

Believing the Incomprehensible God: Aquinas on Understanding God's Testimony

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Abstract: There has been recent epistemological interest as to whether knowledge is “transmitted” by testimony from the testifier to the hearer, where a hearer acquires knowledge “second-hand.” Yet there is a related area in epistemology of testimony which raises a distinct epistemological problem: the relation of understanding to testimony. In what follows, I am interested in one facet of this relation: whether/how a hearer can receive testimonial knowledge without fully understanding the content of the testimony? I use Thomas Aquinas to motivate a case where, in principle, the content of received testimony cannot be understood but nevertheless constitutes knowledge. Aquinas not only argues that we can receive testimonial knowledge without understanding the content of that testimony, but that we have duties to do so in certain cases.

There has been recent epistemological interest as to whether knowledge is “transmitted” by testimony from the testifier to the hearer, where a hearer acquires knowledge “second-hand.”¹ Yet there is a related area in epistemology of testimony which raises a distinct problem: the relation of understanding to testimony. In what follows, I am interested in one facet of this relation: whether/how a hearer can receive testimonial knowledge without fully understanding the content of the testimony? I use Thomas Aquinas to motivate a case where, in principle, the content of received testimony cannot be understood but nevertheless constitutes knowledge. Aquinas not only argues that we can receive testimonial knowledge without understanding the content of that testimony, but that we have duties to do so in certain cases.

As Aquinas conceives of it, revelation provides a case in principle where the content of God's testimony is ultimately incomprehensible to human beings.² For Aquinas, there are many dogmatic propositions which could only be known by revelation, such as Trinitarian dogma that one God exists in three Persons, because knowing these require knowing the divine nature “directly.”³ I will call this subclass “properly revealed truths” (PRTs). Human beings have no epistemic access to the

divine nature and so could neither be able to discover by any a priori reasoning nor empirical investigation that God is a Trinity. Thus, for Aquinas, any knowledge we could have of PRTs in this life can only be testimonial knowledge because PRTs concern truths which only God, or someone in a similar epistemic position,⁴ could know first-hand. Faith is, consequently, a virtue where one trusts God's testimony about Himself. This epistemic dependence is necessary for coming to understand God, which in turn permits human beings to come to love and be united with God in heaven.

PRTs are fundamentally *incomprehensible* because they are truths about God's incomprehensible personal nature. Aquinas claims we do not know in this life *what* God is and that even revealed knowledge only unites us to God "as to one unknown."⁵ What understanding must the believer have in order to properly "receive testimony" from God in this case? Aquinas shows, I will argue, that we can justifiably suspend some kinds of understanding and yet acquire testimonial knowledge. This is similar to cases where we might need to suspend understanding to receive testimonial knowledge from experts. I will conclude by noting that this makes plausible how we have an epistemic obligation to believe God, given that we can be culpable for failing to rely on expert testimony. Thus, the case of revealed knowledge and divine testimony illustrates how someone can acquire testimonial knowledge, and in fact might have epistemic obligations to do so, even in cases where the content of the testimony is not understood by the hearer.

I. Divinizing Faith

First, we need to review some preliminary epistemological considerations about faith and its justification. Faith (*fides*) for Aquinas is a cognitive virtue primarily concerning PRTs, rather than belief about God's existence. This is because of the way knowledge functions in salvation. On Aquinas's theory of action, the will desires and chooses ends/means for action, but what the will can choose or desire is "specified" by the intellect.⁶ Salvation is one such end, and it consists in consummate, final union with God.⁷ This union happens progressively, beginning in this life by developing friendship with God. Friendship with God is directly grounded upon a habitual desire or choice: *caritas* or love.⁸ But love of God, as an act of the will, presupposes some kind of knowledge of God in order for the will to be directed toward Him in desire or choice. Sherwin states it succinctly: "Since communion with God in the good is a prerequisite for friendship with him, unless we believe that such a communion is possible . . . we will never develop a friendship with him. God might indeed love us, wish us good and do good for us, but unless he makes this known to us, we will not become his friends."⁹ We need to have some knowledge of God that would make our acts of choice and desire appropriate: to direct our desires toward God rather than some other object.

