ST. AUGUSTINE AND ST. THOMAS AQUINAS: PHILOSOPHERS ON REASON AS WELL AS ON FAITH

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Although the Catholic Church canonized Augustine and Thomas Aquinas so that they received the honorific title "Saint" before their name, this isn't correct Biblical teaching. According to the New Testament, all true Christians are God's "holy ones," and thus are "saints" (Romans 15:25-26; Phil. 4:22). Therefore, this honorific title should be deleted in all cases from before these men's names

The moment the phrase "the Middle Ages," or "the medieval period" comes into many philosophers' minds, most think of a time man was ruled (in Europe, anyway) by faith, and reason was, at best, a marginal factor. The attitude expressed by Ayn Rand, the philosopher-novelist who wrote such novels as Atlas Shrugged and The Fountainhead, on p. 63 of Philosophy: Who Needs It, is typical of most modern philosophers today: "In Western civilization, the period ruled by Mysticism is known as the Dark Ages and the Middle Ages. I will assume that you know the nature of that period and the state of human existence in those ages. The Renaissance broke the rule of the mystics. "Renaissance" means "rebirth." Few people today will care to remind you that it was a rebirth of reason--of man's mind. In the light of what followed--most particularly, in the light of the industrial revolution--nobody can now take faith, or religion, or revelation, or any form of mysticism as his basic and exclusive guide to existence, not in the way it was taken in the Middle Ages." But, in point of fact, although the Middle Ages in Europe were a period ruled by Faith, reason was a much more significant factor in the philosophy of the period than most modern philosphers would know or admit. The epistemology of the period is of importance today because of its giving at least a partial sanction to man's natural reason and his senses, while reconciling this sanction (or attempting to do so) with faith. This sanction to reason by traditional Christianity (due to medieval philosophy, especially St. Thomas Aquinas's) was important because it allowed (in time) the free use of man's reason without having it by necessity wage a war against the Bible or traditional Christian doctrines. Man's natural reason was given an official stamp of approval in the material realm, as well as to being applied to theology (in order to organize the revelation of the Bible and its (supposed) doctrines, as well as to prove some of revelation's information independently from revelation (natural theology)). Indeed, at least some

support and legitimacy was given to man's reason in general: unlike Hume's skepticism, Man was said to be able to know at least know a significant number of things by his reason, according to most, if not all, Medieval philosophers. As a result, today most traditional (and some not so traditional) Christians aren't highly hostile to science, reason or logic in themselves--and even often use these products of man's mind themselves. The great contribution of St. Thomas Aquinas and (to a considerably lesser extent) St. Aurelius Augustine was devising a system of epistemology that gave sanction to Man's reason without having to subvert Christianity to do so, nor have to have the two have to wage an all-out war between one another.

St. Augustine (354-430 A.D.) was the most prominent and influential of the early Catholic church fathers. He had an enormous influence on traditional Christianity and both a theologian (like devising the traditional Christian doctrine on why suicide was immoral and his defenses of traditional Christian doctrines against the attacks of various heretics) and as a philosopher. He also (today) gets routinely portrayed as a flaming irrationalist and mystic, which is at least partly off the mark. This attitude is again best summed up by Ayn Rand: "Now, we are witnessing the end of the Aquinas line--with the (Catholic) Church turning again to his primordial antagonist, who fits it better, to the mind-hating, life-hating St. Augustine (Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal, p. 315-316)." Of course, St. Augustine did have his mystic side. (Anybody who takes the Bible seriously is going to be called a mystic by a zealous, diehard worshipper of Reason like Ayn Rand was). For instance, he believed in the doctrine of illumination, which essentially amounted to a Christianizing of Plato's theory of the forms.

Now St. Augustine was deeply into Neoplatonism, and he would in many cases try to fit Neoplatonic ideas with traditional Christian doctrines. One major reason for his enthusiasm for Neoplatonism was because his research into Neoplatonism allowed him to solve a big problem he had: he had a hard time conceiving God as a spirit,

instead as some sort of body, until he read books by the Neoplatonists. For instance, describing his struggles in conceiving of God as a spirit, he said in Confessions, book 7, 1: ". . . that although I did not imagine you in the shape of the human body, I could not free myself from the thought that you were some bodily substance extended in space, either permeating the world or diffused in infinity beyond it." But, "By reading these books of the Platonists I had prompted to look for truth as something incorporeal, and I caught sight of your invisible nature as it is known through your creatures*(Confessions, book 7, 20). As a result, St. Augustine in gratitude (as well as in general liking) lavished high praise on Plato and the Neoplatonists, as in The City of God, book 8, chapter 11: "Some of those who are united in fellowship with us in the grace of Christ are amazed when they hear or read that Plato had a conception of God which they recognize as agreeing in many respects with the truth of our religion." See also The City of God, Book 8, chapter 9 and Confessions, book 7, the end of section 20. Then, because of his enthusiasm for the truths (or supposed truths) of the Neoplatonists, he would enthusiastically try to fit them into Christianity. Now, one may ask, what makes all of this liking for Plato by St. Augustine important for Medieval Christian epistemology? It is important because much of Plato's not exactly rational epistemology found its way into orthodox Christian philosophy, albeit somewhat adjusted or Christianized.

St. Augustine liked Plato's theory of Forms, which maintains concepts (universals) have a spiritual substance of their own separate from the imperfect, matter laden, particulars we can sense in the real world. [This separate spiritual substance is what really exists, and the particulars we sense are only pale reflections of this separate spiritual substances, which are called the Forms.] [These Forms exist in another spiritual world human senses can't come in contact with in this life, but our (supposed) immortal souls can come in contact with when we are dead. So what St. Augstine did was to modify and Christianize Plato's theory of the Forms, which resulted in Augustine's doctrine of illumination. One of Augustine's clearest, bluntest statements on this issue is found in De Maestro (The Teacher), section 38: "Concerning universals of which

*This quote from Romans 1 is St. Augustine's favorite scripture, at least in

we can have knowledge (Augustine, like Plato, wasn't a skeptic), we do not listen to anyone speaking and making sounds outside ourselves. We listen to Truth which presides over our minds within us, though of course we may be bidden to listen by someone using words. (Compare this claim with Socrates' claim in the Meno (around 81c to 82b) in the slaveboy episode). Our real Teacher is he who is so listened to, who is said to dwell in the inner man, namely Christ, that is, the unchangeable power and eternal wisdom of God. To this wisdom every every rational soul gives heed, but to each is given only so much as he is able to receive, according to his own good or evil will. . . . Confessedly, we must pay heed to the light (note the word) that it may let us discern visible things so far as we are able." Thus, in St. Augustine's view, Man's mind is naturally incapable by itself of making concepts, which certainly isn't a plain endorsement of humanity's natural reason!

Another passage in Confessions (book 10, chapter 10) is very clear as St. Augustine speaks of how facts got into his memory, which displays his rationalist emphasis (as opposed to the senses): "Therefore they (the facts) must have been in my mind even before I learned them, though present to my memory. . . . How was it that I recognized them when they were mentioned and agreed to be true? (Again, he isn't a skeptic concerning non-Biblical knowledge). It must have been that they were already in my memory, hidden away in its deeper recesses, in so remote a part of it that I might not have been able to think of them at all, if some other person had not brought them to the fore." Then in the next chapter (11), he says: "From this we can conclude that learning these facts, which do not reach our minds as images by means of the senses. (Notice). But are recognized by using our minds, without images, as they actually are, is simply a process of thought by which we gather together things which, although they are muddled and confused, are already contained in the memory." (Sounds suspiciously similar to Plato's doctrine of recollection doesn't it? Of course, St. Augustine, if he was going to be an orthodox Christian,

couldn't buy into Plato's doctrine of recollection because of its inherit belief in the prior existence and transmigration of immortal souls, but he could borrow elements from it). Then in Confessions, book 10, chapter 12, he states how universals are formed: "The memory also contains the innumerable principles and laws of numbers and dimensions. None of these can have been conveyed to it by means of the bodily senses, because they cannot be seen, heard, smelled, tasted, or touched. . . . They are not images of things which the eye of my body has reported to me. We know them simply by recognizing them inside ourselves without reference to any material object. With all the senses of my body I have become aware of numbers as they are used in counting things. But the principle of number, by which we count, is not the same. It is not an image of the things we count, but something there in its own right." "He (the student) is taught not by my words but by the things themselves which inwardly God has made manifest to him (De Maestro, 12, 40)." See also Confessions, book 11, chapter 3.

Now what makes these quotes of text significant? What they show is St. Augustine christianizing Plato's theory of the Forms by substituting the inward Christ for the Forms (which objects "participate" in), who in turn is within all people as the light that allows them to understand the world around them. Furthermore, this understanding need only be stirred up from the memory, not actually newly found out, which is close to much of Plato's doctrine of recollection. The Forms are now (by implication) found in the mind of God, not in a spiritual world of their own. But, however, St. Augustine avoids leaping off the edge into heresy by saying these facts didn't get into the mind by living a previous life, as Plato said, but rather got into the mind through Christ working in people's minds. St. Augustine said, in On the Trinity, book 12, chapter 15, section 24: "For not everyone was a geometrician in the former life, since geometricians are so few among men that scarcely one can be found anywhere. (St. Augustine here is striking back at the slaveboy episode in the Meno by saying the chance the slaveboy was a geometrician in a previous life is zilch).

