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Faith and Reason: A Response to Duncan Pritchard

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Abstract

In a recent essay Duncan Pritchard argues that there is no fundamental epistemological distinction between religious belief and ordinary or non-religious belief. Both of them – so he maintains in the footsteps of Wittgenstein's *On certainty* – are ultimately grounded on a-rational commitments, namely, commitments unresponsive to rational criteria. I argue that, while this view can be justified theologically, it cannot be advanced philosophically as Pritchard assumes.

I offer an account of Aquinas's reflection on faith and reason to show that the theologian – not the philosopher – is entitled to deal with a-rational commitments, because the truths of faith can be seen as simply intellectual – like the rational statements considered by the philosopher – but also as decisions made by way of divine grace. I also suggest that Pritchard's thesis may be re-proposed on a new basis, if Aquinas's theological stance were reinterpreted so as to point out unexpected connections between theology and philosophy.

Introduction

In a recent essay entitled *Faith and Reason*,[1] Duncan Pritchard proposes a view of the Christian faith that he calls 'quasi-fideism'. In this view, the fact that faith is grounded on a-rational commitments, i.e., commitments too deep for rational defence and unresponsive to rational criteria, is not conducive to fideism. It does not render faith extraneous to rational evaluation. In fact – so Pritchard argues – a-rational commitments constitute the ground for non-religious or ordinary belief as well. As a result, there is no reason for considering Christian belief ultimately as different from rational belief.

The proposal in question is worthy of consideration. It makes a significant contribution to the contemporary debate on the relationship between religious and ordinary belief. The former is usually considered a-rational, while the latter is ordinarily seen as rational or perfectly responsive to rational criteria. For Pritchard, instead, *any* belief relies on a-rational commitments. The author of FR backs up his thesis using the final notebooks of Ludwig Wittgenstein

[1] D. Pritchard, 'Faith and reason', *Philosophy* (Supplement on Religious Epistemology, ed. S. Law), forthcoming (henceforth FR).

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published as *On Certainty*, and also takes into account the masterwork of John Henry Newman – *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*. Both works, in fact, point out that the epistemic status of ordinary beliefs is different from what we ordinarily assume it to be, precisely because such beliefs seem often to be rationally groundless.

The a-rational commitments which are of interest to Pritchard are not even beliefs strictly speaking. As previously mentioned, for him they are not answerable to rational considerations, as would be the case when one continues to hold one's belief *despite contrary evidence*. Philosophically speaking, however, Wittgenstein's hinge commitments – which Pritchard considers a-rational – do not have anything to do with beliefs that are held although convincing evidence to the contrary seems to be provided. In their case, in fact, no convincing evidence to the contrary is available – on the one hand – while favourable evidence, though indirect, is provided – on the other.

In this essay, I intend to show that Pritchard's thesis, which he advances in the context of the philosophical debate, can be supported by the theological reflection on faith and reason contained in one of the most significant works of the Christian tradition: the *Summa theologica* by Thomas Aquinas. This work, in fact, supports the idea that both religious and rational belief are based on a-rational commitments. (It is easy to imagine that Thomas's thoughts on this matter can also be found elsewhere. For the sake of conciseness, however, I am going to mainly make reference to this masterpiece, which is usually regarded as the most clear and concise presentation of Aquinas's ideas. I will therefore quote from other works of his only when strictly necessary.)

In the first section of this essay, I show that Pritchard's conviction that religious belief retains a double dimension – a-rational and rational – can be found in Aquinas's reflection. While focusing on faith, Aquinas distinguishes between its *object* – which he finds that resists any rational explanation – and its *signs* – which instead can be attained by reason.

In the second section, I elaborate on rational belief, and show that Pritchard's stance on reason can be supported by Aquinas's theological reflection as well. On the basis of some Thomistic passages, which have often been neglected by scholars of Aquinas, I argue that for the medieval theologian a-rational factors play a significant role in the rational process that he calls '*scientia*'.

In the third section, I argue that Pritchard's thesis, while in one sense consistent with Aquinas's theological conception of faith and reason, taken in that sense would not be consistent with Wittgenstein's position on *hinge* propositions.

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I therefore conclude that the *parity argument* between faith and reason proposed by Pritchard from a philosophical standpoint should be abandoned, although I do not exclude that it may be re-proposed on a new basis, namely, if Aquinas's theological stance were reinterpreted so as to point out unexpected connections between theology and philosophy. (This is – I believe – the reason why Pritchard's exploration of possible common grounds between religious and ordinary belief is especially worthy of consideration.)