Aquinas thinks God is naturally discoverable as First Cause, but that this natural knowledge is inherently limited because of our cognitive capacities.¹⁰ Natural knowledge is indirect knowledge of God as the cause of the universe. This limits how we could desire God: we could desire Him only insofar as He is naturally dis-

coverable as cause, but not as a friend.¹¹ To illustrate Aquinas's point, we can only abstractly desire friendship with "the person who mows my neighbor's lawn"; but we can concretely be friends with Steve, whom I know personally and who in fact mows the lawn. Friendship with God is intended by Christianity to be personal, not merely abstract, uniting our cognitive and affective powers to share in His own willing and knowing.¹² So an analogously similar personal knowledge of God is what Aquinas claims is required for our coming into union with God.¹³ The virtue of faith is that by which we acquire personal knowledge of God, because we believe PRTs, which are the same truths which God knows about Himself.¹⁴ Faith is, on Aquinas's picture, internally related to salvation: personal knowledge of God in PRTs is the same knowledge that will be perfectly understood in heaven (the Beatific Vision) and which will then constitute perfect happiness.¹⁵

This personal knowledge of God would need to be *revealed* knowledge because, given Aquinas's theory of knowledge, we could only naturally arrive at knowledge of God as cause, not as He is personally. We acquire *personal* knowledge of God, Aquinas thinks, because God has chosen to tell us about Himself so as to allow us to enter into relationship with Him. Faith is the cognitive virtue of appropriately trusting God in order to receive testimonial knowledge from Him (PRTs) and makes possible our relating to Him in a personal way.

II. Justifying Faith

If faith is a cognitive virtue by which we acquire testimonial knowledge from God, we appear to run into a problem. Aquinas claims no one, in this life, has direct epistemic access to God. God is not a material object which we could empirically investigate with our senses¹⁶ or a possible object of *a priori* reasoning (in the broad Aristotelian sense of what is *per se nota* and accessible to us).¹⁷ There is no *personal* knowledge of God apart from and prior to faith, although we can have some indirect knowledge of Him through our natural powers of reasoning.¹⁸ Aquinas believes we can come to infer certain truths about God's nature from study of the physical universe (this enterprise is "natural theology"), but this is only inference from God's effects rather than direct access to His personal being or essence.¹⁹ But, if we believe *God*, we would need to know Him in some fairly definite personal way in order to have faith in Him. We can think of this difficulty as a vicious circle. Why should a convert think *this* particular set of propositions was revealed by God? What are actually received by a potential convert are truths *asserted* to be revealed by God, whether in Scripture, some creedal statement, or a particular sermon by a preacher. Every convert would need knowledge of God to decide whether some proposition was truly revealed by Him. We need PRTs to know God's nature, but believing PRTs with justification seems to require evidence. Because PRTs are truths about God's nature, the only possible evidence for their truth would be evidence pertaining to God's nature.

The circle is one that raises the question of the epistemic justification for acts of faith. Natural theology would only function as an indirect limit on testimony. We could reject certain messages as clearly being neither about God nor from Him

if they conflicted with what we concluded in natural theology. But we would not have positive knowledge by which to confirm PRTs because we have no access to what God is. Consequently, natural theology could not justify assent to PRTs. Aquinas further thinks faith requires one not only to believe in the right content (PRTs), but also to believe with the right *attitude*: that attitude is something akin to “trust” in God.²⁰

