

WHAT IS THE VALUE OF FAITH FOR SALVATION? A THOMISTIC RESPONSE TO KVANVIG

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Jonathan Kvanvig has proposed a non-cognitive theory of faith. He argues that the model of faith as essentially involving assent to propositions is of no value. In response, I propose a Thomistic cognitive theory of faith that both avoids Kvanvig's criticism and presents a richer and more inclusive account of how faith is intrinsically valuable. I show these accounts of faith diverge in what they take as the goal of the Christian life: personal relationship with God or an external state of affairs. For this reason, more seriously, the non-cognitivist project likely requires rejecting traditional Christianity and its picture of salvation.

It has been a hot item in Catholic theology of the past fifty years to rail against "propositional" theories of faith and revelation, where these essentially involve "conceptual knowledge by means of words (speech)."¹ In response to these theories, Catholic theologians have felt the need to explore a tighter connection between belief and action.² These Catholic theologians were inspired by a movement in Protestant theology, beginning more or less with Kant, to separate metaphysics and faith. What has for some time occupied theologians has come around to philosophy: contemporary philosophers of religion have likewise begun recently to voice a concern that classical theories of the virtue of faith are unsatisfactory because they construe faith as constituted essentially (in part or whole) by belief in certain propositions. Jonathan Kvanvig, who I treat here, argues that the traditional model of faith makes faith of no apparent value in

¹Dulles, *Models of Revelation*, 42. The work generally is useful as an overview of positions in Catholic theology of revelation at that time.

²This was particularly associated with "liberation" theologians, such as Gustavo Gutierrez or Leonardo Boff. Nevertheless, liberation theologians generally take a non-cognitive view of faith as an assumption rather than defend it. I speculate that Edward Schillebeeckx is chiefly to be credited with popularizing something like a non-cognitive view of faith among theologians of that generation, and it was from him that the liberation theologians appear to have derived their view.



ordinary people's lives. This has led Kvanvig, among others,³ to defend a distinctly non-cognitivist theory of faith which does not essentially or constitutively involve belief in any set of propositions.

After presenting Kvanvig's theory of non-cognitive faith and his objections to the cognitive model, I will examine one cognitive theory that proposes a clear internal connection between belief and the value of faith. Thomas Aquinas holds that there needs to be a cognitive virtue (namely, faith), constitutively involving assent to propositions, in order for believers to have a relationship with God. Nevertheless, I argue that Thomistic faith is not susceptible to the objections that Kvanvig proposes which motivate non-cognitivism. Thomistic faith is a species of intellectual humility where the believer trusts God and what He tells human beings. Thomistic faith accommodates the "implicit faith" of those outside explicit Christian confessions, and can positively construe traditional concern for orthodoxy by understanding "heresy" as a sin of intellectual pride that impairs communion with God (but innocent doctrinal error or ignorance as blameless).

Kvanvig argues that we should develop our theory of faith in light of why that virtue is valuable. I will show that the Thomistic account makes cognitive faith more intrinsically valuable than affective faith. Nevertheless, there is a deeper problem: affective and Thomistic faith have different conceptions of the goal of Christian life (i.e., salvation). I will show that accepting that non-cognitive affective faith is "saving faith" (as Kvanvig does) would entail the falsity of the traditional Christian picture of salvation. While I cannot argue that the traditional Christian picture is in fact true, I will present good reasons to reject non-cognitivism.

1. Kvanvig's View

1.a. Motivation for Non-Cognitivism

Cognitive models of faith hold that belief, particularly propositional belief, is essential to faith. In the beginning of *Faith and Humility*, Kvanvig proposes two general objections to these dominant models of a "cognitive" virtue of faith. These objections motivate a commitment to an alternative model of faith—the non-cognitive, affective model of faith Kvanvig proposes—on which propositions or beliefs might be compatible with affective faith but are not essential to it.⁴

³Daniel Howard-Snyder proposes "nondoxasticism" about faith, which is similar in many respects to Kvanvig's "non-cognitivism." I believe similar criticisms as those presented against Kvanvig's position would likely apply to Howard-Snyder's view. Nevertheless, Howard-Snyder's nondoxasticism (in his account of Markan "propositional faith") involves essential, positive *cognitive* attitudes toward propositions which are not however identical with belief in those propositions; instead of belief, faith can take various other distinct doxastic states of some kind. The idea is that a specially-defined state of belief is not essential to faith. This makes the arguments as presented here against Kvanvig not directly applicable to the nondoxastic view. Howard-Snyder has a number of articles on this topic, the more recent being: "Markan Faith"; "Three Arguments to Think that Faith Does Not Entail Belief"; "Can Fictionalists Have Faith? It All Depends."

⁴Kvanvig, *Faith and Humility*, 19.

A first objection to cognitivism is that belief in a set of propositions is not obviously virtuous. If a state of belief in some propositions is valuable, it seems only to have whatever value attaches to true belief in general. In turn, the value of mere true belief is (at least mostly) constituted by the value of the propositions believed.⁵ True belief that my car's radiator is faulty might be very valuable because use of my car is valuable to me, whereas true belief that there are fifty motes of dust on my desk is probably useless.

In addition, there is a uniquely religious facet to this first objection. If faith is necessary for salvation, such that nobody can "get to heaven" without it, God would seem fundamentally arbitrary and capricious to demand that people believe in some disjointed set of propositions that bear no apparent connection to their moral character. Cognitivism makes faith a trivial affair: "of all the concerns God might have about human beings and the lives that they live, how could it come down to something like a true/false checklist that you fill out honestly, and the answers determine your destiny?"⁶ It would be as if God demanded, as a price of admission, that one get a tattoo on their forearm, or cut off their left toe.⁷ But we know too that people come to believe what they believe largely from matters of circumstance outside of their control—children of Jewish parents are often also Jewish, etc. For this reason, Kvanvig concludes "the idea that the difference-maker regarding one's eternal destiny is simply a matter of being in the right cognitive state is no better than the idea that the difference-maker regarding one's eternal destiny is a tattoo on the right forearm or a missing little toe on the right foot."⁸

Second, cognitive accounts would limit faith to those who explicitly profess or believe given propositions. This seems to rule out that faith could be a natural virtue, one that would be worth having for human life even outside religious contexts.⁹ Instead, Kvanvig proposes, a proper theology of faith can only be grounded upon this prior answer of how faith, generally, plays a beneficial role in human life: "In particular, what is [faith] for, that could possibly sustain a theology built around it, or uphold the idea that it is a major virtue of a well-lived life?"¹⁰ Further, when Kvanvig develops his account of affective faith, he presents cases where people can have faith that is non-religious, or faith without beliefs at all, as in the case of a Little League pitcher who has faith in his ideal of becoming a better pitcher.¹¹

⁵Kvanvig, *Faith and Humility*, 11.

⁶Kvanvig, *Faith and Humility*, 107–108.

⁷Kvanvig, *Faith and Humility*, 11.

⁸Kvanvig, *Faith and Humility*, 107.

⁹Kvanvig, *Faith and Humility*, 15.

¹⁰Kvanvig, *Faith and Humility*, 15.

¹¹Kvanvig, *Faith and Humility*, 19–20.

Again, there is a uniquely religious facet to this second objection. Identifying faith with belief in a given set of propositions will rule out that large numbers of people are saved. On such a cognitive theory of faith as belief in some particular list of propositions, if a person failed to believe one proposition in the list, they would fail to have faith. This is true even of the beliefs traditionally claimed to be so required for salvation, as for example those identified in the Athanasian Creed. Moses, Abraham, and the Apostles cannot be claimed plausibly to have held the propositions identified in the Athanasian Creed as necessary for salvation. And, further, the vast majority of people do not hold any particular beliefs in common which we could jointly identify as required for salvation.¹² Many people would then end up in hell. As a consequence, the cognitivist theory seems to be uncharitable: "It shows smallness of spirit to think that Nestorians, for example, are damned because of their beliefs. The most that could plausibly be claimed is that there will be no Nestorians in heaven—by the time they get there, they will have seen the light."¹³

1.b. Non-Cognitive Affective Faith

Kvanvig argues that, given the failure of cognitive faith to describe something of value, we should begin by describing why faith is valuable, and found our theory of faith on the role that it plays in people's lives.¹⁴ As Kvanvig sees it, there is a clear reason that people value faith. Faith is a trait of character which plays a role in people's lives and the way faith functions should "count as a good thing" for the people who have this trait.¹⁵ For faith to have these characteristics, to play a good role in people's lives, is merely for faith to be like any other virtuous trait of character. What distinguishes affective faith from other virtues is that faith plays a particular role. He defines affective faith as follows: "Faith . . . [is] an orientation or disposition toward the retaining of the goal or plan or project in the face of difficulties in achieving it, one prompted by affections of various sorts and involving complex mental states that are fundamentally affective even if they involve cognitive dimensions as well."¹⁶ This faith is obviously not uniquely religious, and Kvanvig sees this as an advantage of the account. Examples of non-religious faith might be a Little League pitcher persevering toward his athletic goals despite adversity.¹⁷

Faith's (natural) purpose is, for Kvanvig, giving meaning to one's life or unifying the projects one pursues because the faithful person acts in pursuit of an ideal. If this is true, Kvanvig argues, mere assent to a set of propositions of any kind can never fill this role. And Kvanvig is quite liberal with

¹²Kvanvig, *Faith and Humility*, 13–14.

