The Parallel Journey of Faith and Reason:

Another Look via Aquinas's *De Veritate*

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In common with his remarkable range of published writings prepared for various audiences, Fergus Kerr's *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (2002) has placed into the hands of students and specialists a generous but critically discerning assessment of the many different readings of Aquinas which have characterised Thomist scholarship. At the same time, what is perhaps most impressive (but easily forgotten) is that Fergus's appraisal is not simply a critical survey of Thomisms; it is at once grounded in a deeply attentive reading of the Angelic Doctor's texts. One has a sense of an extraordinary erudition lightly borne, allowing the calm survey of a field which, paradoxically, is complex because it is so often full of over-simplifications. To read Kerr on figures as diverse as Aquinas, Heidegger and Wittgenstein is to learn to read. More specifically, it is to learn to read with an intense, generous but discerning attention to the texts. This is one of the many reasons why Fergus's books are so helpful for students: they not only deliver the thought of those thinkers who have been his abiding interest; they teach us the delicate skill of reading diverse texts which span centuries. I offer this contribution to his festschrift in the spirit of a commitment to attentive reading which has been the hallmark of Fergus's work and which has made his books of particular value to students of Christian theology and philosophy. In particular, I intend to focus on an issue which lies at the heart of theology's engagement with philosophy, namely the relationship between faith and reason. While making no pretensions to a significant enhancement of this complex debate, I hope that this essay will serve the students who are so

often Fergus's principal concern by clarifying certain issues through a close reading of Aquinas.

A good proportion of the recent debate concerning the relationship between reason and faith has involved in some way an engagement with Aquinas's thought. The renewed interest in his work over the last thirty years has brought with it a focus on his synthesis of Aristotelian and Platonic thought, and therefore on the nature of his use of philosophical reason in the explication of Christian doctrine. With the possible exception of portions of his commentary on Boethius's *De Trinitate*, much of this discussion has focussed on a small number of key texts in Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*, notably question 1 in the *Prima Pars* on the nature of holy teaching (*sacra doctrina*), and also the single article in question 2 which contains the so-called five ways of proving God's existence. Rather than return to these very familiar passages once again, in this essay I intend to examine this question with particular attention to an earlier text in Aquinas's body of work, the questions on faith and reason in his disputed questions 'On Truth' (*De Veritate*). This treatise, a portion of which we have as a dictated original, was prepared during his first period as a *magister in sacra pagina* in Paris from 1256 to 1259, some years before he commenced work on the *Summa Theologiae*.[1]

However, by way of a preamble I wish to consider an apparent disagreement between Fergus Kerr and another eminent contemporary Thomist, Deny Turner, concerning the purpose of Thomas's five ways and the status of reason in relation to faith. Turner wishes to maintain a degree of autonomy for the reason which belongs to philosophy in accordance with the teaching of the First Vatican Council that it is a matter of faith that God's existence can be

[1] Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas volume 1: The Person and His Work*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University Press of America, 1996), 62-67.

proved by reason alone. Kerr, on the other hand, also points to Thomas's very nuanced understanding of what it means to believe in God in such a way that we have to pay attention to the kind of belief that reason can generate. Having outlined this apparent disagreement, I will mediate with reference to the questions on faith and reason in *De Veritate*. Much of what I offer in the body of the paper is a close and expository reading of just three articles which appear in questions 14 and 15. However, I would like to highlight one suggestion which Aquinas offers which is easily passed over and is not, as far as I know, repeated anywhere else in his corpus, namely the view that faith and reason run 'in a kind of parallel fashion'. Moreover, we will see that it is the teleological structure of reason which is, for Aquinas, most crucial, for it is faith which supplies reason's orientation and thereby makes it more rational. I hope to demonstrate that, while faith and reason are parallel, they are different modes of a single power of understanding. We will see that Aquinas may very well agree with Augustine's view that 'if it is reasonable that faith precede reason with respect to certain great issues which cannot yet be comprehended, then without doubt the reason, however small, that persuades us of this, itself precedes faith.'[2]

Preamble: Believing God

In a recent article entitled 'Faith, Reason and the Eucharist',[3] which is a very helpful summary of his book *Faith Reason and the Existence of God*, Denys Turner defends what he

[2] St. Augustine, *Epistola* CXX, *Consentio ad quaestiones de Trinitate sibi propositas* in *Patrologia Latina* 33, column 453: *Si igitur rationabile est ut ad magna quaedam, quae capi nondum possunt, fides praecedat rationem, procul dubio quantulacumque ratio quae hoc persuadet, etiam ipsa antecedit fidem.*

