knowledge persists as a remote habit, and it is plausible that the believer can be aware of this fact sufficiently to know the proof and know that it would produce knowledge were it not blocked by faith. So William has sufficient resources to deal with the objection.

*Conclusion*

In Chapter Two, we showed that William is a faith-prioritarian: he thinks that it is impossible to simultaneously have faith that a proposition is true and know it through a natural demonstration; and that when someone has the virtue of faith and a demonstration proving an article of faith, they end up believing that proposition by faith rather than having demonstrative knowledge of it. But in the beginning of Chapter Three we showed that in order for his position to be consistent and plausible, William has to deny a key claim of Aquinas: that faith is belief on the basis of authority. In the rest of Chapter Three, we showed that he does, in fact, deny this claim: faith is not belief on the basis of authority, but rather a vision of God as the First Truth. In the Chapter Four, we showed how this vision relates to the propositional belief usually associated with faith. First, we showed how seeing God by faith generates propositional beliefs.

47 Why doesn’t he explicitly say that he is talking about remote habits? I’m not sure. Maybe he hadn’t thought of the distinction when he was writing this passage, in which case this is an Auxerrian solution, but not one that William himself had thought of when he was writing SA 3.12.4. Or, perhaps, maybe he assumed that discussions of habits are about proximate habits unless you have to specify otherwise (as in the discussion of baptized infants). Or, alternatively, he took the phrase *iam habilis* as sufficient to point out that he is talking about proximate habits and not remote habits (which by definition do not make you *iam habilis* to do their corresponding act, but merely *habilis* in a broader sense). In any case this solution is available to William, and is perhaps implied by the phrase *iam habilis*. 
Finally, we showed how such belief does not preclude knowing arguments for what one believes by faith, even if one does not believe on the basis of those arguments. Since the purpose of this dissertation was to explain how William of Auxerre holds to faith-prioritarianism, I take it that that purpose has been fulfilled.

One of the interesting things to emerge from this dissertation is that Aquinas’ and William’s views, while opposed, are opposed in a very precise way. They agree on quite a lot. They both agree on the general picture of knowledge: a given proposition can be the object of different kinds of assent (I can know that P, believe that P, opine that P, etc.), and the manner of assent is determined at least partially by the way in which the proposition is made evident to the mind, such that if I have both strong, certain evidence for P and weak, uncertain evidence for P, I will inevitably end up assenting to P on the basis of the strong evidence and not the weak evidence: I will know it, not opine it or trust that it is true.

Where William and Aquinas disagree is not so much epistemological as anthropological. Both think that the path toward human perfection and fulfillment begins with faith. Aquinas starts his picture of faith with a certain kind of human intellectual activity, conceiving of human perfection on the analogy of a craftsman-apprentice relationship, where we begin by accepting propositions on the authority of the Divine Teacher, which sets us on the path toward eventually knowing them for ourselves (in the life to come). So he thinks of faith as a kind of belief on the basis of testimony, and hence a weak epistemic state relative to knowledge and liable to be displaced by it. William, on the other hand, begins with the insight that intellectual powers like understanding and willing are not terribly different from physical sense powers: we “see” that 1+1=2, and we “see” that it is snowy outside; and human perfection consists in “seeing” God. So it’s not surprising that William starts right off the bat thinking of faith, too, in a visual way, as
seeing God and seeing that the articles of faith are true. But this makes it plausible to see faith as a very strong epistemic state, not liable to be displaced by knowledge.

In essence: William and Aquinas share a set of epistemological views. If you plug in William’s view of faith, you get William’s faith-prioritarianism; if you plug Aquinas' view of faith into that set of epistemological views, you get Aquinas’ knowledge-prioritarianism. So the difference between them seems to be more anthropological than epistemological.

On the other hand, consider some of the distinctions had to make in in Chapters Three and Four to explain how William’s view of faith leads to propositional assent: proximate and remote habits; dignities and suppositions; near and far mirrors; double mirror cognition. These all built up to a strange and interesting view of how a very unusual kind of seeing generates a very unusual kind of knowing. It would be interesting, in a later project, to consider whether Aquinas would consider these moves legitimate, whether they are unique to William or shared with any contemporaries or near contemporaries, and how plausible they are for a 21st century philosophy of faith.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Licka L. 2017. “Attention, Perceptual Content, and Mirrors: Two Medieval Models of Active


VITA

Jacob Joseph Andrews was born and raised in Chicago, Illinois. Before attending Loyola University Chicago as a doctoral student, he received a B.A.-Classics in Latin and Philosophy from Loyola in 2012, a M.A. in the History of Philosophy from Marquette University in 2014, and an MPhil in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy from the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven in 2015.

While at Loyola, Dr. Andrews served as a mentor to undergraduate presenters at the annual Undergraduate Philosophy Conference, co-organized the symposium on Blake Dutton’s book *Augustine and Academic Skepticism*, and started several language and philosophy reading groups including the Online Latin Paleography Study Group. He was the recipient of Departmental Teaching and Research Fellowships at Loyola from 2015-2020 and of the Crown Fellowship for 2020-2021.

Currently, Dr. Andrews serves as Latin, Logic, and Philosophy Teacher at Covenant Classical School in Naperville, Illinois and live-in Houseparent at Jubilee Village in Carol Stream, Illinois.