Aquinas requires something like “trust” as an essential aspect of faith because faith is *testimonial* knowledge. By contrast, for example, he thinks assent to PRTs from inference, rather than trust, is the case for demons. Demons have better cognitive powers than humans and can know when true miracles are performed. Because they know when someone is acting as God’s messenger, and that God cannot lie, they are rationally compelled to believe whatever is revealed. However, the belief of demons is not faith, because they do not *believe God*.²¹ The problem in the case of demons is that they do not have this trust in the testifier (God). It is as if the demons heard revealed truths addressed to someone else and made an inferential judgment. In other words, they come to belief in the truth of PRTs in a deviant manner. The demons do not accept the testimony on God’s “say-so,” but because of some inference.²²

One should note that, as a consequence of Aquinas’s denial that anything less than trust in God Himself could suffice for faith, the believer is not receiving testimonial knowledge from some other human being. It is unimportant to Aquinas’s theory whether a believer were to receive the content of revealed testimony to PRTs in person from Jesus Christ, or in a prophetic vision, or in written Scripture or the preaching of a missionary; all of these are means by which God’s testimonial knowledge is transmitted to us.²³ All of this does not substantially alter the fact that the believer is held to acquire knowledge second-hand from God, as she comes to believe in PRTs because God asserts them to her and not because she knows them first-hand.

III. Understanding Faith

III.1. Understanding

There is no consensus in contemporary epistemology on what “understanding” consists in, and often the term is used to refer to “systematic knowledge.”²⁴ Aquinas employs a technical terminology inherited from Aristotle who distinguishes two cognitive virtues which have a connection to “understanding”: *scientia* (“scientific knowledge”) and *intellectus* (“understanding”). We can distinguish these virtues in terms of their characteristic cognitive operations: *scientia* involves relating one’s knowledge in a coherent whole, drawing inferential conclusions well in a given area of inquiry, whereas *intellectus* involves grasping essences or fundamental principles of reasoning.²⁵ Understanding is epistemically prior to other cognition because it provides the content for other acts and is a form of “intellectual perception.”²⁶ This is illustrated in the process of coming to assent to a conclusion, which happens either because understanding the object itself would make the conclusion necessary (e.g., a necessary truth), or because one already has understanding of other objects

that would permit a deductive inference to the conclusion.²⁷ For example, an understanding of “human beings” involves knowledge that humans are mortal, and so would epistemically ground my knowledge of the truth of the proposition that “all humans are mortal.” This in turn allows the drawing of inferences from that truth (e.g., Socrates, as a man, must be mortal). Understanding is therefore called the “light” of the intellect by Aquinas, and some form of understanding is the epistemic ground of any reasoning.²⁸

For these reasons, we might think of *intellectus* as “objectual understanding” of individual persons, things, or abstract entities (e.g., terms in a proposition). Understanding would then not be merely knowledge that a proposition about an object is true. Instead, we might characterize a “grasp” of the object of understanding as knowing its intrinsic properties, relations to other things, and so forth. “Understanding” is then, for my purposes, a kind of knowledge *how*, knowing what it means for some proposition to be true because one knows the essential nature of the terms or referents of the proposition. By contrast, “scientific knowledge” would be knowledge that something is true in light of relating one epistemic object or proposition to what is more fundamental.

There are two kinds of understanding that testimony will require: understanding the speaker’s trustworthiness and the content of the testimony. Understanding a speaker’s trustworthiness is less relevant to our purposes here, and it involves weighty questions of the justification of acts of faith, so I will only offer a brief *précis* before turning to the content of PRTs. Aquinas is clear that not only is the consent to God’s testimony beyond our abilities, but also the right intellectual perception of the grounds for that consent needs to be effected by grace.²⁹ Aquinas says that faith has as its “formal object” (i.e., the aspect under which we assent to what is revealed) God as “the First Truth.”³⁰ I read Aquinas as holding that this infused understanding therefore has as its content that the revealer of PRTs, namely God, is *epistemically placed* to know and testify to the truth of PRTs.³¹ I cannot justify this picture here and, without getting further into the phenomenological mechanics of how this happens, the overall picture I am painting is that Aquinas conceives of faith along the same lines as ordinary testimony. In the case of faith, however, the perception of a speaker’s epistemological placement is given by grace (unlike perception of another human speaker’s trustworthiness, for example).