1. On faith and its double dimension

Pritchard's argument focuses on rational beliefs, which he considers based on foundations that are not responsive to rational investigation. He does not explore faith, and takes for granted the assumption that faith is typically characterized by a-rational commitments. Although FR's objective is not to investigate faith and its nature, however, Pritchard's proposal needs to be presented in this section specifically devoted to religious belief, in order to show that his proposal can be supported by Aquinas's theological doctrine of faith.

I have already mentioned the *parity argument* applied in FR.[2] Pritchard points out that his view of a 'quasi-fideism' approaches this argument in a more radical way than Reformed epistemologists do. While Plantinga, Alston and others have used this argument to show that religious belief can be as rational as other kinds of belief ordinarily considered rational, 'quasi-fideism takes a more radical line.

[2] The expression 'parity argument' was first employed by T. Penelhum, *God and Skepticism* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1983), Chaps. 2, 5, and 6. Roughly speaking, it requires that the epistemic standard applied to religious belief be no more severe than the one applied to any other belief. This argument was first used by A. Plantinga in *God and Other Minds* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1967), and has since been widely used and also modified. See W. Alston, 'Religious Experience and Religious Belief', *Noûs* **16** (1982), 3–12; *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Cornell, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); A. Plantinga, 'Reason and Belief in God', in A. Plantinga and N. Wolterstorff (eds) *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God* (Notre Dame-London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 16–93; *Warranted Christian belief* (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); N. Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

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According to the quasi-fideist, our everyday beliefs that we take to be through-and-through rational in fact presuppose fundamental a-rational commitments – i.e., commitments which are not rationally grounded'.[3] In other words, instead of insisting on the shared possession of rationality between faith and reason, it is the a-rational foundation of any belief that should be explored. For this reason Pritchard refers to Wittgenstein's metaphor of a *hinge*. For the author of *On Certainty*, 'the *questions* that we raise and our *doubts* depend upon the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, are as it were like hinges on which those turn'.[4] Wittgenstein says that we cannot doubt every belief, because this would 'drag everything with it and plunge it into chaos'.[5] A similar stance is held by Newman, whose view of the foundation of ordinary belief expressed in *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* may have influenced – so Pritchard hypothesizes – Wittgenstein's view of hinge commitments.[6] As a matter of fact, Wittgenstein's remarks mentioned above clearly echo Newman's claim about the possibility of universal doubt. The author of the *Grammar* firmly rejects the hypothesis that 'we ought to begin with a universal doubt'. Ironically, so he argues, this 'is of all assumptions the greatest', because 'doubt itself is a positive state, and implies a definite habit of mind, and thereby necessarily involves a system of principles and doctrines all its own.'[7] Newman's refusal of universal doubt was clearly due to his conviction that not only religious belief but also ordinary belief lacks the high epistemic support proposed by Locke in the fourth book of his *Essay*. Like Wittgenstein, the author of the *Grammar* was convinced that our beliefs seem often to be groundless and at the same time indubitable, which is precisely the conviction supported by Pritchard, who claims that 'it is in the very nature of rational evaluations that they take place relative to hinge commitments which are both groundless and indubitable'.[8] As a result, if not only faith but also rational belief lies on a-rational commitments, then there is no reason to see faith as extraneous to normal epistemological considerations: 'if

[3] FR, 3.

[4] L. Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, eds G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1969), §§ 341–343, cited in FR, 5.

[5] Ibid., § 613, cited in FR, 5.

[6] See D. Pritchard, 'Wittgenstein on Faith and Reason: the Influence of Newman', unpublished.

[7] J.H. Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979 [1870]), IX,3,2,2.

[8] FR, 5.

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the alleged epistemic defect in religious belief were shown to be found in non-religious belief, then this would not be grounds for scepticism about the epistemology of religious belief, specifically, but rather grounds for a general epistemological scepticism.'[9] (Whether this stance is really acceptable from a philosophical standpoint, as Pritchard assumes, is precisely what I intend to assess in the course of this essay.)

