Interpreting God's Truth: A Postmodern Interpretation of Medieval Epistemology

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ABSTRACT

Much of the work on Medieval thinkers, especially Augustine and Aquinas, has centered on the relationship between the emerging church doctrine and secular authority. Linear history treats Aquinas as a central figure in the progression out of the Middle Ages, as Aquinas gives a stronger place to human reason. Both thinkers consciously rejected empirical verifiability as the mode of epistemological verification. Their work stands in opposition to that tradition. Combined, their work represents a system that validates a particular approach to the study of human knowledge. One of the perspective that can be brought to this analysis is that of anthropology which can reveal contrasts among competing forms of epistemological validation outside pressures for historical continuity. Linkage between *truth* generation and the legitimate exercise of authority is clearly evident in Augustine and Aquinas. According to Augustine, a major problem with philosophy is the fact that philosophers disagree over the course to the best possible life. He insists that religious knowledge takes priority over knowledge of the physical environment. Knowledge of nature is not dismissed as unnecessary, but its role is made subordinate.

Introduction

Much of the work on Medieval thinkers, especially Augustine and Aquinas, has centered on the relationship between the emerging church doctrine and secular authority. In Augustine, this discussion takes the form assessing the extent to which he was an apologist for the emerging Church hierarchy in its struggle against the remnants of Roman polytheism. The secondary literature also stresses the connection of Augustine to the transcendentalist elements of the Platonic tradition, as part of the continuity with ancient philosophy.

In the linear model of history Augustine is treated as a transitional figure, fusing transcendentalist elements of the Platonic tradition to the content of Christian doctrine. Linear history treats Aquinas as a central figure in the progression out of the Middle Ages, as Aquinas gives a stronger place to human reason. Drawing on Aristotelian roots, Aquinas makes way for the emergence of modernism, with its stress on empirical verification. Stressing the continuity to the modern period, Aquinas is discussed as defining a place for "natural law," further elaborating the matter of "free will," and circumscribing the limits of reason. All of these subjects will be important to the thinking of other transitional figures such as Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibnitz.

All of this is true, in a sense, but the arrangement is one that stresses the continuity and linearity of development rather than generating an understanding of how Augustine, Aquinas, and other medieval thinkers worked out a system that stands on its own. In the view of these thinkers their system of validating *truth* is superior to the alternatives. Augustine and Aquinas were both aware of the alternatives, especially one that stressed reason as a means to validating *truth*. Both thinkers consciously rejected empirical verifiability as the mode of epistemological verification. Their work stands in opposition to that tradition. Combined, their work represents a system that validates a particular approach to the study of human knowledge. It is a conscious rejection of alternative forms of epistemological validation. Viewing this approach non-linearly, we are in a better position to see the schism between this system and alternatives.

The most fruitful perspective to bring to this analysis is that of an "anthropology." Such an approach can reveal the contrasts among competing forms of epistemological validation outside of the pressures for historical continuity. From an anthropological perspective the system constructed by Augustine and Aquinas represents the working out of epistemological problems in order to empower a certain mode of existence. An epistemological form gets translated into a form of social and political life as it establishes the parameters for "rational" discourse. Free will, natural law, revelation, and ecclesiastical hierarchy represent the solutions to problems that must be addressed in order to rationalize the type of life envisioned by its proponents. Augustine and Aquinas represent the architects of a mode of life carried out through the establishment of a particular structure of validating *truth*.

While Augustine and Aquinas viewed themselves as extracting the "*truth*" from what had gone before, Plato and Aristotle, it is also important to note that they saw themselves competing with these systems of thought. Plato and Aristotle represented alternative forms of textual validation, competing epistemological paradigms, that would empower other forms of social life. If Michel Foucault is correct, that every age is dominated by one episteme,[1] then Augustine and Aquinas can be viewed as elaborating that system for the Middle Ages.

There is one other part of Foucault's logic that is important for understanding how politics emerges in the process of *truth* production. Every method of *truth* production must also provide a mechanism by which a "legitimate" use of force is empowered. *Truth* requires a logic, as well as an institutional structure, in order for enforcement to have the character of reason. Therefore, punishment is a logical extension of any discussion of textual validation. The "political" constitutes an institutional arrangement in which the content of a particular form of *truth* generation is enforced by sanctioned collective action. Such linkage between *truth* generation and the "legitimate" exercise of authority is clearly evident in Augustine and Aquinas.