III.2. *Understanding the Content of PRTs*

It is intuitive that a hearer has to understand the *content* of testimony in some minimal way to acquire testimonial knowledge. As we saw, this poses not a little problem for Aquinas, as the content of PRTs are truths epistemically inaccessible if God were not to reveal them. I will show, first, how Aquinas thinks our natural knowledge of God is possible, although not knowledge of God’s essence. Second, I will show that Aquinas thinks there can be a special case of knowledge by testimony, such that knowledge is transmitted to a hearer but where that knowledge involves a “suspension” of understanding. Finally, I will consider what implications this has for epistemology of testimony more generally.

For Aquinas, our knowledge of God is premised on our ability to understand His causal relation to the universe—this is the knowledge derived in “natural theology.”³² We can understand God as the unique “First Cause” of all things, and as consequently being of a certain nature: immaterial, all powerful, intelligent, ontologically simple, etc. (the derivation of these properties is complicated, but Aquinas thinks we can derive them³³). These descriptions are not merely metaphorical, or merely negative, but true, although deficient, descriptions of God: “every creature represents Him and is like Him, insofar as it has some perfection; yet it does not represent Him as something of the same species or genus, but as an excelling principle, of whose form the effect is not adequate, but of which some similarity follows.”³⁴ So while God cannot be understood in His essential nature in this life, He is “known by us from creatures, according as He is their principle.”³⁵ In other words, we have inferentially-derived knowledge of how God relates to the universe and, on this basis, can infer that God must have certain abilities or properties. It is, as it were, indirect essential knowledge of what God must be.

Aquinas makes a distinction that, in some cases, what is signified directly by our concept (*res significata*) can be literally true of God because the meaning of certain terms is not such as to be inherently only finite or limited. “Being” is a chief example, as Aquinas thinks we can say God exists non-metaphorically in large part because the term “being” signifies no definite kind of thing.³⁶ Aquinas concedes that our use of terms, even in these cases, will nevertheless be inadequate to understand God insofar as the way in which we conceive these terms (*modus significandi*) is such that *how* we understand these concepts is always limited. So, on one hand, these terms will be literally or properly true of God, more so than of creatures.

But, on the other hand, we will never in this life understand *how* these terms are true of Him, because we do not understand the thing signified in the way it would be exemplified by God (e.g., how God exists or is wise). Consequently, while our knowledge of God is indirect in this life, some indirectly derived terms (like “being”) can be used to form propositions which are not only metaphorically but literally true descriptions of God’s essence.³⁷ Thus we do not have essential understanding of God, meaning direct epistemic access to His essence, but we do have indirect understanding of God in terms of His effects or actions.

However, Aquinas also thinks we can transcend the ordinary senses of the terms we use.³⁸ Our natural knowledge that God is the cause of all being in the universe also involves recognition that He is utterly distinct from entities in the universe. This recognition of God’s uniqueness is what makes possible the recognition of the deficiency in our ordinary language and concepts, and hence permits us to make true statements about Him.³⁹ We understand that God is not something of which we have experience and that our terms are derived from finite things, and we can adjust our language correspondingly (this is what Aquinas calls “analogical” predication⁴⁰).