But we ought rather to believe, that the intellectual mind is so formed in its nature as to see those things, which by the disposition of the Creator are subjoined to things intelligible in a natural order, by a sort of incorporeal light (hence the name "the doctrine of illumination") of an unique kind; as the eye of the flesh sees things adjacent to itself in this bodily light, of which it is made to be receptive, and adapted to it." St. Augustine certainly wasn't going to advocate the transmigration of souls, which is something he goes on to attack after the passage quoted from above. But St. Augustine didn't want to totally give up Plato either, so he Christianized the doctrine of recollection as well as Plato's theory of the Forms through some modifications.

Following Plato, St. Augustine brought into Medieval Christian epistemology the idea that there is a virtual chasm between what was intelligible (what could be understood) and what was sensible (what could be sensed). This chasm, with its dangerous implications for the reliability of man's reason (if our senses are useless, then how can we trust our reason?), is a logical result of the doctrine of illumination. If man cannot derive universals (concepts) from particulars (individually existing things we sense) through using reason to integrate and analyze sense-data, then another <u>non-sensory</u> method of deriving universals from reality has to be devised. And St. Augustine, choosing to follow Plato's lead, said man can only derive universals through the mind alone. But how can the mind alone figure out anything without using the senses? Simple: the Supernatural (the Forms for Plato, Christ for St. Augustine) interacts <u>directly</u> with out minds so we can know universals in the real world without using our senses to help derive them. Thus, if one accepts this theory of epistemology, the human mind can not know even the material world without <u>direct</u> aid from God (or the Forms), and thus the senses become useless in knowing the real world, if one pushes this theory of epistemology to its logical conclusion. (Fortunately, St. Augustine didn't, although Plato did (at least in the <u>Phaedo</u>), as we shall see).

For proof of the major distinction St. Augustine placed on the intelligible

and the sensible, as well as of his belief that the mind can acquire knowledge directly (without the use of the senses), as well as with the senses, consider the following text:

"For where as there are two kinds of knowable things,--one of those things which the mind perceives by the bodily senses; the other, of those which it perceives by itself (note this distinction is drawn very clearly by St. Augustine), --these philosophers (the skeptical academics of Augustine's time) have . . . much against the bodily senses, but have never been able to throw doubt upon those most certain perceptions of things true, which the mind knows by itself, such as is that which I have mentioned, I know that I am alive. But far be it from us to doubt the senses; since by them we have learned to know the heaven and the earth . . . (On the Trinity, book 15, chapter 12, section 21).*

"And they (the eternal things known through wisdom) abide, but not as if fixed in some place as are bodies; but as intelligible things in incorporeal nature, they are so at hand to the glance of the mind, as things visible or tangible in place are to the sense of the body (On the Trinity, book 12, chapter 14, section 23)."

"On the one hand we need light that we may see colours, and the elements of this world and sentient bodies that we may perceive things of sense, and the senses themselves which the mind uses as interpreters in its search for sense knowledge. On the other hand, to know intelligible things with our reason we pay attention to the interior truth. Everything we perceive we perceive either by bodily sense or by the mind. The former we call "sensible things," the latter "intelligible things;' or to use the terminology of our christian authors, the former we call "carnal things," the latter "spiritual things (De Maestro, 12, 39)." Certainly here we find implied a dual channel method of obtaining knowlege: one channel by the senses, the other by the mind alone. Thus, following Plato, St. Augustine definitely believed the mind could take in information

*This attack on the skeptical academics obviously undermines the claims of St. Augustine being an all out mystic (e.g. Demea in Hume's Dialogs on Natural Religion) since St. Augustine believes knowledge that isn't revealed by God can be reliable also).

without the use of the senses.

Also following Plato directly, St. Augustine said one couldn't know the concept "righteous" through the senses, but only from within (see halfway through chapter 6 of book 8 of On the Trinity), which certainly echoes Plato in the Phaedo, about 65 c-d, when he had an exchange in which the Good and the Beautiful were said to exist, but were not seen with the eyes.

One very important factor, however, in St. Augustine's epistemology was that he never said that Man's mind is impotent, his reason useless, his senses worthless, and reality an illusion. St. Augustine had no use (though he admitted he had been tempted by) for all-out skepticism, even concerning the material world alone. Certainly, St. Augustine was not an all-out irrationalist, as can be shown from the quotes just above, especially the one quote from On the Trinity, 15, 12. But his desire to follow Plato's philosophy (epistemology included) did cause him to make statements that certainly wouldn't build confidence in Man's senses. St. Augustine is quoted by St. Thomas Aquinas as saying (Summa Theologica, First part, QQ.84, A. 6): "We cannot expect to learn the fulness of truth from the senses of the body. . . . whatever the bodily senses reach, is continually being changed (echoing Heraclitus here); and what is never the same cannot be perceived." Aquinas also goes on to quote Augustine's statement that through the senses one can't tell if an object is perceived by the mind's imagination or by the senses. But St. Augustine never goes overboard like Plato did in the Phaedo: "And I supposed (the soul) reasons best when none of these senses disturbs it, hearing or sight, or pain, or pleasure indeed, but when it is completely by itself and says good-bye to the body, and so far as possible has no dealings with it, when it (the soul) reaches out and grasps that which really is (the Phaedo, "around" 65 c, see also 66 a)." Certainly St. Augustine could have taken a much stronger, "no senses, by faith alone" approach to encouraging people to accept Catholicism, but we shall see he didn't have an all-out irrationalist apporach on this issue either. Indeed, he said (in On the Trinity, book 15, chapter 12) that he wrote three books against the skeptical philosophy of the

Academic philosphers, which I am sure just didn't consist of asserting the superiority of faith, but also of an active defense of man's mind and senses, if his comments elsewhere in this chapter of On the Trinity (also quoted above partly) are any indication.

St. Augustine's dual chanel approach (by the mind directly and through the senses) to obtaining knowledge produces a curious result in De Maestro. In the last three chapters of book 12 (38, 39, and 40), one find both an extreme rationalism ("He (the student) is taught not by my words but by the things themselves which inwardly God has made manifest to him," 40) and a stark empiricism ("When he sees he learns not from words uttered but from the objects seen and his sense of sight," 39). This paradox of embracing two extremes in epistemology results from St. Augustine's (seeming)* belief that nothing can be taught by the means of words. Thus Augustine was forced to believe people learned by some direct means not using words, but rather through what was sensed directly and by what was revealed by the inward Teacher directly to the mind. Surely, however, Plato's idea that men learned universals by being reminded of the Forms through the particulars we sense also plays a role here. If one can only be reminded (or be told by the inward Teacher) of universals if one senses directly the object of which corresponds some universal (which appears to be what St. Augustine believed), then one has to believe that an object must be sensed before one can know a universal that corresponds to the object. Either way it happened, St. Augustine pushed the two channels by which he said man obtained knowledge to their respective epistemological extremes.

St. Augustine's conclusion in De Maestro, in which he says nothing can be taught by the means of words, is ridiculous. If it was true nothing could be taught by words, then why did he write De Maestro (using words to write it) to teach us that words can't be used to teach anything? (His actions in writing the essay contradict his words in it). Further, how could I have learned from De Maestro that St. Augustine believed nothing could be learned by the means of words through

*It is my firm opinion St. Augustine said this out of a desire to pull the reader's leg or to indulge in a love of pardox, or both.

the words he wrote in De Maestro? If nothing could be learned by the means of words, then we had better shut down Michigan State right away, the sooner the better*- all the teachers and courses here use words in their lectures and textbooks to teach. (Even in a class like chemistry the procedures of the experiments students are to do in a lab are described by the means of words in a lab book or textbook of some kind). If nothing could be learned by the means of words, let's burn every book in sight for fuel--otherwise all they do is take up useful space. If nothing could be learned by words, that would mean I could only learn about China by going there, not by reading about that country in books. If nothing could be learned by the means of words, the Bible is rendered useless. Clearly, St. Augustine must either have been trying to pull the reader's leg by coming to such a conclusion--or else he was a lunatic!

Also, St. Augustine uses a clearly loaded example when he asks whether telling a person by the means of words whether he saw a man flying was as reliable as being told wise men are better than fools in the last section of De Maestro (40). The reason why we wouldn't believe Augustine's statement about a man flying necessarily (but would about wise men being better than fools) is because to state that men can fly just by themselves is to state such an obvious absurdity judging by our past experience we would judge it false. Such a statement would lack plausibility on its face because we would think he was a liar and actually contradicts our past experience. It becomes an issue of personal reliability, and not just his use of words in itself. To never have seen the city of Athens, and yet believe it exists because someone told us through words isn't the same case as someone telling us by words he saw a man flying by flapping his arms. To say a man can fly by himself contradicts our previous (and personal) experience (so we shouldn't believe it due to this contradiction (unless actually shown the flying man) is different from believing Athens exists because someone told us it exists (which doesn't contradict our previous experience since we know cities can and do exist which we haven't seen before, since in at least some cases we travel to the cities

*in order to save taxpayers' money

we heard about but never saw, and then see them for the first time with our naked eyeballs).

