

THE NECESSITY OF FAITH

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In the order of nature, when we learn anything, authority precedes reason.

— Saint Augustine

Nothing conduces more to the acquiring of a firm and assured knowledge of things than a preliminary accustoming of ourselves in the doubting of all things and especially of the things that are corporeal. . . .

— René Descartes

Saint Augustine wrote the following in reference to the Manichaeans not long after he had converted to the Catholic faith. “You know, Honoratus, that I fell among these people for no other reason than that they declared that they would put aside all overawing authority, and by pure and simple reason would bring to God those who were willing to listen to them, and so deliver them from all error. What else compelled me for nearly nine years to spurn the religion implanted in me as a boy by my parents, to follow these men and listen diligently to them, than that they said we were overawed by superstition and were bidden to believe rather than to reason, while they pressed no one to believe until the truth had been discussed and elucidated? Who would not be enticed by these promises. . . ?”¹ Then in answer to this he writes, “We see

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¹ Saint Augustine, *The Usefulness of Belief*, sect. 2 (*Earlier Writings*, Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1953).

how Christ Himself, according to the story which they also accept, demanded faith above everything else and before everything else, *because those with whom He was dealing were not yet able to penetrate the divine secrets*. What was the purpose of so many great miracles? He said Himself that they were done for no other purpose than that men should believe in Him. . . . Would He have turned water into wine, to mention only one instance, if men would have followed Him if He had merely taught them and done no miracle?"² Saint Augustine implies that Christ, in demanding that men begin by believing, was following an order necessitated by the condition of man. I wish to examine this necessity, showing that the necessity of faith arises from the disproportion of the human intellect to reality. By necessary I mean here necessary *sub conditione*, namely, given that man is to reach beatitude and that God will lead man *secundum modum eius quod movetur*. By faith I intend the act of faith and the habit which elicits this act. But before considering the reason for the necessity of faith we must first clarify the nature of the act of faith itself.

Following Saint Thomas,³ we observe first that the act of believing is found in the second operation of the intellect, that of composing and dividing or of making judgements. What I believe is either true or false, and truth and falsity are found in the second operation of the intellect. The objects of belief, then, are statements or propositions. For example, I believe that Christ is God or that the pope is infallible. Now when I assent to a statement I assent to either of the two sides of a contradiction. Thus with respect to the divinity of Christ I can think either that Christ is God or that Christ is not God. Likewise, for any combination of subject and predicate I can conceive either that A is B or that A is not B. But in itself the intellect is a possible intellect. This means that the intellect is potential with respect to the two parts of a contradiction.

² Ibid., sect. 32 (emphasis added).

³ *De Veritate*, q. 14, a. 1.

Considered in itself the intellect is not determined to one side or the other. So that if, for any combination of subject and predicate, a man is asked whether A is B, he is not in the nature of his intellect determined to saying either yes or no. In order to be determined to one the intellect must be moved by some mover. And the intellect can be moved either by its proper object, namely reality as intelligible, or by the will.

The intellect, since it is led from potency to act, and since it is so led either by the intelligible forms or by the will, can be related in various ways to the two parts of a contradiction. The intellect can be in a state of *doubt*, and so remain undetermined with respect to both sides. And this can be because of the weakness of the reasons or because of the equality of the arguments for both sides. The intellect can also be inclined more to one side than the other, yet without being completely determined to the one side. This is the state of the man who has *opinion*. Finally, the intellect can be completely determined to one side of the contradiction. The proper object can determine the intellect in this way either mediately or immediately. The intellect is moved immediately by its proper object when, simply by understanding the terms of the proposition, it understands that the proposition is true. Such are self-evident propositions, in which the predicate is in the definition of the subject, for example, "the whole is greater than the part." This act is called by Saint Thomas the act of *understanding*. The proper objects move the intellect mediately when the intellect knows the truth of a proposition through a middle term, resolving the conclusion into first principles which are themselves self-evident. This is the disposition of the one who possesses *science*.

The intellect can be led to assent to a statement either because the statement is seen as self-evident or because it is supported by arguments. The intellect can also be moved to assent by the *will*, i.e., not because one sees that the statement is true but because it seems good to accept it as true. This is the act of belief or *faith*.

Quandoque intellectus non potest determinari ad alterum partem contradictionis neque statim per ipsas definitiones terminorum, sicut in principiis, nec etiam virtute principiorum, sicut in conclusionibus demonstrativis est; determinatur autem per voluntatem, quae elegit assentire uni parti et precise propter aliquid, quod est sufficiens ad movendum voluntatem, non autem ad movendum intellectum, utpote quod videtur bonum vel conveniens huic parti assentire. Et ista est dispositio credentis, ut cum aliquis credit dictis alicuius hominis, quia videtur decens vel utile. (*De verit.* q. 14, a. 1)⁴

Two things about belief are noteworthy for our present purpose. The first is that though the intellect gives full assent to what is believed, still, since the assent is not caused by the proper object of the intellect, i.e. something seen, the movement or cogitation of the intellect does not come to rest. The thinking does not cease, but continues to seek its proper object. Saint Anselm described this movement as "faith seeking understanding." The second thing to note is that the intellect when believing is moved by something extrinsic to it, namely, the will. Therefore in faith the intellect can be said to be held captive by the will, since a man is said to be a captive when he is held or restricted by an extrinsic power. Accordingly, Saint Paul spoke in 2 Corinthians ch. 10 of "bringing into captivity every intellect unto the obedience of Christ" ("in captivitatem redigentes omnem intellectum in obsequium Christi").