For example, Aquinas thinks we recognize we would have to refer to God by both abstract (e.g., “Truth”) and concrete terms because we can infer that God is both Truth itself and a concrete entity. As human language does not naturally have any term that could indicate both together, Aquinas thinks, we use both terms together

to try to remedy the deficiencies in our language (e.g., Truth Himself subsisting as a concrete entity).⁴¹ It is when we recognize the deficiency and form a proposition by an act of judgment that we can predicate our names of God truly and properly.⁴² We might compare this to how we describe fundamental forces or particles in physics, of which we have no direct experience. We can come up with descriptions of what such things are or what they are like, or we can use language in new ways to describe objects of which we have no sense experience, or even those of which we might never be able to encounter (e.g., “dark matter”). There are epistemic limits to our knowledge of God, but it is our ability to recognize our epistemic limits that allows us to speak truly of Him. We can know that we do not know Him as He is.⁴³

PRTs are also constrained by these epistemic limits. Aquinas notes that the terms used in revealed propositions still remain human terms; the Trinitarian terms “Father” and “Son” are derived from familial relations, for example.⁴⁴ But revealed propositions are unique in a different facet. The acts of judgment by which these propositions were formed were not *human* acts of judgment. Instead, revealed propositions depend for their truth on the judgments which God made in selecting and combining our human terms to describe Himself. Jacques Maritain called this “superanalogy,” as opposed to the ordinary “analogical” way we speak of God. Instead of being expressions of judgments derived from our natural knowledge of God (reasoning from His effects), PRTs are expressions of God’s own judgments about Himself.⁴⁵

While it might seem as if the content of PRTs would remain beyond our grasp in their full signification—how they apply to God—we do seem to be able to understand something about them. We can understand the terms and analogies God uses in Scripture and can thereby come to understand meaningful truths about Him.⁴⁶ The problem in understanding PRTs is instead that they are “too meaningful”; it is impossible for us to understand fully what it is like for them to be true of God.

Because the believer, however, knows that God *does* know the full meaning of PRTs, Aquinas argues that the believer can suspend their understanding of the content of PRTs and nevertheless acquire knowledge. Aquinas thinks it is precisely this kind of suspension of understanding that necessarily occurs in faith: “when someone is taught by a teacher, it is required that the conceptions of principles are received from the teacher not as intelligible in themselves, but in the mode of credulity [i.e., as testimonial knowledge], as being above one’s own capacity [to understand].”⁴⁷ This seems parallel to the way the hearer can have justified belief in testimony despite not knowing the testifier’s justifications for their assertion. In the case of the content of testimony, the hearer understands some basic meaning of the terms used by the testifier and that those propositions are proposed meaningfully by an expert, but does not know the full implication of the truths that are transmitted—she does not yet have “objectual understanding” of the referents of the terms used.

This “teleological suspension” of understanding is not mysterious. Confronted with expert testimony, we can and often do suspend first-hand objectual understanding and accept that the expert understands better than we do. It is this suspension that facilitates coming to first-hand understanding, e.g., if we are taking the expert

as our teacher.⁴⁸ Such epistemic dependence is quite normal, as we depend upon teachers and experts in many situations in order to acquire epistemic goods.⁴⁹ The epistemic dependence of faith, for Aquinas, similarly exists in order for the believer to acquire epistemic goods: namely, that by accepting PRTs via testimonial knowledge in this life, we can come to perfectly understand them in the Beatific Vision. Faith is therefore “the beginning of eternal life in us.” Those PRTs we accept about God here on earth are the same that lead us to understand Him perfectly in heaven.⁵⁰ But this fulfilled understanding is not entirely delayed; assent to PRTs makes possible epistemic goods attainable in this life, such as theological or mystical understanding of God.⁵¹

IV. Conclusion

Thomas Aquinas’s analysis of faith highlights some ways in which understanding plays a critical role in testimonial knowledge. Every receiver will need to trust that the testifier has knowledge, justification for their beliefs, and so the receiver will in any standard case of testimonial trust lack understanding of those justifications themselves. One accepts testimonial knowledge because of some further good to be gained, whether practically or epistemically, by trusting the testifier. In epistemic dependence on experts, a lack of understanding is acceptable within certain bounds. We can suspend understanding of the justification that a testifier possesses if we understand that they are trustworthy (competent and sincere in asserting *p*) and we can suspend understanding of the content of testimony if we understand the basic meaning of the terms used and that the testifier is using these terms meaningfully to convey expert testimony. These “teleological suspensions” of understanding are epistemically valuable in the case of testimonial knowledge. We could not come to understand from experts if we did not depend on their understanding in this way.