St. Augustine gave such a peculiar conclusion to the reader in De Maestro because he evidently liked paradoxes, like Plato, whom he followed philosophically as well. But one can find St. Augustine actual belief on this subject in On the Trinity, book 15, chapter 12, section 21: "Far be it from us too to deny what we have learned by the testimony of others: otherwise we know not that there is an ocean; we know not that the lands and cities exist which most copious report commends to us; we know not that those men were, and their works, which we have learned by reading history (which is written in words--EVS); we know not the news that is daily brought us from this quarter or that, and confirmed by consistent and conspiring evidence; lastly, we know not at what place or from whom we have been born: since in all the things we have believed the testimony of others. And if it is most absurd to say this then we must confess, that not only our own senses, but those of other persons also, have added very much indeed to our knowledge. (section 22 then begins). All these things, then, both those which the human mind knows by itself, and those which it knows by the bodily senses (here is St. Augustine's dual channel epistemology once again in very clear words), and those which it has received and knows by the testimony of others, are laid up in the storehouse of memory . . ." Certainly St. Augustine was trying to tease the reader with a clever paradox with the conclusion of De Maestro. St. Augustine was (at least here in On the Trinity) a verbal empiricist, not a zealous "object" empiricist, concerning how the senses obtained knowledge.

Another issue brought up in De Maestro (see section 3) is the concept of "nothing"--just what is "nothing"? Earlier in De Maestro Augustine and Adeodatus agreed that a word signifies something. But "nothing" signifies not a something, but a void or non-existence. So how can nothing be a something? What does "nothing" represent? Ayn Rand, in her Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology, p. 77, proposed a solution: ". . . existence can be differentiated from non-

from non-existence; but non-existence is not a fact, it is the absence of a fact, it is a derivative concept pertaining to a relationship, i.e. a concept which can be formed or grasped only in relation to some existent (particular) that has ceased to exist (her emphasis, my word in the parentheses)." As she goes on to say, one can only come to a knowledge of "nothing" starting from something that exists and then getting rid of that something. One couldn't come to the conclusion that something exists or any particular attribute of something that exists if one begins with an emptiness, a lacking or an absence. "Nothing" has no attributes to it (unlike material objects) and so one void can't be differentiated from another void, while one can differentiate one material object from another since they do have attributes. A man (who is something) can only notice a lacking if he used to have something and then lost it (like a richman who become poor).* A poor person who never saw (say) a car (a lacking) is unlikely to figure out such a thing as a car exists just because he can't go to places he wishes at 70 miles per hour (from his need or lack). (A poor person my wish he could go 70 miles per hour, but he won't be able to conclude such a thing as a car (a thing that exists) in fact does exist from his lack of the car).

The doctrine of illumination has potential problems with it since it could be in conflict with the Bible, even though it purportedly is based on the Bible. If it is true Christ works directly in the mind of every person to teach them concepts (universals) that they can't derive on their own from particulars, then this means Christ is in every unbeliever's mind, as well as in Christian minds. But the Bible says that (Romans 8:9-10): "However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. (That is, is not a Christian). And if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the Spirit is life because of righteousness." Also, it is written (Colossians 1:26-27): "(But now) this mystery has been manifested to his saints . . . which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." Therefore, if Christ was in everyone, teach-

*or if he saw someone have something he didn't have.

ing them universals directly, as per the doctrine of illumination, then the exclusivity which the Bible indicates concerning that Christ dwells only in Christians (through the Holy Spirit) is flatly denied. This idea that Christ will intimately link Himself with the mind of a hostile unbeliever (like an atheist) clearly conflicts with 2 Corinthians 6:14-15: "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership does righteousness have with lawlessness? And what fellowship does light have with darkness? And what agreement does Christ have with Belial? Or what part does a believer have with an unbeliever?"* Also, the idea Christ Himself is directly needed to give a man a mind to understand any material thing isn't necessary. Note carefully 1 Cor. 2:11: "For who among men knows the things of a man, except the spirit of man, which is in him? Even so the things of God no one knows except the Spirit of God." Here we find the "spirit of man" and the Spirit of God, which a man (if he is a Christian) can have both. Now the Spirit of God is the means by which Christ is present in a person (see Romans 8:9-10 quoted above). But a man can obviously have "the spirit of man," which then (according to the above scripture), allows him to know "the things of a man," which certainly should include knowing universals about material things since that is within reach of man's natural abilities and dominion. The "spirit of man" is enough for men to learn universals. One doesn't need to bring the inward Christ into the picture (along with the Holy Spirit) to allow people to learn universals. God has made it such that we can learn about material things on our own without his direct** help. To have two spirits doing the same thing would be redundant. Thus scripture in actuality does not favor the doctrine of illumination, even though it is based on giving a very narrow and specific meaning to a text in scripture (John 1:9).

Of course the most unusual feature of St. Augustine's epistemology is his dualism in the channels by which one can obtain knowledge. For instance, he says on one hand concerning the mind in One Free Will, book 2, 6, 14, that: "If

*There's nothing like refuting the Supernatural using the Supernatural!

**By this "direct" I mean that there isn't a need for an inward Teacher concerning material things. (The Holy Spirit is needed for

without the aid of any bodily organ, neither by touch nor by taste nor by smell, neither by the ears nor the eyes, but by itself alone reason catches sight of that which is eternal and unchangeable . . . (which) is God." And, in 7, 23, St. Augustine says: "We must know this (a certain truth concerning numbers) by the inner light, of which bodily sense knows nothing." Concerning the senses he said in The City of God, book 11, 27: "We apprehend them (material things) by our bodily senses, but it is not by our bodily senses that we form a judgement on them. For we have another sense, far more important than any bodily sense, the sense of the inner man, by which we apprehend what is just and what is unjust . . ." Thus while St. Augustine emphasizes the mind as a means of acquiring knowledge, the senses aren't ignored.

The problem with Augustine's dual channel method of obtaining knowledge is the "rationalist" channel, not the empirical channel, which uses the senses to obtain data for the mind. The problem is this: Can the mind ever know anything just by itself, without using the senses in any form, directly or indirectly? More specifically, can a consciousness acquire information without the senses? The answer is no, for the reason stated by Ayn Rand in Atlas Shrugged, p. 942: "A consciousness conscious of nothing but itself is a contradiction in terms: before it could identify itself as consciousness, it had to be conscious of something. If that which you claim to perceive does not exist, what you possess is not consciousness." In other words, a consciousness can't be counted as conscious unless it knows something. And a consciousness can't know itself until it is conscious, and since an empty consciousness isn't a consciousness, a consciousness has to acquire data from some outside of itself in order to be conscious (which means being able to know something). Thus an empty consciousness can't know anything* just by itself--in order to be even counted as conscious, it must get data from somewhere outside itself. The example which St. Augustine likes to use as something the mind knows just by itself (that it is alive) is known by the mind sensing the bodies functions, the use

*If it isn't even conscious by itself, then it obviously can't know anything about the outside world either!

of the senses, and by analyzing, integrating, and recalling information gained from the senses (not from the Forms or the inward Teacher). Thus, rationalism, whether limited (like St. Augustine's) or unrestrained (like Plato's in The Phaedo) has a serious problem at its root: If a consciousness can't be counted as conscious (knowing something) unless it knows something else from outside itself, then obviously a consciousness can't know anything just by itself*

Interestingly, St. Augustine's rival St. Thomas Aquinas had a view similar to Ayn Rand's above. Notice Summa Theologica, First part, QQ. 87, A. 1: "Now the human intellect is only a potentiality in the genus of intelligible beings, just as primary matter is a potentiality as regards sensible beings; and hence it is called possible (or passive--see the English translator's note). Therefore in its essence the human mind is potentially understanding. Hence it has in itself the power to understand, but not to be understood, except as it is made actual. . . . But as in this life our intellect has material and sensible things for its proper natural object, as stated above (Q. LXXXIV., A. 7), it understands itself according as it is made actual by the species abstracted from sensible things, through the light of the active intellect (not the light of the inward Christ!), which not only actuates the intelligible things themselves, but also, by their instrumentality, actuates the passive intellect. Therefore the intellect knows itself not by its essence, but by its act." Also interestingly, St. Thomas, in his Reply Obj. 1 of this same article attempts to sidestep a quote from St. Augustine in the first objection, (note the similarity to Descartes' 'cogito') which was: "the mind knows itself by itself, because it is incorporeal" (De. Trin. ix. 3).

As we have already seen above in the many quotes from St. Augustine above, St. Augustine certainly can't be called an all-out irrationalist of the "Man's reason is of the Devil" school. He believed reason had a legitimate role in a man's life, though he certainly wasn't an unabashed advocate of the use of reason (see Confessions, book 10, 35). But he believed that it had its proper role.

*Using its memory merely involves manipulating sense data which originally was from outside itself. (I am leaving divine revelation outside of consideration at the moment).

consider the following: "It was you (God) who made the intelligence by which he (the craftsman) masters his craft and visualizes whatever he is to make. It was you who made his physical senses, which are the channels through which his mental picture of the thing he is making is transmitted to the material. They then relay the finished product to the mind, so that by referring it to the truth, which presides there as arbiter, it may decide whether it is well or badly made (which shows St. Augustine didn't think Reason was acquiredfrom the Devil because of Man's first sin--EVS) (Confessions, Book 11, 5)."