[3] Denys Turner, 'Faith, Reason and the Eucharist: Music as Model for their Harmony' in *Redeeming Truth: Considering Faith in Reason* edited by Laurence Paul Hemming and Susan

describes as a minimalist conception of reason as found in Aquinas's work. He draws a distinction between two different kinds of disagreement. If we both consider the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, I might argue, for example, that he is very clever while you might argue that he has black hair. This is not really a proper kind of dispute because we are not arguing about the same kind of thing. This is what Turner and the mediaeval thinkers refer to as a *diversitas* – a 'diversity'. By contrast, while I argue that Ludwig Wittgenstein is very clever you might argue that his intellect was rather mediocre. We are now engaged in a dispute and able to argue about the same kind of thing. This is what Turner and the mediaeval thinkers call an *oppositio* – an 'opposition' in which we take opposing sides of an argument concerning something that is common between us, in this case the intelligence of Ludwig Wittgenstein. This distinction is the basis of Turner's citation of Aquinas's teaching that *eadem est scientia oppositorum*: 'the knowledge of opposites is one and the same'. In other words, my claim that Wittgenstein is clever and your claim that Wittgenstein is of moderate intelligence lie at opposite ends of one and the same spectrum, namely the notion of Wittgenstein's intelligence. This means that we can, by virtue of this same spectrum, engage in reasoned argument.

For Turner, the rational discussion of the existence of God concerns a *scientia oppositorum*; it is the kind of thing about which we can have a discussion. Of course, that debate may concern the discernment of the nature of any disagreement so that the parties can be sure that they are dealing with an *oppositio* rather than a *diversitas*. Still, for Turner it is this kind of rational discussion which concerns Aquinas in the five ways.[4] In the course of his discussion,

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Frank Parsons (London: SCM 2007), 15-33; idem., *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[4] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1a.2.3.

Turner deals with a number of objections to the possibility that God's existence might be the subject of rational demonstration, notably the view that, even if one could demonstrate by philosophical means that God exists, one would not arrive at the God of faith, but the Pascalian 'God of the philosophers'. In other words, the philosophical demonstration of God's existence such as one finds in the five ways pertains to the first unmoved mover, the necessary cause, and so on, and not the God of Trinitarian faith who is the subject of Christian praise and devotion. It is this kind of objection which Turner ascribes to Fergus Kerr in his book *After Aquinas*. Kerr does indeed comment on the disproportionate attention paid to the five ways amongst Anglophone philosophers, particularly given their striking brevity in the *Summa*. Nevertheless, Kerr's position is rather more nuanced than Turner suggests. Kerr refers to a distinction which Aquinas makes, following Augustine, between believing in God (*credere Deum*), believing God (*credere Deo*), and that belief which commits one to God (*credere in Deum,* occasionally translated as 'believing unto God' but referring to that belief which binds us to God).[5] It is said that even infidels – amongst whom one would include pagan philosophers – believe in God, but this does not mean that they have what Thomas calls 'the *act* of faith'.[6] There is something belonging to faith which is more than simply the intellect's assent to a proposition which might result from a rational demonstration such as one finds in the five ways. Faith must begin *credere Deo* - 'believing God' – and deepen, little by little, towards *credere in Deum*.[7]

[5] Aquinas, Summa Theologiae 2a2ae.2.2.

[6] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 2a2ae.2.2.ad 3, my emphasis.

[7] Aquinas, Summa Theologiae 2a2ae.2.3. In modern philosophical discussion, a distinction is often made between 'belief *that*' and 'belief *in*'. For example, I may hold the belief *that* it is currently raining outside, while I believe *in* my friend's ability to use her talents to transform the lives of other people. The belief *that* something is the case may elicit our assent to a fact

For Kerr this means that '…Thomas clearly thinks that the proposition 'God exists', held as true by a non-Christian, on the basis of theistic proofs, does not mean the same as the proposition 'God exists' as held by a believer.'[8] It is not the case that the subject of the philosopher's belief and the subject of the Christian's faith are different (as would be the case in Pascal's distinction to which Turner objects); they refer to the same thing. Rather, I take it that Kerr is pointing out that the significance of these different modes of believing – how they appear in practice in the *act* of faith rather than in the form of rational assent, if you like – will be very different. Turner seems to ascribe to Kerr the view that the believer's assent of faith and the philosopher's belief in God do not *refer* to the same thing. I take it they do, and it seems that Kerr thinks they do. Thomas says on this subject 'For they [infidels] do not believe that God exists *under the conditions that faith determines*; and so they do not truly

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which we suppose is demonstrable or at least likely, while the belief *in* something or someone will provoke our commitment, trust and faith. By *credere Deum*, Aquinas means 'believing that God exits' as a matter of demonstration; by *credere Deo* he means believing God's address in revelation; by *credere in Deum* he means that belief in God which betokens trust and the *act* of faith. These different modes of belief can be distinguished, particularly in the latter's involvement of the will.