In fact, this account makes clear how such epistemic dependence in faith might be morally and epistemically mandatory. Whereas coming to accept some belief by sheer force of will is generally thought impossible, it does not seem as counter-intuitive to think that we can voluntarily choose *not* to believe a certain testifier. But there are cases where such lack of trust seems blameworthy.⁵² It would be epistemically foolish, for instance, to reject the consensus of the scientific community and instead opt to believe in pseudo-science. To offer, as an excuse, that one has not come to independent confirmation of Western medicine or the unreliability of astrology involves, on Aquinas’s picture, a mistake of looking for the wrong kind of testimonial understanding.

This is why Aquinas holds that a choice *not* to trust in God’s testimony is the greatest of sins: unbelief leads us to be completely disconnected from ultimate truth and unable to will any moral goods effectively.⁵³ Rejecting God’s testimony is to reject the testimony of the expert knower *par excellence*, and so supremely epistemically irresponsible. Similarly, in the natural case, humans inhabit an epistemic community alongside experts. Human experts are obviously not supremely trustworthy, as God would be. Nevertheless, Aquinas’s account seems plausible in these natural cases as

well. We can have obligations of deference to experts, even when we do not fully understand their justifications.

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Notes

1. See, for example, the account given by Elizabeth Fricker, “Second-Hand Knowledge,” in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 73.3 (Nov. 2006): 592–618; see also “Against Gullibility,” in *Knowing from Words*, ed. A. Chakrabarti and B. K. Matilal (Kluwer, 1994), 125–161.

2. A note on my use of the term “testimonial knowledge” or “knowledge” in regard to faith: unless I explicitly specify otherwise, I will be using these terms in the broad, minimalist, ordinary sense of “knowledge (e.g., as testimony transmits “knowledge” from speaker to hearer), not in the sense of Aristotelian *scientia*. I posit that this only entails assent with appropriate justification (e.g., testimonial) to true propositions, and so compatible with the virtue of faith.

3. Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones de Veritate* [QDV], q. 14, a. IX, resp. (translations of Latin texts are my own unless otherwise noted) [quod scilicet excedit facultatem intellectus omnium hominum in statu viae existentium; sicut Deum esse trinum, et unum et huiusmodi. Et de his impossibile est ab aliquo homine scientiam haberi; sed quilibet fidelis assentit huiusmodi propter testimonium Dei, cui haec sunt praesto et cognita.]

4. E.g., those experiencing the Beatific Vision.

5. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* [ST] I, q. 12, a. 13, ad. 1. [ei quasi ignoto coniungamur.]

6. Michael Sherwin clarifies how practical action relies on different kinds of knowledge (some supplied by faith and others by hope) in *By Knowledge and Love* (Washington, DC: Catholic Univ. of America Press, 2011), esp. 32.

7. Cf., ST I, q. 3, a. 8.

8. Cf., ST II-II, q. 23, a. 1.

9. Sherwin, *By Knowledge and Love*, 151.

10. Cf., ST II-II, q. 2, a. 3.

11. ST II-II, q. 4, a. 7, resp. [naturalis cognitio non potest attingere ad Deum secundum quod est obiectum beatitudinis, prout tendit in ipsum spes et caritas.] Cf., ST I, q. 1, a. 1, resp.

12. ST I-II, q. 110, a. 4, resp. [enim per potentiam intellectivam homo participat cognitionem divinam per virtutem fidei; et secundum potentiam voluntatis amorem divinum, per virtutem caritatis]

13. Thomas Aquinas, *De Divinis Nominibus Dionysii*, c. 1, l. 2, n. 70; c. 7, l. 1, n. 705.

14. ST II-II, q. 4, a. 1, resp.

15. *ST* II-II, q. 5, a. 1, resp.