Now most men see that it is necessary for the passions be

⁴ "When the intellect is not able to be determined to either side of a contradiction—neither immediately through the definitions of the terms themselves, as in the case of first principles, nor through the power of the principles, as in demonstrated conclusions—it may however be determined by the will, which chooses to assent to one side on account of something which is sufficient to move the will but not to move the intellect, inasmuch as it seems good or fitting to assent to this side of the contradiction. This is the disposition of the person who believes something, as when someone believes what someone else says because it seems fitting or useful."

made subject to reason and in this way be held captive; and that this is not an evil for the passions, but rather a perfecting of them, helping them to attain their proper objects. But this is less commonly seen to be true for the intellect, that the intellect itself needs to be subjected and captivated for the sake of attaining its proper object. The philosopher Hegel wrote of scholastic philosophy, "But thus conditioned thought was not free, for its material was already posited *ab extra*; it was to the proof of this material that philosophy devoted its energies. . . . Philosophy was indeed called an *ancilla fidei*, for it was in subjection to that material of the Church's creed, which had already been definitely settled; but yet it was impossible for the opposition between Thought and Belief not to manifest itself."⁵ But rather than being in opposition to thought, as Hegel wrote, we intend to show that belief is necessary in order that thought attain to its proper object.

We can begin with the argument which Saint Thomas gives when discussing this question in the *Secunda Secundae*.

. . . ultima beatitudo hominis consistit in quadam supernaturali Dei visione. Ad quam quidem visionem homo pertinere non potest nisi per modum adiscentis a Deo doctore: secundum illud Io. 6,45: Omnis qui audit a Patre et didicit venit ad me. Huius autem disciplinae fit homo particeps non statim, sed successive, secundum modum suae naturae. Omnis autem talis addiscens oportet quod credat, ad hoc quod ad perfectam scientiam perveniat: sicut etiam Philosophus dicit quod oportet addiscentem credere. Unde ad hoc quod homo perveniat ad perfectam visionem beatitudinis praexigitur quod credat Deo tanquam discipulus magistro docenti. (II-II, q. 2, a. 3)⁶

⁵ Hegel, G. F., *The Philosophy of History* (New York, Dover Publications, 1956), part IV, sect. II, ch. II.

⁶ ". . . the ultimate beatitude of man consists in a certain supernatural vision of God. But man is not able to reach this vision unless in the manner of one learning from God the teacher, according to the saying in John 6:45, 'Everyone who hears from the Father and learns comes

Man's happiness consists in the vision of God. And God leads man to this vision the way a teacher leads his student to wisdom. But, says Saint Thomas, the student, in order to come to wisdom, to seeing, must first believe. And, therefore, the man who desires to see God must also first believe. Saint Thomas is implying that, not only with regard to truths which exceed the capacity of reason, but also for those which are within reason's grasp, one must believe in order to understand. And the argument further implies a common reason for the priority of believing in both cases.

The reason for the necessity of faith seems to be more implicit than explicit in Saint Thomas' argument. Before examining what that reason is, let us briefly consider the premise that man is led to the beatific vision "*per modum addiscentis a Deo doctore*" ("in the manner of one learning from God the teacher"). The vision of God will be the perfection of knowledge. Therefore, God must lead man from (*educere*) a state of imperfection to a state of perfection. And only God can be the principal agent of this instruction, since only God perfectly knows Himself, just as the teacher can only lead the student efficiently into the knowledge of what he himself knows. Yet "God moves each thing according to the manner of the thing moved" ("Deus autem movet unumquodque secundum modum eius quod movetur"). (II-II, q. 52, a. 1) The good teacher is precisely the one who leads the mind of the student to knowledge, understanding and respecting the nature of the human intellect, just as the good doctor is the one who understands and respects the nature of the human body. In this way God is said to lead man to the perfect knowledge

to me.' Now, man participates in this instruction not all at once, but successively, in accordance with the manner of his nature. But every such learner must believe if he would at last arrive at perfect knowledge. And so the Philosopher said that it is necessary for the student to believe. Whence, in order to reach the perfect vision which is beatitude, it is first required that man believe God just as a student believes his teacher."

of himself in the manner of a teacher leading the student to wisdom. "And they shall all be taught of God." (John 6:45)

In order to manifest the reason for the necessity of faith I would like to contrast two views about coming to know the truth, one in which faith is not necessary and appears to be more of an impediment, and another in which faith is necessary. Let us begin with the view which denies the necessity of faith. We will consider the presentation of this view given by René Descartes. Descartes did not deny divine faith, yet he did deny the necessity of human faith for coming to know, and thus he denied the basis for Saint Thomas' argument. Descartes has been called the father of modern philosophy. And so we might suspect that if Saint Thomas' argument rests upon proper principles, then a philosophy which has Descartes for its father will be a philosophy in some way opposed also to supernatural faith.