The idea that faith is not extraneous to rational criteria, yet at the same time is mainly based on a-rational commitments has consistently been developed in the *Summa theologiae*. For Aquinas, faith is 'an act of the intellect assenting to the Divine Truth at the command of the will moved by the grace of God.'[10] Faith is formally an intellectual act, namely, a type of *knowledge* – adherence to Christ implies a kind of knowledge about him and his message. However, this kind of knowledge lacks a fundamental aspect of any knowledge, i.e., the *evidence* of the *object*. ('Object' is employed here as a synonym of 'Christian beliefs' as well as 'revealed truths' or 'truths of faith', namely, all of the statements that the faithful assume to be true and revealed by God.) But what exactly does Aquinas mean by 'evidence'? Evidence is the quality due to which some objects, 'of themselves, move the intellect or the senses to knowledge of them.'[11] Unlike the object of any rational belief, the object of faith is not evident, which is why the assent of faith is given only 'at the command of the will moved by the grace of God.' For Aquinas, 'those things which are of faith surpass human reason. Hence, they do not come to man's knowledge, unless God reveals them'. In addition, 'since man, by assenting to matters of faith, is raised above his nature, this must needs accrue to him from some supernatural principle moving him inwardly; and this is God.'[12] In conclusion, what moves the believer to assent to the revelation is 'the inward instinct

[9] D. Pritchard, 'Wittgenstein on faith and reason: the influence of Newman', 9.

[10] 'Actus intellectus assentientis veritati divinae ex imperio voluntatis a Deo motae per gratiam'. (Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, tr. by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, second and revised edition [London: Oates and Washbourne, 1920], henceforth ST, II-II, q. 2, a. 9)

[11] '… per seipsa movent intellectum nostrum vel sensum ad sui cognitionem'. (ST, II-II, q. 1, a. 4)

[12] 'Ea enim quae sunt fidei excedunt rationem humanam: unde non cadunt in contemplatione hominis nisi Deo revelante. … Quia cum homo, assentiendo his quae sunt fidei, elevetur supra naturam suam, oportet quod hoc insit ei ex supernaturali principio interius movente, quod est Deus.' (ST, II-II, q. 6, a. 1)

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of the divine invitation.'[13] To put it otherwise, God is 'the chief and proper cause of faith.'[14]

By pointing out that the object of faith is not evident, and consequently the faithful accept the truths of faith only thanks to divine grace, Aquinas clearly emphasizes the a-rational foundation of religious belief. In addition, this acceptance must be totally *firm*, and the believers are expected to be sure that statements such as 'Jesus is the Son of God' or 'He is risen from the dead' are true. For Aquinas, this firmness is granted by divine grace, and this is why it surpasses the firmness given by intellectual virtues such as intellect, science, and wisdom. In fact, the former is due to God – who cannot fail – while the latter is due to human reason – which is fallible.[15] (Moreover, this persuasion itself – it is God who moves inwardly the believers – is supposed to be accepted *by faith*, and consequently taken by the faithful as more certain than any other statement.) As John Jenkins points out, in Aquinas's view 'the faithful hold the articles of faith with even greater certainty than the principle of non-contradiction'.[16] It goes without saying that the firm assent that the believers are required to give to the truths of faith lacks rational foundations, because no evidence can justify such a high level of certainty. In conclusion, since the certainty in question is due to divine grace, it is *a-rational*: it is too deep for rational defense and unresponsive to rational considerations.

From this, however, does not follow that religious belief lacks rational support of any kind. For Aquinas, there are many arguments for the divine revelation. They show that such revelation is not internally inconsistent, namely, its statements are coherently related to one another. The arguments at hand are not able to support the certainty

[13] According to Aquinas, the believer is moved to believe for many reasons such as miracles and, what is more (*quod plus est*), 'by the inward instinct of the Divine invitation (*interiori instinctu Dei invitantis*).' (See ST, II-II, q. 2, a. 9, ad 3)

[14] Aquinas states that 'science begets and nourishes faith, by way of external persuasion afforded by science; but the chief and proper cause of faith (*principalis et propria causa fidei*) is that which moves man inwardly to assent.' (ST, II-II, q. 6, a. 1, ad 1)

[15] 'In so far as science, wisdom and understanding are intellectual virtues, they are based upon the natural light of reason, which falls short of the certitude of God's word, on which faith is founded.' (ST, II-II, q. 4, a. 8, ad 3)

[16] J. Jenkins, 'Faith and revelation', in B. Davies (ed.), *Philosophy of religion. A guide to the subject* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2007), 202–227: 216f.