¹³Kvanvig, *Faith and Humility*, 136.

¹⁴Kvanvig, *Faith and Humility*, 15.

¹⁵Kvanvig, *Faith and Humility*, 15.

¹⁶Kvanvig, *Faith and Humility*, 15.

¹⁷Kvanvig, *Faith and Humility*, 19.

what counts as an “ideal.” He criticizes Dewey (who offered a similar view of faith) for proposing limiting criteria supposedly internal to the nature of ideality to criticize some ideals, such as narrow-minded narcissism, as failing to be “ideals” of the right kind. By contrast, Kvanvig’s account of affective faith is descriptive and functional rather than normative, and so he holds there are no conditions internal to ideals to distinguish one from another. A selfish person acting only in their own narcissistic self-interest counts as acting in service of an ideal. And we can admire the character trait of pursuing these ideals, even when those ideals are morally noxious: “pursuing Nazi goals in the face of considerable danger is certainly odious behavior . . . but the question is whether it can nonetheless involve a display of courage.”¹⁸ Kvanvig thinks it does, as “one should be able to approve the character trait while disapproving the end pursued.”¹⁹

What is the role of belief in affective faith? Although beliefs might accidentally follow from the affective state (e.g., one comes to have certain beliefs after committing to an ideal),²⁰ Kvanvig rejects that belief in propositions has an intrinsic role in constituting that one has affective faith. The value of faith for Kvanvig is that faith gives unified meaning to human life in the face of difficulties, and such faith does not ordinarily require ontological commitment or beliefs in any particular set of propositions.²¹ This does not rule out that people of faith have cognitive commitments of any kind. Instead, “affective faith and the way of life embodying it will always involve cognitive commitments of one sort or another: how could it not? . . . the point, however, is that the precise nature of those cognitive commitments is quite indeterminate.”²²

At other times, Kvanvig appears to insist on the “multiple realizability” of what it is to act in service of an ideal such that *no particular* cognitive states are required for acting in that way: “The pattern [of behavior] is multiply realizable by a wide variety of underlying intentional states and attitudes. . . . What matters is that the responses fall into a pattern of the sort that counts as an instance of that disposition.”²³ He does briefly note that two particular people do not exemplify exactly the same pattern of behavior, given that they do not have exactly the same (inessential) cognitive and affective states that accompany the disposition to produce the pattern of behavior, but Kvanvig is not demanding exactly the same pattern; rather, “what we look for is some high degree of overall similarity.”²⁴

But this seems confused. Kvanvig vacillates between saying, as in the first case, that affective faith requires *indeterminate* cognitive content, and,

¹⁸Kvanvig, *Faith and Humility*, 65.

¹⁹Kvanvig, *Faith and Humility*, 65.

²⁰Kvanvig, “Affective Theism,” 125.

²¹Kvanvig, *Faith and Humility*, 112–113.

²²Kvanvig, *Faith and Humility*, 135.

²³Kvanvig, *Faith and Humility*, 128.

²⁴Kvanvig, *Faith and Humility*, 129.

in the second case, that affective faith requires no particular cognitive content. These do not strike me as obviously identical. One could have some basic cognitive disposition, a doxastic state, and yet have no particular proposition in mind—my mental state would be indeterminate. Perhaps I believe somebody is the President of the United States, but I do not have a proposition in mind as to who that is. This seems to me a way someone could have indeterminate cognitive content. Nevertheless, what Kvanvig seems to mean is the second rather than the first: he insists that the same disposition to act a certain way, to produce a pattern of behaviors, can exist without any other cognitive or affective dispositions being required for or essential for the production of that pattern. It will become important to distinguish that claim from the very different claim that some cognitive or affective attitudes are necessary to support some disposition, but what these attitudes are can differ among instances according to some norm, or involve non-propositional cognitive content, etc. (and so be indeterminate).

Finally, Kvanvig sees religious affective faith as a sub-species of the general case: whereas affective faith is a disposition to act in service of an ideal, religious affective faith is acting in service of a religious ideal. As Kvanvig notes, “In the Christian tradition faith is supposed to be central to salvation.”²⁵ Yet “the centrality of faith to salvation doesn’t by itself yield the right kind of defense of it. In order to assess the significance of the kind of faith in question, we begin by asking . . . why would it be that this particular phenomenon is so central to eternal salvation?”²⁶ Kvanvig then argues that non-cognitivism makes an internal relation of faith to salvation clear: “an account of faith in terms of dispositions to respond in service of an ideal is easily seen as being internally related to a process of reconciliation when the ideal itself is or involves the coming of the Kingdom of God and what it represents.”²⁷

Despite Kvanvig’s occasional use of the term “saving faith,” there is no further explicit elaboration of what Christian salvation involves. But, as I will present in my objections, there are enough statements of what saving faith is *not* that allows us to (by contrast) reconstruct Kvanvig’s picture. One of those clear denials is believers need not have any cognitive beliefs about Christianity, including beliefs that any Christian doctrine is true, in order to count as having affective faith in Christ:

even if it is in some sense required that one come at some point to believe certain things and to adopt a particular cognitive perspective on all there is and one’s place in it, it would be a strange gospel to impose this requirement in the backtracking fashion that insists that what must be true in the end in order to be saved must be true now in order to be being saved.²⁸

²⁵Kvanvig, *Faith and Humility*, 105.

²⁶Kvanvig, *Faith and Humility*, 105.

²⁷Kvanvig, “Affective Theism,” 107.

²⁸Kvanvig, *Faith and Humility*, 136.

Kvanvig is clear (as we will see) in holding that anyone could conceivably commit to acting as a “believer” with affective faith, following Christ or bringing about the Kingdom, even while consciously denying that Christ ever existed.

However, Kvanvig likely holds that there is no need to give an elaborate account of salvation because the model of affective religious faith is functional, like the account of affective faith generally speaking. Then, because there are no constitutive beliefs or attitudes other than a disposition to act for an ideal, we do not need to specify what that Christian ideal actually is. As long as there is some distinctively Christian ideal, such as following Jesus, and someone counts as acting in service of *that*, they thereby count as having saving faith. Naturally, Christians will hold that their ideal is worth pursuing, so affective religious faith that commits one to pursuing Christian ideals is valuable. Thus, nothing further *needs* to be said about salvation.

2. Thomas Aquinas

2.a. Salvation as Deification

Thomas Aquinas constructs the account of faith in the *Summa Theologiae* in the context of an explicit elaboration of the goal of Christian life. He does this for reasons similar to Kvanvig: Aquinas wants to show why faith is valuable. In general, Aquinas holds that the end of human life lies essentially in contemplation of God’s essence (the “Beatific Vision”).²⁹ For my purposes, I will focus only on the way Aquinas thinks we can attain this goal. Aquinas, I argue, presents a plausible picture of human life as finding its perfection in relationship with God. Aquinas then shows this picture of salvation entails that human beings need a cognitive virtue in order to engage in a relationship with God, and he identifies faith as that cognitive virtue.

Aquinas holds we cannot have complete or true virtue without charity.³⁰ Charity is a virtue of personal love of God, which Aquinas refers to as a kind of “friendship” between a human and God. But Aquinas notes that wishing someone well does not constitute friendship. Instead: “a certain mutual love is requisite, since friendship is between friend and friend: and this well-wishing is founded on some kind of communication.”³¹ Friendship requires both mutual love between parties and communication as necessary conditions. The human-God species of friendship, then, will involve not only mutual affection, but some kind of communication. As we will see, Aquinas thinks God takes the initiative in founding this friendship because God shares with human beings knowledge of Himself.

²⁹Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* Iallae 3, 8.

³⁰See especially Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* IIallae 23, 6–8.

³¹Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* IIallae 23, 2.