16. *ST* I, q. 12, a. 3.

17. Cf., *ST* I, q. 12, a. 4.

18. *ST* I, q. 12, a. 5.

19. *ST* I, q. 12, a. 12.

20. Cf., *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 10, resp. [ita credere debet homo ea quae sunt fidei non propter rationem humanam, sed propter auctoritatem divinam.]

21. *ST* II-II, q. 5, a. 2.

22. It is of course an odd case: their trust relies on God always speaking the truth. While it might be that they accept some truth because God said it, it is an inferential process that leads to this trust in the truth of the statement, not a trust in God Himself as a testifier. It is thus deviant; not a case of testimonial knowledge.

23. I am bracketing, then, any problem that might arise with how an individual preacher or book of Scripture is known to accurately relay the message; instead, I assume all these means are reliable transmission of the original message from God.

24. John Greco gives such a picture of understanding in, “Episteme: Knowledge and Understanding,” in *Virtues and Their Vices*, ed. Kevin Timpe and Craig Boyd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 285–302. See also Jonathan Kvanvig, “Knowledge, Understanding, and Reasons for Belief,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Reasons and Normativity*, ed. Daniel Starr (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

25. Cf., Thomas Aquinas, *In Libri Ethicorum*, n. 1149 [scientia est habitus demonstrativus, idest ex demonstratione causatus.]; n. 1179 [sic convenienter cognitio principiorum quae statim innotescunt cognito quod quid est circa terminos intellectus nominatur.]

26. *ST* II-II, q. 8, a. 1, ad. 2. [discursus rationis semper incipit ab intellectu et terminatur ad intellectum, ratiocinamur enim procedendo ex quibusdam intellectis, et tunc rationis discursus perficitur quando ad hoc pervenimus ut intelligamus illud quod prius erat ignotum. Quod ergo ratiocinamur ex aliquo praecedenti intellectu procedit.] Cf., *ibid.*, resp. [Et hoc manifeste patet considerantibus differentiam intellectus et sensus, nam cognitio sensitiva occupatur circa qualitates sensibiles exteriores; cognitio autem intellectiva penetrat usque ad essentiam rei, obiectum enim intellectus est quod quid est.]

27. *ST* II-II, q. 1, a. 4, resp. [Uno modo, quia ad hoc movetur ab ipso obiecto, quod est vel per seipsum cognitum, sicut patet in principiis primis, quorum est intellectus; vel est per aliud cognitum, sicut patet de conclusionibus, quarum est scientia.]

28. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles [SCG] IIIb*, c. 154, n. 4.

29. *ST* II-II, q. 6, a. 1.

30. *ST* II-II, q. 1, a. 3, resp. [Unde nihil potest cadere sub fide nisi in quantum stat sub veritate prima. Sub qua nullum falsum stare potest, sicut nec non ens sub ente, nec malum sub bonitate.]

31. *ST* II-II, q. 8, a. 4, ad. 2.

32. *ST* I, q. 13, a. 1, ad. 2. [quia ex creaturis in Dei cognitionem venimus, et ex ipsis eum nominamus, nomina quae Deo attribuímus, hoc modo significant, secundum quod competit creaturis materialibus.]

33. Much of the first part of the ST is devoted to such a derivation, as is the more narrative *SCG I*.

34. *ST I*, q. 13, a. 2, resp. [quaelibet creatura intantum eum repraesentat, et est ei similis, inquantum perfectionem aliquam habet, non tamen ita quod repraesentet eum sicut aliquid eiusdem speciei vel generis, sed sicut excellens principium, a cuius forma effectus deficiunt, cuius tamen aliqualem similitudinem effectus consequuntur.]

35. *ST I*, q. 13, a. 1, resp. [sed cognoscitur a nobis ex creaturis, secundum habitudinem principii, et per modum excellentiae et remotionis.]