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that the believer is required to have, but they show that the Christian belief is not unresponsive to rational considerations. To make this point clearer, it is helpful to refer to Aquinas's distinction between *believing* and *seeing*, which correspond to the *object* and the *signs* of faith respectively. I have already shown that the object of faith consists of those statements that are taken as true although evidence in their support is missing. For Aquinas, the object of faith can only be *believed*. On the other hand, faith can to a certain extent be supported by *signs*, namely, arguments that are in themselves evident and point to the content of faith though are not able to show its truth. These signs can be *seen*, because they are *evident*, namely, are acquired by reason. Let us consider the following passage:

> Those things which come under faith can be considered in two ways. First, in particular; and thus they cannot be seen and believed at the same time, as shown above. Secondly, in general, that is, under the common aspect of credibility; and in this way they are seen by the believer. For he would not believe unless, on the evidence of signs, or of something similar, he saw that they ought to be believed.[17]

Any statement can either be seen, namely, attained by reason, or believed, namely, accepted by grace. Since the truths of faith cannot be seen – with the exception of the ones Aquinas notoriously calls *preambles of faith*[18] – it must be concluded that they can only be believed. The signs of faith are instead in themselves evident and show that the object of faith may be true. Aquinas says that the truths of faith can be known but '*non quasi demonstrative*', namely, only in a limited sense. The faithful, in fact, 'know them [the truths of faith] *not as by demonstration*'.[19] In other words, while the believer does

[17] 'Ea quae subsunt fidei dupliciter considerari possunt. Uno modo, in speciali, et sic non possunt esse simul visa et credita, sicut dictum est. Alio modo, in generali, scilicet sub communi ratione credibilis. Et sic sunt visa ab eo qui credit, non enim crederet nisi videret ea esse credenda, vel propter evidentiam signorum vel propter aliquid huiusmodi.' (ST, II-II q. 1 a. 4, ad 2).

[18] They are those revealed truths that for Aquinas can be attained by demonstration: 'Early, middle and late in his writings, St. Thomas speaks of a twofold knowledge of God, one that was achieved by pagan philosophers and which is based on knowledge of material things, another that results from God's revealing Himself to men' (R. McInerny, 'On Behalf of Natural Theology', *Proceedings of The American Catholic Philosophical Association* **54** [1980], 63–73: 64).

[19] 'Per hunc modum fideles habent eorum notitiam, non quasi demonstrative.' (ST, II-II q. 1 a. 5 ad 1)

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not know that the statements of faith are true, he or she knows that they *are not impossible*: 'The reasons employed by holy men to prove things that are of faith are not demonstrations'; they are 'persuasive arguments showing that what is proposed to our faith is not impossible'.[20] This view is further confirmed in a well-known passage of his *Comments on Boethius's De Trinitate*, in which Aquinas wonders 'whether in the science of faith, which is concerning God, it is permissible to use the rational arguments of the natural philosophers'. Thomas first points out a general principle according to which

> the light of faith, which is gratuitously infused into our minds, does not destroy the natural light of cognition, which is in us by nature. For although the natural light of the human mind is insufficient to reveal those truths revealed by faith, yet it is impossible that those things which God has manifested to us by faith should be contrary to those which are evident to us by natural knowledge.[21]

Then Aquinas argues that there are three ways to use reason in religious matters. Only one of them is of interest for the present purpose. (The others concern the preambles of faith, which I have already mentioned above, and the so-called 'negative apologetics'.) It is the way we follow in order 'to give a clearer notion, by certain *similitudes*, of the truths of faith, as Augustine in his book, *De Trinitate*, employed any *comparisons* taken from the teachings of the philosophers to aid understanding of the Trinity'.[22] Obviously, 'similitudes'

[20] 'Rationes quae inducuntur a sanctis ad probandum ea quae sunt fidei non sunt demonstrativae, sed persuasiones quaedam manifestantes non esse impossibile quod in fide proponitur. Vel procedunt ex principiis fidei, scilicet ex auctoritatibus sacrae Scripturae, sicut Dionysius dicit, II cap. de Div. Nom. Ex his autem principiis ita probatur aliquid apud fideles sicut etiam ex principiis naturaliter notis probatur aliquid apud omnes.' (ST, II-II q. 1 a. 5 ad 2)

[21] 'Lumen fidei, quod nobis gratis infunditur, non destruit lumen naturalis rationis divinitus nobis inditum. Et quamvis lumen naturale mentis humanae sit insufficiens ad manifestationem eorum quae manifestantur per fidem, tamen impossibile est quod ea, quae per fidem traduntur nobis divinitus, sint contraria his quae sunt per naturam nobis indita.' (Aquinas, *Super Boethium De Trinitate*, tr. by Brennan R.E. [NewYork: Herder and Herder, 1946], q. 2).

[22] 'Ad notificandum per aliquas similitudines ea quae sunt fidei, sicut Augustinus in libro de Trinitate utitur multis similitudinibus ex doctrinis philosophicis sumptis ad manifestandum Trinitatem.' (Ibid.)

