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Rémi Brague and this Extraordinary Use of 'Believe'

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Abstract

Rémi Brague in *On the God of the Christians* gives a defence of the validity of faith against modern presumption that science supplies the model for all knowledge. Brague argues that since God is superpersonal, faith must know God in the way we know persons. Personal knowledge requires the connaturality of a loving will: hence faith in God requires love, utterly unlike any scientific knowledge. In criticism, it is suggested that love is essentially motivated by its object's value, and so presupposes knowledge of the object. What is crucial in faith is not the love the subject brings but the demands of a supremely valuable reality. Since faith is, in the broadest sense, experiential, it has points of contact with scientific rationality.

Keywords

Rémi Brague, Faith and scientific knowledge, Connatural knowledge, Intentionality of love, Balthasar's aesthetic analogy

During one of his 'Lectures on Religious Belief', Ludwig Wittgenstein declares that in religion 'there is this extraordinary use of the word "believe"'. Wittgenstein recalls from his own Catholic religious instruction that 'One said, had to say, that one *believed* in the existence of God, and if one did not believe, this was regarded as something bad. Normally if I did not believe in the existence of something no one would think there was anything wrong in this'. But also, Wittgenstein observes, belief ordinarily indicates a lack of certainty, so that it can be said '"You only believe—oh well....'" Religious belief decidedly does not involve this uncertainty, yet neither does it conform to how 'we generally use the word "know"'.[1]

[1] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, ed. Cyril Barrett (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966), pp. 59-60.

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Wittgenstein's perplexity is not merely personal: his puzzlement is typical of Western thought when confronted with (Biblical) religious belief, faith. This can be seen even from classical Catholic theology. According to St. Thomas Aquinas, faith is an act of the mind, oriented towards truth, yet its firm assent does not come from the clear vision of the truth which characterizes scientific knowledge, but is brought about by the will.[2] As St. Thomas is well aware, such a gallimaufry of faculties and categories has no place in the thinking of 'The Philosopher' Aristotle, or in Greek philosophy generally. Given that the West's standard, scientific knowledge continues to grow in achievement, prestige and ambition, an anomalous religious belief has increasingly come to be considered untenable. This is recognized by Pope Francis in the encyclical *Lumen Fidei*, and the encyclical offers a response in theological and very general philosophical terms. It is also recognized by distinguished and decorated Catholic philosopher Rémi Brague. In his recent book, *On the God of the Christians*, Brague seeks to work out a detailed philosophical response, one which is in accord with Catholic teaching, and indeed with Aquinas. A consummation devoutly to be wished—Brague's attempt is no doubt a worthy one. In the present paper I will outline the understanding Brague has of faith, and reflect on how far it is successful.

The first move made by Brague is to challenge whether there really is a single, standard way 'we generally use the word "know"'. He doesn't dispute that the modern West *thinks* that mathematical, experimental science gives it the model of real knowledge, which simply has to be applied in different cases. Nevertheless 'this is not at all what we *actually are doing*. In fact, we naturally distinguish several ways of knowing'.[3] There is knowledge *that* such-and-such is the case as opposed to knowledge *of* an object; there is knowledge about general things, as distinct from knowledge about singular things. Modern Westerners speak, quite normally, of knowing mathematical and logical laws, knowing persons, knowing beauty, great art, good and evil. In none of these instances are the canons of experimental science applied. On the contrary, applying the criteria of scientific knowledge in these instances is considered a mistake. When the materialist Doctor Cabanis declared that he didn't believe in the soul, since in his thirty years of scientifically dissecting corpses he had never encountered one, he merely showed a misunderstanding of what knowledge of the soul amounts to.

In order to know things, we have to go seek them where they are. And different kinds of things are in different places, on different

[2] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ* 2a2æ. 2, 1-2.

[3] Rémi Brague, *On the God of the Christians (and on one or two others)*, trans. Paul Seaton (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 2013), p. 26.

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planes. From his consideration of our several modes of knowing, then, Brague derives a rule, a metaphysical principle in fact, which is at the heart of his overall case. '*[I]t is the nature of the object that dictates to me the way I am to gain access to it*'.[4] As Brague notes, this principle was laid down by Aristotle in the *Nichomachean Ethics*. St. Thomas and the other Scholastics learnt it there; it was revived with vigour by neo-Thomists such as Maritain and Gilson; today, it has become a commonplace of Catholic thinking.