[8] Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 67. The confusion is reflected in O'Brian's translation of the relevant phrase in *Summa Theologiae* 2a.2ae.2.2.ad 3: *Non enim credunt Deum esse sub his conditionibus quas fides determinat* is rendered as "In their belief God's existence *does not have the same meaning* as it does in faith" . See the Blackfriars edition of the *Summa Theologiae*, vol.31 (my emphasis).

believe that God exists, because, as Aristotle says, with regard to simples, defective knowledge is not knowledge at all.'[9]

Nevertheless, this exchange opens up a line of enquiry: given that they *refer* to the same thing, how exactly does faith differ from the rational assent which results from a philosophical demonstration of God's existence? Is it simply that reason establishes as true a list of propositions about God – he exits, is incorporeal and simple, for example – while faith adds to that list such propositions or qualifications as 'God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit'? What does our answer to that question reveal about the relationship between faith and reason? I would like to explore answers to these questions with reference to questions fourteen and fifteen in Aquinas's *De Veritate* in which he discusses at greater length what we mean by 'belief'.

Faith

Aquinas begins his discussion of faith by examining the nature of belief (*credere*) in general.[10] He distinguishes belief from other acts of understanding. In one kind of understanding, we form 'the simple quiddities of things', namely what things *are*. Such simple understanding does not involve truth or falsity; Aquinas refers to it as 'the imagination of the understanding' (*imaginatio intellectus*). By contrast, the second operation of the understanding involves joining or separating concepts; for example, one can join 'woman' and 'tall' in the proposition 'the woman is tall'. Affirming or denying those concepts does

[9] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 2a2ae.2.2.ad 3, quoted in Kerr, *After Aquinas*, 67.

[10] Aquinas, *De Veritate,* 14.1.responsio. All translations are taken from Thomas Aquinas, *Truth* ('Quaestiones disputatae de veritate'), trans. R. W. Mulligan et al. (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1952).

involve truth and falsity. It is this second operation of the understanding – the joining together or separating of concepts – which is a matter of belief that Aquinas labels 'faith' in the broadest sense. He simply wishes to stress that belief is a matter of truth and falsity, and not merely a preference or a kind of simple understanding. To put it succinctly, belief discerns.

How, asks Aquinas, do we come to believe certain things and not others? He refers to the 'possible intellect', namely that aspect of my intellect which potentially possesses knowledge: 'The possible intellect...as far as its own nature is concerned, is in potency to all intelligible forms, just as first matter of itself is in potency to all sensible forms.'[11] What Aquinas means is that the aspect of the intellect which *potentially* has knowledge can receive the form of anything which can be known, whether it be the form of a mug or the form of a language, and thereby be actualised. This is why Aristotle teaches that 'the soul is in a manner all things' because the intelligible soul is, as it were, 'plastic'; just as a piece of modelling clay can receive the figure of anything pressed into it, so the soul can receive the form of all things which can be known (that is, all intelligible forms).

[11] Ibid. Matter, for Aristotle and Aquinas, is in itself a 'pure potentiality'. Aquinas here refers to it as 'first matter'. This is to say that it could potentially be anything which is apparent to the senses (a sensible substance). As such, there could not be pure matter because such a material entity would be nothing in particular. Form qualifies matter as a particular thing – a'this' rather than a 'that' (say, a pen rather than a book). Matter itself can potentially become anything sensible by receiving a particular form, hence matter is 'in potency to all sensible forms.'

Aquinas now has to answer an important question. If the possible intellect is not in itself determined, what orientates it towards one side of a proposition rather than another? How do we come to believe some propositions and not others? According to Aquinas, there are two things which move the possible intellect in one direction rather than another: its proper object and the will. By 'its proper object', Aquinas means something which 'fits' (in the aesthetic sense) with the possible intellect. In the case of the human possible intellect, its proper object is that which is the true end or fulfilment of the human intellect. In the end, Aquinas thinks is God and the proper object of the human possible intellect therefore also includes creatures specifically in their relation to God. When confronted with divergent propositions, the possible intellect can, of course, be orientated more towards one side of the proposition than another, and to differing degrees. At this point, Aquinas distinguishes between these 'degrees of orientation' and, in a fashion reminiscent of Plato's Line in the *Republic*, makes important distinctions between doubt, opinion, knowledge (*scientia*) and belief. First to doubt. When considering contrary propositions, someone is in doubt if they are not moved in any particular direction. For example, there may be insufficient evidence for one proposition rather than another, or the will is not inclined in one direction rather than another. Someone in a state of opinion is broadly inclined in one direction rather than another; one member of a contradictory proposition draws the intellect, but always with the fear that the other is true. For example, someone may be of the *opinion* that God exists if there is a high degree of ambivalence about their claim.