"Textual Exclusivity" in Augustine and Aquinas

All claims about the nature of the world are essentially circular in nature. Conclusions are dependent on the epistemological premises that govern what can and cannot enter the discourse on *truth*. Conclusions represent the results made possible by the premises, and the very creation of results has the effect of reinforcing those premises. Thus, textual validity is generated within a closed system in which premises are reinforced by the act of conclusion, regardless of the content of either.

For Augustine and Aquinas the foundational premises for their epistemological and ontological assertions can be traced to a single source, the Bible. The Bible contains parables and stories that, by analogy, are to be the source of inspiration to the believers of the Christian faith in the Middle Ages. In addition to presenting a "text" on living in society, the Bible also contains both explicit and implicit assertions regarding knowledge. In epistemological terms, the Bible also establishes the parameters of human understanding, the relation of the empirical world to the transcendental, and a model of textual validation.

What is unique about the epistemological system that emerges out of church doctrine is the self-conscious nature of its closure. Alternative epistemologies, ie. Aristotle, are to be subsumed under the epistemological system developed by the church scholars, or, in a political sense, they are to be openly suppressed. Suppression of alternative epistemologies is part of the political process regardless of the dominant episteme. The gatekeeper function of what enters the realm of discourse is always part of the power/knowledge matrix. However, what is unique about this particular doctrine is that by closing itself off from any input that is empirical in nature, the system has essentially isolated itself from sources of criticism that might arise outside of the conditions necessary for its own generation. The text is "exclusive" in the sense that it cannot be subject to any external, empirical information that might cause doubt about its own fallibility. This exclusivity, and separation from the world, is a major component in the longevity of this particular epistemological form. A challenge can simply be labeled as heretical and, thus, can be subject to the most direct form of suppression.

The "*truth*" of the text is accepted as a "given," as the starting point for all discourse. Thus, all discourse within this model assumes a given form of knowledge, assuming as fact the very knowledge it seeks to validate through the process of representation. All conclusions have embedded within them the implicit assumptions of the given text as the premise of their generation.

Within a textually exclusive model of epistemological validation the sacred text is not only the origin of all discourse on *truth*, but also the starting point for all discussions involving practical application. As with all forms of practical application, the politics of a textually exclusivity operates deductively. As Foucault puts it, all institutions of power require some process where they generate a supporting discourse on the *truth* in order to exercise power.[2] Only after the supporting *truth* is generated can political application appear as a legitimate expression of that power.

Like all forms of validation, textual exclusivity represents a closed system. Because the *truth* generated within this framework also has a "sacred" character, an alternative form is not simply considered irrational, but is claimed to be heretical. Institutional structures are reflective of the general conditions for *truth* generation in a given period. Challenges are legitimately suppressed because they represent a threat not only to a specific *truth*, but the entire system of validation. The circle is closed, uniting the generation of knowledge and the expression of collective power.

The Politics of Augustine's Epistemology Omnipotent God and the Sacred Text

Augustine makes it clear that a major problem with philosophy is the fact that philosophers disagree over the course to the best possible life. The problem, says Augustine, stems from the fact that these philosophers sought to answer the question in human terms. They have sought to use human experience and reason as a means to find an answer to this enduring question.[3] In the "demon-adoring city" it was the case that Epicureans and Stoics were equally admired. Augustine concludes that the senses are not to be the source of *truth* to this important matter. In contrast to the Greek and Roman philosophers, Augustine claims that there is "no shadow of disagreement" among the writers of the "Holy Writ." They are in agreement that the Bible is the word of God Himself, whether copied from *God's* own words or of God speaking through those who wrote His words.

The epistemological foundation of Augustine's theology rests on the assertion that the Bible is both sacred and infallible. As a methodology, this claim requires that the text remain immune from all challenges that might come from this world. According to Augustine the scripture is the word of God. It is the supreme authority "concerning all those *truths* we ought to know."[4] While humans are fallible and may interpret it falsely, the work itself is infallible.[5] *God's* word is *truth* itself, but the word is not transmitted through the objects of the world but only to those "who can hear with the mind."[6]

Establishing the infallible nature of the text allows Augustine to do several things. First, it establishes a specific intellectual task to human beings, one of *interpreting* and discussing the sacred *truths* contained in the document. Second, it effectively isolates the text from all criticism, challenge, or alternative that might spring from secular sources. The text may be discussed, but only the nature of human interpretation can be the subject for debate. The words themselves cannot be the subject of speculation. The "word" is the measure of itself.