Yet for all the impressive backing, Brague's rule is not quite the straightforward matter he suggests. Indeed, mention of Aristotle may call to mind some complications, since Aristotle notoriously used the wrong way of knowing in one realm of enquiry. Aristotle approached the object of physics, mobile being, with the teleological method of assigning goals, and so helped hold back physics for centuries. It is arguable, nevertheless, that Aristotle's method was appropriate to mobile being *as he conceived it*, a mobile being intrinsically goal-directed. So we can see that identifying the nature of an object is no simple task, and not easily seperable from our ways of knowing. Only with successful application of the mathematical and experimental method was the true quantative, mechanical being of physics established. Furthermore, we can learn here that just because a kind of object and associated kind of knowing is generally or even universally recognized—be it Aristotlean physics, or astrology, or witchcraft amongst archaic peoples, or Christianity—does not mean that the system achieves truth, and doesn't mean that it should be exempt from criticism from other systems, or from an overarching understanding of cognition and rationality.

In the overthrow of astrology and archaic witchcraft, Christian reasons and reasons from general Western ethics were just as important as scientific objections. Still, experimental science has been particularly brazen in defying Brague's principle, and has won a good deal of its prestige from the contraventions. Thus, the objects of chemistry and biology apparently had distinct natures with their distinct modes of access. But mathematical science has shown that chemical objects and to a significant degree biological objects are just complex patterns of the objects of physics, and the special procedures just a consequence of working on a larger scale. These successes of mathematical science have no doubt had an impact on all our notions of rationality and knowledge: there is now less enthusiasm about grand teleological attributions in any realm, and much more focus on testing against reality.

Let us turn now, perhaps with some circumspection, to the nature Brague assigns to the object of Christianity, and the mode of

[4] Ibid., p. 33.

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knowing he derives from it. The God of the Christians, says Brague, is 'something like a person'; indeed, 'he is *more personal* than the persons we are familiar with',[5] *super*personal. And the crux of this super personality is that God's love is not subject to limitation. We human persons, says Brague, 'have something in us that would prefer only to exist by loving', 'We all know that the unity that binds us to the beloved counts more than our mere identity with ourselves'.[6] Yet because of finitude and sin our love is 'the property of a nature that does not coincide with it'. With God alone 'are being and love identical': '"God is love" (*I John* 4:16)'. This Johannine formulation Brague takes 'literally . . . , as if one meant to say: what God is, is love, and nothing else'.[7]

It is not difficult to see that personhood could have an impact on ways of knowing. Brague contends that the being of a person immediately rules out any possibility of knowledge by the experimental method. An experiment must be repeatable, and to achieve this experimental subjects and conditions must be controlled, that is, artificially limited. But the subject is thereby treated as a thing to be manipulated, *de*personalized. So no knowledge of the subject *as* person can result.

How Brague's argument plays out with the personhood of God may be illustrated from Walker Percy's novel, *The Second Coming*. Will Barrett, the (somewhat deranged) hero, constructs the 'ultimate scientific experiment' to 'settle the question of God once and for all'.[8] The experimental set-up is that Barrett retreats to one of a network of caves and undertakes to wait there until he dies, unless God gives a sign. If there is no sign, then God does not exist or refuses to manifest himself, 'which comes to the same thing as far as we are concerned'.[9] Whereas if there is a sign, God does exist. What happens is that Will gets a terrible toothache in his cave which causes him to abandon the great experiment; he gets lost trying to retrace the way he entered the caves; finally, he falls down a different opening, before a young woman whose help he desperately needs, and who desperately needs his help. The novel is telling us that God, *as* person, refuses to submit to artificial experiment; that God bursts our attempts at manipulation, our constraints and demands; and that, in this case at least, God has something better planned for his creature than the creature had planned for himself. Percy, like

[5] Ibid., p. 31, p. 32.
[6] Ibid., p. 60.
[7] Ibid., p. 64, p. 65, p. 63, p. 64.
[8] Walker Percy, *The Second Coming* (London: Panther Books, Granada Publishing, 1985), p. 178.
[9] Ibid., pp. 182-83.

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Brague, believes the modern scientific method can't yield knowledge of God, because God is (super)personal.