In the third rule of the *Rules for the Guidance of Our Native Powers* Descartes wrote, "let us now more closely examine all those actions of our understanding by which we are able to arrive, without fear of deception, at the knowledge of things. We recognize only two, viz., intuition and deduction. By intuition I understand, not the fluctuating testimony of the senses, nor the misleading judgement of a wrongly combining imagination, but the apprehension which the mind, pure and attentive, gives us so easily and so distinctly that we are thereby freed from all doubt as to what it is we are apprehending . . . we place alongside intuition this other mode of knowing, viz., by way of deduction—by which we understand all that is necessarily concluded from other certainly known data. . . . These two paths are the most certain of the paths to knowledge, and the mind should admit no others. All the rest should be rejected as suspect of error and dangerous."

According to Descartes, then, if someone desires to come to a knowledge of reality he should accept and make use of only the acts of intuition and deduction, rejecting all others as dangerous impediments to knowledge. It seems that it is

in conformity with the meaning of Descartes to equate these two acts with those which Saint Thomas called understanding and science, that is, the two acts in which the intellect is determined completely to one part of a contradiction solely on the basis of what it sees for itself. Descartes would then be saying that if we wish to acquire a knowledge of the truth we should withhold our assent from all propositions except those which the intellect itself grasps as self-evident or as necessarily connected with propositions which are seen as self-evident. This excludes as paths to knowledge the acts which Saint Thomas called belief and opinion.

Descartes himself noted that all men in growing up must rely on things told them by others, that they must accept, without being yet able to understand, things told them by parents and teachers. But instead of seeing this as something helpful, he saw it as a disadvantage. He said that it would have been better if from the beginning we had the use of reason and guided ourselves by it alone. As he wrote in the *Discourse on Method*, "Since we have all passed through the state of infancy before being men, and have therefore of necessity been long governed by our sensuous impulses and by our teachers (teachers who were often at variance with one another, and none of whom perhaps counseled us always for the best), I also came to think that it is well-nigh impossible our judgments can be so correct and reliable as they would have been, had we from the moment of our birth been in entire possession of our reason and been all along guided by it alone."⁷

Seeing then that the ideal disposition for acquiring true and certain knowledge would be to have been born into this world with the use of reason, free of all beliefs and opinions taught us by others, and determined to accept only what one could

⁷ Descartes, René, *Discourse on Method*, part II (All quotations from Descartes are taken from: *Descartes, Philosophical Writings*, selected and translated by Norman Kemp Smith, New York, The Modern Library, 1958).

see for oneself, Descartes conceived of the idea of deliberately and methodically reducing his intellect to such an indeterminate state. He would do this by forcing his intellect into a state of doubt wherever it had given assent from any cause other than what was certain and self-evident. He considered this to be a serious task and waited some years before carrying out his intention. When he felt himself ready he procured a time and place of solitude.⁸ He described this experience in a series of "meditations", and he requested his readers to spend "several months, or at least weeks" reflecting on the things contained therein.⁹

On the first day he wrote, "Today, then, as I have suitably freed my mind from all cares, and have secured for myself an assured leisure in peaceful solitude, I shall at last apply myself earnestly and freely to the general overthrow of all my former opinions."¹⁰ In the course of this first meditation he reaches the conclusion that "there is no one of all my former opinions which is not open to doubt." This, though, is only the first step, since the goal is to bring the intellect to *actually be* in a state of doubt which, as Descartes notes, is not so easy. "But it is not sufficient to have taken note of these conclusions; we must also be careful to keep them in mind. For long established customary opinions perpetually recur in thought, long and familiar usage having given them the right to occupy my mind, even almost against my will, and to be masters of my belief. . . . This is why I shall, as I think, be acting prudently if, taking a directly contrary line, I of set purpose employ every available device for the deceiving of myself, feigning that all these opinions are entirely false and imaginary. Then, in due course, having so balanced my old-time prejudices by this new prejudice that I cease to incline to one side more than

⁸ Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, med. I.