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and 'comparisons', while in themselves rational arguments, only partially support the revealed truth, because they can only show that such revelation *is not impossible*.

In conclusion, the view of faith that Pritchard calls 'quasi-fideism' can find support in Aquinas's doctrine, according to which faith is – on the one hand – due to God's grace, and is consequently *a-rational*, while – on the other hand – it can be investigated by reason, and is therefore responsive to rational criteria.

2. On reason and its double dimension

I can now move on to show, in addition, that Pritchard's view of rational belief can be supported by references to Aquinas's theological thought. Before I go on, however, I need to register a *caveat*. Unlike Aquinas's stance on faith, which I have discussed so far, the view I intend to expound now may not be equally convincing. As a matter of fact, the idea that Aquinas highlights a-rational elements in the context of what he calls '*scientia*' is a controversial one. For some, Aquinas's epistemology was a form of foundationalism, and required that any statement must be either proved through demonstration or accepted as self-evident. Alvin Plantinga, for example, suggested that Aquinas was foundationalist in regard to both ordinary and religious belief,[23] and John Jenkins pointed out that this view of Aquinas's epistemology was held also by not a small number of Thomists.[24] However convincing the idea that Aquinas was a foundationalist may be, it is nevertheless contested by a number of passages

[23] See Plantinga, 'Reason and Belief in God'. Plantinga seems later to have revised his position in light of an interpretation put forward by various scholars of Aquinas. According to them, Aquinas can be seen as an evidentialist with respect to *scientia* but not with regard to faith. (See *Warranted Christian belief*, 83, note 72). It has been argued, however, that it is not clear if Plantinga has seriously rethought the claims advanced in 1983 (see R. Di Ceglie, 'Alvin Plantinga and Thomas Aquinas on Theism and Christianity', *Philosophy & Theology* **27** [2015], 235–252).

[24] Referring to Locke's foundationalist perspective, Jenkins ('Faith and revelation', 226) states that the ideas expressed by Locke, especially in the fourth part of the *Essay on Human Understanding*, have widely shaped modern and contemporary views on faith and reason, including interpretations of Aquinas. Among such interpretations, Jenkins cites not only Plantinga's, but also John Hick's, Terence Penelhum's and Louis Pojman's. A different reading of Aquinas's epistemology has been presented by E. Stump in 'Aquinas on the Foundations of Knowledge', *Canadian*

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from not only *Summa theologiae* but also other Aquinas's works – as we shall see in the course of this paper. (These passages have often been neglected, perhaps because they are part of Aquinas's reflection on the merit of faith as related to evidence and not on the epistemology of *scientia*.)

In one of these passages, Aquinas wonders whether or not arguments for Christian belief diminish the merit of faith. He distinguishes two kinds of arguments:

> Human reason in support of what we believe, may stand in a twofold relation to the will of the believer. First, as preceding the act of the will; as, for instance, when a man either has not the will, or not a prompt will, to believe, unless he be moved by human reasons; and in this way human reason diminishes the merit of faith. … Secondly, human reasons may be consequent to the will of the believer. For when a man's will is ready to believe, he loves the truth he believes, he thinks out and takes to heart whatever reasons he can find in support thereof; and in this way human reason does not exclude the merit of faith but is a sign of greater merit.[25]

Obviously, for the present purpose the relation between evidence and merit is of no interest. Instead, what I intend to focus on is Aquinas's idea that rational arguments are supposed to follow previous decisions. Among the two types of arguments he takes into account, Thomas prefers the ones that *follow* the will of the believer, who is expected to be ready to accept the divine revelation *before* finding proofs in its support.

One may object that, on closer inspection, the arguments at stake are not real demonstrations, because in Aquinas's view no demonstration can be offered in the realm of faith. In reply, it can be said that

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Journal of Philosophy Suppl. Vol. **17**, 125–158. According to Stump, the medieval thinker was not a foundationalist.

[25] 'Ratio humana inducta ad ea quae sunt fidei dupliciter potest se habere ad voluntatem credentis. Uno quidem modo, sicut praecedens, puta cum quis aut non haberet voluntatem, aut non haberet promptam voluntatem ad credendum, nisi ratio humana induceretur. Et sic ratio humana inducta diminuit meritum fidei … Alio modo ratio humana potest se habere ad voluntatem credentis consequenter. Cum enim homo habet promptam voluntatem ad credendum, *diligit veritatem creditam*, et super ea excogitat et amplectitur si quas rationes ad hoc invenire potest. Et quantum ad hoc ratio humana non excludit meritum fidei, sed est signum maioris meriti.' (ST, II-II, q. 2, a. 10)

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what I have just stated applies also when Aquinas reflects on *completely evident* subjects. This is the case of the revealed truths that can be attained by demonstration, the 'preambles of faith' which Aquinas considers part of *scientia*:

> Demonstrative reasons in support of the preambles of faith, but not of the articles of faith, diminish the measure of faith, since they make the thing believed to be seen, yet they do not diminish the measure of charity, which makes the will ready to believe them, even if they were unseen.[26]

As in the previous passages, Aquinas is focusing on merit and evidence. It clearly emerges, however, what is of interest for the present purpose, namely, the fact that the will of the believer is expected to be ready to accept certain truths regardless of the presence or absence of sound arguments in their support.