"All the same I remembered many of the true things that they (the secular scientists) had said about the created world, and I saw that their calculations were borne out by mathematics, the regular succession of the seasons and the visible evidence of the stars. I compared it all with the teaching of Manes (the founder of Manicheism), who had written a great deal on these subjects, all of it extremely incoherent. But in his writings I could find no reasonable explanation of the solstices and the equinoxes or of eclipses and similar phenomena such as I had read about in books written by secular scientists. Yet I was expected to believe what he had written, although it was entirely at variance and out of keeping with the principles of mathematics and the evidence of my own eyes (Thus reason is used to judge a religion false by St. Augustine--no blind faith here--EVS) (Confessions, book 5, 3).

"But just as we are superior to the beasts by reason of our powers of reason and intelligence, so our superiority to the demons should appear in a life of goodness and integrity (The City of God, Book 8, chapter 15)."

"Lastly, the wonderful beauty of the world itself is at hand from without, both to our gaze, and to that sense which is called touch, if we come in contact with any of it: and . . . But we are treating now of the inner man, and of his knowledge, namely, that knowledge which is of things temporal and changeable; into the purpose and scope of which when anything is assumed, even of things belonging to the outer man, it must be assumed for this end, that something may thence be taught which may help rational knowledge. And hence the rational use

of those things which we have in common with irrational animals belongs to the inner man; neither can it be said that this is common to us with the irrational animals (On the Trinity, book 13, Chapter 1, 4)."

Thus, St. Augustine wasn't a total irrationalist by any means. Indeed, to the extent he said man could acquire secular knowledge, it was a defense of man's reason against skepticism, even if he used a questionable method to do so (the doctrine of illumination). In this respect (of using rationalism to defend man's reason against skepticism), St. Augustine was like Plato (who devised the theory of the Forms to hold off skeptics like Heraclitus and Protagoras) and Kant (who used the idea of a priori knowledge to hold off David Hume). Whether or not rationalism is a solution to skepticism is in question. (See the above problem of whether a mind can be conscious by itself, let alone acquire information about the world). Kant's idea of a priori knowledge has had a high price in that all of it is considered by many modern philosophers to say nothing about the real world--which certainly doesn't get one anywhere in understanding the world around us, if this says-nothing-about-the-world idea be true. ("Analytic propositions are trivial, boring and meaningless tautologies.") (Two rocks put together with two rocks will add up to four rocks every time--so it seems math does say something about the real world).

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) is St. Augustine's only rival in medieval philosophy who could match him in influence and importance. St. Thomas Aquinas was the (primary) author of the monumental work Summa Theologica, as well as numerous other works. Just as St. Augustine was a Neoplatonist who enthusiastically accepted and then modified Plato to fit Christianity, St. Thomas Aquinas accepted and worked hard to fit Aristotle's doctrines fit a Christian frame of mind. And since Plato and Aristotle had fundamental difference on epistemology, their respective successors in the traditional Christian world (Augustine and Aquinas) are going to have their resulting differences as well. And Aquinas, predictably since he follows Aristotle, is a much more zealous exponent of man's

natural reason, compared to St. Augustine's more ambivalent attitude.

Aquinas, unlike Augustine at times, didn't doubt that man's senses were giving man's mind an accurate picture of the world (though he admitted, like Aristotle, mistakes in identification were possible). For instance, although he noted phantasms (mental images of . . things) weren't always true, he did state bluntly that: "The senses in the act of sensing are always truthful; they cannot err about their proper objects (Aristotle's De Anima in the version of William of Moerbeke and the Commentary of St. Thomas Aquinas (here after called Aquinas's Commentary on De Anima), book 3, lectio 5, section 645)." Or he said, in contrast to understanding, which can be correct or incorrect, that: "Sensation, on the other hand, can only be 'correct', for the senses are infallible with respect to their proper objects (Aquinas's Commentary on De Anima, Book 3, Lectio 4, section 630)." For St. Thomas it is important for the senses to carry induitable information since the senses are the only way the human mind can get information on material things* (The errors that occur are the result of wrong interpretation (analyzing and integration) of the senses data the senses bring in (Aquinas's Commentary on De Anima, Book 3, Lectio 11, section 751).

Of course, Aquinas's belief that the senses are the only way to get information (which the the mind interprets) is in decided contrast to St. Augustine's "dual channel" epistemology, which has both the mind and senses being able to get information on material things directly. St. Thomas, following Aristotle, forges ahead by saying the forms of material objects, as is (that is, in combination with their matter) are not intelligible, but only sensible (Summa Theologica, First part, Q. 79, A. 3). The reason for saying they are only sensible until inside the mind is the simple fact material things' matter cannot enter a person's immaterial mind. If men could only understand things by allowing matter to physically enter themselves, then they would soon be filled up with things and not be able to understand any more things for good after a certain

*Again, setting aside divine revelation which can go directly into a person's mind.

amount of matter is allowed into us. This problem with letting in matter is why the plants, which are without the senses animals have, are totally limited "knowing" things. (See Summa Theologica, First Part, QQ 75, A. 5).

The most important problem for St. Thomas is this: How can that which is sensible be converted into what is intelligible so that the human mind can make use of sense data? St. Augustine (emending Plato in the process), solved this problem by sidestepping it: the inward Teacher (Christ) in each person's mind directly tells him the universals that can be correlated with what things he senses. But St. Thomas took a different, much more involved route by following Aristotle's lead, and so St. Thomas lacked most of the direct supernatural element found in Augustine's doctrine of illumination. So since St. Thomas dispensed with Augustine's doctrine of illumination, it means he will have to get much more involved in the mechanics of how the human mind understands than St. Augustine had to. (One doesn't need to explain the Supernatural very much--it just happens).

As St. Thomas understood it, the sensible had to be converted into the intelligible to be useful to the human mind. "Science is in the intellect. If, therefore, the intellect does not know bodies, it follows that there is no science of bodies; and thus perishes natural science, which treats of mobile bodies (Summa Theologica, First part, QQ 84, A. 1)." The two entities used to bridge the gap are phantasms and the active intellect. Phantasms are the sensed images of variousindividual objects that come within the range of our senses." "On the contrary, phantasms are actual images of certain species but are immaterial potentiality (Summa Theologica, Part 1, Q. 79, A. 4, reply obj. 4)." "Even the phantasm is the likeness of an individual thing; wherefore the imagination does not need any further likeness of the individual whereas the intellect does (Summa Theologica, Part 1, QQ 84, A 7, Reply Obj. 2)." The Active intellect uses the phantasms as its "raw material," so to speak, to abstract out of particular individual objects universals (concepts). "Therefore material things must needs by understood as they are abstracted from

matter and from material images, namely phantasms (Summa Theologica, First Part, QQ. 85, A. 1)." "The reason of this is that the principle of singularity in material things is individual matter whereas our intellect, as we have said above (Q. LXXXV. A.1), understands by abstracting the intelligible species from such matter. Now what is abstracted from individual matter is the universal (Summa Theologica, Part 1, QQ. 86, A. 1)." Thus, St. Thomas bridges the gap between the sensible and the intelligible and the particular and the universal.

But just how does the universal get abstracted from the particular? What does St. Thomas mean by "abstract"? St. Thomas is cooperative--he tells us:. "But if we consider colour and its properties without reference to the apple which is colored; or if we express in word what we thus understand, there is no error in such an opinion or assertion, because an apple is not essential to colour, and therefore colour can be understood independently of the apple. Likewise, the thingswhich belong to the species of a material thing, such as a stone, or a man, or a horse can be thought of apart from the individualizing principles which do not belong to the notion of the species. This is what we mean by abstracting the universal from the particular, or the intelligible species from the phantasm; that is, by considering the nature of the species apart from its individual qualities represented by the phantasms (Summa Theologica, QQ. 85, A. 1, Reply Objection 1)." In his commentary on De Anima, Aquinas says: "And lest it be said that the mind works in the same way in mathematics and in natural science, he (Aristotle) adds that the relation of things to the intellect corresponds to their separability from matter. What is separate in being from sensible matter can be discerned only by the intellect. What is not separate from sensible matter in being, but only in thought, can be perceived in abstraction from sensible matter, but not from intelligible matter. Physical objects, however, though they are intellectual discerned in abstraction from individual matter, cannot be completely abstracted from sensible matter; for 'man' is understood as including flesh and bones; though in abstraction from this flesh

and these bones (emphasis his, Aquinas' Commentary on De Anima, book 3, lectio 8, section 716)." But now how does the mind know what universals to pick out of the phantasm? How is abstracting done? St. Thomas gives two answers: "First, by way of composition and division; thus we may understand that one thing does not exist in some other, or that it is separate therefrom. Secondly, by way of simple and absolute consideration (he sounds a little like Descartes here); thus we understand one thing without considering the other (Summa Theologica, QQ. 85, A. 1, reply obj. 1).