⁹ *Ibid.*, med. II, note 20: Descartes' Reply to Objection 2. C. Adam and P. Tannery, *Oeuvres de Descartes*, 1897-1910, vii, p. 130.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, med. I.

another, my judgement, no longer dominated by misleading usages, will not be hindered by them in the apprehension of things."¹¹

On the second day he noted the following, "So disquieting are the doubts in which yesterday's meditation has involved me that it is no longer in my power to forget them. Nor do I yet see how they are to be resolved. It is as if I had all of a sudden fallen into very deep water, and am so disconcerted that I can neither plant my feet securely on the bottom nor maintain myself by swimming on the surface. I shall, however, brace myself for a great effort. . . ."¹² The result of his effort was a new method and new principles for all knowledge. According to Descartes, the mind can intuit certain immaterial realities, since it is in a way distinct from the body. And the knowledge of the material, sensible world depends upon the intuition of the immaterial realities. These are the soul and God, which are known, according to Descartes, "more easily and certainly than the things of the world."¹³ He considered his proofs for "the existence of God and the distinction between mind and body" "to be equal, or even superior, in certainty and evidence to those of geometry."¹⁴ From these truths he then proceeded to deduce principles and truths about the natural and sensible world.

An important premise in this understanding of knowing is the view that the acquiring of truth is not difficult. What were for the ancients among the last and most difficult truths to know, namely, the existence and perfections of God and the nature of the immortal soul, were for Descartes the first, easiest, and most certain. Descartes wrote in the *Rules for the Guidance of Our Native Powers*, "Throughout the treatise as a whole our aim will be to follow so carefully the paths which lie open to man and which lead to truth, and to render them

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., med. II.

¹³ Ibid., dedication.

¹⁴ Ibid.

so easy that anyone who has perfectly mastered this whole method, however ordinary his mental powers, may be enabled to see that no path is closed to him which is not also closed to all others, and that his ignorance is not due to any defect in his native powers or in his method of procedure. As often as he applies his mind to the knowing of anything he will either be entirely successful, or he will realize that success depends on some experience which he has not been able to obtain, and accordingly he will not blame his mental powers for his being thus perforce halted. Or he will succeed in showing that the thing sought altogether exceeds the range of our mental powers. . . ."¹⁵

The intellect, then, is able either to grasp its object perfectly and easily, or not at all. Any difficulties there may be consist in the presence of obstacles. And the principle obstacles for the intellect in apprehending its object seem to be those things to which we have given assent without seeing for ourselves, clearly and with certitude, namely, beliefs and opinions. These obstacles are cleared away by the method of reducing the intellect to a state of doubt and indetermination through the balancing out of all beliefs and opinions with arguments for their contradictories. In this way Descartes reached the conclusion that, "Nothing conduces more to the acquiring of a firm and assured knowledge of things than a preliminary acustoming of ourselves in the doubting of all things. . . ."¹⁶

There is another view of acquiring truth, one for which faith is necessary. Saint Augustine expressed this view concisely when he wrote in the second chapter of *On the Morals of the Catholic Church* that, "in the order of nature, when we learn anything, authority precedes reason." To understand why the natural order is to begin with belief in order to come

¹⁵ Descartes, *Rules for the Guidance of Our Native Powers*, rule VII.

¹⁶ Descartes, *Meditations*, med. II, note 20: Descartes' Reply to Objection II. C. Adam and P. Tannery, *Oeuvres de Descartes*, 1897-1910, vii, p. 130.

to know we can compare with Descartes' doctrine an image of learning given by Plato. The image is from book VII of the *Republic*, where Socrates is recounting his discussion with Glaucon.

"Next, then," I said, "make an image of our nature in its education and want of education, likening it to a condition of the following kind. See human beings as though they were in an underground cave-like dwelling with its entrance, a long one, open to the light across the whole width of the cave. They are in it from childhood with their legs and necks in bonds so that they are fixed, seeing only in front of them, unable because of the bond to turn their heads all the way around. Their light is from a fire burning far above and behind them. Between the fire and the prisoners there is a road above, along which see a wall, built like the partitions puppet-handlers set in front of the human beings and over which they show the puppets."

"I see," he said.

"Then also see along this wall human beings carrying all sorts of artifacts, which project above the wall, and statues of men and other animals wrought from stone, wood, and every kind of material; as is to be expected, some of the carriers utter sounds while others are silent."

"It's a strange image," he said, "and strange prisoners you're telling of."

"They're like us," I said.

Socrates then begins to describe man's journey out of the cave.

"Then most certainly," I said, "such men would hold that the truth is nothing other than the shadows of artificial things."

"Most necessarily," he said.

"Now consider," I said, "what their release and healing from bonds and folly would be like if something of this sort were by nature to happen to them. Take a man who is released and suddenly compelled to stand up, to turn his neck around, to walk and look up toward the light; and who, moreover, in doing all this is in pain and, because he

is dazzled, is unable to make out those things whose shadows he saw before. What do you suppose he'd say if someone were to tell him that before he saw silly things, while now, because he is somewhat nearer to what is and more turned towards beings, he sees more correctly; and, in particular, showing him each of the things that pass by, were to compel the man to answer his questions about what they are? Don't you suppose he'd be at a loss and believe that what was seen before is truer than what is now shown?"