Religious knowledge takes priority over knowledge of the physical environment. Knowledge of nature is not dismissed as unnecessary, but its role is subordinate. The physical world has value only to the extent that it present a body of information that will illuminate the true meaning contained in scriptures. Such illumination allows the comparisons, analogies, and metaphors contained in the Bible to be understood. Without such knowledge, the instruction as to the mode of living to be enacted could not be fully understood. Knowledge of the world is useful only to make the word of God more clear.

It is also the case that the physical world has much that defies explanation, giving further evidence that the material world is not the source of knowledge. Human reason is inadequate to

unlock all of nature's mysteries. Minerals that flow like water when heated and crackle when put in water, wood that sinks in water only to rise later, are phenomena that defy rational explanation.[8] These marvels are too much for human reason and serve as a demonstration that God has the power to produce miracles. Such miracles are "easy for Omnipotence to do."

Thus, while the empirical word cannot produce a system of knowledge that can challenge the sacredness of the scriptures, it can serve as a means to validate the content contained in the text. This can be achieved only if the content is accepted as a premise for the understanding of how to interpret the text of the world. In order to make the circular logic that functions as the epistemological foundation, God is defined in such a way as to make it the origin, purpose, and teleology of all human activity. As that which is defined as the origin of all things, God has the capability of shaping the world as he would like it to be. As that which is defined as timeless,[9] God has no beginning and no end, and is, therefore, outside and immune from the temporal, logical, inquiry concerning cause and effect. Yet God returns to the linear and temporal history in his relationship to human kind.

Existing outside of time, God can know past, present, and future simultaneously. Critical of cyclical history, Augustine asserts that the history of mankind has a beginning and an end. Such a position challenges that of many Greek and Roman writers.[10] While God is outside of temporal history, he created human history and set it on a linear path. Once Christ died for human salvation, that event did not need to be repeated.[11] God starts mankind's linear history but is outside of the logic which governs it.

God is the cause of causes and therefore the cause of God is a question that cannot be considered as a part of rational inquiry. God is independent of what He makes,[12] outside of the rationale that was created to govern the world of human beings. Therefore, human reason can neither validate nor invalidate the content of the sacred text. The text simply "is." It excludes all other possible texts that would claim to compete with its authority. It is to be the source of all that one needs to know.

Augustine's Ontology: Mankind as Revealed by the Word

Having established both the omnipotence of God and the isolation of God from empirical reality, Augustine has created the foundation for a text that cannot be challenged by any form of human thought or experience. The text reveals *God's* word. It is, therefore, from that word that one is to learn of one's nature and purpose in the temporal world. If the word is the will of God, then human beings have the task to decipher its meaning. The word is considered to be a reflection of *God's* perfection, a perfection that escapes human capacities.

While the overt purpose of inquiry into the *truths* of the sacred text is to uncover their meaning, there is also an implicit operation that simultaneously occurs. If the logic is circular, based on foundational assumptions, then the act of *interpreting* also has the function of making the text rational. If the text is rational perfection then all of its elements must convey a unity that is *God's* perfection. Text reinforces itself in the process of its own dissemination.

This is clearly demonstrated as Augustine moves into the discussion of the human nature. Beginning with a single individual, Adam, from which all others, even Eve, were to spring forth into the world, it is revealed that God desired that human being should share one nature." God created women out of man so that the whole race will have sprung from a single individual.[14] In an obvious contrast to Greek and Roman mythology, Augustine has here created the basis for a singular view of subjectivity revealed as an "intention" of God. This position asserts that human beings share identical prospects and choices in their existence. Thus, they can be treated as a mass.

Central to the Christian theology of Augustine, and to "textual exclusivity" in general, is the idea that the human subject has a duty or obligation to follow the *truth* contained in the text. In Augustine and other Christian thinkers this presents a multifaceted problem that must be solved. The infallible *truth* has been asserted, but the question remains as to the mechanism by which human beings can be made to feel a sense of obligation to it. More specifically, by what rationale can they be punished for not adhering to its prescriptive nature. This problem is solved by introducing the idea of "free will."

Free will is one of the most important features of Christianity. Central to its content is the idea that human beings possess the capability to exercise choice over their motives and behavior in the world. In truly circular logic, Augustine claims to demonstrate a proof of free will. Augustine states that if God has foreknowledge of our wills, he must have foreknowledge of something rather than nothing and, therefore, we must have wills.[15] If we have freedom of the will, we can be held accountable for our choices, the role assigned to God within Christian theology.

