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## Faith and Reason

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CIT Human Journey

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### Faith and Reason

The authors Augustine, Aquinas, and Dante represent the Catholic Intellectual Tradition claim that human reason and faith are compatible. Augustine struggled to find God because of his sinful behavior during his youth. On his journey to converting to Catholicism, Augustine reasons through his questions regarding God to find the truth. Aquinas writes about how humans do not have the capacity to ever reach the full knowledge of God. After Dante describes his journey through hell and purgatory, he finally reaches heaven and is incapable of describing God because it is beyond human comprehension. Augustine, Aquinas, and Dante each embody the Catholic Intellectual Tradition claim that reason and faith are compatible in their writings in different ways, but with the same message: that faith and reason are correlated and one must turn to faith because reason can only explain God and the divine to a certain point.

Augustine's journey to find God was one filled with suffering and obstacles, but was led to Catholicism by reasoning through his doubts and finally turning to faith alone. He, at first, had trouble reaching the conclusion that reason was not enough to understand God and the Catholic faith, but once he did he became enthralled by God and fell in love. Augustine's early life was consumed with sinful, lustful, and gluttonous behavior. His goal in life was to find the truth though, but wrestled to do so. Augustine began to unravel the falseness in Manichaeism

and turn towards Catholicism. Later looking back, he writes, ““Thus I was ignorant how this image of Yours could be; but I should have knocked at the door and proposed the question how it was to be believed, and not jeeringly opposed it as if it were believed in this or that particular way.” (6. IV.164) He is speaking to God about his regrets about his uneducated views on Catholicism. Augustine after being enlightened realized that the way he perceived the Catholic faith was not in the correct light; Augustine tried to prove everything through reason, but it was not attainable. For this reason, he was not able to convert.

Augustine turned to the Catholic faith slowly and with much hesitation, because worldly pleasure held him back. Once Augustine was able to let go of his sinful behavior, he was free and able to turn to faith. He writes, “From this time on I found myself preferring the Catholic doctrine, realizing that it acted more modestly and honestly in requiring things to be believed which could to be proved...” (6.V.165) which he is admitting that he is now able to accept the teachings of the Catholic faith. These teachings are ones in which he questioned and did not understand because he was trying to use human reason to solve something beyond human knowledge. Augustine reaches the understanding that in order to believe in the Catholic faith, it asks its followers to trust in God for things that cannot be explained. This way of viewing the Catholic faith allows Augustine to finally open his heart and mind to God. This directly embodies the claim that faith and reason are compatible because Augustine understands that faith can be worked through by reason only to a certain point and then the rest is left up to trusting in God.

Aquinas also strongly emphasizes the claim that faith and reason are compatible in his writings. He is more direct in reaching this conclusion than Augustine. Aquinas’s writing gets to this belief right away, while Augustine has to struggle to reach the point of accepting the third

claim. Aquinas fervently supports this claim and wants to spread its importance to others turning to the Catholic faith and for this reason, he writes about it. Aquinas reveals that, "...there are many who are naturally not fitted to pursue knowledge; and so, however much they tried, they would be unable to reach the highest level of human knowledge, which consists in knowing God" (4.250), which is addressing the idea that some humans are not able to reach even the highest form of human knowledge. This is because some humans are more intellectual than others and delve deeper in searching for the truth in life. Here, Aquinas presents the first obstacle with human reason; it can only go so far as to explain the divine because some are more capable than others.

Aquinas then explores deeper into the claim that human reason and faith are compatible by explaining that there is no way for humans to ever reach the full knowledge of God. He states, "if the only way open to us for the knowledge of God were solely that of the reason, the human race would remain in the blackest shadows of ignorance" (4.251) in which he believes that human knowledge will not take human very far in trying to deter through the complexity of God and the Catholic faith. This is because humans are earthly beings, while God is divine; therefore, humans cannot reach beyond mortal state of thinking. This is why Aquinas believes that if human knowledge were the only source of discovering God, then humans would be completely ignorant of the existence of God altogether.

Aquinas continues to unravel the intricacies of the third claim in order to support his belief that reason and faith are compatible by explaining that God reveals himself to humans. Previously, Aquinas admits that humans would never be able to uncover the mystery of God by themselves. This is why God aids humans and exposes himself in ways humans can receive him

on earth. Aquinas says, "So the things that are of God no man knoweth but the spirit of God, but to us God hath revealed them by his Holy Spirit" (5.253), which supports the notion that God only has the divine knowledge and reveals it to humans by the Holy Spirit. It is necessary for God to reveal himself, or humans would always be ignorant about him. Since reason cannot explain everything, God takes it upon himself to help humans understand his complexities.

Dante's writing as well represents the idea of human reason and faith being compatible when he reaches heaven. Dante takes a journey through hell, purgatory, and heaven, while taking on the daunting duty of describing each of them. To do this is of great difficulty since he is mortal and has never actually experienced the afterlife. In his poem, he has most difficulty describing heaven since it is of the holiest and most divine place. Dante writes, "What I saw is more than tongue can say:/ Our human speech is dark before the vision. / The ravished memory swoons and falls away" (326. 55-57), in which he is trying to describe heaven. He acknowledges that it is almost impossible for him to do so because human words and thought do not begin to cover what paradise is. The human vocabulary is neither elaborate nor expanded enough to explain the experience of travelling through heaven. This is because it is beyond the human mind's capacity.

When Dante comes into God's presence he is overcome with emotion, sensation, and marvel and is at a loss for words. Dante becomes overwhelmed by the divine presence and says, "O Light Supreme who doth Thyself withdraw/ so far above man's mortal understanding, / lend me again some glimpse of what I saw..." (326. 67-69), which he basically is asking for God to reveal himself and God's knowledge. God is all-knowing, therefore Dante wants him to share this knowledge so Dante can understand the divine truth. Dante does share in God's knowledge

in *Paradiso* for a moment and at once it all makes sense to him, but then this disappears and he has no memory of it. This is because if he were to know what God knows, then Dante would be all-knowing as well, so instead God reveals himself for a short moment. Dante's experience in heaven reflects the third claim because he has to let go of reason to be able to open his mind to God. Human reason would not be able to describe or comprehend what Dante experienced in heaven, therefore he turns to faith.

Human reason and faith are compatible because to a certain extent reason can support faith, but reason has its limits. Humans are only given a restricted capacity to learn and understand things beyond the earth. This is where faith comes into play to take over and guide the human to trust in God and his teachings. Since some things cannot be explained it is necessary for humans to turn to faith. Humans only share in God's knowledge to a limited extent because God is all-knowing and if humans were also all-knowing then there would be no one divine God. Instead humans would be equal to God, which is not in accordance to the Catholic faith. This is why in order for a God to exist there must be compatibility between faith and reason. Augustine, Aquinas, and Dante all support the third claim of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition that reason and faith are correlated each in their own ways, but in accordance to each other.