"Yes," he said, "by far."

"And if compelled to look at the light itself, would his eyes hurt and would he flee, turning away to those things that he is able to make out and hold them to be really clearer than what is being shown?"

"So he would," he said.

"And if," I said, "someone dragged him away from there by force along the rough steep, upward way and didn't let him go before he had dragged him out into the light of the sun, wouldn't he be distressed and annoyed at being so dragged? And when he came to the light, wouldn't he have his eyes full of its beam and be unable to see even one of the things now said to be true?"

"No he wouldn't," he said, "at least not right away."

"Then I suppose he'd have to get accustomed, if he were going to see what's up above. . . ." ¹⁷

According to Socrates the men in the cave are "like us." That is, with respect to perceiving reality we are like men living bound in a cave who mistake the shadows of images of things as reality. And in order to attain a true perception of reality we must endure a difficult and unpleasant climb. And, as Socrates explains in the same book, this journey is only for the most gifted, and requires approximately fifty years of formation and trials. Being outside of the cave signifies the state of one perceiving things as they truly are. But even outside of

¹⁷ Plato, *The Republic*, translated by Alan Bloom (New York, Basic Books, 1968, emphasis added).

the cave there is an orderly and gradual process of beholding the things which can be seen.

“. . . At first he'd most easily make out the shadows; and after that the phantoms of the human beings and the other things in the water; and, later, the things themselves. And from there he could turn to beholding the things in heaven and heaven itself, more easily at night—looking at the light of the stars and the moon—than by day—looking at the sun and sunlight.”

“Of course.”

“Then finally I suppose he would be able to make out the sun—not its appearances in water or some alien place, but the sun itself by itself in its own region—and see what it's like.”

“Necessarily,” he said.

The last thing to be seen is the sun which, as Socrates explains, is an image for the first cause of all that is. The view of learning contained in this image is opposed to that of Descartes. For Descartes, the first cause, God, is one of the first things to be seen, and from this knowledge he proceeds to understand the rest of reality. For Plato, as well as for Aristotle and Saint Thomas, the first cause, though first in the order of being, is last in the order of knowing. What is the basis for this difference between Descartes and his predecessors? In Plato's image the man, even when he is led out of the cave, cannot immediately behold what is around him because his eyes have not yet adjusted to the light. It seems to him that the shadows he saw in the cave were clearer and more distinct, and hence more real, than the things now before him. Hence Socrates says, “he'd have to get accustomed, if he were going to see what's above.” Descartes seems to recognize no need for such an accustoming of the faculties. For Descartes there is only need for intuition, “which the mind, pure and attentive, gives us so easily and so distinctly that we are thereby freed from all doubt as to what it is we are apprehending,” and deduction, which “can never be wrongly performed by

an understanding that is in the least degree rational.” But for Plato, since the faculties are weak and unaccustomed, a man will need to follow a guide or teacher along the difficult way out of the cave, and this will require believing another. In this view it would be impossible for a man to retreat into solitude for a few days and alone achieve a demonstrative or intuitive knowledge of the first cause. It will be worthwhile, then, to examine more closely what is implied by “accustoming” here, since from the disagreement on this point seems to arise the disagreement about the necessity of faith.

Aristotle, when discussing the question of the difficulty of acquiring the truth, uses an image which is very similar to that of his teacher Plato. “Perhaps,” he writes, “as difficulties are of two kinds, the cause of the present difficulty is not in things but in us. For just as the eyes of bats are to the light of day, so also is the intellect of our soul to those things which are of all nature most manifest.”¹⁸ To understand what Aristotle intends by this comparison we must understand how the eyes of bats are to the light of day. Now Aristotle, when arguing for the separateness of the intellect from any bodily organ, and hence for the soul's immortality, based his argument on a difference between the intellect and the sense faculties which seems to contradict the former comparison of the intellect to the eyes of bats. “After strong stimulation of a sense,” he observed, “we are less able to exercise it than before, as e.g. in the case of a loud sound we cannot hear immediately after, or in the case of a bright color or a powerful odor we cannot see or smell, but in the case of mind, thought about an object that is highly intelligible renders it more and not less able afterwards to think objects that are less intelligible: the reason is that while the faculty of sensation is with the body, the mind is separate from it.”¹⁹ It might seem, then, that Aristotle's comparison of our intellects to the eyes of bats

¹⁸ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Bk. II, ch. I.

¹⁹ Aristotle, *De Anima*, Bk. II, ch. 4.

is erroneous, since the intellect, not being an act of a bodily organ, is not impeded by a strong impression from its object, as happens with the senses.