If human beings possess free will, there is an immediate problem. If God is outside of temporal experience and is eternal, then why does God not intervene and only produce "good" outcomes in the world? Is God somehow culpable for the existence of evil by not using his foreknowledge? How can human beings be held accountable if God had foreknowledge of their actions? How could those actions be free, and therefore punishable, if there was foreknowledge of them? This issue represents both a logical problem and an issue of textual authority, since the scriptures assert the existence of good and evil and the necessity of choice among them. Augustine addresses the apparent contradiction between choice and necessity by suggesting two forces between which man is trapped.

Mankind is between angel and beast.[16] Since God is perfect, and is the reflection of good, the beast that tempts mankind is not of God but of the devil.[17] Human beings possess the power of choice, free will, to choose between these alternatives. A choice is possible that is contrary to *God's* will.18 Even though, having perfect knowledge and being eternal, God is aware of the choice we will make He allows us the freedom to choose contrary to His will. However, we have to face the consequences of such choices We thus have a mission in this world. We are to resist temptation in order to demonstrate to God that we understand the message of scripture and the message sent by the embodiment of God, Christ. We are sent into this world to know evil and then to purge it from our souls.[19] It is not the corruptible flesh that made us sinful, but the sinful soul that made the flesh corruptible.[20] If we are not worthy of this task a fate awaits us. We will be doomed to eternal punishment.

The Politics of Textual Exclusivity in Augustine

The mode of political life that Augustine supports follows directly from the epistemological assumptions regarding the Bible as the source of true knowledge and the limits of our rational understanding of the world. Those acknowledging the power of divine wisdom are superior to those who do not. The authority of church bishops in the interpretation of the "*truth*" of scripture is also secured. While justice on earth can never be fully realized, the goals can only be acknowledged within the realm of Christian faith.

The belief in a singular source of eternal knowledge establishes the grounding for a particular set of social and political practices. Politics emerges for those followers of the "Heavenly City" as a process of disseminating the one true word of God, while actively suppressing alternatives. The technique of *truth* production involved establishing a content that remains outside the domain of empirical inquiry. Since religious *truth* maintains the highest position in a hierarchy of *truth*, all other *truths* must be subordinate. In practical terms the suppression of both Greek and Roman religions, as well as philosophy, become a logical outcome. As Augustine describes it, if there is *truth* found in ancient Greek or Roman mythology it must be captured within the foundational assertions of Christianity. Anywhere *truth* is found it is good, so it belongs to God.[21]

The political implications of such an epistemological position bear directly on what Augustine saw as the rights of those outside the fold of Christian theology. A major focus of the church's efforts should be the suppression of alternative religions, as well as competing sects of Christianity. The foundation for such an effort was epistemological in nature. For the "heathens" to have any *truth* was considered "unlawful" by Augustine.[22] The *truth* must be taken from them. They do not enjoy the rights to use those *truths*. Since there is only one ultimate *truth*, it maintains an exclusive right to claim itself as the only *truth*. Having more than one context from which to formulate an understanding of the world will confuse and distort the human understanding of *God's* message to human beings. The books of the heathens are poor and cannot contain the will of God contained in the scriptures.

The heathen's words are insufficient to challenge the word of God. Such is their error that their beliefs and possessions can be expropriated in the name of the *truth* contained in scriptures. They do not have the right to speak or the right to be wrong. Those outside the community of believers are not following *God's* word and therefore, do not have the same rights. Their words are illegitimate. Heretics do not speak from *truth*, and their suppression is a duty of all Christians.[23]

The words of non-believers and "philosophers" cannot enter the realm of discourse, as they do not speak from "truth." With no legitimate language that can be used to validate an alternative to the Christian epistemology, proponents of other philosophies and belief systems have no mechanism to challenge their own annihilation. From the exclusivity of this epistemological stance to a political prescription is a very short step.

Not only must the heathen's ideas be taken and their words limited, but they must also forfeit any right to property.[24] Only when one acknowledges the *truth* of Christianity does one acquire

property rights. To have it otherwise would allow for the property of the heathens to serve ungodly acts. These goods and property must be turned to Christian uses.

Textual exclusivity has now come full circle. Those that do not follow the word of God contained in the scriptures do not have the same rights as those that do. Anyone proceeding from such an error is perpetuating a "wrong." Such a person "needs divine authority to give secure guidance."[25] It is the duty of a blameless person not just to do no wrong, but to punish others who engage in wrong-doing.[26]

To preserve order things must be in their proper place.[27] A wrong-doer is out of place. It is justifiable to place such a person in a condition of slavery. This is the case because "such a condition of servitude could only have arisen as a result of sin."[28] It is better to be a slave to man than a slave of passion.[29] As a penal action, slavery has as its role the preservation of the "natural order."