Next, Aquinas discusses the case of the possible intellect coming to adhere to one proposition rather than another without reservation. This can happen in two ways. First, it can happen immediately in the sense of there being no *mediation*. Such is the case when we understand what Aquinas calls 'principles'. These are self-evident propositions which of necessity

orientate the intellect towards particular knowledge. A good example of such immediate knowledge would be the proposition that 3 is greater than 2, or that 5+1=6. One simply 'sees' that these propositions are true for 'Here, the very nature of the thing itself immediately determines the intellect to propositions of this sort.'[12] On the other hand, we also have knowledge which is mediated. This occurs when one reasons from first principles towards a sure conclusion through the process known as demonstration. We 'demonstrate' (via a chain of discursive reason) that such-and-such is the case. This leads to a state of *scientia*, or knowledge. This is the kind of demonstration which Turner has in mind regarding the proof of God's existence by reason.

How, then, does Aquinas distinguish belief from his other categories of knowledge, opinion and doubt? When we are determined to one side of a contradictory proposition neither by definition of terms (e.g. 3 is greater than 1) nor mediately via a rational demonstration delivering *scientia*, then we may be determined by the will which assents to one proposition rather than another 'because it seems good or fitting to assent to this side. And this is the state of one who believes.'[13] What does Aquinas have in mind? At first sight, this looks voluntaristic. In other words, by placing the will in pride of place, we apparently come to believe something because we want it to be true. This is where our modern sensibilities grate with Aquinas's understanding of the will and assent. What he has in mind is not this kind of naked voluntarism which is simply a matter of wanting something to be true, but rather an aesthetic construal of truth. How is this so?

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

For Aquinas, the good, the true and the beautiful are 'convertible', which is to say that one always implies the others, although they are not conceptually identical. Something that is good is also true and beautiful.[14] These are called 'transcendentals' and they are not merely linguistic categories; they are ontological.[15] A transcendental category is transcendent in the sense that it exceeds all categories of particular things, for example genus and species. So we could have a beautiful, good or true table, mug or landscape. By contrast, 'slim' is not a transcendental because one could not have a 'slim' thought (other than metaphorically), whereas one could have a beautiful, good and true thought. So the term 'slim' refers only to certain particular things, for example people. Aquinas would say that the transcendentals are 'convertible' and, more specifically, they are convertible with the focal transcendental which is 'being'. When we talk of something as true, we are also talking of its beauty and goodness. Nevertheless, the transcendentals are not synonymous. To be 'true', for example, always implies 'being' but it adds conceptually the sense that to be true involves the conformity of a knower with that which is known which is the basis of the understanding's assent to a proposition.

This means, for Aquinas, that our will's cleaving to what is beautiful is not simply a matter of taste. Rather, our perception of beauty is also a perception of the good and the true. That which we find attractive or beautiful can also be a route to, or intimation of, truth and therefore a path to assent. It is another route which is different to demonstration leading to *scientia*. Of course, Aquinas is well aware that we frequently fail to will the good, true and beautiful because of sin and the tendency to will intermediate things (for example, material

[14] Aquinas, *De Veritate* 21.1 on the convertibility of 'being' and 'good'.

[15] For a detailed treatment of the transcendentals, see Jan Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals: The Case of Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996).

wealth) for their own sake rather than as signs of a transcendent and eternal source of truth. Idolatry is, at its heart, a failure to discern truth by the improper willing of something that is created as if it were the ultimate goal of the will.

How might we best describe the kind of belief which is arrived at through the will's desire of the good, true and beautiful? First, it is important to remember that Aquinas does not think of assent in terms of human subjects seizing knowledge of passive objects. This is not 'minds' grasping 'things'. Rather, the truth can sometimes seize the intellect. For Aquinas, the intellect's assent via belief is just as much a question of the truth seizing the intellect as the intellect seizing the truth. He puts it this way: 'Because of this the understanding of the believer is said to be 'held captive,' since, in place of its own proper determinations, those of something else are imposed upon it: "bringing into captivity every understanding..." (2 Cor 10.5).'[16] There is a *convenientia*, or aesthetic 'fit'. When we choose a pair of shoes (or a spouse, or new house), we do not decide by rational *demonstration* (at least not entirely), but neither is our choice irrational or without its reasons; rather, it comes via belief emerging from an aesthetic construal of truth mediated by the will. This way of approaching matters is very much consonant with a traditional and Platonic conviction that the way we think about things is somehow an image of, or sharing in, the way things *are*. Yet it is not quite the same as doubt, opinion or *scientia*.