But Brague goes well beyond this exclusion in his understanding of what is involved in knowledge of persons, personal knowledge. For every person, he maintains, is a 'living freedom',[10] a mysterious, unfathomable being. 'Who has ever heard it said that someone has completely come to know even those he knows best: his spouse, his children, his friends? In my case, it is now forty years that I do *not* know my wife'.[11] When we ask a person who they are, and the question represents a genuine desire to know, 'the only true response is: "You will see . . . ."' And, crucially, this response 'cannot be given except in an experience rooted in love or friendship. Love consists precisely in the space that is opened, in which the other person can say, or rather, show, what he or she is. Or rather: what he or she will be.'[12]

In thus saying that love is necessary for personal knowledge, Brague is not merely pointing out that one must really attend to persons, and so 'love' them in a minimal sense, in order to comprehend them. This sort of loving is also needed for knowledge of the sun, sand, and sea-slugs; it can also be present in the fiercest hate. The love Brague means is uncaused willing—'I have no reason for loving than the fact that I love'[13]—which flows into attitude, emotion, self-giving. It is such full-bodied, full-blown love which is held to cause knowledge of persons.

Brague's thinking here is clearly influenced by existentialism and personalism—particularly their Christian variants, and most particularly, I suspect, the version of Gabriel Marcel. The influence need not be a bad thing: I would conjecture the same for parts of *Lumen Fidei*. Yet these ideas can also be found in Aquinas—at least according to some of his interpreters, most particularly the editors of the Blackfriars *Summa*. As set out by general editor Thomas Gilby, O.P., the Blackfriars group find great significance in St. Thomas' references to a judgement by inclination or connaturality, connatural knowledge. In the connatural mode of knowing, knowledge is produced by the knower having a kinship or affinity with the reality known, becoming attuned to the reality[14]—just as Brague contends for personal knowledge.

[10] Brague, p. 32.
[11] Ibid., p. 39.
[12] Ibid., p. 32.
[13] Ibid., p. 68.
[14] Thomas Gilby, 'Appendix 2: The Dialectic of Love in the *Summa*', in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ: Volume 1: The Existence of God: Part One: Questions 1-13*, ed. Thomas Gilby, O.P. (Blackfriars: New York: Doubleday Image Books, 1969), p. 242.

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Moving on to knowledge of the superpersonal God, Brague finds the need for love even more pressing. '[T]he faculty which grasps must be of the same nature as the object which is grasped'.[15] Now the God who has declared '"I am [will be] who I am [will be] (*Exodus* 3:14)"' is pure liberty, and so 'can only be encountered in liberty'.[16] Further, God is pure love, and nothing but love. Since 'No one understands love except by loving',[17] without love one can't get any sort of hold on God at all. Brague's formulations here obviously echo a central, gnomic Christian text, and he can be seen as offering an explication of that text, through connaturality. '[E]veryone who loves is a child of God and knows God. Whoever fails to love does not know God, because God is love' (*I John* 4:7-8).

And again, still, Brague's account agrees with that of St. Thomas, on a certain reading of the Angelic Doctor. Brague claims that to St. Thomas 'the act of faith is an act of will',[18] which is not strictly correct. The *Summa* categorizes faith as 'an act of the mind', but one wherein 'the mind is brought to decision by the will'; the will is responsible for 'prompting the mind'.[19] In the Blackfriars volume on faith, though, editor T.C.O'Brien construes this willing as loving, and its prompting as the result of connaturality between loving will and God.[20] It follows that, for St. Thomas as for Brague, faith's knowledge of God is an affective knowledge, and a knowledge by connaturality. As Brague says, 'The will is the organ of the vision of God'[21]: the loving will, love, flows into knowledge.

But, to the contrary, William Shakespeare writes that 'Love is blind'.[22] Indeed, the Swan of Avon found this notion so captivating that he used it in four plays. In one of them, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, he goes on to note that 'winged Cupid' is 'painted blind'[23]: blindness is one of the god of love's traditional characteristics. In his reading of Shakespeare René Girard puts a typical spin on the point; Girard maintains that the love at issue is blind as a result of being mimetic, copied from others. However that may be, it is not difficult to think of everyday instantiations of Shakespeare's dictum.

[15] Brague, p. 43.
[16] Ibid., p. 32, p. 43.
[17] Ibid., p. 68.
[18] Ibid., p. 43.
[19] *ST* 2a2æ. 2, 1, ad 3, 2a2æ. 2, 2.
[20] T.C.O'Brien, 'Appendix 3: Faith and the Truth about God', in St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ: Volume 31: Faith (2a2æ 1-7)*, trans. and notes T.C.O'Brien (Blackfriars: London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1974), p.204. See also Gilby, pp. 246-252.
[21] Brague, p. 43.
[22] William Shakespeare, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, ed. Norman Sanders (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), II.i.67.
[23] William Shakespeare, *A Midsumer Night's Dream*, ed. Wolfgang Clemen (New York: Signet Classic, Penguin Books), I.i.235.