The problem faced here is the issue of knowing whether or not a concept is arbitrary or not. How do we know whether or not a word (which symbolizes a concept) represents anything in reality? The mind can know what objects are to be under a given concept based on three main elements, as Ayn Rand pointed out:* 1. A common attribute needeeds to be picked out of the objects we sense, which is: 2. an attribute which simultaneously distinguishes these objects (or an attribute of them) from other objects (or/and their attributes) we sense and: 3. the objects' common attribute must exist in some quantity but can exist in any quantity if it was measured.** This last element is very important, since it allows us to group underneath the same universal objects whichs which are not absolutely identical in their common attributes so far as our senses can tell. (In short, it allows for variations of that common attribute the objects have in common). For instance, a partial definition taken from my dictionary of this word "book" is: "A set of written, printed, or blank sheets bound together . . ." If I apply Rand's criteria here, anything which does have these characteristics is included, while that which doesn't have these charcteristics in common (that is, of the common attribute) is automatically excluded. Thus, an unabridged dictionary, a Bible, and a softcover bestseller have these common attributes mentioned in the definition, while anything else (a watermelon, a man, a boat) gets excluded. And while these three books all vary in their common attributes, like number of pages, height,

*This three part division is my own, though the ideas are definitely hers.

**A measurement is a quantification of a relationship of some object's attribute compared to some standard, like a pound, foot, meter, etc. (Ayn Rand's definition

width, length, weight, etc., they all have common attributes that if measured would exist in some quantity, but do vary in degree. The common attribute can, in short, exist in objects to a greater or lesser amount, but so long as it has that (or those) common attribute(s) in any amount, the concept fits that object. However, it must be noted that a definition doesn't contain all the characteristics of objects that are their common attribute(s). For instance, the definition above concerning books omits that a book has a cover on it thicker and/or tougher than the sheets inside. The definition "rational animal" omits that men have ears and brains. A concept just doesn't stand for the defining characteristics of various objects, but for all the shared common attribute(s) that the objects share (including even ones not discovered yet*).

Of course, many of these ideas are hardly new. St. Thomas, following Aristotle, recognized that: " . . . the intellect is able to combine many simple and separate objects and make an intelligible object of them. And such combinations are sometimes true and sometimes false. . . . This is against the view of Plato that the understanding of things in space involved a sort of continuous movement. In fact spatial things can be understood in two ways: either as potentially divisible--and thus the mind considers one section of a line after another, and so understands the whole in a period of time; or as actually indivisible--and thus the whole line is considered as a unity made up of parts and understood simultaneously. He adds therefore that, in the act of understanding, either both time and length are divided, or both are not divided (Aquinas's Commentary on De Anima, Book 3, Lectio 11, sections 751, 753). "The human intellect must of necessity understand by composition and division. For since the intellect passes from potentiality to act, it has a likeness to things which are generated, which do not attain to perfection all at once but acquire it by degrees: so likewise the human intellect does not acquire perfect knowledge by the first act of apprehension; but it first apprehends something about its object, such as its quiddity, and this is its first and proper object; and then

*Two hundred years ago, it wasn't known that all (living) men have α waves in their brains--yet this is and was a common attribute of men.

it understands the properties, accidents, and the various relations of the essense. Thus it necessarily compares one thing with another by composition or division; and from one composition and division it proceeds to another, which is the process of reasoning" (Summa Theologica, First part, QQ. 85, A. 5).

Another issue concerning whether or not concepts are arbitrary are "borderline cases." For instance, what would we call a book which had its cover missing and its sheets of paper were barely holding together? Or how about the colors of the spectrum: where does (say) red end and orange begin? And what about (on a similar topic) cases in which one language has a word that can only be translated by a phrase in another. For instance, the Greek word "logesete" (from Matt. 6:7) can't be translated in English by a single word. It has to be translated by two words in English: "vain repetitions." So how can these cases be explained without concepts becoming arbitrary?

The solution to the above problem is based on the fact that concepts are formed by men so as to serve a role in organizing knowledge inside their minds. Now if we had a concept for every minor variation in sight (like a special concept to be only applied in the case of coverless books and another one to be used for only black haired, six foot four, blue eyed males) then our minds would be overwhelmed by all these minor variations being represented by each by an individual concept. The mental effort saved by having concepts would be eliminated if we had a concept representing every little variation imaginable. So we use descriptive phrases to cover minor variations. For instance, a coverless book can be called just that--"coverless book"--using two words to stand for what we mean. On the other hand, we have to be careful not to make concepts so broad that anything can fit under them. To use the word "chair" for all types of furniture would be to use the language in a very loose way. "The requirements of cognition determine the objective criteria of conceptualization. They can be summed up best in the form of an epistemological "razor": concepts are not to be multiplied beyond necessity--the corollary of which is: nor are they to be

integrated in disregard of necessity (her emphasis, Ayn Rand, Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology, p. 96). Thus whether we use a concept (or a descriptive phrase composed of concepts), it still refers to something in reality, even if it is our choice to use either.

The issue of knowing what to abstract and what not to is related to another issue: how does the mind know what is the essential characteristic of an object and what is an accident instead? St. Thomas says, following Aristotle, that the mind is infallible in finding the essence of an object. "Yet through this latter object as such is neither true nor false, the mind understanding it is true in so far as it is conformed to a reality understood. (The common sense correspondence theory of truth is present here, obviously). So he (Aristotle) adds that just so far as the mind bears on an essence, i.e. understands what anything is, it is always true; but not just in so far as it relates one thing to another (where an error can occur, which St. Thomas explains in detail later). The reason for this is that, as he says, essence is what the intellect first knows; hence just as sight is infallible with respect to its proper object, so is the intellect with respect to essence. It cannot, for instance, be mistaken when it simply knows what man is; . . . (his emphasis, Aquinas's Commentary on De Anima, book 3, lectio 11, sections 761-762). The issue becomes just what is the essence of an object. St. Thomas gives a partial definition (and how it is picked out of the accidental characteristics) in another place: "From this text of Aristotle one can go on to show that the intellect's proper object is indeed the essence of things; but not the essence by itself, in separation from things, as the Platonists thought. Hence this 'proper object' of our intellect is not, as the Platonists held, something existing outside sensible things; it is something intrinsic to sensible things; and this, even though the mode in which essences are grasped by the mind differs from their mode of existence (matter) in sensible things; for the mind discerns them apart from the individuating conditions which belong to them in the order of sensible

reality (Aquinas's Commentary on De Anima, book 3, lectio 8, section 717).

The main problem St. Thomas (and Aristotle) have on this idea an essence concerning some object can be found automatically with the mind from the first sense data presented to it is that it doesn't allow one's knowledge of the essence of a thing to change as one learns more about an object. The essence of a thing is assumed to be found upon one's first examination of various similar objects, and no improvement in knowledge concerning its essence can occur (so it seems). For instance, if one encounters a previously undiscovered species of an animal for the first time (say the Loch Ness Monster) at a distance one may not derive its essence at the first glance. One may have to look at (and even dissect) a number of such a species before figuring out its essence--and even then you could be wrong if you weren't careful in your research. Or, for a bigger problem, a child as he grows older, although he may use the same words representing a concept, what he may mainly mean by them (their essence in his mind) may change. For instance, a toddler may mean by the word "man" just his father, and then later may use the same word and the same concept for any person who talks and stands upright. In other words, a child's mind doesn't automatically get the essence of an object as adults would consider it to be, yet the child uses the word standing for the universal "man" and would point at an individual man if asked what a "man" was. Clearly, a young child wouldn't home in on the definition of man adults have—"a rational animal," which reveals a part of the essence of the concept "man." Or one could always initially mistake an obvious, but not so important part of a thing, and miss (on first examination) the more important underlying characteristics of a thing (which are its essence).

Now Aquinas was at least partially prepared for such an objection, for he said: "The human intellect must of necessity understand by composition and division for since the intellect passses from potentiality to act, it has a likeness to things which are generated, which do not attain to perfection all at once but acquire it by degrees(notice that): so likewise the human intellect does

not acquire perfect knowledge by the first act of apprehension; but it first apprehends something about its object, such as its quiddity (effectively another word for "essence"), and this is its first and proper object (which is the same phrase St. Thomas applied to essence in the just above quoted section of his commentary on De Anima); and then it understands the properties, accidents, and the various relations of the essence (Summa Theologica, Part 1, QQ. 85, A. 1)." my emphasis. Now Ayn Rand, who followed after Aristotle for much of her epistemology proposed this solution to the problem of knowing what is the essence of a thing (and, by implication what is an accident instead): ". . . the essence of a concept is that fundamental characteristic(s) of its units (her term for an individually existing thing which is considered to be part of a group of similar things) on which the greatest number of other characteristics depend, and which distinguishes these units from all other existents (individually existing objects) within the field of man's knowledge. (My emphasis). Thus the essence of a concept is determined contextually (her emphasis) and may be altered with the growth of man's knowledge (Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology, p. 69)." Thus, the essence of an object, as is known by an individual human, "change" in the sense people learn more about the object as they examine it (like the young child learning more about the concept "man," which is Ayn Rand's example), even though the object(s) don't change at all. For Ayn Rand, essence is relative to the amount of knowledge men have on various objects. Notice though that what was previously considered the defining essence of an object (like the case of the child who considers man to be an "upright, talking animal" and then moves on to calling man a "rational animal" as an adult) still describes accurately some characteristic of the object in question (a man is an "upright, talking animal" as well as a "rational animal"). Thus while one may be mistaken as to the truly most important characteristics of some object at first (picking out some other ones instead), one was accurate within one's knowledge of the object, and even the defining essence may be something new as one's knowledge increases, the old defining essential characteristics of the objects in

question are still accurately describing some feature of the objects in question.