Politics emerges as a reflection of the system of epistemological validation present in a culture. Absolute *truth* requires absolute authority. Slavery, as the control of bodies and their activities, emanates from that condition.

Aquinas: The "Science" of God Deductive Logic and Religious Knowledge

In the writings of Aquinas there is a much greater sensitivity to the challenges that might come from science and philosophy to the Bible as the source of knowledge. In seeking to create a relationship between religion and science, Aquinas makes two critical epistemological assumptions. The first relates to how Aquinas views the methods of science, especially the logic of inquiry in the sciences. The second relates to the status of empirical knowledge generally, and in relation to the status of "higher" knowledge. Thus, while somewhat more moderate in tone than Augustine, Aquinas does not represent a substantial epistemological break. Thus, in the final analysis, this does not mark a substantial change in political prescription.

Regarding science, Aquinas describes science in a largely "deductive" enterprise. The sciences do not argue their principles, but use these principles to demonstrate other *truths*.[30] The principles serve as the foundational assumptions from which other *truths* can be logically and scientifically determined. Keeping the first principles immune from objection means that the authority of first principles must stand on their own, outside of any attempt to demonstrate their validity. As the authoritative application of fixed and eternal *truths*, authority is both the origin and conclusion of Aquinas's position. This framework of deductive application maintains the authority of existing texts rather than having concern for the generation of new ones.

Aquinas develops his epistemological points by drawing a distinction between faith and reason. But faith to Aquinas has a specific meaning. It cannot be separated from a discussion of "*truth*" because Aquinas treats faith as *truth*. The knowledge that constitutes the doctrine of faith serves as the source of all other *truths* and a human being's place in the world. It is the first *truth*. Empirical knowledge is both inferior and subordinate to the "wisdom" of theology.

According to Aquinas, the human being possesses two powers; the corporeal organs and the intellect.[31] To Aquinas the senses are associated with appetites of the body and are not the means by which humans understand God. Of the intellect, Aquinas states that the human being does not possess the eternal intellect of God and, therefore, cannot possess knowledge of *God's* essence.[32] Our intellect knows that there must be a God, as it can deduce that there must be a cause of human life. All corporeal things must be subject to causes.[33] The mode of corporeal knowledge, however, is insufficient to know the essence of God.

Human beings have a desire to know and understand, but they have great limitations in the pursuit of knowledge about God. The human being is given the power of reason by God to understand the world, but this limited power is unable to grasp the complex and infinite wisdom that inspired the writing of the Bible. But the divine gift of reason allows human beings to make choices about the world and their own moral behavior. Humans should act in ways that reflect the divine law, as they come to understand it through the power of reason. Reason gives human beings the power to act according to "natural law,"[34] an immutable *truth* that all human beings share. Thus, reason is a tool through which human beings can come to follow that which is eternal and divine.

"Natural reason" is the faculty that allows humans to have some knowledge of their immediate environment. With sensation as its source, natural reason can address the world of appearance. Ascribing the power of reason to human beings Aquinas asserts that human beings can come to a rational understanding of some of the workings of the world. However, that "natural understanding" is finite.[35] Through the intellect, human beings can only attain knowledge about the working of corporeal things.[36] But such an understanding of the world's objects is relegated to the superficial knowledge of appearances.

Of those things that are the products of theology and scripture Aquinas asserts that human powers are of limited use. Faith is concerned with things that exceed human reason.[37] For example, it is impossible for a person to have knowledge of the Trinity through "natural reason."[38] This knowledge must be arrived at through another mechanism. In order to have real knowledge, the end and purpose of the world must be understood. This requires a "supernatural light" that is given by God.[39] This power allows the intellect to move beyond the realm of pure sensation.

Knowledge in the realm of faith comes from revelation. Revelation requires a disconnection between the human intellect and the world. The more we are separated from the body, through "dreams" and the "alienation of the senses" the more we are able to understand the role and power of divine revelation.[40] In this state of separation that which is divine can join with that which is human. Revelation, asserted Aquinas, takes place when God unites himself with the intellect of human beings.

Through revelation human beings have a method for understanding *God's* will on earth.[41] However, unlike the empirical understanding of the physical world, the science of God cannot be challenged by alternative explanations. Displaying some sensitivity to the tension between "reason" and "revelation" Aquinas counsels those of faith to be certain to keep the two realms

separate. Whoever tries to prove the Trinity by reference to natural reason detracts from faith, and is likely to fall under the ridicule of the unbeliever.[42]

Establishing the idea of a divine intellect separate from human understanding creates the basis for a type of epistemological transcendentalism. *Truth* exists, as *God's truth*, in a form that is both separated from and superior to human understanding. Universal *truth* exists because as God is eternal so it must be with divine *truth*.[43] In order to complete his circular logic Aquinas adds, if no intellect were eternal no *truth* would be eternal. The epistemological and the ontological reinforce one another in a circular logic.