In the closing paragraphs of this article, Aquinas distinguishes more carefully between the kind of belief which we call faith and that knowledge which is characterised by assent resulting from rational demonstration (*scientia*). The latter case, namely rational demonstration leading to *scientia*, concerns a single linear movement from first principles,

[16] Aquinas, *De Veritate*, 14.1.responsio.

through rational and discursive demonstration to a conclusion to which we assent. The crucial point is that Aquinas thinks of this as a motion: it is a passage from potency to act which has a beginning, a middle and an end.[17] As the intellect arrives at its conclusion, discursive reason stops and the intellect finds rest in *scientia*. The discursive reason *generates* the knowledge. So Aquinas states:

> For in scientific knowledge the movement of reason begins from the understanding of principles and ends there after it has gone through the process of reduction. Thus, its assent and discursive thought are not parallel, but the discursive thought leads to assent, and the assent brings thought to rest.[18]

Belief is a different matter. The intellect assents to a proposition because of the will's discernment of a certain fittingness and beauty. However, this is not a result of a linear process of discursive thought which finds some kind of termination. So whereas knowledge (*scientia*) is the product (end result) of rational and discursive demonstration, faith is not generated in this linear way. However, this does not mean that faith has nothing to do with reason understood as demonstration. Nevertheless, it seems that there is not really a merging of belief and demonstrative reason, but an operation of reason which Aquinas says is in some strange way 'parallel' to belief. Reason (understood in the somewhat restricted sense of rational demonstration) enquires into that which is believed, but, unlike *scientia*, it does not establish that belief. Nevertheless, the understanding, says Thomas,

[17] On the motion of reason, see particularly *De Veritate* 15.1.This is discussed in more detail below.

[18] Aquinas, De Veritate 14.1.responsio.

> ...still thinks discursively and inquires about the things which it believes, even though its assent to them is unwavering...It is by discursive thought, however that it [belief] is distinguished from understanding, and by the fact that assent and discursive thought are, in some kind of way (*quasi*), 'parallel' and simultaneous, that it is distinguished from scientific knowledge (*scientia*).[19]

What Aquinas means is that the intellect may assent to a proposition by belief and cleave most fervently to it, but discursive enquiry into the object of that belief (say, God) does not stop; it continues 'in parallel'. So belief – and that includes faith – is different to mere 'understanding' because it involves a continual use of discursive reason. By assent and reason running parallel, it is distinguished from *scientia*, or knowledge.

What we seem to have, therefore, is discursive reason running alongside belief, but without the reason *generating* faith. So faith and reason belong together, but without collapsing into each other. As parallel lines join at infinity, so faith and reason only finally merge in the infinity of God. On the basis of this discussion of belief, a variety of which we call 'faith', it seems that Fergus Kerr is right to suggest that the *scientia* which is generated by the rational demonstration of God's existence, such as one finds in the five ways, is not the same kind of thing as one finds in faith's understanding. *Scientia* concerns those things which are present to the mind and expressible in terms of rational demonstration from first principles; faith concerns 'things as yet unseen'. Nevertheless, faith is accompanied 'in parallel' by discursive reason. The kind of discursive reason which Aquinas exercises in the five ways accompanies his thinking throughout the *Summa*, but it does not generate or establish the *sacra doctrina* which is his subject matter.

[19] Ibid.

As a brief aside, I should mention that this matter is discussed again when Aquinas states that 'it is impossible to have faith and scientific knowledge about the same thing.'[20] At first glance, this seems to suggest that the subject of the kind of rational demonstration that we find in Aquinas's five ways cannot be the same as the subject of faith. Reading on, however, we realise that, for Aquinas, a thing can be an object of belief in two ways. First, one can believe those things which are beyond humanity's intellectual capacity in this life, such as the Trinitarian doctrine of God. We assent to these on the basis of divine testimony. Secondly, something can be an object of belief not in an absolute sense, but in some respect when it exceeds the capacities of some people. For those able to grasp God's existence or that God is non-corporeal by means of rational demonstration, they hold *scientia* or knowledge. Others who are not able to grasp such rational demonstration may believe these things rather than 'know' these things. What Aquinas resists is any sense that the same person can know and believe something at the same time, for the latter involves also an action of the will – a perception of beauty which provokes desire – which then prompts the intellect to assent. For Aquinas, the point is that knowledge of God's existence has its source in our rational demonstration of the proposition 'God exists', whereas belief in the existence of God, which involves a movement of the will, has its source in God himself. Because the ground of belief is divine testimony, this will exceed knowledge of God's existence which finds its source only in dialectical argument; *credere Deum* becomes *credere Deo*. In the life of the Christian, such belief, which concerns the will's participation in the illumination of God's address, will appear differently to knowledge alone.

[20] Aquinas, *De Veritate*, 14.9.responsio.