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A young man passionately in love with a beautiful woman fails to recognize her superficiality and inveterate selfishness. The love felt by a mother for her only son conceals from her his cruel and violent tendencies. Then again, a warm-hearted, demonstrative farmer fails to see the love in the formal behaviour of an old-world aristocrat towards his daughter. If a more academic example is desired: the great anthropologist E.E.Evans-Pritchard distrusted the use of empathy, love, in the study of archaic peoples[24]—because it usually meant anthropologists projecting their own feelings upon the peoples. Finally, a brilliant remark by Simone Weil turns Brague's conception of the relation of love and knowledge on its head. In 'A Note on Social Democracy' Weil acknowledges the French socialist President Léon Blum as 'a highly cultured man of subtle intelligence', a man of 'sincerity and sympathy and morality'. Yet 'he lacks the touch of cynicism which is essential for perspicacity'[25]: the contrary of love is necessary for knowledge.

In some of these cases, at least, Brague could argue that they do not exhibit the love he is concerned with. That what they're about is physical attraction, or infatuation, or sentimentality, not real love. But such a reply merely opens up the deeper difficulty for Brague's account. If, as Brague says, 'I have no reason for loving than the fact that I love', if 'A love that is explained is not love'[26]—if love is, in this sense, pure willing—how can we distinguish genuine love from false love? Intensity of willing, sincerity, even persistence over time don't do the job.

For the phenomenology of Dietrich von Hildebrand, love is essentially intentional, related to an object[27]; analytic philosophers, similiarly, have spoken of a conceptual connection between love and its object. In his system Aquinas classifies several types and levels of love—natural, sensitive, irascible—but where love of the will is at issue, he too says that 'love demands some apprehension'.[28] Even with St. Thomas' celebrated connatural knowledge, I would humbly submit, a habit of perception precedes the habit of willing. In these very different philosophical traditions, love is construed as a response to an object's goods or values, apprehended by us. Interestingly, Charles Taylor has noted that the Romantics held love to be a compound of feeling and will and thought.[29]

[24] E.E.Evans-Pritchard, 'Anthropology and History', *Essays in Social Anthropology* (London: Faber and Faber, 1962), p. 61.

[25] Simone Weil, *Selected Essays 1934-1943*, ed. and trans. Richard Rees (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 151, p. 153.

[26] Brague, p. 68, p. 63.

[27] Dietrich von Hildebrand, *The Heart: An Analysis of Human and Divine Affectivity*, ed. John Henry Crosby (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 2007), pp. 6-7.

[28] *ST*, 1a2æ. 27, 2.

[29] Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 21-22.

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But if love is a response, there is motive for loving: there are reasons, and there's reasoning. It is possible to distinguish well-founded from ill-founded love, proportionate from disproportionate, real love from false. Our young man's love is false, because his passion for the beloved's beauty has led him to project onto her other qualities she does not possess. The attitude of our doting mother has degenerated into sentimentality because she won't face unpleasant facts about her son. In thus establishing that genuine love is not blind, though, we have not only abandoned Brague's unmotivated, inexplicable love, but also, in the process, rejected his whole understanding of persons and access to them. Brague has contended that connatural love is necessary for personal knowledge; intentional love, however, requires antecedent, independent apprehension of truths about beloved persons. Love cannot be a necessary condition for knowledge of persons, since knowledge of persons is a necessary condition for truly loving them.

Nor are the persons known anymore Brague's mysterious, unfathomable beings. Brague has said 'it is forty years now that I do *not* know my wife'. Yet presumably Brague knows that his wife is not a con-artist, who for those forty years has been running a scam to fleece him of his money, which will culminate tomorrow when she disappears to Acapulco with the contents of his bank accounts. We can know that people are honest and trustworthy, as we can know that they are egotistical or have a violent streak. What 'we *actually are doing*' with people includes identifying character: persons have personalities. Even when due allowance has been made for free-will's potential for change, and its impact on the exactitude of knowledge, there are fathoms to persons, and they are rather less mysterious than Brague advertizes. Just because the experiments of mathematical science cannot bring knowledge of persons, doesn't mean we can't learn about them from experience, and in this sense have experimental knowledge of persons.

Incidentally, I find rather breath-taking Brague's presumption that the hidden depths of people will be wondrous. What if, in some cases, they're terrible? What if there is hatred and rage down there? By Brague's account, such individuals would be beyond the comprehension of one who approaches them with love, since 'the faculty which grasps must be of the same nature as the object that is grasped'.