As Ayn Rand stresses, "essence" is epistemological in nature (depends on what we know about an object), not metaphysical (what the objects really are). The essence of a thing, regardless of the extent of a person's knowledge about a thing, is definitely an actual characteristic of a thing, though an individual person (or humanity in general) may not know what are the most important characteristics of an object until it has been scrutinized repeatedly. The "essence" of a thing can "change" as people acquire more information on an object (and contrast it in relation to other objects), even though the object stays the the same. "Essence" is considered to be what are deemed to be the most important characteristics of an object relative* to the objective amount of knowledge men have on some object. This idea of Ayn Rand's doesn't make "essence" fundamentally subjective in nature because it is still based on what the objects are (clearly, man's essence could never be called "inanimate"), but allows for future adjustments as Man learns more about various objects (which would enable one to get out of the objections presented earlier).

Probably the biggest problem in epistemology is the question of first principles and axioms. St. Thomas, in Summa Theologica, Part 1, Q. 2, A. 1, explained that a thing could be self-evident in itself and to us, or it could be self-evident but not to us because we might not know the essence of the subject and predicate of a proposition. St. Thomas put "God exists" in the latter category (showing his disdain for the ontological argument for God existence in the process) since one might not know the essence of God. Of course, first principles for Aquinas are self-evident and can't be demonstrated since they can't be broken down into more basic principles. "For a thing can be called self-evident in two ways, either because we can know it by nothing else except itself, as first principles are called self-evident; or because it is not accidently knowable, as colour is visible of itself, whereas substance is visible by accident (Summa Theologica, QQ. 87, A. 1, reply obj. 1)." "For the act of understanding implies the simple acceptation of something; whence we say that we understand

*We must not equate statements of relations (relativity) with subjectivism. The statement "I weigh less than the earth" is an objective truth despite it involves a relation. Read[illegible]

first principles, which are known of themselves without any comparison (Summa Theologica, First part, QQ 83, A. 4). One example St. Thomas used showing how first principles were indemonstratable was noting that a "circle" is "round." "Round" is such a basic concept (in St. Thomas's view) that one needs to point at an object with it, or know what it is as one notes a circle is round. "Round" can't be broken into any lower level concepts for St. Thomas.

The enormous importance of first principles was known to St. Thomas, since he knew that if one was uncertain of them, all reasoning done based on them would be uncertain (since one wouldn't know the right starting place), which then would make human reason itself untrustworthy: ". . . human reasoning, by way of inquiry and discovery, advances from certain things simply understood--namely, the first principles; and, again, by way of judgment returns by analysis to first principles, in the light of which it examines what it has found (Summa Theologica, Part 1, Q. 79, A. 8)." St. Thomas emphasized that one can be certain of first principles: ". . . the intellect cannot err, as in the case of first principles from which arises infallible truth in the certitude of scientific conclusions (No Humean-skeptic sympathies here!) (Summa Theologica, Part 1, QQ. 85, A. 6)."

But is there a good way to prove certain axioms are self evident and that one can be 100% certain of them? The most ingenious method available concerns putting the law of non-contradiction to work concerning these basic first principles. If one denies one of these very basic principles, one will find that in the process of reasoning done to deny that axiom that one must use that axiom in one's arguments against that axiom. Thus one, in order to deny such an axiom, contradicts oneself since one uses that same axiom in his argument's reasoning--and thus one's argument is self-refuting. One example of this is found in St. Augustine's Enchiridion, chapter 20, which (implicitly) proves the axiom "consciousness is conscious": "But I am not sure whether one ought to argue with men who not only do not know that there is an eternal life before them, but do

not know whether they are living at the present moment; nay, say that they do not know what it is impossible they can be ignorant of. For it is impossible that anyone should be ignorant that he is alive, seeing that if he be not alive it is impossible for him to be ignorant; for not knowledge merely, but ignorance too, can be an attribute only of the living. But, forsooth, they think that by not acknowledging that they are alive they avoid error, when even their very error proves that they are alive, since one who is not alive cannot err." One can also find St. Augustine in On the Trinity, book 15, chapter 12 pounding away at the skeptical academics with a similar argument in favor of the idea one can have absolute certainity that one is alive. St. Augustine, in The City of God, book 11, chapter 26, uses the same argument: "But the certainty that I exist, that I know it, and that I am glad of it, is independent of any imaginary and deceptive fantasies. In respect of those truths I have no fear of the arguments of the academics. They say, 'Suppose you are mistaken?' I reply, "If I am mistaken, I exist." A non-existent being cannot be mistaken; therefore I must exist, if I am mistaken (shades of Descartes!)." Thus what St. Augustine considered that which the mind knows directly (just by itself) really are basic first principles from another point of view.

This idea that the law of non-contradiction proves axioms since to deny certain statements involves the use of those same statements in the argument you use to deny them was put to work by Ayn Rand in a truly ingenuous fashion: She applied it to the exterior world as well, and found a way to make it stick. For instance, consider the classic argument used to cast doubt on the reality of the external world. "Can one know if one is dreaming or not when you see things? Is the dream world the real world and what we take to be the real world the dream? How can one be certain then that which one sees exists?" But this argument actually is self-contradictory, though it doesn't seem so. This argument uses a fact of the external world ("People have dreams when they sleep") to deny that same external world, thus contradicting itself. After

all, people have to have dreams in actuality if one is going to use this argument. Of course, I could throw at it the "non-falsifiable hypothesis" idea of the logical positivists, which would go something like this: A statement has to have meaning to be worth anything, and if any event that has, is, or will occur will fit in with that statement, then it has no meaning since by explaining everything it really explains nothing. A statement has to be potentially falsifiable to have any meaning, let alone be true. Thus if everything I experience is a "dream," then I had better be concerned with these so-called "dreams," since the actual supposed "real world" that I can't get at has no effect on me. Thus to say "Everything you sense is a dream," has no meaning for me since nothing that has, is, or will happen to come from that actual supposed "real world" (which I can (supposedly) never have any contact with) will ever have an effect on me. So why should I believe any exists besides the supposed "illusions" I have all the time? The supposed "real world" in this instance (something like Kant's "Noumeal" world, which no one can experience) I can't ever come in contact with, so why should I care about it? But I like Ayn Rand's refutation better. Of course, one could question the law of the excluded middle and say contradictions can exist--but to do this (this is how Ayn Rand made her ideas on axioms stick) one would have to use in an argument supposedly refuting the law of the excluded middle, somewhere in that argument, the law of the excluded middle. "Let the caveman who does not choose to accept the axiom of identity, try to present his theory without using the concept of identity or any concept derived from it . . . let the witch-doctor who does not choose to accept the validity of sensory perception, try to prove it without using the data he obtained by senory perception--let the head-hunter who does not choose to accept the validity of logic, try to prove it without using logic . . . (Ayn Rand, Atlas Shrugged, p. 965)."

Now the role of faith in the thought of St. Augustine and St. Thomas is "rather" large, as one could well imagine of the two greatest philosophers of

"the Age of Faith." To Saint Thomas, faith was to have absolute certainty in something which one doesn't sense. "But this act to believe, cleaves firmly to one side, in which respect belief has something in common with science (i.e. certainty and understanding; yet its knowledge does not attain the perfection of clear sight, where in it agrees with doubt, suspicion and opinion (Summa Theologica, Part 2, Second part, QQ. 2, A. 1)." "Two things are requisite for faith. First, that the things which are of faith should be proposed to man: this is necessary in order that man believe anything explicitly. The second thing requisite for faith is the assent of the believer to the things which are proposed to him (Summa Theologica, Part 2, Second part, QQ. 6, A. 1). Importantly, this second part of faith has the inward cause of God moving through grace within the one who assents. Thus the true act of faith is done with God influencing you to assent. St. Augustine has the same basic approach St. Thomas did: "We therefore that we may refute these, who seem to themselves through prudence to be unwilling to believe what they cannot see, although we are not able to show unto human sight those divine things which we believe, yet do show unto human minds that even those things which are not seen are to be believed (Concerning Faith of Things Not Seen, section 1)."