Returning now to the specific nature of faith, in *De Veritate* and elsewhere throughout his corpus Aquinas is clear that faith is a gift and a virtue, and in being a virtue it is also a *habitus,* a way of being or, more literally, a way of holding or having oneself in Aristotle's sense of *hexis*.[21] But why does faith have to be a gift? Thomas explores that question with reference to humanity's end or goal. As with belief in general, Aquinas states that faith is generated by two things: first, the perceived good which moves the will because it is the will's end or goal; and secondly the understanding's assent which is given under the influence of the will. Aquinas goes on to say that man has a twofold goal. One is proportionate to man's nature, namely the happiness which can be achieved in this life. In *De Veritate,* Aquinas associates this with the happiness of which the philosophers speak, namely that which comes by contemplation or through the exercise of certain moral virtues based on

[21] For Aristotle's understanding of 'habit' (*hexis*) see, for example, *Nichomachean Ethics* II.4. For Aquinas on *habitus,* see Summa Theologiae 1a2ae.49-54. See also John Milbank's contribution to this volume. The notion of' habit' comes under increasing scrutiny in early modern philosophy because what is undertaken merely habitually is apparently devoid of reason and awareness. If I attend church by habit, I do so for no good reason and without reflection. Yet this is not what Aristotle and Aquinas have in mind. To possess a habit is to perform an act easily because it has become part of a creature's nature. For example, a concert pianist, because of years of dedicated practice, can play the piano because of numerous acquired habits of musicianship. In the exercise of those habits (that is, in playing the piano), the pianist is most fully herself and most fully self-aware; it is the most acute expression of her rationality. See also Simon Oliver, 'The Sweet Delight of Virtue and Grace in Aquians's Ethics' in *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7(1), January 2005, 52-71.

prudence.[22] Nevertheless, because of humanity's fallen state even the achievement of that which is proportionate to our nature frequently lies beyond our grasp. However, there is another good which is man's end, and this is 'out of all proportion to man's nature'; it cannot be attained to, either in thought or desire. Why does Aquinas emphasise that this end is 'out of all proportion' to human nature? Because he wants to stress that this end is not 'just a little bit beyond us'. Neither does he want to suggest that, by the increased or better use of our human nature, we could move closer to this end. This is something which is wholly other than anything which might be achieved by the autonomous exercise of human power, so getting closer is not something to which we might attain. Rather, 'it is promised to man only through the divine liberality.' In other words, it is a free gift of God.

Now, if something is ordered to a particular end, its nature must bear some kind of proportion to that end. There must be something already within which is an intimation of the end to be achieved. What does this mean? Take the following trivial example: there would be no point directing a dog towards the attainment of a PhD as its end because there is nothing in a dog's nature which is proportionate to the attainment of a doctorate; there is no rational mind which can be moved and developed to attain such a thing. On the other hand, the end of hunting and killing prey is proportionate to a dog's nature and, in the form of instinct, it has some intimation of this end within its nature. So there is, in humanity, 'an initial participation of the good which is proportionate to that nature.' He puts it this way:

> This happens in so far as, in a certain sense, the end is made to exist inchoatively (*inchoatio*) within it, because it desires nothing except in so far as it has some likeness

[22] Aquinas, *De Veritate*, 14.2.responsio.

> of that end. This is why there is in human nature a certain initial participation of the good which is proportionate to that nature.[23]

Yet there is apparently nothing in human nature which is proportionate to the end which we call eternal life in God's presence. There must, says Aquinas, be some initial participation in this good, the *visio dei,* in the one to whom it is promised: 'Consequently, we must have within us some initial participation of this supernatural knowledge.' How? Through faith. So faith is the gift of an initial participation in our final, eternal end which comes to exist incohatively within human nature by the divine liberality. This is 'the substance of things hoped for' of Hebrews 11.1 which is a faint intimation of our end and the good that moves the will to which the understanding then gives assent under the will's influence. This faith, via a light which is infused in us by grace, presents those things which are beyond natural knowledge. For now, I wish to point out only one very important element of the above discussion: our supernatural end is 'incohatively' present in human nature via divine liberality in the form of faith, and this faith is an initial *participation* in supernatural knowledge. I would like now to turn to a more explicit discussion of the nature of reason, for here we will find a clearer understanding of reason's relationship to faith.

In the opening article of this question, Aquinas asks about the nature of reason by comparing it to understanding. Are they different powers? He makes this distinction in a way which will seem strange to us, but makes perfect sense to a mediaeval theologian who is not bound by the formal disciplinary distinctions of modern academic life. He uses the category which we think belongs to physics, but which for Thomas belongs as much within metaphysics and theology as it does within natural philosophy, namely motion. Aquinas uses the term *motus,*

[23] Aquinas, *De Veritate* 14.2.responsio.

but he means any kind of change: locomotion (i.e. change of place), growing, learning, or even thinking. Motion is passage from potency to act. For example, at the moment I only potentially know Japanese. By going to Japanese lessons, my mind moves from potentially knowing Japanese to actually knowing Japanese. The motion of learning can often be arduous and difficult. This is the key characteristic of the motion we call 'reason': it is 'transition from one thing to another by which the human soul reaches or arrives at knowledge of something else.' [24] It is the discursive movement of the mind by which we achieve understanding. 'Understanding' is that point at which we arrive at the end of the motion of learning. However, it is crucial to remember that, although Aquinas will refer to understanding as 'rest' (as opposed to motion), it does not mean that the understanding mind is static or inoperative; quite the opposite is the case. When I understand Japanese, my mind is in a greater sense of actuality and therefore activity, but it is no longer in a state of motion. It simply understands, and understanding is an activity. This is why, when we talk about God being fully actual and beyond motion we do not mean that God is 'static'. Quite the opposite: God is pure act, what Aristotle called *energeia*.