This view is perhaps even better explained in another passage, in which Aquinas focuses more generally on the merit of *any* demonstration – *both* related and unrelated to religious subjects. Aquinas confirms the content of the passages I have just mentioned by explaining how exactly the process of knowing and demonstrating is characterized by both rational and a-rational aspects. He says that evidence clearly requires assent on the part of the knower. He also says, however, that assent is not the only possible response of the knower once evidence is given, and distinguishes the concept of *assent* (*assensus*) from the concept of *consideration* (*consideratio*):

> Two things may be considered in science: namely the scientist's assent to a scientific fact and his consideration of that fact. Now the assent of science is not subject to free will, because the scientist is obliged to assent by force of the demonstration, wherefore scientific assent is not meritorious. But the actual consideration of what a man knows scientifically is subject to his free will, for it is in his power to consider or not to consider. Hence scientific consideration may be meritorious if it be referred to the end of charity, i.e. to the honor of God or the good of our neighbor.[27]

[26] 'Rationes demonstrativae inductae ad ea quae sunt fidei, praeambula tamen ad articulos, etsi diminuant rationem fidei, quia faciunt esse apparens id quod proponitur; non tamen diminuunt rationem caritatis, per quam voluntas est prompta ad ea credendum etiam si non apparerent.' (ST, II-II, q. 2, a. 10, ad 2)

[27] 'In scientia duo possunt considerari, scilicet ipse assensus scientis ad rem scitam, et consideratio rei scitae. Assensus autem scientiae non subiicitur libero arbitrio, quia sciens cogitur ad assentiendum per efficaciam

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Aquinas claims that, if the assent is not a matter of free will (before the evidence, one cannot withhold assent), the same cannot be held with respect to *consideration*: this *is* a matter of free will, because one *can decide* whether or not to reflect on something that is already known.[28] This is why the reflection at stake 'may be meritorious if it be referred to the end of charity, i.e. to the honor of God or the good of our neighbor'. (It could be objected that a contradiction arises here with that which Aquinas says in the same article; namely, that the believer 'has not, however, sufficient reason for scientific knowledge, hence he does not lose the merit'. From this passage it seems to follow that in the case of demonstrative knowledge there cannot be merit. However, it is easy to realize that, saying so, Aquinas is not referring to demonstrative knowledge in general, but only to *assent*, which he conceives as not being susceptible to merit or demerit.)

Aquinas therefore reiterates his conviction that the believer should argue on the basis of a *preceding* decision. Unlike the passages previously mentioned, however, the one under consideration is concerned with a more general reflection on the epistemic nature of demonstrative knowledge. Aquinas claims that 'scientific consideration may be meritorious *if* it be referred to the end of charity, i.e. to the honor of God or the good of our neighbor' (my emphasis). This obviously amounts to saying that not only the believer, but also anyone else might decide to continue to hold one's belief in spite of the presence of what may seem to be contrary evidence. In conclusion, Aquinas sees the presence of rational motives (arguments) and at the same time of a-rational commitments (previous decisions) in the context of rational reflections – which is precisely what I wanted to show in support of Pritchard's view of ordinary rational belief.

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demonstrationis. Et ideo assensus scientiae non est meritorius. Sed consideratio actualis rei scitae subiacet libero arbitrio, est enim in potestate hominis considerare vel non considerare. Et ideo consideratio scientiae potest esse meritoria, si referatur ad finem caritatis, idest ad honorem Dei vel utilitatem proximi.' (ST, II-II, q. 2, a. 9, ad 2)

[28] Perhaps this is why Claudia E. Murphy says that for Aquinas 'it is possible for an agent to have sufficient motivation for believing a proposition, and nonetheless to be able at least to withhold assent from it, or even to dissent from it (that is, to be free with respect to coming to believe it)' (C. Murphy, 'Aquinas on Voluntary Beliefs', *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* **74** (2000), 569–597: 586).