36. *ST I*, q. 13, a. 11, resp. [hoc nomen ‘qui est’ nullum modum essendi determinat, sed se habet indeterminate ad omnes.]

37. *ST I*, q. 13, a. 3, resp. & ad. 1. Cf., Eleonore Stump, “The Nature of a Simple God,” in *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association 87* (2013): 33–42.

38. Gregory Rocca, *Speaking the Incomprehensible God* (Washington, DC: Catholic Univ. of America Press, 2004), 157. Cf., *ST I*, q. 13, a. 3, resp. & ad. 1.

39. *ST I*, q. 13, a. 5, resp. [Et sic, quidquid dicitur de Deo et creaturis, dicitur secundum quod est aliquis ordo creaturae ad Deum, ut ad principium et causam, in qua praexistunt excellenter omnes rerum perfectiones.]

40. Cf., *ST I*, q. 13, a. 5.

41. *ST I*, q. 13, a. 1, ad 2.

42. Rocca, *Speaking the Incomprehensible God*, 340–350.

43. For a more extended treatment, see Brian Davies, “Aquinas on What God Is Not,” in *Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies (Oxford University Press, 2002), 227–236.

44. *ST I*, q. 12, a. 12, ad. 1. [per revelationem gratiae in hac vita non cognoscamus de Deo quid est, et sic ei quasi ignoto coniungamur.]

45. Jacques Maritain gives an extensive treatment of the “superanalogy” of revealed terms in *Degrees of Knowledge* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 256–259.

46. Rocca, *Speaking the Incomprehensible God*, 193–195.

47. *SCG IIIb*, c. 152, n. 4. [Et similiter, cum aliquis a magistro docetur, oportet quod a principio conceptiones magistri recipiat non quasi eas per se intelligens, sed per modum credulitatis, quasi supra suam capacitatem existentes: in fine autem, quando iam edoctus fuerit, eas poterit intelligere. Sicut autem ex dictis patet, auxilio divinae gratiae dirigimur in ultimum finem. Ultimus autem finis est manifesta visio primae veritatis in seipsa: ut supra ostensum est. Oportet igitur quod, antequam ad istum finem veniatur, intellectus hominis Deo subdatur per modum credulitatis, divina gratia hoc faciente.]

48. Fricker gives a picture similar to this in our acquisition of language as children, but it is obviously applicable to any case of coming to understand new meanings or principles; “Testimony and Epistemic Autonomy,” 226–227.

49. For a more extended critique of the “ideal of the autonomous knower,” see Fricker, “Testimony and Epistemic Autonomy,” 226–250.

50. *ST II-II*, q. 4, a. 1, resp. [fides est habitus mentis, qua inchoatur vita aeterna in nobis.]

51. The three cognitive Gifts are Wisdom, Understanding, and Knowledge. For example, Gift of Understanding begins from the understanding of faith and proceeds supernaturally to a deeper understanding of the PRTs; *ST II-II*, q. 8, a. 1, ad. 2 [discursus rationis semper incipit ab intellectu et terminatur ad intellectum, ratiocinamur enim procedendo ex quibusdam intellectis, et tunc rationis discursus perficitur quando ad hoc pervenimus ut intelligamus illud quod prius erat ignotum. Quod ergo ratiocinamur ex aliquo praecedenti intellectu procedit. Donum autem gratiae non procedit ex lumine naturae, sed superadditur ei, quasi perficiens ipsum. Et ideo ista superadditio non dicitur ratio, sed magis intellectus, quia ita se habet lumen superadditum ad ea quae nobis supernaturaliter innotescunt sicut se habet lumen naturale ad ea quae primordialiter cognoscimus.] See also Thomas Aquinas, *Super librum De Causis exposito*, 6.175. [sed Dei quidditas est ipsum esse, unde est supra intellectum.]

52. Fricker, "Testimony and Epistemic Autonomy," 243.

53. *ST II-II*, q. 10, a. 3, resp.