Yet friendship with God is not something human beings are naturally capable of having.³² Not only are humans born in a state where they are unable to choose actually to engage in relationship with God (original sin), but they also lack the right capacities (cognitive, etc.) to be in personal relationship with God.³³ God therefore needs to give grace and cause the human being to undergo a kind of ontological change where the human being shares in God's own mode of existence (sanctifying grace).³⁴ Whatever this state involves, the important point is that God gives the human being certain capacities (infused virtues, theological virtues, Gifts of the Holy Spirit) that enable them to engage in personal relationship with God.³⁵ In sum, because the human being is made by God to be like God, the human being can know and love God in a similar way to how God knows and loves Himself.

Thomas therefore holds that salvation is a process of "divinization/deification," coming to be like God, and this process involves a change in cognitive as well as affective dispositions.³⁶ Human beings not only change what they do, but how they *are*. Aquinas is echoing a traditional Christian vision of salvation, inherited from the early Church. This view of salvation is highly ecumenical and defended extensively by contemporary theologians.³⁷ For that reason, one does not need to accept the details of the Thomistic theory in order to accept a picture of salvation as deification. That view, at minimum, involves the following two theses: that salvation lies in metaphysical likeness to God through personal relationship, and God's grace is necessary to permit people to have the capacity to engage in this relationship.

Thomas begins the *Summa Theologiae* with an argument that salvation requires knowledge beyond "naturally" discoverable knowledge of God. First, special knowledge was necessary because "man is ordered to God as to an end which exceeds the comprehension of reasoning. . . . The end, however, must be first known by men, whose intentions and actions should be ordered to that end."³⁸ The second reason depends on the first: men

³²A complicated discussion, in Thomistic tradition, turns on the meaning of the term "capable" in this claim. Among some Thomists, there is a kind of remote capability for human beings to have the Beatific Vision called an "obediential potency." I am leaving aside the complexities of this discussion, and merely focusing on the far less controversial claim that supernatural activities of union with God, in virtue of being supernatural, are beyond natural human capabilities.

³³Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* Ia1ae 109, 2.

³⁴Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* Ia1ae 110, 2

³⁵See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* Ia1ae 110, 4 ad 1.

³⁶Cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* Ia1ae 112, 11. See also Hofer, "Aquinas, Divinization, and the People in the Pews," 54–72.

³⁷There is an extensive literature on the topic. For example, Christensen and Wittung, *Partakers of the Divine Nature*; Meconi and Olson, *Called to be the Children of God*; Williams, *The Ground of Union*; Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*.

³⁸Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* Ia 1,1 [quia homo ordinatur ad Deum sicut ad quendam finem qui comprehensionem rationis excedit. . . . Finem autem oportet esse praecognitum

would not know securely or with certainty even the naturally knowable truths that are necessary for understanding that goal. Both responses involve some presuppositions Aquinas makes about motivation and human choice. For Aquinas, all human action involves the intellect's perceiving something as a good, which the will is then enabled to desire as its object and so act upon in a variety of ways (e.g., mere wish, decision, etc.). Consequently, nothing can be chosen by my will without a prior intellectual act whereby I come to see why I have a reason for action; i.e., I "perceive" some end as good and then can choose means to achieve it.³⁹ Human action is end-oriented, and any intentional act requires understanding of an end before a human can intend to act in any way.⁴⁰

Aquinas notes that God has given human beings a special goal in life: personal relationship with Him. This end would require knowledge not merely of God acquired from God's effects (e.g., natural theology), but of God as He is in Himself and as having specific intentions toward humans.⁴¹ But, then, we run into a problem: God is both beyond human comprehension *and* not directly accessible to our cognition. God is an entirely immaterial being, so we can at most reason to Him from His effects in sensible reality, but His immaterial nature is not directly accessible because of our cognitive limitations.⁴² Human cognitive powers are oriented toward material, sensible things, and not immaterial ones. For this reason, if we are to act so as to enter into a relationship with God, who is beyond the natural scope of our cognitive abilities, "it was necessary for the salvation of men that something be made known to them by divine revelation which exceeds [the natural power of] human reason."⁴³

This engaging in friendship with God requires that a human has knowledge necessary to do so, and it is this knowledge that permits affective states in relation to God (e.g., charity, or other consequent virtues or Gifts). Aquinas even responds to an objection here that union involving

hominibus, qui suas intentiones et actiones debent ordinare in finem.]

³⁹The argumentative strategy in the *Summa Theologiae* is practically identical with that used elsewhere in the corpus for this same point; cf., *Summa Contra Gentiles* I 5, 2: "nobody tends toward something studiously and with zeal unless they first perceive it." [Nullus enim desiderio et studio in aliquid tendit nisi sit ei praecognitum.]

⁴⁰Sherwin, *By Knowledge and By Love*, 22.

⁴¹Aquinas claims that belief in the Trinity, a properly revealed doctrine about God's nature, is required of all people at all times, and in God's actions in Christ, but he qualifies that this faith can be (as I will explain later) *implicit*. While belief in the Incarnation is explicitly qualified as encompassing in a general belief in divine providence, Aquinas is less clear how the Trinity is implicit in other beliefs. On one Thomistic theory, belief in the existence of God and His Providence, termed "primary credibilia" is sufficient for salvation (see Nichols, *Chalice of God*, 94). While I take no stand on this here, it is noteworthy the way Aquinas states the issue might indicate that a believer needs to hold some doctrine about God as He is in Himself beyond belief in God's mere existence, perhaps that God is "sovereign Goodness." Cf., Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* IIaIIae 2, 7, ad 3, and 2, 8, resp. and ad 1–3.

⁴²Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* Ia 12, 12.

⁴³Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* Ia 1, 1 [necessarium fuit homini ad salutem, quod ei nota fierent quaedam per revelationem divinam, quae rationem humanam excedunt].

only our affective faculties—love—would be sufficient for a relationship with God without knowledge of Him. Aquinas responds that our union with God is not union of a faculty or a part of the human person with God, but a complete union of our person to God in a mode appropriately personal. A union of my “affective faculties” or acts with someone else—e.g., you and I both feeling the same emotion, but being unaware of each other, residing on either sides of the planet—would not be a friendship. So, Aquinas plausibly suggests, a personal union of the friendship sort requires having right perception of what one loves.

As Aquinas sees it, friendship with God is like any other friendship insofar as not only do both parties need to love each other, but their love needs to be mutually responsive, and this involves cognition of some kind. (It seems plausible to cash out this requirement in contemporary language of “joint attention” and “shared knowledge,” which are cognitive states to some degree.⁴⁴) Thus, Aquinas concludes: “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.”⁴⁵ Therefore, Aquinas concludes that we can have a personal relationship with God only if God reveals Himself to human beings as someone who wants to be friends with us, and that it is precisely this cognitive communication of God’s readiness to engage in a relationship that permits each to engage in truly mutual affection. As Aquinas says, we can only tend toward or seek God given that we know something about Him by the articles of faith, and so acceptance of God’s testimony about Himself is then a prerequisite for achieving deification (“salvific deformity”).⁴⁶ As we will see, Aquinas then argues that sustaining the cognitive states involved in this mutual awareness requires that the human have a cognitive virtue: faith.

2.b. Thomas Aquinas’s Cognitive Account of Faith

Aquinas is operating from the presupposition that Christian life aims at a personal relationship with God not merely in an afterlife but here below. But personal knowledge of God is required to enter into relationship with Him. Aquinas proposes that this personal knowledge of God, as required for friendship, is sustained in believers by a cognitive virtue: call this “Thomistic” faith. After presenting the essential features of this virtue

⁴⁴While the literature is voluminous on this topic, see for example Carpenter and Liebal, “Joint Attention, Communication, and Knowing Together in Infancy,” 159–181.

⁴⁵Sherwin, *By Knowledge and By Love*, 151.

⁴⁶Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* IIaIIae 4, 7, ad 5. This claim will be qualified below. Aquinas holds that there are minimal beliefs necessary for forming a relationship with God, and these beliefs are outlined in such a way as to leave open the possibility that those who have never heard the preaching of the Christian Gospel can come to personal relationship with God because of such beliefs.

and its relationship to propositions, I will address the obvious objections to the cognitive account. This will show that Thomist faith is robust and valuable. Thomistic faith will illustrate not only that affective faith misses an important aspect of Christian life, but that affective faith is unmotivated because (at least) one cognitive theory of faith can plausibly avoid the motivating objections.