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3. On the ultimate difference between faith and reason – on the one hand – as well as theology and philosophy – on the other.

So far I have argued that Pritchard's conviction that there is no ultimate epistemological difference between faith and reason can find support in Aquinas's theological reflections. Now I intend to show that, while the parity argument can be applied to theological views, the same cannot be said of the philosophical point of view taken by the author of FR. Philosophically speaking, in fact, there remains a fundamental distinction between faith and reason.

To determine this ultimate difference, it is helpful to reflect on a well-known passage in which Aquinas says that, if natural reason attains conclusions that contrast with the truths of faith, then the arguments that natural reason has used are certainly wrong:

> If … anything is found in the teachings of the philosophers contrary to faith, this error does not properly belong to philosophy, but is due to an abuse of philosophy owing to the insufficiency of reason. Therefore also it is possible from the principles of philosophy to refute an error of this kind, either by showing it to be altogether impossible, or not to be necessary.[29]

Aquinas claims that, even if it appears to be rationally convincing, any argument contrasting with the truth of the Christian revelation must be rejected as wrong.[30] This very position applies also to the

[29] 'Si quid… in dictis philosophorum invenitur contrarium fidei, hoc non est philosophia, sed magis philosophiae abusus ex defectu rationis. Et ideo possibile est ex principiis philosophiae huiusmodi errorem refellere vel ostendendo omnino esse impossibile vel ostendendo non esse necessarium.' (Aquinas, *Super Boethium De Trinitate*, q. 2, a. 3)

[30] Moreover, it is possible to conjecture that something similar might also be affirmed in the absence of the aforementioned contrast, though Aquinas does not state it explicitly. In fact, rejecting *any* rational statement contrasting with faith logically implies the conviction that reason could be mistaken, even if every argument seems to support its conclusions. It is precisely what Aquinas seems to say elsewhere: 'In order to avoid mistakes in demonstrating, one should be aware of the fact that quite often something universal seems to be demonstrated, which is not being demonstrated.' ('Quod non accidat in demonstratione peccatum, oportet non latere quod multoties videtur demonstrari universale, non autem demonstratur'.) (Aquinas, *Expositio libri Posteriorum Analyticorum*, I, tr. by Larcher, F.R. [Albany, N.Y.: Magi Books, 1970] I, lectio 12.) It is, therefore, possible to attribute to Aquinas the conviction that even when rational arguments

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distinction between assent and consideration. In that case, although evidence is expected to give rise to assent on the part of the knower, Aquinas claims that the knower may decide not to assent, and such decision would be meritorious if due 'to the honor of God or the good of our neighbor'. One should therefore reject any evidence, however sound it may seem to be, if one believes that such evidence is in contrast with the honor of God or the good of neighbor.[31] Furthermore, one should continue to *consider* the object in question, in order to rationally find out why the evidence provided is either 'altogether impossible' or 'not necessary'. Aquinas is sure that continuing to advance these considerations will show that the evidence rejected, however sound it might have seemed, was 'due to an abuse of philosophy owing to the insufficiency of reason'. Consistent with this rejection, one should start again reasoning 'from the principles of philosophy to refute an error of this kind' and find new evidence in order to replace the previous one.

It is clear that this attitude can be accepted only from a theological point of view. Based on his previous religious commitment, Aquinas does not want to abandon his conviction. In addition, not only does he reject any evidence that is in contrast with previous religious beliefs; he also urges reason to start working again from the beginning because he seems to be certain *by faith* that *reason is fully reliable*. His wanting to start reasoning again 'from the principles of philosophy' and not by way of faith seems to imply that for him, if reason works appropriately and in accord with its own nature, it cannot be mistaken. Aquinas openly states that 'the contrary of a truth can never be demonstrated … [and] the arguments brought against faith cannot be demonstrations, but are difficulties that can be

confirm the truths of faith, the certainty is offered by faith (which for Aquinas is infallible) and not by reason (which for Aquinas could be mistaken even if every argument apparently suggested that it is not). This hypothesis may be supported by the following passage: 'A man of little science is more certain about what he hears on the authority of an expert in science, than about what is apparent to him according to his own reason: and much more is a man certain about what he hears from God, Who cannot be deceived, than about what he sees with his own reason, which can be mistaken.' (ST, II-II, q. 4 a. 8 ad 2)

[31] On this relationship between faith, love for God, and evidence, see R. Di Ceglie, 'Faith, Reason, and Charity in Thomas Aquinas's Thought', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* **79** (2016), 133–146.