St. Augustine was never very much part of the blind faith, "its absurd, so believe it" school, though he did have tendencies in this direction. "From now on I began to prefer the Catholic teaching. The Church demanded that certain things should be believed even though they could not be proved, for if they could be proved, not all men could understand the proof, and some could not be proved at all. I thought that the Church was entirely honest in this and far less pretentious than the Manichees, who laughed at people who took things on faith, made rash promises of scientific knowledge, and then put forward a whole system of preposterous inventions which they expected their followers to believe on trust because they could not be proved (Confessions, book 6, section 5)." ". . . the

mind is also subject to a certain propensity to use the sense of the body, not for self-indulgence of a physical kind, but for the satisfaction of its own inquisitiveness. This futile curiosity masquerades under the name of science and learning, and since it derives from our thirst for knowledge and sight is the principal sense by which knowledge is acquired (note that again, my emphasis, in the Scriptures it is called gratification of the eye. (This is from I John 2:16). For although, correctly speaking, to see is the proper function of the eyes, we use the word of the other senses too, when we employ them to acquire knowledge (Confessions, book 10, 35)." St. Augustine certainly wasn't an unabashed advocate of Man's natural reason like St. Thomas was. But St. Augustine certainly wasn't all-out anti-reason, as has been noted before. "All the same I remembered many of the true things that they had said about the created world, and I saw that their calculations (of the secular scientists) were borne out by mathematics, the regular succession of the seasons and the visible evidence of the stars. I compared it all with the teaching of Manes (founder of the Manichees) who had written a great deal on these subjects, all of it extremely incoherent. But in his writings I could find no reasonable explanation of the solstices and equinoxes or of eclipses and similar phenomenona such as I had read about in books written by secular scientists. Yet I was expected to believe what he had written, although it was entirely at variance and out of keeping with the principles of mathematics and the evidence of my own eyes. . . . (Manes) wrote at great length on scientific subjects, only to be proved wrong by gentile scientists, thereby making perfectly clear the true nature of his insight into more abstruse matters (Confessions, book 5, sections 3 and 5)." Thus reason was used by St. Augustine to reject a false religion--and to begin hunting for something better.

Even in St. Augustine's tract Concerning Faith of Things Not Seen he uses what can be called the "prophecy proof" of the Bible (its ability to predict the

future, like of Christ's crucifixion or of Babylon's fall) after pointing out things non-believers believe in although they didn't or don't see them. (A typical sample of these is that non-believers don't see (remember) their own parents have them for their own children--they have to believe based on testimony from others that mom and dad really were mom and dad*). Since St. Augustine advanced proofs for God's existence in his writings and reasoned a theodicy in On Free Will (he could have toughed it out by using Isaiah 55:8-9 if he had wanted to), one can hardly call him a zealous, "by blind faith alone," type.

St. Thomas didn't fall in the blind faith category either. After quoting I Peter 3:15 ("Being ready always to satisfy every one that asketh you a reason of that faith and hope which is in you"), he said that: "Now the Apostle would not give this advice, if it would imply a diminution in the merit of faith. Therefore reason does not diminish the merit of faith (Summa Theologica, Part 2, Second Part, QQ. 2, A. 10)." But St. Thomas had another problem. He was trying to fit together faith and reason so as to leave room for both without having one subverting the other. So St. Thomas had to draw some fine lines. Consider this: "On the other hand, though demonstrative reasons in support of the preambles of faith, but not of the articles of faith, diminish the measure of faith, since they make the thing believed to be seen, yet they do not diminish the measure of charity, which makes the will ready to believe them, even if they were unseen; and so the measure of merit is not diminished (my emphasis, Summa Theologica, Part 2, Second part, QQ. 2, A. 10, rep. obj. 2)." In order "to assent to the truth of faith," one needs to know not only what to believe but also that "that he should have a sure and right judgment on them, so as to discern what is to be believed from what is not to be believed, and for this the gift of knowledge is required (Summa Theologica, Part 2, Second part, QQ. 9, A. 1)." This knowledge comes straight from God, "by simple intuition,"

*This argument doesn't sound very persuasive to me. Does it to you?

instead of the knowledge derived from human reasoning through a "discursive" or "argumentative" process, as St. Thomas went on to describe. Thus for St. Thomas there were two ways to gain knowledge: faith in God's revelation (which was backed by miracles) and by natural reasoning being applied to what is sensed.

Of course the biggest complaint about faith by a non-believer is that you might be believing in what is false since you didn't sense what you are believing in. ". . . an error made on your own is safer than ten truths accepted on faith, because the first leaves you the means to correct it, but the second destroys your capacity to distinguish truth from error (Ayn Rand, Atlas Shrugged, p. 983). The response a Christian could make to this kind of attitude is that if Man was created by God and God has an end (purpose) for him, that this end has to be made known to mankind through divine revelation if man is to know what really to do that is best for himself (See Summa Theologica, First part, QQ. 1, A. 1). Faith in the Bible gives us knowledge of the final cause ("Why?"), while science tells us the efficient cause ("How?") which allows us to reconcile faith and reason by giving each their respective and non-conflicting realms. And faith is needed to believe revelation since God doesn't tell, in many cases, why we should obey this or that command, other than by his own authority. (An example of the latter is Leviticus 25:17: "So you shall not wrong one another, but you shall fear your God; for I am the Lord your God"). God said "Thou shalt not steal" to ancient Israel from Mount Sinai, not "Thou shalt not steal because . . ." We are to trust that his commands are good ones, either because of the good things he has done for us (we can trust a God who was willing to die on a stake for us, can't we?), or we can put natural reason to work to try to find out why God told us to do certain things (natural law theory). Either way, we have to believe it is His will that He wants us to do His commands (in other words, that He isn't "just put us on" for some sort of cosmic joke). Other reasons given for us to have faith are that: One, it allows us to get truth on God and his nature much quicker than we could by doing it ourselves. Two, it allows the less capable mentally to know of God without trying to figure out things by their own rather weak natural reason (by comparison) to geniuses, etc. And three, it allows us to have more certainty in what is known about God since many errors and disputes will occur as people try to find out

things about God without revelation. (See Summa Theologica, Part 2, Second Part, QQ. 2, A. 4). Also, as St. Thomas noted (always remember that this was his idea of faith--it isn't placing faith in a book, but obeying after hearing a command straight from heaven to do something): "The believer has sufficient notive for believing, for he is moved by the authority of Divine teaching confirmed by miracles, and, what is more, by the inward instinct of Divine invitation: hence he does not believe lightly (Summa Theologica, Part 2, Second Part, QQ. 2, A. 4)." Thus faith, since it allows us to know our purpose in life and what is best for us to do, is far from being Ayn Rand's "short circuit destroying the mind (Atlas Shrugged, p. 945)," but is necessary if we intend to run the affairs of this and the next life properly.

One issue that now can come up is this: is all knowledge the human mind can obtain good knowledge? Are there things we would be better off not knowing? It has been suggested that in Genesis that the tree of knowledge of good and evil was a symbol that represented the early Hebrews belief that some knowledge people just shouldn't have. (It has also been suggested that the words "of good and evil" were later additions to the text: originally it was only "the tree of knowledge." This idea seems to lack manuscript support, at least judging from the fact that all twelve of the Bible the author looked through had the full rendering, including even James Moffatt's translation (he was quite a higher critic and frequently rearranged verses in his translation to their supposedoriginal places)). So this seemingly problem leads to another issue: Should Man have knowledge of as many things possible, or are there things he shouldn't know? For instance, the whole world might have been better off if Man didn't know anything about atomic power so that then we couldn't make A-bombs. And, to push this to its logical conclusion, if not all knowledge is good knowledge, then is being omniscent (as God is) good? Here is certainly a problem for St. Thomas, since he placed a fair amount of importance on

gaining knowledge, whether by reason or by faith.

The obvious reply to make concerning the idea that being omniscent may not be good is that the evils that can occur from having certain kinds of knowledge come from immoral decisions that use that knowledge, not the knowledge itself. For instance, if everyone took seriously the idea to love his neighbor as himself, then having knowledge about atomic power wouldn't be a problem since then no one would make an A-bomb with his knowledge (and then use it). Thus having knowledge is no problem if one is perfectly moral, no matter what kind of knowledge it is. Thus, since God has aperfect, holy, righteous character, there is no problem in His knowing about everything since He won't do evil with it. On the other hand, since man isn't perfectly moral (not by a long shot), there are things we may be better off not knowing, like how to make A-bombs. This problem of scientific knowledge giving mankind technological abilities beyond his moral ability to handle is an old theme of many science fiction novels and stories, so it isn't something really new. The solution to mankind's dilemma with having knowledge evil can be done with is to become moral--which is something the author doesn't think will happen until the Millenium.