In order to resolve this difficulty we must note that the sense is impeded from perceiving in two ways.²⁰ The sense can be impeded in one way when the bodily organ is damaged by a strong stimulus. In this way the ear can be hindered from hearing because of a loud sound, or the eye from seeing after looking at a bright light, since the sound or the light can physically impair the bodily organ. This impairment of perception cannot occur to the intellect which is not the act of a bodily organ. In another way the senses can be prevented from perceiving because of a disproportion between the sense power and its object. For example, man cannot smell many things which a dog can smell because of the disproportion between the human power of smelling and most odors. And similarly the bat cannot see well in the light of the day because his vision is more proportioned to the darkness. And so there is a different reason why I have difficulty seeing after looking at a camera flash and why I have difficulty reading in dim light. It is the disproportion between the human intellect and reality which, according to Aristotle, makes the acquiring of the truth difficult and which, we argue, makes believing necessary.

What, then, more explicitly, is meant by the proportion or disproportion of a power to its object? Suppose, for example, someone intends to make a fire, and that he has only some large logs and a match. He probably will not be able to start a fire. And why not? Because of the disproportion between the fire and the wood. Fire burns wood, but not any fire burns any wood. The power of the fire must become proportioned to the wood, its object. One will first use the match to ignite some paper, which in turn will burn some small twigs, and then some larger sticks, and so on until the fire is strong

²⁰ Saint Thomas, *In Metaphysicorum*, Bk. II, lect. 1.

enough to burn the logs. Now in general a proportion is a sameness of ratio or relation, and therefore any proportion consists of at least two relations and four terms. We write, "A:B::C:D," signifying that A has the same relation to B as C has to D, for example when the antecedents are both doubles of their respective consequents. What, then, is the meaning of speaking of the intellect as proportioned to its object, or the fire to the wood, and what are the four terms? The flame of the match has some relation to the logs, but not the certain relation necessary. And we have just expressed two relations and four terms: the actual relation of the fire to the wood, and the required relation that it needs in order to burn the wood. When the actual relation is the same as the required relation then there is a sameness of ratio and thus a proportion. And the process of bringing the actual relation into the proper relation can be called a proportioning. This must be done by altering one or the other of the terms of the actual relation. When a power has the required relation to its object it can be said to be proportioned to its object.

An indication of a disproportion between the intellect and its object is the difference between the order of being and the order of knowing, that what is first in reality is not always what is first in our knowledge. Hence, we distinguish between principles or beginnings of knowing and principles of being. For example, the truth that we cannot at the same time both affirm and deny the same predicate of the same subject is a first principle. Yet, it is not a principle of the being of anything; it is only a principle of our knowing. But when Democritus said that the first principles were tiny atomic particles, he was intending to state what is first in the being of things, not what is first in our knowing.

On this point it is instructive to compare Descartes and Aristotle. Both wrote works on what each called "first philosophy". For Descartes, what he treats in his *Meditations on First Philosophy* is also the first part of philosophy to be studied. Yet for Aristotle, his writing on what he called first philo-

sophy, and what was later called metaphysics, is the last part of philosophy to be studied. Descartes seems to identify the order of being with the order of knowing. This is seen also in the fact that God, Who is first in being, is also for Descartes among the first things to be known; whereas for Aristotle, as well as for thinkers such as Plato and Saint Thomas, God is among the last things to be known, and this knowledge itself depends upon a very developed knowledge of material things as grasped through the senses.

There would seem then to be a special difficulty in seeing how the principles are principles, and this fact itself indicates a need for placing faith in some authority. Aristotle wrote in the first chapter of the *Physics*, "When the objects of an inquiry, in any department, have principles, causes, or elements, it is through acquaintance with these that knowledge, that is to say, scientific knowledge, is attained." But there are two senses of knowing the principles. One can simply know the things which happen to be principles, or one can further know the principles as principles. For example, Aristotle often makes use of the distinction between potency and act. Fundamentally, this is a distinction which all see apart from any acquaintance with the writings of Aristotle. It is simply the distinction recognized when we see that there is a difference between "he is such-and-such" and "he can be such-and-such." What Aristotle saw that others did not see is that this distinction is the first distinction, that in the light of which other things ought to be understood. And again, one of the fundamental points of disagreement between Descartes and his predecessors concerns his "*Cogito, ergo sum.*" Yet the disagreement here is not about whether it is true, but about whether it is first. There is, then, a special difficulty in seeing the principles as principles. And it seems that in order to come to know the principles as principles one must learn many things in the right order, for only by knowing the order of different truths to one another will one come to see what is prior and what is posterior. Therefore, one of the first and

most important things a beginner must do is to put order into his studies. Yet it belongs to the wise man to order, that is, to the one who has reached perfection in knowledge. And so, the first step on the path to knowledge of the truth requires perfection in knowledge in order to be made. Therefore, one must believe a teacher.