Aquinas's talk of reason as motion might also alert us to another distinction which, although he does not make it explicitly, might help to understand more precisely the nature of his position. To stress the motive nature of reason – its process or action in time, if you like – we might better refer to reason*ing* as a means of sharing in that eternal reason – the *Logos* – of the divine. Strictly speaking, whenever Aquinas speaks about 'reason' in relation to human beings, he is referring to a temporal activity which we undertake towards a particular end. So rather than refer to the noun form – reason, or *Logos* – for human beings it is more accurate to refer to the present participle of the verb to reason, for reason is something in which we

[24] Aquinas, *De Veritate* 15.1.responsio.

participate by the reasoning activity of our intellects. In other words, it is an activity we perform which is teleological in orientation; it has a goal beyond itself.

There is, however, another state of understanding which is not arrived at through the motion of discursive reason. This is the understanding which belongs to spiritual substances (that is, angels) who simply know by an influx of light from the source of truth. To see what Aquinas has in mind, think of the way in which we sometimes know things 'intuitively'. We do not have to go through the motion of learning, but are already in a simple state of understanding. Angelic understanding is not arrived at by the motion of reason, but by a simple reception. By this kind of understanding 'one is said to understand because in some sense he reads the truth within the very essence of the thing. Reason, on the other hand, denotes a transition from one thing to another by which the human soul reaches or arrives at knowledge of something else.'[25]

What is key, however, is that, in the motion of human learning through reasoning, the intellect both moves itself and is moved by the goal which is desired. In other words, it participates in the goal for which it strives (for example, knowledge of something). So Aquinas says:

> Consequently, although the knowledge proper to the human soul takes place through the process of reasoning, nevertheless, it participates to some extent in that simple knowledge which exists in higher substances [i.e. spiritual creatures and ultimately

[25] Aquinas, *De Veritate* 15.1.responsio.

> God as the source of all truth], and because of which they are said to have intellective power. [26]

With respect to the motion of reasoning, this motion proceeds from 'rest'. For example, I begin my motion of learning Japanese in a state of 'rest' in my ignorance of Japanese. Yet some intimation of my eventual goal (the knowledge of Japanese) must be somehow incohatively present in me before I can make the motion of learning Japanese truly my own. For example, I should have some basic understanding of language in general. So we must start from some simple perception of things which is itself not the product of the motion of reason. Moreover, what Aquinas has in mind in discussing reason in relation to the simplicity of angelic understanding is that the former participates in the latter and, where human intellectual activity reaches its height in simple understanding rather than the laboured movements of discursive reason, there we find the greatest intimations of the angelic.

Another way of thinking about this is related to Aquinas's understanding of faith as a kind of *eros*, or desire. He is clear that the proper end or goal of humanity is something supernatural, namely the beatific vision. This is what we desire and it is a teleological account of human nature. In the seventeenth century René Descartes (amongst many others in the early modern period) produced a radical critique of final causation or teleology in which he argued that one cannot aim towards an end or goal unless one already knows what that end or goal *is*. In many respects, the Neoplatonic and Aristotelian traditions would agree; indeed, Aristotle wrestled with the aporia that the philosopher desires that which philosophy discloses as

[26] Aquinas, *De Veritate* 15. a 1. *responsio*

unattainable, namely knowledge of the first cause and principle of all things.[27] The knowledge of the first cause, being eternal, cannot be attained by humanity which is, of its nature, material and temporal. If we imagine that human reason is striving *for* something, yet it knows nothing of that for which it will strive, it will be, as Plato put it, mere futile 'wandering'. This is why Augustine was so critical of *curiositas* (curiosity). Today, we tend to laud 'curiosity' and the pursuit of knowledge for knowledge's sake as if it were an end in itself. For Augustine, only God was desirable as an end in himself. *Curiositas* was decadent; it was directionless 'wandering' from one intermediary to another with the mistaken view that these intermediaries – knowledge of created being – were true ends in themselves. So if reasoning is a kind of 'wandering' in search of a goal or direction, is faith that which supplies sufficient intimation of the goal (the beatific vision) in order to provide reason with its proper teleological structure? On this view, faith would give sufficient 'hints' such that reason would become *more* rational in finding its way. Theologically, the way in which this might best be articulated is via the incarnation, in which Christ is revealed as both the goal (namely the truth and the life, the 'life that is hidden with Christ in God' (Colossians 3.3)) and the way. As John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock put it, 'only the arrival of the goal in the midst of the way [i.e. Christ] reveals again the way'.[28] This, then, is the answer to Descartes' question: we encounter intimations of the end of human being via the address of faith which leads reason and thereby makes it *more rational* by enhancing its desire and establishing its teleological orientation. Here is Turner's very elegant way of putting much the same point:

[27] On 'the distress of philosophy', see Jan Aertsen, *Nature and Creature: Thomas Aquinas's Way of Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 213-218.