It cannot be pretended, unfortunately, that the dictum 'love is blind' has no application to Christians' understanding of God. We may find historical examples of sentimental projection upon God in the medieval Brethren of the Free Spirit, in Quietism and Pietism; some would add post-Vatican II Catholicism. It is with us every day in all those saccharine hymns of Jesus meek and mild, in sickly sweet religious paintings, statues, theologies. Loving believers can and do find in God the products of their own disordered wills. No less than

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love of persons does true love of the superpersonal God require antecedent apprehension of truths. This has of course generally been recognized in Christianity. It has been seen that there must be, in the phrase of William of Saint-Thierry, a 'school of charity',[30] wherein ordinary human love is corrected, purified, perfected. And the great teacher of the way to love God is God Himself, most especially the Word made flesh Who dwelt amongst us.

For a book Brague has titled *On the God of the Christians*, Christ's appearances are fleeting. We have been told of the novel Christian conception that 'God is love'. But this is presented as an abstract, one might say a metaphysical, proposition. Things are rather different in its original context. The *First Letter of John* also says 'This is the revelation of God's love for us, that God sent his only Son into the world', says 'any spirit which acknowledges Jesus Christ, come in human nature, is from God' (4:9,2). In the epistle, knowledge of God is sensory perception of the historical, corporeal Jesus Christ, which seems far indeed from what Brague proposes. 'Something which has existed since the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our own eyes, which we have watched and touched with our own hands, the Word of life—this is our theme.' (1:1)

The purport of this Johannine theme can be clarified by reference to theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar and his renowned aesthetic analogy. Beauty, Balthasar contends, is perceived by the senses, yet is also spiritual: 'the spiritual has been corporealised within it'.[31] When standing before the beautiful, what matters is not the attitude a person brings, but his 'being moved and possessed by it'; one who really apprehends beauty 'is now fully subordinate to it, determined by it, animated by it'.[32] Something analogous can happen, Balthasar argues, in confrontation with the Revelation of God, especially in Christ. There can be a sensory perception of corporealised spirit: of supreme beauty and goodness, holiness and sacredness, the numinous. Christ has 'an interior rightness and evidential power' which 'possesses the power to illumine the perceiving person by its own radiant light, and this not simply intellectually but in a manner that transforms man's existence'.[33] St. Paul on that road to Damascus, after all, was by no means a loving man looking for the love divine. Rather he was knocked to the ground, overwhelmed and determined by the reality of God—'Christ Jesus took hold of me' (*Phil* 3:12). Brague's focus

[30] Quoted in Étienne Gilson, *The Mystical Theology of Saint Bernard*, trans. A.H.C. Downes (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1990), p. 67.

[31] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics: Volume I: Seeing the Form*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, ed. Joseph Fessio, S.J., and John Riches (San Francisco: Ignatius Press; New York: Crossroad Publications, 1983), p. 317.

[32] Ibid., p. 247.

[33] Ibid., pp. 465-66.

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is on man seeking God; according to Balthasar, Revelation is God seeking man.

Central to the Balthasar account is that the very reality of God demands a response from us. The response begins with apprehension of God in faith, but faith's perception entails essentially, conceptually, trust in God, hope in God, love of God. We have seen that authentic love generally is required by a reality's intrinsic goodness; faith in and love of God are required by God's supremely good reality. Anyone who claims to know but not to love God merely demonstrates that he doesn't truly know. This is of course just the insight Newman embodies in his distinction between notional and real assent. It is also an insight which offers a solution to one of Wittgenstein's paradoxes.

Wittgenstein has said that in religion failure to believe in the existence of God is regarded as something bad, whereas normally failure to accept an existent is not regarded as bad. Yet consider again an aesthetic analogy, this time to do with music, since Wittgenstein was a lover of classical music. If, at one of the musical soirées the Wittgenstein family held in their Winter Palais in Vienna, a member of Viennese high society had failed to perceive the existence of beautiful sounds in the Clarinet Quintet by Brahms, one of Ludwig Wittgenstein's favourite composers, then Ludwig would most definitely have regarded this as something bad. Indeed, given Wittgenstein's temperament, it is likely that he would have broken off all contact with the offending philistine. In the ethical realm, the failure to recognize the existence of a murder—to recognize that this killing *is* murder—is regarded as bad. If I do not see that an Australian Aborigine, or a Muslim, or, for that matter, a white trash redneck, is a person, this is bad. Quite generally, knowledge or ignorance of intrinsically valuable realities brings praise or blame. To count as a virtue faith's knowledge of the supremely valuable God is not anomalous, nor irrational; there is no need for any Kierkegaardian leaps. Nor is there any need to make the knowledge a product of the believer's virtuous, loving will, with all the attendant difficulties—as does Brague, and as also does Aquinas, on the Blackfriars reading at least.