Thomistic faith is an intellectual virtue by which a believer comes to accept certain propositions from God Himself and acquire testimonial knowledge. The nature of the virtue is cognitive, because the virtue aims at accepting propositions, but the believer is not exclusively motivated by “purely” cognitive reasons to accept these propositions. Aquinas says that faith involves the activity of the will in choosing to accept the testimony of God.⁴⁷ In this, I am abstracting from whether and how acceptance of propositions from God comes about—I do not consider how acts of faith are justified. It is noteworthy for our purposes that Aquinas rejects the view that the assent of faith can be compelled by the weight of the evidence.⁴⁸ Aquinas has a story that involves God’s grace moving a person to accept what is proposed by revelation.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, Aquinas believes that the case of faith is relevantly like accepting testimony from another human being, but that God’s grace is necessary for the hearer to understand or otherwise perceive that God is proposing some propositions to the hearer for belief.⁵⁰

What does God propose for acceptance? God needs to reveal Himself in order to allow human beings to be in a personal relationship with Him. In an ordinary relationship with another person, I need to perceive that person as a person before I can have any relationship at all. Similarly with God, the key propositions that God reveals are those which concern facts about God’s personal nature as, for example, that God is a Trinity of Persons. While Aquinas thinks we can acquire natural knowledge of God as cause of the universe, these revealed statements are not such natural knowledge, but rather expressions of how God understands Himself.⁵¹ Trinitarian propositions are the best examples of properly revealed truths, being things only God can know.⁵² Without God revealing them, Aquinas

⁴⁷Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* IIaIIae 4, 2.

⁴⁸A very clear account of Thomistic faith that construes faith as testimonial knowledge can be found in Lamont, *Divine Faith*; for a discussion of justification and motivation of accepting God’s testimony, see esp. 187–206.

⁴⁹Cf., Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* IIaIIae 6, 1 but also IIaIIae 2, 9, ad 3.

⁵⁰Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* IIaIIae 6, 1 [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. Therefore faith, as regards the assent which is the chief act of faith, is from God moving man inwardly by grace].

⁵¹Gregory Rocca describes this as the switch between thinking of truth in concepts as “meaning-dependent” and instead switching to seeing the meaning of divine names as “truth-dependent.” While limited in being phrased in human concepts, the *referent* of what is predicated is modified; *Speaking the Incomprehensible God*, 195.

⁵²Maritain, *Degrees of Knowledge*, 298.

thinks, we could never know God is a Trinity. Therefore, because humans have no cognitive access to God's essence, we cannot "verify" that God is a Trinity, and can only take it on God's say-so.

It is these particular kinds of propositions that facilitate coming to understand God personally. Initially, humans do not know fully what these propositions mean.⁵³ Yet they are true statements about God's personal nature, and they facilitate a growth in mutual awareness and love. Aquinas compares the process of moving from faith to deeper cognitive awareness of God with the case of a student who accepts his teacher's say-so on some matter he is being taught and then comes to understand the matter more fully later.⁵⁴ Aquinas thinks it is on the basis of this propositional awareness of God that a person can acquire non-propositional mystical acquaintance with God, as God will "indwell" the believer as long as they have loving faith.⁵⁵

Aquinas holds that faith ordinarily requires assent to propositions. First, there are good reasons that we might only be able to be aware of God in the right way through propositions. Humans are not cognitively equipped to recognize God's intentions without His help; also, God has to "lower" Himself to accommodate our ordinary ways of knowing. But why propositions in particular? Here we can be a bit speculative: for Aquinas, natural knowledge of God in this life is limited to indirect knowledge of God via His effects. Yet the kind of knowledge required to form a relationship must also be personal in allowing us to learn who God is as a *person*. Communication involving propositions seems to be the only way to do this. God is utterly simple and beyond our comprehension, so who and what God is has to be explained using sets of propositions suitable to our way of knowing.⁵⁶

Second, there are good independent reasons for God to use propositions to communicate with us. Aquinas thinks one could also be made aware of God by special revelation. Such revelations are, comparatively, rare.⁵⁷ We can speculate that Aquinas thinks God has good reasons for not revealing Himself ordinarily in these ways. One good to be gained by learning the faith from others is the promotion of charity among human beings who form the Church on earth—they are not self-sufficient to engage in relationship with God by themselves, but require apostles,

⁵³Smith, *Thomas Aquinas' Trinitarian Theology*, 191.

⁵⁴Thomas Aquinas, *In librum B. Dionysii De divinis nominibus expositio*, I-1, nn. 61–82.

⁵⁵The three intellectual Gifts are understanding (Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* IIaIIae 8), knowledge (9), and wisdom (45). The one most resembling non-propositional acquaintance is wisdom.

⁵⁶Although it refers to the complexity of propositions in general, Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* IIaIIae 1, 2. Cf., IIaIIae 1, 6 ad 2. Consider why Aquinas rules out prophetic visions as a suitable means for union with God: *Summa Theologiae* IIaIIae 171, 1.

⁵⁷Aquinas proposes, however, that revelations of Christ might have occurred either explicitly or privately before Christ by the ministry of the angels (Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* IIaIIae 2, 5 ad 3).

evangelists, teachers, pastors, and so forth.⁵⁸ Humans can transmit propositions in verbal or written sentences, but they could not do so with non-propositional knowledge.

As we saw, Aquinas does believe there is non-propositional knowledge of God through mysticism. Yet mystical acquaintance with God, the non-propositional knowledge believers can have of God through the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, presumes the presence of the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love.⁵⁹ Aquinas allows that, for example, the Gift of Wisdom enables the believer to judge about God not by reasoning or propositional knowledge, but by what Aquinas calls a kind of sympathy or connaturality (*compassio sive connaturalitas*) with God. As the Gift of Wisdom is precisely connatural knowledge that arises from *love* of God, the believer could not have the Gift of Wisdom or any similar connatural knowledge of God without already having charity.⁶⁰ And, as we have already seen, Aquinas holds that faith is the foundation of right relationship with and love of God: "As the principle of corporeal love lies in vision by means of a corporeal eye, so similarly that which begins spiritual love ought to be on account of the intellectual vision of what can be loved spiritually. The vision of that spiritually lovable thing, namely God, is something not possible for us to have in the present life except through faith."⁶¹ In sum, faith involves propositions both because of our cognitive limitations and because propositions facilitate (directly or indirectly) forming the right kind of relationship with God. Without faith, it would not be possible for human beings to come to love God in the way that produces their ultimate beatitude.⁶²

2.c. Responding to the Motivating Objections

Whether or not Aquinas is correct that faith strictly requires propositions, he gives us a picture of how we could reasonably expect that faith ordinarily involves such propositions. I argue, then, Thomas's account makes

⁵⁸This is the point of the gratuitous graces (like the grace of words, Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* IIaIIae, 177, 1) and of duties in the Church (*Summa Theologiae* IIaIIae 183, 2).

⁵⁹E.g., Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* IaIIae 68, 8, resp. and ad 2.

⁶⁰Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* IIaIIae 45, 2.

⁶¹Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* III, 118 [Sicut enim amationis corporalis principium est visio quae est per oculum corporalem, ita etiam dilectionis spiritualis initium esse oportet visionem intelligibilem diligibilem spiritualis. Visio autem illius spiritualis diligibilis quod est Deus, in praesenti haberi non potest a nobis nisi per fidem: eo quod naturalem rationem excedit; et praecipue secundum quod in eius fruitione nostra beatitudo consistit. Oportet igitur quod ex lege divina in fidem rectam inducamur].

⁶²Although it is important to note that one could follow the main of Aquinas's account that we require the right kind of personal knowledge of God, but nevertheless deny this knowledge is even ordinarily propositional. Nevertheless, such a view would be opposed to non-cognitivism about faith because of the constitutive role of knowledge. The view could lead to a variant non-cognitivism, however, if it were true not only that we have non-propositional awareness of God but also that this awareness cannot be communicated in propositions of any sort. Such a view would require a different response than the one I offer of Kvanvig's version of non-cognitivism.

it clear how propositions relate internally to the valuable cognitive virtue that is faith. And we will see that faith is nevertheless valuable in addition to the value of the truth of those propositions. If this is true, Thomistic faith avoids the first of Kvanvig's criticisms.

Aquinas holds faith can be defined as "a habit of mind making the intellect to assent to that which is not apparent, by which eternal life is begun in us." It is the latter part of that definition that highlights the internal connection of salvation to belief as a cognitive virtue. The knowledge of God constitutive of our happiness in heaven is contained virtually in the propositions to which faith assents—in other words, they refer to God and enable us to come to know Him more fully.⁶³ By adhering to the truths of the faith, we can stand outside of merely human knowledge and be "deified" through participating in God's self-knowing.⁶⁴ Aquinas uses this point to claim that all believers share "the mind of Christ."⁶⁵ The value of faith as a cognitive virtue is that it enables a human being to know God as God knows Himself.