Church Authority and the Bible

Knowing the divine is a problem for Aquinas, as it was for Augustine. Even if the sacred text is still considered to be *God's* word, there is the problem of deciphering its metaphors, analogies, and allegories.[44] If "science" is deductive, then the science of God is the application of authoritative first principles to the world. The source of these first principles is the Bible.

As in Augustine, the Bible is regarded as the word of God, either directly or through intermediaries. However, as Aquinas is aware of the challenge from philosophy and science to the accepted wisdom of the sacred text, he needs to give it priority. As in Augustine, this is accomplished by isolating the text from the influence of empirical or rational arguments about its validity. Sacred text is above human understanding.[45] Sacred doctrine is of a higher order than knowledge of the physical world.[46] Therefore, it cannot be subject to challenge by either human reason or empirical evidence. Sensitive to the rise of the new methods of inquiry, Aquinas proclaims the study of God and the Bible as a "science." However, it is a "science" on its own terms. It is the science that is divinely revealed.[47]

This strategy allows Aquinas to try to bridge the gulf between what is given to mankind as the word of God, and the increasingly strong assertions regarding the nature of human reason. By bridging the gap Aquinas hopes to maintain a status for the scripture within the increasingly material centered culture at the end of the Middle Ages. As a "science," theology must have a method. This is accomplished in Aquinas by giving epistemological status to revelation. Revelation has the authority of *God's* word.[48]

Having created epistemological space for revelation, and separating the knowledge that comes through revelation from challenge by sense experience, Aquinas now has one more challenge. The believer must accept the *truth* of what has come through divine revelation. However, how is one person's revelation to be sorted from the next? Does all revelation have the same status? Such a condition would produce chaos in the institution of the church.

Aquinas confronts this by suggesting that human beings are not equal in their abilities to discern the true significance of revelation. Some intellects will have a greater understanding of the faith than others. They will receive greater "divine light" and this will allow them to see God more clearly.[49]

The practical outcome of such an epistemological formulation is to increase the power of the centralized church. The demonstration of what is revealed takes place with reference to authority.[50] Ultimately, this authority is contained in two places. The text of the Bible is the authority of *God's* word, and the church hierarchy is asserted to be the authoritative interpreter of *God's* words on earth.

The Politics of Textual Exclusivity in Aquinas

The political implications of these epistemological principles can be found in numerous places in Summa Theologica. The text supports the distinctions among the various types of law, eternal, natural, and human,[51] as well as supporting the notion of just wars as the advance of good over evil.[52] However, the full range of the implications of the discussion of sacred *truth* reveals itself in the discussion of those who do not follow the ways of the church.

In the discussion on unbelievers, Aquinas makes several distinctions. He holds that unbelief is the greatest sin,[53] yet he asserts that a lack of belief in those never exposed to the *truth* of the church's teachings cannot be punished. Even if exposed, the unbelievers should not be compelled to join the church. The act of belief requires an act of the will.

Like Augustine, Aquinas allows human beings the power to make choices. Having reason, as the ability to know ends, human beings have the ability, given by God, to move themselves. This is the will. Aquinas locates the will within reason.[54] Reason precedes the will and directs it.[55] The will is that part of reason that sets the soul in motion towards it object.[56] While God may cause the existence of mankind, and provide human beings with the power of reason and the power to will, Aquinas asserts that this condition does not mean that God controls all of mankind's activity. Human will is free to face the choice of good or evil in the world.

An unbeliever must be moved by the will to become a member of the church. It is the responsibility of believers to educate unbelievers in the *truth* of scriptures and to bring them into the church. Aquinas states that unbelievers should be tolerated in society, unless their rites and practices are "not truthful or profitable."[57] While this prescription is somewhat ambiguous, it does soften the tone of Augustine. However, there is one condition that would not be tolerated. Unbelievers must never have authority over believers. They must never be allowed to "inhibit" the faithful.

Regarding the ability to willfully profess faith, the door does not swing both ways. If at one time a person professed faith they should be compelled to fulfil their promise, even by bodily force.[58] Heresy must be dealt with even more harshly. Heresy represents a corruption of the church's *truth*. As it states in the Bible, diseased flesh must be removed.[59] The heretic should be separated from the church by excommunication and separated from life by execution.