Brague has correctly, and importantly, observed that, while the modern West believes knowledge is just a matter of applying the mathematical scientific method, 'this is not at all what we *actually are doing*'. Yet with knowledge of persons and of God Brague himself does not take into account all that 'we actually are doing'. Rather, he concentrates on a small portion of our practices. In so limiting his vision, he is guided by the philosophical theories of existentialism and personalism. Brague is further hindered from seeing the whole of Christian belief, I think, by his determination to reconcile existentialist/personalist findings with the categories of classical Catholic theology. These are, of course, just the categories of classical Greek

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philosophy: intellect in opposition to will, being opposed to goodness, etc.. As Stephanus Pfurtner, O.P., has remarked, though, 'nowhere in the world' of the ancient Greeks 'did there exist the phenomenon of faith which had been brought home to biblical man through his relationship to Yahweh'.[34] And one may wonder if the Greek concepts are really capable of grasping this phenomenon. Even St. Thomas with his definition of faith as intellect moved by will—which is in its turn moved by good apprehended, and so by intellect?—is, it might be suggested, like a man trying to hammer a square peg into a round hole, or, again, like a man attempting to catch a fly with chopsticks. It is noticeable that *Lumen Fidei* largely steers away from the Greek conceptions, preferring Biblical terms.

Brague's blinkered perspective on faith is all the more unfortunate because 'what we actually are doing' is more congruent with modern science and modern rationality than existentialism, personalism or the Greek philosophical categories. Unlike the mysteries of an unmotivated will in existentialism/personalism, and abstract, often *a priori* Greek science, the faith of Christians involves what 'we have heard, . . . seen with our own eyes, . . . watched and touched': it is experiential/experimental. Not experimental in exactly the same sense as physics and chemistry, but in a way analogous to that of our knowledge of persons, to aesthetics and ethics, and so to human sciences such as sociology, economics, history. Contrary to the second Wittgenstein paradox, religious usage is not wholly different from how 'we generally', scientifically, 'use the word "know"'.

Now Brague has made the case that artificial, controlled experiment cannot give knowledge of persons or God. Behind his argument one can sense Jesus' pronouncement '"Scripture also says: *Do not put the Lord your God to the test*"' (*Mt* 4:7). But Christ puts the God of the Pharisees and scribes to a most rigorous testing. The understandings, the conceptions they have of God are subjected to the experience of reality; what their hard hearts have projected upon God is separated from the real. While we must not experiment upon the person of God, we must experiment, in the broadest sense, upon the conceptions we have of the person of God, including the conceptions we think of as Christian. Thus it is that St. Paul instructs us to 'test everything and hold on to what is good' (*1 Th* 5:21). Naturally for Pharisees and scribes, ancient and modern, their concept of God gives the real super-person: here too it is not easy to separate the nature of an object from our knowing.

There is in Brague, as in Wittgenstein, something of Kant's 'I have found it necessary to deny knowledge, in order to make room

[34] Stephanus Pfurtner, O.P., *Luther and Aquinas—a Conversation: Our Salvation, Its Certainty and Peril*, trans. Edward Quinn (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1964), p. 51.

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for faith'.[35] In the face of the dominance and aggression of modern experimental science, faith is put behind a firewall, sealed off in a water-tight compartment. By construing faith as a mode of knowledge for which love is necessary, Brague situates it beyond scientific cognition and scientific criticism. Whether this sequestration could be a practical strategy for religion, and is not like setting up a plastic screen before a raging inferno or a tumultuous flood or a charging rhinocerous, may be debated. But, more importantly, the philosopher of science C.S. Peirce has noted that the only principle of logic recommended by Jesus is just that of experimental science: 'Ye shall know them by their fruits'[36] (*Mt*: 7:16) The faith of Christians is after all not as 'extraordinary'—neither so removed from the rest of our lives, nor from scientific knowing—as Brague would have it.

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[35] Paraphrased from Immanuel Kant, *Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London and Basingstoke: The MacMillan Press Ltd, 1982), B xxx, p. 29.

[36] C.S.Peirce, 'How to Make Our Ideas Clear', *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, ed. Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1974), Vol. V, p. 402, n.2.

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