We can see why the virtue is distinct from the propositions, because Aquinas holds that one needs to accept the relevant propositions *because* they were proposed for belief by God. Aquinas uses the case of the "faith" of demons (mentioned in the Epistle of St. James) as an illustration. The demons acquire cognitive certainty that some propositions are being proposed by God for belief because of their special cognitive capacities—demons can recognize a true prophet, miracles, etc. They know God always tells the truth, so they come to acquire knowledge and belief in those propositions.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, Aquinas holds, the demons lack the virtue of faith, even though they believe all the same propositions that a Christian believes. Demonic faith is not a cognitive virtue because the demons did not accept these propositions for the right reasons. A believer has a cognitive virtue not merely because they accept some propositions, but because they accept the propositions in a cognitively virtuous manner: believers accept the propositions *because* they trust God and accept His testimony. The demons do not accept the propositions because they trust God (they don't); demons came independently to see some propositions were true.

Aquinas therefore proposes that the "object" of faith is really God Himself as testifier, trust in whom is the reason one assents to whatever propositions He proposes for belief. Aquinas uses the language of "formal object" to refer to the fact that God is the object of the believer's trust, and "material object" to refer to the propositions that are accepted in virtue of

⁶³Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* IIaIIae 4, 1 [habitus mentis, qua inchoatur vita aeterna in nobis, faciens intellectum assentire non apparentibus].

⁶⁴Aquinas, *In librum B. Dionysii De divinis nominibus expositio*, VII-1, nn. 50–57.

⁶⁵Aquinas, *Super I Epistolam B. Pauli ad Corinthios lectura*, caput 2, lec. 3.

⁶⁶Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* IIaIIae 5, 2.

that trust.⁶⁷ The demons go wrong because, although they accept the material objects of faith (the propositions), they do not have the right formal object: trust in God. Kvanvig objects: "The idea that one must believe a certain set of doctrines, independent of coming to see them as true from a love of truth, is baffling."⁶⁸ Yet, for Aquinas, God is Truth itself ("First Truth"), and one has saving faith only when one assents to what God reveals because you love God, who is Truth.⁶⁹ Thus, ironically, it is precisely love for Truth that is supposed to motivate the believer to accept propositions God proposes. Further, it is *only* when the believer assents out of respect for the Truth that they have Thomistic faith. The difference is then that Aquinas thinks love of true propositions is not mutually exclusive with, but complements, love of God. As God is that First Truth in virtue of which propositions are true, believing a proposition because God testifies to its truth can *better* exemplify love of the truth than believing a proposition because one comes to be independently convinced of its truth (e.g., being convinced by inductive reasoning).

What I have hoped to show in presenting Aquinas's account of faith so far is that Thomistic faith is not merely assent to propositions, but a valuable doxastic attitude of epistemic trust in God. The second of Kvanvig's criticisms, however, presented a different challenge. The second criticism was that a cognitive model of faith limited faith to those who profess explicit acceptance of some set of propositions, but that many people who had religious faith (Moses, Abraham, and the apostles) did not believe the same propositions. To respond to the second challenge, we should note that Aquinas holds there are strong cognitive limits on our knowledge of God.⁷⁰ The propositions believed only need to be of the appropriate character for human beings to engage in relationship with God, and, as we will see, Aquinas's construal of the requirement is relatively liberal. Aquinas proposes two conditions on the propositions involved in faith. The first is a negative condition: there will be a minimum necessary set of propositions to accept in order to count as having faith. The second is a positive condition: people can be obligated to believe different specific beliefs which follow from that minimum set of propositions, depending on circumstances, and failure to do so can be culpable.

The negative condition is easier to grasp. We might characterize the virtue of Thomistic faith as a form of intellectual humility. On one side, this virtue involves being deferential not only to God Himself, but also to those instruments of God's revelation, such as Scripture, prophets, evangelists, or

⁶⁷Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* IIaIIae 1, 1.

⁶⁸Kvanvig, *Faith and Humility*, 136.

⁶⁹The role of faith is a necessary condition for justification, Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* IIaIIae 113, 4, resp. and ad 1. Nevertheless, Aquinas also holds that there is the possibility of faith that is *not* informed by love of God. This is "formless faith," and formless faith does not suffice for salvation. In this case, one would believe God, but not because one loves Him.

⁷⁰We cannot know *what* God is in this life, even by revelation; Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I 12, 13 ad 1.

the Church's pastors. This is why Aquinas holds that adherence to the doctrines passed down in Scripture and the hierarchical tradition of the Church is the *only* way to trust correctly in God's testimony, as an "infallible rule of the faith."⁷¹ And, as intellectual humility, faith not only involves assent, but withholding assent when appropriate. Duties of withholding assent are apparent in Thomas's Trinitarian theology, where he thinks we have to avoid trying to say too much and restrain ourselves to what we know about the Trinity by revelation, sticking closely to the words of Scripture.⁷²

We will therefore expect that, because faith is valuable in light of the personal relationship with God, the minimum propositions required to have faith will be beliefs that God exists as a personal being and that He is interested in engaging in relationship with human beings. Unsurprisingly, Aquinas explicitly identifies the minimum necessary set of propositions required to count as having faith as precisely these two beliefs: "all the articles are contained implicitly in certain primary matters of faith, such as God's existence, and His providence over the salvation of man, according to Hebrews 11: 'He that cometh to God, must believe that He is, and is a rewarder to them that seek Him.'"⁷³

Aquinas does not mean that all the articles of faith (e.g., Incarnation) are logical entailments of the belief that God exists and that He rewards those who seek Him. Rather, it seems instead that there are minimum beliefs required to have the right understanding of God, and then all other propositions God reveals can be considered as (a posteriori) specifications of those beliefs. These additional articles of faith that God revealed, Aquinas thinks, are cognitively valuable. Explicit knowledge of the Passion or Trinity give us moral guidance and help us know God better, so while theological elaboration is not sufficient for growth in charity, it is intrinsically suited to promote it.⁷⁴

Aquinas thinks every saved person holds these two basic beliefs at least implicitly. Kvanvig actually concedes this point to Aquinas. While Abraham did not profess the Athanasian Creed, nor did Abraham explicitly endorse claims "that God is redemptive or that God is for us," still Kvanvig thinks "it is obvious that, among his cognitive commitments can be found claims that entail that God is redemptive or that God is for us."⁷⁵ Similarly, while Abraham or Moses or the Apostles did not profess the Athanasian or Nicene Creeds, it is plausible that they were committed to claims like the two Aquinas lays out as the minimal necessary for faith.

The positive condition on what needs to be believed is harder to enunciate, as it depends on many factors, not least of which is what period of

⁷¹Aquinas, *In librum B. Dionysii De divinis nominibus expositio*, I-1, nn. 29–40.

⁷²Smith, *Thomas Aquinas' Trinitarian Theology*, 154–156. cf., Sokolowski, "God's Word and Human Speech," 203.

⁷³Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* IIaIIae 1, 7.

⁷⁴Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* IIaIIae 1, 7 ad 2–4.

⁷⁵Kvanvig, *Faith and Humility*, 80.

time and place a believer lives! Faith is a properly intellectual virtue, and so it ordinarily involves assent to propositions. But, as an attitude toward a person, the doxastic attitude of faith can take different objects in different situations, depending on how God has proposed a belief *to you*. Aquinas holds that God revealed Himself gradually to humanity over the course of history, and there are different obligations for different people. Moses, Abraham, and the Apostles therefore had different epistemic obligations, even if they all held the minimal necessary propositions required for faith. Aquinas rejects the view that everyone is required explicitly to believe, for instance, the propositions of the Athanasian Creed. Rather, whether you have the relevant virtue depends on your cognitive capacity, station, place, time, and many other factors. The key is that one is responsive *to God* from one's situation.