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answered'.[32] This is proposed by him as neither a demonstration nor an intuition. It must be therefore *on faith* that he grounds his trust in reason.[33] (Not surprisingly, at the beginning of *Summa contra Gentiles*, sometimes called his '*summa philosophica*', Aquinas takes St. Hilary's words as orientation for his reflection: 'I am aware that I owe this to God as the chief duty of my life, that my every word and sense may speak of him.'[34] For Aquinas this is a *duty*, as it is confirmed by the words he uses – *officium* and *debere*. Such a duty arises from Aquinas's *desire* to completely devote himself to reflect on God and his works.)

The attitude so far explored is manifestly unacceptable from a philosophical point of view. Nevertheless, it seems to coincide with the one maintained by Pritchard, whose thesis supports the philosophical employment of commitments 'of a visceral nature'. As I said in the first section, for the author of FR such a-rational commitments are not even beliefs, because they lack two qualities that any belief should have, namely, truth-directedness and responsiveness to rational criteria. Pritchard gives the example of a parent who continues to hold that his/her child is innocent although the charges brought against him/her appear increasingly convincing. For the author of FR, this 'applies to our hinge commitments. Once we recognize that they are completely unresponsive to rational considerations … then they cease to be plausible candidates for being beliefs'.[35]

This, however, does not seem to match the examples Pritchard quotes from Wittgenstein's *On Certainty*. From Wittgenstein's claim that 'my having two hands is, in normal circumstances, as certain as anything that I could produce in evidence for it'[36], it does not follow that his having two hands lacks evidence. In addition, there is no evidence to deny his having two hands. If he denies that, he should also deny that his sight functions appropriately, and should in turn end up doubting any other possible belief. As I have already said

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

[33] On this, see R. Di Ceglie, 'On Aquinas's Theological Reliabilism', *Heythrop Journal*, doi: 10.1111/heyj.12243.

[34] 'Ego hoc vel praecipuum vitae meae officium debere me Deo conscius sum, ut eum omnis sermo meus et sensus loquatur.' (Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, tr. by Pegis, A., Anderson, J. F., Bourke, V. J., and O'Neil, C.J. [New York: Hanover House, 1955–57], I, 2).

[35] FR, 6.

[36] L. Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, §250, cited in FR, 4.

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in the first section, for both Wittgenstein and Newman universal doubt necessarily implies doubting itself, which is clearly conducive to self-referential contradiction. The author of *On Certainty* clearly states that 'if you tried to doubt everything you would not get as far as doubting anything. The game of doubting itself presupposes certainty'.[37] The result of this reflection, therefore, is that indirect evidence is provided in support of the commitments in question, because, if doubting everything generate self-referential contradiction, this is clearly *an indirect demonstration* that denying hinge commitments is simply *irrational*.

In conclusion, Wittgenstein's hinge commitments do not seem to depend on a-rational commitments that are not even beliefs. A-rational commitments are subject to doubt because convincing evidence to the contrary seems to be provided and evidence in favour seems not, and this perfectly applies to both Pritchard's example of the parent who sticks to his/her belief that his/her child is innocent and Aquinas's claim that the will must be ready to believe despite contrary evidence. This does not apply, however, to Wittgenstein's hinge commitments, which appear to be undeniable because no convincing evidence to the contrary is provided, while evidence in their favour, though indirect, is available.

Conclusion

Pritchard argues that a-rational commitments can be considered the ultimate foundation of not only religious but also ordinary rational beliefs, and concludes that there is no fundamental epistemological distinction between faith and reason. I have argued that this thesis cannot be advanced from a philosophical point of view, while at the same time it impressively coincides with Aquinas's theological reflection. Unlike the philosophical standpoint, in fact, the theological one is analogous to Pritchard's stance, because the commitments that the theologian deals with are not simply intellectual contents but also affections and decisions, which the faithful consider due to divine grace.

I do not exclude that Pritchard's reflection may reveal unexpected potential and lend itself to new interpretation. If not only theology but also philosophy took into consideration a-rational motivations, then the parity argument could really apply to both faith and reason in the way Pritchard intends to. In this direction, Aquinas

[37] Ibid., §250, cited in FR, 5.

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may already have offered significant suggestions, while focusing on the possibility of assenting before evidence if evidence goes against what had been previously believed. It requires further investigation, however, whether 'the honor of God or the good of our neighbor', namely, the a-rational motivations the Angelic doctor looks at as reasons for not assenting before evidence, may also play a role – even only partly – in the philosophical discussion. If so, the parity argument could really apply to faith and reason as Pritchard maintains.[38]

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