Textual Exclusivity in Aquinas

Aquinas anticipates the challenges to sacred doctrine coming form philosophy and seeks to subordinate the questions of philosophic inquiry to the revelation contained in the sacred text of Christianity. Their best source of such wisdom, according to Aquinas, remains the scriptures. Revealing *God's* word, these works bring humans closest to the understanding of *God's* will. Inspired through divine revelation, these writing are isolated from challenge as the source of our knowledge about God.

Yet, Aquinas anticipates the assertion of a text on the self that will become paramount in the early Enlightenment. Much of Summa Theologica is a description of the nature and power of the human being. The human character, its powers and limitations, the necessity for human law, and the use of reason to formulate methods of logical inquiry into the secrets of the material world, demonstrate an interest in many earthly problems that are uncharacteristic of pure theological dogma.

One sees in Aquinas a stronger and more delineated text on the self than was found in Augustine. It is a text on the self that moves in the direction of a more universalized text on subjectivity, but is not quite there. As its inspiration comes from sacred Christian texts (and a strong influence from Aristotle), Aquinas has not fully abandoned the text of a singular universal *truth* with a divine source. Faith still takes a priority over reason and the faithful have a path to grace that is not universally shared.

Conclusion: Textual Exclusivity as a Paradigm of Knowledge

Michel Foucault made an important contribution to our self understanding by the tone set in the Archeology of Knowledge. Constituting the background for that work, and much of Foucault's other writings, was the idea that societies use filtering mechanism in order to sort through the vast array of possibilities when it comes to personal attitudes and beliefs, on the one hand, and collective action, on the other. The construction of rules that govern the filtering process determines what enters the domain of "rational" discourse in any culture. It is for this reason that both past cultures as well as present practice needs to be understood through the lens of archeology.

Read as archeology, present and past practice reveals that every system of thought requires some method of assigning authority to text. This is necessary as a mechanism for selecting among the infinite variety of possibilities with regard to modes of living. Commonality of text allows for the formulation and dissemination of a dominant set of metaphors that will allow greater depth in the process of communications. What is unique about the model of authority developed within "textual exclusivity" is the use of a single text as the source of authority.

Does assigning authority to text end conflict? This is certainly not the case. For example, within the United States in the Nineteenth Century there were proponents of slavery that used the Bible as their source of authority.[60] Many abolitionists also sought the Bible's authority for their cause.[61] In the Twentieth Century "liberation theology" has challenged church hierarchy over the matter of *interpreting* text. Struggle appears on the margins, over the deductive application of *truth*, not over the mechanism by which *truth* is generated.

If "textual exclusivity" does not end conflict, it does circumscribe the parameters of conflict in very specific ways. The "fact" is never in dispute, but simply the interpretation of the fact. The fact must be placed within its proper context in order to have its proper prescriptive message applied in the world. Further, the authority of the text assigns power to a specific hierarchy assigned the task of "proper interpretation." In Christianity, this is the case for both Catholicism and Protestantism, even though the locus of that authority is somewhat different.

This work has focused on two figures in the Christian tradition, as archetypes of a way of thinking about knowledge and the way it gains authority in the world. However, it would be false to believe that this epistemological issue is unique to Christianity. The issues are the same for all religious literalism. In his 1999 work entitled Moderate and Radical Islamic Fundamentalism, Ahmad S. Moussalli describes a "correct discourse" within Islamic Fundamentalism as "one that is based on actions justified by the sacred text."[62] As in Christian literalism, Moussalli describes how the text is to be used as a prescriptive basis for action. In general, the epistemology used by all textual literalists is the same, regardless of whether they are Christian, Hindu, or Muslim.

To simply call this view "medieval" or "premodern" ignores the present political components surrounding the discourse on epistemology. The struggle over what enters the domain of rational discourse is a political struggle. The Inquisition would not have been necessary if there had not been a political struggle over this form of textual validation. The Inquisition also serves as an indication that competing forms of textual validation were present even while an exclusive text on the *truth* was dominant.

Another problem in treating the medieval or premodern period as distinct from the present is that it gives a false impression of "necessary" progress. Textual exclusivity may no longer be the dominant paradigm for generating *truth* in the world, but it has not been overtaken by a notion of progress in the way formulated by Enlightenment modernists. If different epistemological models continue to compete and struggle for dominance, then an idea of necessary progress cannot be sustained. In a passage reminiscent of Augustine's discussion of science, Pat Robertson in his 1985 Beyond Reason speaks of how science cannot answer every human question. Robertson concludes that "the Enlightenment assumption that man has the capacity to understand all reality is sadly lacking." There are "limits to our brain power."[63] Robertson concludes that these unanswered questions serve as sufficient proof of God and his power of miracles. Where debate still takes place, there is no final resolution or "progress" in the Enlightenment sense.