Thomistic faith accommodates innocent epistemic errors. Even if a believer disbelieves in some revealed propositions, you can still have faith if you retain the right attitude toward more basic propositions of the faith (e.g., "everything in Scripture is God's word").⁷⁶ Failure in believing what is, in fact, the material object of faith does not automatically entail that one does not believe in the right formal object (e.g., someone might be misinformed as to what is in Scripture on the question of, say, whether Abraham was the father of Melchizedek). But this misinformation does not automatically mean that this person no longer believes in Scripture as God's revelation. The easy way Aquinas proposes to tell whether this person has the virtue of faith is to correct them and observe the reaction of the believer: citing St. Augustine and the Decretals, "'By no means should we accuse of heresy those who, however false and perverse their opinion may be, defend it without obstinate fervor, and seek the truth with careful anxiety, ready to mend their opinion, when they have found the truth,' because, to wit, they do not make a choice in contradiction to the doctrine of the Church. Accordingly, certain doctors seem to have differed either in matters the holding of which in this or that way is of no consequence, so far as faith is concerned, or even in matters of faith, which were not as yet defined by the Church."⁷⁷

But, as Aquinas immediately notes, we can be sure that someone who persists obstinately in their own opinion even when corrected or is such that they are not sensitive to the teaching of the Church or Scripture, is someone who lacks faith.⁷⁸ Thus the reverse is equally possible: someone who denies one article of the faith, even if assenting to everything else in Scripture, can lack the formal motivation to believe of someone having faith.⁷⁹ "Heresy" involves belief in some of the same propositions as believers, but not for the right reasons. Heresy is thus relevantly like what we

⁷⁶Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* IIaIIae 2, 3.

⁷⁷Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* IIaIIae 11, 2 ad 3.

⁷⁸Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* IIaIIae 11, 2 ad 3.

⁷⁹Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* IIaIIae 5, 3, ad 2.

saw in demonic faith: believing in the articles of faith, e.g., because I think they are likely true, is to lack trust in *God's knowledge* and instead to trust in my own. In this case, one is not expressing the right attitude toward God's testimony by sifting through what one agrees or disagrees with.

Given that faith is an epistemically virtuous way we defer our judgment to God, a species of intellectual humility, it is then clear why Aquinas thinks not deferring our judgment to God in matters proper to faith is an epistemic vice. This is analogous to what might be wrong in willfully distrusting known epistemic experts: teachers, scientists, etc. This is then how to interpret why vices of unbelief and of heresy are evil. These vices do not consist in merely not believing some propositions (just as faith is not merely belief in propositions). Heresy is a form of intellectual pride, and such pride is clearly a vice.⁸⁰ The fact that such sins are possible (*pace* Kvanvig) does not seem more problematic than holding that sins can be committed with our intellects as well as with our bodies. A person can sin from an inordinate desire for knowledge just as well as other from other desires; e.g., Nazi doctors misused a desire for scientific knowledge to justify atrocities. So it seems perfectly possible that not believing in certain revealed propositions could in some cases be culpable and lead to damnation. As faith is a prerequisite to love of God, so, in virtue of being someone who does not believe for the right reasons, a true heretic does not love God.

Kvanvig also seems to accept the possibility that breaking faith can merit punishment at least in some circumstances, as he acknowledges that there might be reasonable and acceptable ways to sanction those who break communion of faith with other Christians.⁸¹ However, Kvanvig often rhetorically links a cognitive theory of faith with the view that deviations from doctrine should require ecclesial sanctions. Nevertheless, there are two distinct questions involved—whether faith constitutively involves cognitive states and whether we can punish people for deviant cognitive states. Even if it is true that heresy can be, in some cases, a moral evil, such a view of heresy would *not* entail approval of any vehement condemnatory rhetoric surrounding heresy, state or ecclesial sanctions of heretics, particular ways of speaking about or to heretics (e.g., anathemas), and so forth.⁸² Whether, how, or under what circumstances Christians ought

⁸⁰Although the proximate end of heresy is a kind of intellectual pride, Aquinas also thinks one could be a heretic for covetousness as well as for more general pride; *Summa Theologiae* IIaIIae 11, 1 ad 2 [“the proximate end of heresy is adherence to one’s own false opinion, and from this it derives its species, while its remote end reveals its cause, viz. that it arises from pride or covetousness”].

⁸¹Kvanvig, *Faith and Humility*, 75–76 gives a comparatively positive account of excommunication (Kvanvig calls this all “anathema,” but he seems to mean a practical sanction like excommunication) in the life of the early Church.

⁸²It is helpful to recall that, for Aquinas, there can be many cases of “material” heresy, where one non-culpably comes to believe something erroneous about the Christian faith. Such non-culpable error is not best dealt with by condemnations and, in fact, such condemnations are inappropriate. By illustration, one can see such a theory of non-culpable error

to sanction their own members, whether for heresy or anything else in general, is a distinct issue from what faith does or does not constitutively involve. A Thomistic account of faith does not require a particular theory of ecclesial sanctions and so I see no need to defend such a view here.

Thomistic faith is premised on the view that salvation constitutively involves personal friendship with God. As friendship requires mutual attention and awareness, friendship requires some cognitive states in the friends. Aquinas then argues that the relevant cognitive states that human beings could have toward God, in order to be aware of Him, have to come through revelation and ordinarily involve propositions. Consequently, the virtue of Thomistic faith is an epistemic virtue of reliance on God's testimony about Himself—it is, simply, a form of epistemic humility. Not only does faith lead to assent to propositions, but also restraint from affirming too much and overstepping epistemic boundaries. Finally, it becomes clear why people might possess the same virtue of faith even though they have varying moral obligations to believe different sets of propositions, depending on their circumstances. Thomistic faith is valuable because it is partially constitutive of a human being's loving relationship with God.

Three Issues with Non-Cognitivism

3.a. First: Cognitive Faith is More Valuable

If we compare the two views, a first reason to prefer Thomistic faith is that affective faith is either not intrinsically valuable or only valuable when it forms part of a complex state. The value of affective faith is dependent both on the nature of the ideal to which one commits and how one commits to that ideal. This is illustrated in the fact that affective faith can take on various ideals, and there seem to be no limits on what ideals one can commit to by affective faith. Kvanvig utilizes this feature very often to argue that non-cognitivism is more pluralist or inclusive than cognitivism, because commitment to an ideal can involve any number of kinds of ideals and we cannot a priori rule out any ideal as valuable for someone. This raises a worry that Kvanvig could admit commitment to any number of ideals, from morally praiseworthy to despicable, as equally instances of affective faith. In general, one might think that the *ideal* to which one commits is that which has intrinsic value or disvalue, and it is from the ideal that the virtue derives its value.⁸³ For one to commit to a despicable ideal with affective faith would be morally odious, not praiseworthy.

While Kvanvig disclaims that there are any criteria internal to affective faith to differentiate these ideals, Kvanvig does offer criteria *external*

implicit in the way that theological dialogue with other Christians involves embracing a principle of charitable interpretation.

⁸³This worry does not presume a "unity of the virtues" thesis (that one cannot have any of the virtues unless one has them all) which is an assumption Kvanvig explicitly denies (*Faith and Humility*, 143). Rather, the worry is that, whether by itself or in combination with any other virtuous states, affective faith only appears valuable instrumental to attain some other intrinsically virtuous state or state of affairs.

to affective faith that would rule out these cases. Kvanvig gives a partial account of how affective faith needs to be counter-balanced by humility, and perhaps another executive virtue, and it is only the complex state of having affective faith + humility (+ wisdom?) that is truly valuable.⁸⁴ Traditionally, by comparison, practical wisdom (i.e., prudence) is a virtue that is a quasi-intellectual virtue, by which an agent perceives *in truth* when and how to act rightly; i.e., it is essential to practical wisdom that one have correct cognitive perception of moral reality (whatever that is). Kvanvig introduces a similar requirement into humility. According to Kvanvig, humility involves “directing of attention for the right reasons.”⁸⁵ Humility then, like prudence, essentially involves cognitive states conforming to reality and to the true or appropriate reasons for action. For this reason, those ideals worth having are only those which constitutively involve the right reasons for action. If this is the way to understand Kvanvig’s overall picture, then affective faith is best described neither as intrinsically or instrumentally valuable, but as a constitutive aspect of a more complex state.⁸⁶ Yet, as the further state of affective faith involving humility is what is truly valuable, it would appear that affective faith is of dubious character as a virtue in its own right apart from these other states.

By contrast, Aquinas’s account of the theological virtue of faith has an entirely different object. Thomistic faith is about a person, not an ideal or pattern of behavior—God is First Truth and Love itself. As God is First Truth, He is uniquely trustworthy, and so the believer gains a kind of infallibility in what they believe.⁸⁷ Thomistic faith involves attention to propositions, but is primarily attention to a person proposing those propositions and to whom those propositions refer—God. AtTMt least, if humility is valuable, Thomistic faith is too. The Thomistic virtue of faith is therefore like a species of intellectual humility whereby the believer practices appropriate cognitive deference to God. Thomistic faith is valuable as ordinarily constitutive of a relationship with God. Love is impossible without faith, and faith that is livened by charity is the beginning of what it is to possess the eternal happiness of heaven even while on earth.⁸⁸

The virtue of Thomistic faith is thus valuable independently of the value of the knowledge gained thereby. Faith is the beginning of a

⁸⁴Kvanvig makes this point in the context of religious faith, in *Faith and Humility*, 131. In order, for example, to correct the way some virtues can go wrong, Kvanvig seems to balance one virtue against another, as in the example that humility would be needed to correct “unbalanced” affective faith; 152–153.