Now let us consider more properly the disproportion of the human intellect and its object, and whence this disproportion arises. As we have seen, the actual relation between a power and its object can be different from the required relation because of one or the other of the two terms in the actual relation. There can be an impediment to knowing either because of a defect on the part of the thing known or on the part of the intellect. From the side of the object there arise three different relations of the intellect to its object corresponding to the division of the sciences into mathematics, natural philosophy and metaphysics. On the side of the power, we should consider that the human intellect knows all that it knows through the senses and the imagination. As Saint Thomas teaches, our knowledge is able to proceed as far as the senses are able to lead us by the hand. We can, then, know only those things which are in some way present to the senses or imagination. And according as things are in different ways present in the phantasms or images which the senses and imagination supply, so will they be differently related to the intellect as its objects. In order to see how the different objects of the intellect are present in the phantasms it is useful to recall the division of sensibles made by Aristotle in the *De Anima* (II, 5).

In dealing with each of the senses we shall have first to speak of the objects which are perceptible by each. The term "object of sense" covers three kinds of objects, two kinds of which are, in our language, *per se* perceptible, while the remaining one is only *per accidens* perceptible.

Of the first two kinds one consists of what is perceptible by a single sense, the other of what is perceptible by any and all of the senses. I call by the name of proper object

of this or that sense that which cannot be perceived by any other sense than that one and in respect of which no error is possible; in this sense color is the special object of sight, sound of hearing, flavor of taste. . . . Such objects are what we propose to call the proper objects of this or that sense.

Common sensibles are movement, rest, number, figure, magnitude; these are not peculiar to any one sense, but are common to all. There are at any rate certain kinds of movement which are perceptible by touch and by sight.

We speak of a *per accidens* object of sense where e.g. the white object which we see is the son of Diaries; here, because "being the son of Diaries" is accidental to the *per se* visible white patch, we speak of the son of Diaries as being perceived or seen *per accidens* by us. Because this is only *per accidens* an object of sense, it in no way as such affects the senses.

The human intellect knows through phantasms, that is, sense impressions retained, collated and presented to the intellect. If, then, something is in no way represented by or contained in the phantasms, not even as in an effect or in a likeness, then this can in no way be known by the human intellect. Consequently, the different ways in which things are present in the imagination make a difference to these objects as intelligible. Now the objects of the science of mathematics—number, figure, and magnitude—are *per se* sensibles, and thus are *per se* present in the phantasms. So the intellect can readily grasp the proper principles of such objects, and can proceed from these principles to conclusions through demonstrative arguments. The objects of natural philosophy, on the other hand, such as grass, cows, and stars, being *per accidens* sensibles, are only present *per accidens* in the images or phantasms from which the intellect abstracts. The cow is not *per se* present in my sense or imagination, but only these black and white patches of color and this mooing sound. But these are accidents which belong to the cow, and so it is not right to say that the cow is in no way present to the sense or imagination. Rather it is present through its accidents. Further, the things

which are contemplated in metaphysics, such as substances existing separately from matter, are not even *per accidens* present in the phantasms. For, the *per se* sensibles are not accidents belonging to such substances. They are present rather as causes of those things which are grasped by the phantasms *per accidens*. Finally, the things known only by divine faith, such as the Persons of the Trinity, are not even present in this latter way to the imagination.

The intellect, then, is proportioned to the objects of mathematics, and so can proceed to come to know them by the paths required by Descartes, that is, by the method of definition and demonstration. But the intellect is not so proportioned to the objects of natural philosophy or of metaphysics, the objects of neither being represented *per se* in the phantasms. Yet, the reason or nature of the disproportion is not the same in each case. The relation between the intellect and the objects of natural science falls short of the proper relation because of a defect on the part of the things, whereas the disproportion between the intellect and the objects considered in metaphysics arises from a defect on the part of the intellect. Thinking being an activity, the intellect will know a thing through that which is actual in it, and so a thing is able to be known by the intellect insofar as it is in act. The objects of natural science, being material and changing, are to that extent potential and lacking in actuality, and for this reason difficult to know. But the difficulty in knowing God and the separate substances is due not to any imperfection on the part of the objects but rather to the weakness of our intellects.

If, then, someone intended to restrict himself to the acts of understanding and science he could never come to a true knowledge of natural philosophy or of metaphysics. For, this would presuppose either 1) that the proper principles of the objects of these sciences were represented *per se* in the phantasms, or 2) that the human intellect comes to know apart from the senses, like an angelic intellect. And, in fact, Descartes

makes and elaborates the first assumption for the knowing of natural things in his twelfth rule. There he states that, "it is certain that the infinite multiplicity of shapes suffices for the expression of all the differences in sensible things." If one could find in shape the proper and sufficient principles for explaining sensible things, this would imply that the specific differences of natural things were nothing other than the accidental differences found in the common *per se* sensibles. The second assumption, that the human intellect comes to know, or comes to know best, apart from the senses, seems to be a guiding principle throughout Descartes' *Meditations*. There he proceeds by trying to separate as much as possible his thinking from sense and imagination. Descartes begins his third meditation, in which he proves the existence of God, in this way: "I shall now close my eyes, stop my ears, withdraw all my senses, I shall even efface from my thinking all images of corporeal things; or since that can hardly be done, I shall at least view them as empty and false."