[28] John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2001), 61.

> So faith just is the gift by which reason has learned to desire an understanding it couldn't know it could seek; as gifts are with us, so with grace; as amongst ourselves the perfectly judged gift meets a desire we didn't know we had.[29]

So faith and reasoning are, for Aquinas, different modes of the single power of *intelligere*, or understanding.[30] In our earlier discussion, we saw that understanding is that simple perception of things by which truth is simply 'seen'. This belongs to spiritual substances (angels) who are the subjects of a god-like and direct illumination of divine light. Regarding rational understanding, this produces an assent which is the product of discursive thought leading to demonstration. Regarding that understanding which belongs to faith, this concerns an assent which is the product of the will but which is accompanied by reasoning. It is crucial to note, however, that there is only one unifying power of understanding:

Reasoning is that power of understanding which belongs properly to temporal creatures who, through motion, must proceed from one thing to another because of their imperfection. The perception of truth in faith is that power of understanding which is the gracious gift of God by which we see through a glass darkly, but which gradually over time becomes brighter as we move deeper *credere in Deum*. So Thomas says,

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[29] Turner, op.cit., 17.

[30] Aquinas, De Veritate 15.1.responsio: 'Accordingly, there is no power in man separate from reason which is called understanding. Rather, reason itself is called understanding because it shares in the intellectual simplicity, by reason of which it begins and through which it terminates its proper activity.'

> the power which moves in thought from one thing to another and the power that perceives truth are not different powers, but one power which knows truth absolutely, insofar as it is perfect, and needs movement in thought from one thing to another, in so far as it is imperfect.'[31]

Conclusion

So for Aquinas both faith and reason participate in some measure in that simple knowledge which exists in higher substances and, ultimately, in God. Reasoning operates by the motion of discursive thought to generate assent and understanding. Faith, by contrast, is the will's perception and desire of the beautiful, and therefore the true and the good, which give themselves to be known and seize the understanding. Reasoning accompanies faith, moving as it were in parallel. Faith provides the intimation of the direction and goal of reasoning which make reasoning more rational, illiciting in human reason a desire for an understanding it could not, of its own power, know that it could have. Nevertheless, they are different modes of the single power of understanding.

Does it make any sense, in this context, to talk of reason's autonomy from faith? Clearly on the basis of my interpretation of Aquinas, because faith and reason run parallel, there is not, properly speaking, a collapse of faith into reason nor reason into faith. On the other hand, the metaphysical structure of both modes of understanding – that of participation in simple understanding – suggests their abiding unity. The mode of belief which always accompanies philosophy may, however, need to be distinguished. That assent which is the outcome of the will's perception of the beautiful surely belongs to all human enquiry, at least as it has been conceived on either side of Enlightenment rationalism and modern logocentrism. This is

[31] Ibid.

because in some sense all rational enquiry is motivated by the will's passion or *eros* for, as we all know, Aristotle states in the first line of the *Metaphysics*, 'all men by nature desire to know'. Faith, however, is a particular mode of belief which is *credere in Deum* and accompanies hope and charity towards our salvation. It is a particular kind of gracious gift which does not push reasoning aside, nor does it deploy reasoning sporadically as a handmaid who takes the occasional weekend off, nor is it subsumed nor subsumes reasoning, but accompanies reasoning at every moment.

Returning finally to the five ways with which I began this essay, how does the notion of the parallel nature of faith and reason enhance our understanding of Aquinas's purpose in this very brief article of the second question of the *Summa*? If Aquinas is intending to demonstrate both reasoning's ability at least to tend towards the rational demonstration which leads to *scientia* concerning God's existence, then at the same time he demonstrates – via this exercise of reasoning – precisely reasoning's inability to establish the things of faith. So the limits of reasoning alone and its concomitant need for another mode of understanding is itself established by proper reason. Paradoxically, reason first establishes that it must be preceded by faith seeking, and so we return to St. Augustine's teaching but also to Aquinas's sense, in his early work, that faith and reason run together in *quasi* parallel fashion. As parallel lines meet at infinity, so the seeking of faith and the motion of reasoning, as different modes of created understanding, join finally at the infinity of God's simple self-understanding in the eternal *Logos*:

> Faith is a habit of mind, by which eternal life begins in us, and which makes our understanding assent to things which are not evident.[32]

[32] This is Aquinas's summary definition in *De Veritate* 14.2.responsio.