⁸⁵Kvanvig, *Faith and Humility*, 198.

⁸⁶Thank you to Mark Murphy and anonymous reviewers for this suggestion.

⁸⁷Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* IIaIIae 1, 3.

⁸⁸Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* IIaIIae 4, 1. Even in the case of a believer having what Aquinas calls “lifeless” or “unformed” faith, faith in the absence of love of God, Aquinas thinks that lifeless faith is still a valuable disposition both epistemically and morally. In addition to the value of having beliefs about God that are true, it seems plausible that having lifeless faith facilitates acts of repentance (e.g., going to confession) and causes the believer to be less evil than might otherwise be the case. Cf., *Summa Theologiae* IIaIIae 4, 4–5; IIaIIae 7, 2 ad 2.

personal relationship with God, which is immensely valuable. Having faith permits the believer to participate in shared attention with God, both in loving God and developing that attention so that the believer comes to participate in God's own cognitive and affective states (the Gifts). Faith, a constitutive part of that relationship, is therefore intrinsically valuable.⁸⁹ If we are looking for an account of faith that makes faith intrinsically valuable, or even merely worth-having in its own right, we thus have very good reasons to opt for the Thomistic account rather than affective faith.

3.b. Second: Affective Salvation is Impersonal

The second problem is that affective faith does not seem to be able to have personal relationship with God as a constitutive element. Kvanvig never directly says what salvation is, and, methodologically, he aims to discuss faith apart from salvation.⁹⁰ But Kvanvig's claim seems to be that affective faith would be sufficient to be "salvific faith," i.e., sufficient for salvation.⁹¹ We can reconstruct the broad strokes: non-cognitive salvation is conformity to an ideal of some sort. Kvanvig identifies the ideal at the core of religious (Christian) faith a commitment to bring about the "Kingdom of God." What this means is exemplified by Jesus Christ's pattern of behavior on earth. But the believer only needs "pro-attitudes" toward Jesus rather than any definite beliefs about him.⁹² That is to say anyone can commit to acting as Jesus Christ did, without ever even believing *that* Jesus Christ existed at some point in history, just like I can act like Superman without believing that Superman is a historical figure. While there are cognitive beliefs that the believer ordinarily holds, e.g., "Jesus acted in such-and-such a manner," these are incidental to the commitment. I have affective faith if my behavior aims consistently (committedly) at the ideal: bringing about the Kingdom.

There is a worry here. As noted earlier, Kvanvig holds that whatever beliefs or cognitive states that are held can be indeterminate, and he applies this claim directly to religious faith. People with religious faith "might include various kinds of skeptics and agnostics regarding the existence of God and any or all of the central claims of the major world religions. That is, one can commit to a certain ideal, even to being an unconditional follower of Jesus or Mohammed or whatever, without any of the standard cognitive attitudes of ordinary folk on such paths."⁹³ Kvanvig's inclusion of skeptics or agnostics among "believers" makes it unclear whether *any*

⁸⁹This is true even if faith ceases to be operative in the afterlife. Faith is a valuable attitude toward God, whether it is replaced by another attitude or not. E.g., if I trust my parents as a child in their decision to have me learn a musical instrument, and then as an adult see good reasons to play an instrument, the attitude of trust is no less valuable even if it was no longer necessary to motivate my playing the instrument as an adult.

⁹⁰Kvanvig, *Faith and Humility*, 105.

⁹¹Kvanvig, *Faith and Humility*, 93, 77, 166–118, 128, 136.

⁹²Kvanvig, *Faith and Humility*, 116.

⁹³Kvanvig, "Affective Theism," 140.

internal affective and conative attitudes are essential to any commitment to an ideal (e.g., “multiple realizability”). We might think, by contrast, that an ideal is always a rational goal of some sort, such that one has to have *some* reasons to count as acting for an ideal.

Consider a charitable reading that affective faith includes internal attitudes but no beliefs. We here imagine the believer imitates Christ’s affective and conative attitudes. Plausibly, Christ loves God as His Father. The believer should then come to love God as Father in the course of imitating Christ’s affections. It is nevertheless very hard to see how such an attitude of personal love and relationship could be sustained without belief in the propositions “that God exists,” or similar claims. I cannot, for example, have a personal relationship with Superman because Superman does not exist. Kvanvig responds to such criticism by noting that one can act in regard to persons by way of *hoping* they exist, as someone could commit to a project of seeking advice from a hermit without knowing that this hermit exists.⁹⁴ The affective believer is committing to draw closer to God by their actions and affections; the more pronounced that process becomes, the more the affective believer appears to love God.

Certainly, the love you have for someone you hope exists is a kind of love. Yet the love involved in a believer coming to imitate a standard set by another (another person that they have no essential cognitive beliefs about, including their existence) is not the love that produces or is constitutive of a friendship. In sum, the relevant attitude constituting friendship does not seem possible if you are not sure if the Other exists. This does not require that I am explicitly conscious of the Other, or that I can describe the Other propositionally, but only that there is cognitive content on my part in virtue of which I am responsive to that Other and the truth of which *matters* to whether I am in a friendship or not. Obviously, a person can be unsure, e.g., if a friend of theirs is still alive or reading their letters. But if I *never* have beliefs that you exist, I can only be in a pretended relationship.

However, it gets worse. This view might not be non-cognitivism if certain act-types are constituted by beliefs. While I can act in promoting democracy without believing in the existence of democrats, I cannot promote democracy without beliefs about democracy. The concept “democracy” is internal to that action-type. I cannot love someone without knowing anything about them or being acquainted with them, and I cannot be their friend if they don’t exist. On the other hand, I need no concept of air currents in order to do something that counts as moving the air. E.g., my actions could certainly count as moving ambient air, even absent a concept of “ambient air.” We can preserve the non-cognitivism of the account by holding that what counts as “service of an ideal,” is purely the external state of affairs or pattern of behavior aimed at. Perhaps this makes sense for other cases, but this seems an odd way to think of the Christian life, unless the Kingdom were purely a matter of external affairs.

⁹⁴Kvanvig, *Faith and Humility*, 114.

I do not know how to prove this, but it seems very plausible that such a move would rule out the central case: having a relationship is not merely to bring about an external state of affairs.⁹⁵ Affective faith, even if it can be made plausible, ultimately does not *aim* at the same thing that Thomistic cognitive faith aims at. Cognitive faith aims essentially at forming a relationship with a person, God, whereas affective faith aims at an ideal of behavior or a way that the world should be. This difference, however, is highly significant.

3.c. Third: Differing Paradigms

The final point is a more profound and serious disagreement that I cannot here resolve, but which I will try to present. If Kvanvig's objections against cognitive faith are accurate, or if affective religious faith is faith sufficient for salvation (i.e., saving faith), it would follow that traditional Christianity's complete theological paradigm is fundamentally flawed. I concede that traditional Christianity could be grossly mistaken about the nature of its own claims, and I will not attempt to rebut a skeptical position that is a normative rather than descriptive account of Christian faith. Nevertheless, I will end by proposing that affective faith nevertheless cannot explain central features of a religious attitude that many of us could see as valuable.

Kvanvig acknowledges cognitivism about religious faith as the "received" view of Christianity, indicated by the way Church authorities have delimited doctrinal beliefs as necessary for salvation. Yet Kvanvig thinks this is all the worse for dogma.⁹⁶ He proposes that the traditional Christian emphasis on doctrine arose and became dominant, despite being alien to the essence of Christianity, because of historical contingencies. The story, in short, is that political forces (and specifically the Emperor Constantine) transformed Christianity from a purely affective religion of love, which held no appreciable or essential doctrinal beliefs about God or Jesus, to one of anathema and condemnation that utilized doctrine in enforcing conformity for political ends.⁹⁷ It is not clear to me whether Kvanvig's historical account is supposed to be falsifiable by appeal to ecclesiastical

⁹⁵A final striking fact is that "grace" has no explicit place in Kvanvig's account and is not (as far as I can see) mentioned at all in the context of religious faith presented in *Faith and Humility*. Rather, Kvanvig sees faith as a natural, human virtue which can take religious ideals as its object. Grace seems necessary, then, only to provide us with information about a uniquely Christian ideal—committing to an ideal seems an ordinary human activity otherwise. Specifically too, it seems a problem that Christ plays no important role in salvation beyond being an example of conduct; people with no experience of Christ can commit to a similar pattern of behavior as Christ's. If such help from God is needed, the need for such help seems to be for reasons external to faith itself. But this seems very close to classical Pelagianism, which held that, apart from Christ's example, we need no other special help from God in living a good life. Cf., Pohle, "Pelagius and Pelagianism."