Since the mind does come to know through the senses, and since the principles of physical and metaphysical objects are not represented *per se* in the phantasms, the intellect cannot in the beginning be determined by its proper objects through the acts of understanding and science. It must first become proportioned through other acts, namely, those of belief and opinion. This is seen for example in the *Physics* of Aristotle, in which a great part of the work is dedicated to simply leading the student to seeing the principles through many dialectical considerations. And one would hardly put forth the time and effort needed to follow and understand such a difficult work if one did not have a prior belief that it was worth the effort. The teacher, in order to know how to lead the student well, must be in perfect possession of the science. But the student, though he must follow the teacher, cannot as yet understand all the reasons for the way in which the teacher is leading him. As Saint Thomas explains,

Non autem in principio suae doctrinae ei qui instruitur tradit rationes subtilium de quibus instruere intendit: quia tunc statim in principio scientiam haberet perfecte qui instruitur; sed tradit ei quaedam, quorum rationes tunc, cum primo instruitur discipulus, nescit; sciet autem postea perfectus in scientia. (*De Veritate*, q. 14, a. 10.)²¹

And so, there is, because of the weakness of the human intellect, a necessary training before one comes to know, which training or proportioning requires acts of belief and opinion.

Yet, even in order to begin this preparation, or even in order to begin the study of mathematics, acts of belief are first necessary. For, one must first choose a book or a teacher. But this judgement cannot be made on the basis of the proper object, which would be a knowledge of the subject, since it is just this that one is seeking. This first judgement, then, is made not on the basis of what one knows, but on the basis of one's inclinations, that is, what one likes. I choose to listen to this teacher because I like him or what he says, or because someone else whom I like told me he was a good teacher, but not because I see for myself that he is a good teacher, though I may come to see this afterwards. And this is for the intellect to be determined by the will, which is to believe.

Our Lord demands faith of his followers. And we have seen that for Saint Augustine and for Saint Thomas this is not something unnatural or arbitrary, but rather something reasonable and necessary, corresponding to man's nature and condition. Our Lord, in order to lead men to an understanding of divine things and ultimately to the vision of God, must lead men from a state of imperfection in knowing to a state of perfec-

²¹ "The teacher does not, in the beginning of his instruction, give the reasons for the more subtle points which he endeavors to teach the student, since this would imply that right at the beginning the one being instructed would need to possess the science perfectly. Instead, the teacher presents the student with certain things, the reasons for which the student is at first ignorant. However, the student will understand these things later, when he is perfected in the science."

THE NECESSITY OF FAITH

tion. And when in thus leading man our Lord first requires faith He is following an order necessitated by the nature of man, and in particular by the relation of the human intellect to its objects. We have, then, examined the disproportion between the human intellect and reality, and attempted to manifest how this disproportion is the reason for the necessity of faith. In doing this we have also considered the view of René Descartes, for whom faith was more of an impediment to coming to know. Descartes, in asserting this, also denied in a number of ways the disproportion between the intellect and its objects, thus giving a negative confirmation that this disproportion is the reason why faith is necessary.

No man can come to me, except the Father, who hath sent me, draw him; and I will raise him up in the last day. It is written in the prophets: And they shall all be taught of God. Every one that hath heard of the Father, and hath learned, cometh to me. Not that any man hath seen the Father; but he who is of God, he hath seen the Father. Amen, amen I say unto you: He that believeth in me, hath everlasting life. (John 6:44-47)

KNOW THYSELF

Michael A. Augros

Once upon a time in ancient Greece there were seven sages named Thales, Pittacus, Bias, Solon, Cleobulus, Myson, and Chilon. These sages, in their desire to make men wise and good, inscribed two sayings at Apollo's temple in Delphi.¹ The two sayings were *Know Thyself* and *Nothing too much*. The first of these two sayings is the subject of this talk.

The first thing to say about the saying *Know Thyself* is that it is an exhortation. Exhortation is very important for making a good beginning in the moral and intellectual life. Did not Aristotle himself write an exhortation to philosophy, namely his lost work called the *Protrepticus*? And did not the *Hortensius*, an exhortation to philosophy by Cicero, have a profound influence on St. Augustine's life?² *Know Thyself* differs from these two exhortations by being extremely short and by being the first exhortation of the philosophers. Note that the brevity of the two-word saying *Know Thyself* is in keeping with its wisdom. As the divine wisdom expresses all truth in one divine word, so it is the mark of wise men to say much in few words. *Know Thyself* is a truth of this sort: I will spend this entire lecture unfolding just those two little words, and even then I will not dare to claim I have exhausted them.

There are four things to ask about this exhortation. First,

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¹ Protagoras 343a-b, Phaedrus 229d-230a, *City of God* Bk. XVIII, Ch. 24-25.

² *Confessions*, Book III.