Regarding "textual exclusivity" I would like to add one final point. In this work, textual exclusivity has only been discussed in the context of religious forms of textual validation. However, the notion of authority emerging from text itself is not simply a religious phenomenon. When constitutional courts concern themselves with *interpreting* the intentions of constitutional framers, the authority of text reveals itself in a "secular" fashion. When ethno-nationalists assert the primacy of nationhood as an exclusive text for the determination of who can live in what region, there are elements of textual exclusivity present.

An epistemological approach to the study of political power must concern itself with the way in which a text achieves its authority through a process of validation. This validation may take several forms. Textual exclusivity has the character of assigning validity simply through the

acceptance of the text's authority as text. In such a condition, there can be no appeal to external evidence or alternative ways of thinking. The text simply exists. Its authority is from its existence. Power flows from its *truth* into the world.

ENDNOTES

1. Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge (New York: Pantheon, 1980).
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3. Augustine, Book 18, chapter 41 in City of God (Washington, D. C: Catholic University Press, 1952).
4. Ibid., chapter 3.
5. Augustine, "On Christian Doctrine," in Medieval Thought: Augustine and Aquinas, ed. Norman F. Cantor (Waltham, Massachusetts: Blaisdell Publishing, 1969), 32.
6. Augustine, Book 11, chapter 2, City of God.
7. Augustine, "On Christian Doctrine," 34–35
8. Augustine, Book 21, chapter 5, City of God.
9. Augustine, "City of God," in Medieval Thought, 56.
10. Augustine, "Confessions." in Medieval Thought, 67.
11. Ibid., 61.
12. Ibid., 74.
13. Ibid., 77.
14. Ibid., 77–78.
15. "City of God," 57.
16. "Confessions," 77.
17. City of God," 54.
18. Ibid., 57.
19. "Confessions," 75.
20. Augustine, Book 14, chapter 3 in City of God.
21. Augustine, "On Christian Doctrine," in Medieval Thought, 37.
22. Ibid., 38.
23. Augustine, Book 19 chapter 16 in City of God.
24. Augustine, "On Christian Doctrine," in Medieval Thought, 38.
25. Augustine, Book 19, chapter 14 in City of God.
26. Ibid., Book 19, chapter 16.
27. Ibid., Book 19, chapter 13.
28. Ibid., Book 19, chapter 15.
29. Ibid., Book 19, chapter 15.
30. Aquinas in "Summa Theologica," Introduction to St. Thomas Aquinas, ed. Anton C. Pegis, (New York: Modem Library, 1948), 13.
31. Ibid., 77.
32. Ibid., 94.
33. Ibid., 93.
34. Ibid., 640.

35. Saint Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), vol. 1, part 1, Q. 79., article 4, 417.
36. Ibid., Q. 75, Article 2, 379.
37. Ibid., Q. 32. Article 1, 176.
38. Ibid., 176.
39. Ibid., Q. 79, Article 4, 417.
40. Aquinas in Introduction, 92.
41. Ibid., 4.
42. Aquinas, Summa Theologica, vol. 1, part 1, Q. 32, article 1, 176.
43. Aquinas in Introduction…, 179.
44. Ibid., 17.
45. Ibid., 4.
46. Ibid., 11.
47. Ibid., 5.
48. Ibid., 14–15.
49. Ibid., 82.
50. Aquinas, Summa Theologica, vol. 1, g. 32, article 1, 176.
51. Ibid., "Treatise on Law," vol. 2, part I
52. Ibid., vol. 2, part 2, Q. 40, 577.
53. Ibid., Q. 10, article 5,428.
54. Aquinas in Introduction
55. Ibid., 514.
56. Ibid., 501.
57. Aquinas, Summa Theologica, vol. 2, part 2, g. 70, article 11, 436.
58. Ibid., Article 8,432.
59. Ibid., Q. 11, article 3, 440.
60. See James 0. Buswell, Slavery, Segregation and Scripture (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William Be Eerdmans Publishing, 1964).
61. See Gerda Lerner, The Grimke Sisters from South Carolina: Rebels Against Slavery. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1967).
62. Ahmad S Moussalli, Moderate and Radical Islamic Fundamentalism (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1999), 50.
63. Pat Robertson, Beyond Reason: How Miracles Can Change Your Life (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1985), 16–17.

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