⁹⁶Kvanvig, "Affective Theism," 126.

⁹⁷The story can be gleaned both from the more direct narration in Kvanvig, *Faith and Humility*, 82–88, but also 75, 136, and 199–201.

history; as I am not a historian, I leave the matter to the side.⁹⁸ Regardless, Kvanvig's historical account seems to play a *normative* role rather than a descriptive one. If historical Christianity had never valued affective faith, it is unclear whether this would be a problem with historical Christianity or with affective faith.

Abstracting from the historical details, Kvanvig's narrative about the rise of cognitive faith raises three serious theological and methodological questions. First, if Kvanvig's narrative was correct that historical contingencies led to the wholesale replacement of a central aspect of Christianity, *all* dominant Christian theological claims should be guilty until proven innocent. This includes not only views on faith and salvation, but also all sorts of beliefs. E.g., if Christians have been operating under delusion about faith for so long, why think Christians got "love" right? Second, the motivation for non-cognitivism involved a deep-seated suspicion of traditional claims to special access to God's revelation (in Scripture/Tradition) or activity (grace). If these claims are jettisoned, it is hard to see why the result leads us to more than a "religion of pure reason" or secular humanism. Finally, non-cognitivism requires a paraphrase or reinterpretation of the way many Christians understand their theological claims, so that doctrinal claims should be read as having primarily practical rather than theoretical significance.⁹⁹ As with emotivism, I will not rule out *a priori* that Kvanvig can offer these paraphrases, but it seems difficult to do so and I suspect results will not closely match traditional Christian claims.¹⁰⁰ Loving and knowing another person is not easily paraphrased into language about commitment to an ideal of action.

Notice that I am arguing not that non-cognitivism is wrong. Rather, I am pointing out that the non-cognitivist account of faith has a cost. My point is therefore a *caveat emptor* more than a *reductio ad absurdum*. Kvanvig's notion of faith differs from traditional Christian notions of faith and he recognizes this. The price of admission to non-cognitivism requires the traditional Christian to paraphrase their apparently cognitive beliefs about grace, God, Jesus, and so forth into quasi-emotivist semantics, or at least to relativize them significantly in terms of practical commitments. The cost, it seems to me, is quite high.¹⁰¹ I do not know how to argue against this apparently normative view.

⁹⁸For an overview of recent historical research about earliest devotion to Jesus, see Hurtado, *How on Earth Did Jesus Become a God?* Chadwick also has a celebrated history of the early Church, *The Early Church*.

⁹⁹Kvanvig gives some of these paraphrases in *Faith and Humility*, 75–76.

¹⁰⁰The attempted paraphrases of dogmatic claims to practical or affective claims, such as those pursued by liberal theologians like Tillich, have been largely unpersuasive to ordinary believers.

¹⁰¹The non-cognitivist programme resembles, in important ways, the programmes outlined by Kant or Schleiermacher in regard to religion, and anyone is perfectly free to embrace such a programme, but we should have no illusions that their programmes are very different from traditional Christianity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, first, some irenic considerations. The defenders of affective faith appear to presuppose a certain relationship between belief and evidence. The view that faith is belief in propositions compelled by sufficient evidence seems implausible because, if a room full of philosophers cannot agree that the external world exists, how can they come to agree on the dogmas of the Athanasian Creed?¹⁰² On the other hand, if believers adhere to the doctrines of Christianity without sufficient evidence, then this attitude of adhering to a set of propositions without evidence could appear closer to bigotry rather than any praiseworthy attitude, even if one waters down the required doctrinal propositions to a minimal set. The believer can hurl anathemas at those with whom they disagree, and countenance the worst treatment of people they take to be unbelievers.

Thomistic faith rejected this dilemma, because it rejects the envisioned connection between faith and evidence. Faith for Aquinas results not from having sufficient evidence to compel assent to the proposed doctrines, but from God moving the believer to assent through grace.¹⁰³ Consequently, the attitude of being attentive to God, to be ready to assent to whatever He reveals, is what makes faith valuable and what leads us to accept the propositions that we need for salvation. For the same reason, the believer does not make the error of thinking (as does Aquinas's heretic¹⁰⁴) that they have sufficient evidence for those beliefs or comprehensive understanding of all of the articles of faith. The believer instead must rely on God's understanding and knowledge, and faith is precisely that virtue of relying on God in this way — faith is a virtue of epistemic humility in relation to God.

Going slightly beyond Thomas's picture, even more avenues for coincidence can be found in John Henry Newman's account of faith. Newman shares with Aquinas the view that faith involves belief in propositional doctrines and certainty that these doctrines are true, so that "without certitude in religious faith there may be much decency of profession and of observance, but there can be no habit of prayer, no directness of devotion, no intercourse with the unseen, no generosity of self-sacrifice."¹⁰⁵ Faith "does not demand evidence so strong as is necessary for what is commonly considered a rational conviction . . . it is mainly swayed by antecedent considerations."¹⁰⁶ Clearly, though, bigots too reason by such antecedent considerations, and abuse others with their narrowmindedness. Newman's solution is that faith "takes its character from the moral state of the agent."¹⁰⁷ Faith is reasoning and assent to propositions because

¹⁰²This objection, phrased in this way, comes from one of the anonymous referees.

¹⁰³Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* IIaIIae 6, 1.

¹⁰⁴Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* IIaIIae 11, 1.

¹⁰⁵Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, 220.

¹⁰⁶Newman, *Fifteen Sermons Preached Before the University of Oxford*, 187.

¹⁰⁷Newman, *Fifteen Sermons Preached Before the University of Oxford*, 249–250.

of the *good* moral character of the agent, whereas bigotry results from a bad state.¹⁰⁸ In other words, faith is a species of intellectual humility whereas bigotry is a species of intellectual pride.¹⁰⁹ The check against faith going wrong and becoming bigotry is not philosophy or a better set of arguments, but love of God.

This supplement from Newman brings the Thomistic and affective pictures closer together. Kvanvig presumes that affective faith is valuable only when it constitutes a more complex state involving an additional virtue of humility. Kvanvig proposes, in describing this complex state, that humility is a virtue of attention to *persons*.¹¹⁰ Perhaps, then, affective and cognitive faith are valuable in distinct ways. Whereas affective faith is valuable in making us courageous in pursuit of valuable goals in life, cognitive faith is valuable because it makes us humble before God, making us attentive to God and able to enter into a loving relationship with Him. On this vision of what cognitive faith entails, the fears about doctrine and dogma do not arise. Those who use dogma to attack others lack precisely the virtue of epistemic humility that is cognitive faith. "Those who say, 'I love God', and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen" (1 Jn. 4:20, NRSV).

Even if there is some irenic ground of coincidence such that both affective and cognitive faith are valuable, it bears repeating that traditional Christianity does have apparently admirable, valuable states not explained or captured by Kvanvig's account of affective faith. At the end of his life, several weeks after September 29th, 1273, Thomas Aquinas was saying Mass in a chapel dedicated to St. Nicholas. After he was finished with the Mass, he came out and the brothers of the Dominican convent noticed a remarkable transformation in him: Thomas stopped his writing entirely and threw away his writing materials, even though he was mid-way through the incomplete final treatise of the *Summa Theologiae*. When questioned by his secretary, Reginald, as to the reason for the change, Thomas answered, "I cannot do any more. Everything I have written seems to me as straw in comparison with what I have seen."¹¹¹

Both Thomas's writing and his putting aside the pen were admirable and praiseworthy. Being competent to distinguish the propositional articles of faith from their ultimate referent is no less a component of what it is to have faith than the disposition required in adhering to those propositions in the first place, given that the object of Thomistic faith (and hence of all properly revealed truths) is God Himself. Refusing to write appears praiseworthy because the knowledge of God Thomas had acquired through study, or indeed propositional belief about God, was

¹⁰⁸Newman, *Fifteen Sermons Preached Before the University of Oxford*, 239.

¹⁰⁹Newman, *Fifteen Sermons Preached Before the University of Oxford*, 305–311.

¹¹⁰Kvanvig, *Faith and Humility*, 193–198.

¹¹¹Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, 289.

inferior to direct personal interaction with God Himself. Thomas accepted using propositions to learn about and love God, but was willing to put them aside in favor of “face-to-face” relationship with their referent. Affective faith does not seem able to explain why this attitude is valuable. Nevertheless, it is.¹¹²

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