Now St. Thomas was in many ways a zealous advocate of Man's natural reason, so long as it stayed within its proper role. His taking from Aristotle's philosophy injected into Europe, in a modified formed, the common sense rationality of "the Philosopher." St. Thomas affirms all the basic common sense notions of the world: every effect has a cause (Summa Theologica, First Part, QQ. 76, A. 2 and QQ. 2, A. 3), that contradictions can't exist (Summa Theologica, Part 1, QQ. 85, A. 5--in another place he even said God can't do a contradiction), that human knowledge corresponds to something in the real world (the correspondence theory of truth) (Summa Theologica, Part 1, QQ. 85, A. 7 and QQ. 85, A. 1), that the senses are reliable (Aquinas's Commentary on De Anima, book 3, lectio 4, section 630 and lectio 5, section 645; Summa Theologica, First part, Q. 78, A. 3), that men are born knowing nothing (which means all knowledge must be acquired) (Aquin-

as's Commentary on De Anima, Book 2 lectio 12, section 373 and Summa Theologica, Part 1, QQ. 84, A. 3), that human reason can be applied on practical worldly affairs (Summa Theologica, First part, Q. 76, A. 5 and QQ. iy, A. 4 (this article concerns knowing the future some by knowing causes), that an outside world exists which is composed of various objects outside the mind (affirmed almost everywhere concerning how universals are derived: Summa Theologica, Part 1, QQ. 87, A. 1; QQ. 85, A. 3; QQ. 86, A. 1; QQ. 79, A. 3, reply obj. 1; QQ. 76, A. 2, reply obj. 4, etc). Certainly ideas like these will provide a much more fruitful place for science to grow than (say) the "all is illusion" attitude of Hinduism (which never had Aristotle influence it, however). Even St. Augustine at his more irrationalist moments would always hold to the existence of an outside world composed of real objects. And, in addition, Christianity always believed in a God of order who doesn't keep changing his laws (natural or physical) all the time on the basis of whim. So certainly traditional Christianity, even if it would never have been affected by Aristotle, would have provided a more tolerant climate for secular science to grow than Hinduism would have. But as it happened, traditional Christianity got fused with Aristotle (and Plato), which helped to provide a much more hospitible place for secular science to grow since it restrained the tendencies for many traditional Christians to go off on the deep end concerning the importance of faith (as opposed to reason).

Certainly no fan of David Hume's skeptical philosphy is going to like St. Thomas' philosophy, even if one omitts his Christianity. And remember, such a rationalistic view of the natural world is found in a Medieval philosopher writings, not some modern era philospher's. The practical effect of St. Thomas' full flegded endorsement of (and St. Augustine's tolderance for*) Man's reason can be found today in western secular science. Thanks to Aquinas's work, Western science to to use Aristotle's common sense view of the world as its epistemological base without having to wage a war against Christianity to do so. Indeed, Christianity's idea that God created an orderly, regular, pred-

*St. Augustine had enough use for Man's reason such that St. Thomas' full fledged endorsement could get by St. Augustine's ecclesiastical authority.

ible universe helped science greatly. Men could use their natural reason to investigate the world of reality without so much fear that some priest or bishop would condemn them for exercising their curiosity. (It's true that Galileo got clobbered by the Church, but this was at least partly due to Galileo's conflict with Aristotle, not just (supposedly) the Bible). Indeed, it allowed--no, it created--the attitude many traditional Christian scientists had that faith is used to know about spiritual things, but it is good to use reason in exploring the material realm created by God. Galileo's statement to the effect that the Bible tells us how to go to heaven but not the way the heavens go is almost pure Thomism. Thus great scientists like Sir Isaac Newton, Blaise Pascal, Johann Kepler, Robert Boyle, Lord Kelvin, and Louis Pasteur were all traditional Christians of one kind or another who didn't feel their discoveries were opposed to or undermining their (or others) faith. As Newton put it, they were thinking God's thoughts after Him. Aquinas's assigning reason and faith their respective realms gave these scientists all the room they needed to make their discoveries without having to give up their faith in the process. Faith in the Bible gives us knowledge of the final cause ("Why?"), while science tells us the efficient cause ("How?"), which allows us to reconcile faith and reason by giving each their respective and non-conflicting realms).*

The other practical effect was, both directly and indirectly, it spread Aristotle's common sense rationality to various types of Christians, who routinely came to apply (on a lower level than the scientists mentioned above) it to their practical affairs in life, and even used it to organize the knowledge gained from the spiritual revelation from the Bible. As a sign of how deeply this respect and use of Aristotle's common sense views of the world has sunk into the traditional (and not so traditional) Christian world, consider the following (admittedly anecdotal) examples:

Jehovah's Witnesses (hardly a liberal, broadminded denomination) said in The Watchtower of May 15, 1987, p. 21 that: "A christian should not underestimate the danger of making unwise decisions in connection with his service to God. It is not that wrong decions are deliberately made after a consideration of relevant facts. Sometimes they are made simply on the basis of instinctive reactions.

*The theory of evolution incites such controversy since science gets into describing the "How?" of the Bible's

Once emotions succeeed in beclouding the issue and an imperfect heart exerts undue influence on thinking ability, all manner of harm and brief can result."

Or you can find the Seventh-Day Adventist LaVerne Tucker, a director of an independent radio and TV ministry within his church, affirming the law of non-contradiction implicitly in The Quiet Hour Echos, April 1987, p. 3: "This claim--the dead can communicate--is either true or false. If true, it would be one of the grandest truths that ever came to weeping, mourning, humanity. If false, it is a shameless fraud perpetuated in the name of life's sweetest and tenderest memories. As we open the Word of God (a spiritual issue like this has to be settled conclusively by revelation), in our Search for Truth, I leave it with you to decide. The claim is true or false. It cannot be both. Let us turn to the Word of God--the one dependable source of truth."

Or, in a little ad run constantly in The State News, right near the crossword puzzle on the comic page one finds this: "Jesus died to take away your sins, not your minds." "Looking for a warm, friendly, loving, intellectually stimulating and challenging community? The Episcopal Ministry at M.S.U. is for you. Join us Sundays at 5 p.m. at the Alumni Chapel. For more information call 351-7160."

Or, in the Detroit News of May 19, 1987, page 2 of the first section, one will find an article entitled "Religion, Teaching Called Inseparable." This article, which discusses parochial schools run by fundamentalists, says: "Mr. Vanaman and other church-school operators contend there's no such thing as a nonreligious classroom subject. "You cannot teach without imparting values," he said, using as an example a basic lesson on the isosceles triangle, a three-sided geometric shape with two equal sides. "We teach them that triangle. Then we say, look, math is a science. All science is truth. Truth has its origin in God. The purpose of math is that you may learn how to live in an orderly universe." Bob Bolton, Pastor of the Bethseda Baptist Church in Marquette and its 45-student Christian Day School Ministry, offered a similar example: "Two plus

two is always four. God is a God of order. He's always true, He's always the same."

Or consider Jehovah's Witnesses once again in The Watchtower of Febuary 15, 1987, p. 28: "Hindu views are most commonly encountered in the city (of Calcutta). The Bengali people in particular are fond of quoting a saying of Ramakrishna, who lived and preached in the mid-19th century. "Jotto moth, totto poth," means, when loosely translated, that all religions are but different roads leading to the same goal. "Is this viewpoint difficult to overcome?" I asked. "Not if the person is open to reason. We can tactfully explain some obvious differences, such as our Bible-based hope of living forever in human perfection on earth. Or we can point out that it is not possible for opposite views to be true at the same time. For example either there is an immortal soul or there is not one." "That's sound reasoning." "Yes, but too often people refuse to take what we say seriously. They are sure that they know what we believe and that they believe the same thing. This attitude tends to foil any constructive discussion. So we try to leave some literature and move on to the next person.""

The traditional Christian philosopher Richard L. Purtill, in his book C.S. Lewis's Case For the Christian Faith, after mentioning the view of reason's role in religion held by some traditional Christians ("Some appear to believe that the weight of argument is against Christianity, but so much the worse for argument.") and another view that says commitment to any view of life (Humanism, Communism, Christianity, Buddhism, etc.) is a leap of faith, he then mentions C.S. Lewis' view on p. 12-13: "There remain a number of Christians, however, who take an older and bolder view: that reason is on the side of Christianity. These Christians maintain that if we begin to ask fundamental questions about the universe, and follow the argument where it leads us, then it will lead us to belief in God; that if we examine the evidence of history and of human experience, we will be compelled to acknowledge that the only satisfactory explanation of the evidence leads us to Christianity. Such Christians acknowledge that there is

still a gap between intellectual assent and committment to a Christian way of life, but believe that reason is neither opposed to such a committment nor irrelevant to it--rather, it is the best possible ground for it."

This attitude towards reason and Christianity is most zealously found among the Creationist scientists who attempt to fit all the facts (as opposed to interpretations (theories) derived from the facts) into a fundamentalist view of Genesis. In this attempt they have been much more successful than generally thought. (It's amazing what evolutionists will say about evolution--when they don't think creationists are looking--which is something the Creationists have taken advantage of to the hilt by quoting evolutionists in their books). Interestingly, the Creationist assault on evolution has had the curious effect of having some evolutionists adjust their theory some because of the anomalies creationists point out that give evolution some trouble. Stephen Jay Gould's "Punctuated Equilibrium" concept, which explicitly attempts to explain the gaps in the fossil record (thus conceding in the process that they exist, and that they are not the creation of overactive Creationist imaginations), is a good example of the traditional evolutionsts response to a most peculiar scientific assault on their theory, as well as an example of traditional Christian rationalism.*

Thanks to St. Thomas (and some to St. Augustine), Man's reason was endorsed, permitted to operate, and was even defended (against skepticism) in a Western world which even today is pervasively influence by a religion which emphasizes the necessity of faith. St. Thomas, by carefully attempting to define the roles of faith and reason into relatively exclusive realms, attempted to solve a conflict that has always festered, with considerable success. Thus the sanction given to reason by the "Age of Faith"'s two most important philosophers helped to lead to the scientific, industrial Western world of today.

*meaning "pro-reason"