

A theological evaluation of atheistic ontological disproofs and modern apologetic responses

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Abstract

This paper presents an exposition and critique of various contemporary responses to atheistic “ontological disproof” arguments based on the alleged incoherency of theistic attributes. Arguments in this class seek to demonstrate either an *incompatibility* between multiple attributes of God, or an *inconsistency* within a single attribute of God.

The focus of this paper is on the differences between many modern apologetic responses that utilize analytic philosophy and Anselmian perfect being theology and those available from the classical traditions of apophatic theology and analogical God-talk. Special attention is paid to theologians who are contributing to this debate and who exhibit these characteristics to various degrees in their methodology: William Lane Craig, Thomas V. Morris, John S. Feinberg, and Richard Swinburne. The resulting theological positions of these scholars will also be examined, with attention paid to any non-traditional, unorthodox, or heretical views in contrast to more classical, orthodox doctrines.

The overall debate will then be cast in a more classical context via the thinking of Thomas Aquinas and his followers. Thomistic analogical theology will be explicated, contrasted with these modern apologists’ views, and then offered in response to atheistic ontological disproof arguments. The Thomistic system, with its apologetic strengths and more traditional theology, will be recommended as not only a viable, but a more desirable, response to such arguments.

Key Terms

Atheism, Ontological Disproof, Apologetics, Philosophy of Religion, Anselm, Greatest Possible Being, Analytic Philosophy, Thomism, Analogy, Orthodoxy, Heresy, Theology.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	i
Abstract / Key Terms	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii
List of Figures	v
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
1.1 Background: Modern Atheistic Arguments and Apologetic Answers	1
1.2 Problem Statement: Non-Traditional and Unorthodox Theology	2
1.3 Objective and Methodology	4
1.4 Content Summary	5
Chapter 2: Atheistic arguments	6
2.1 Introduction	6
2.2 Atheistic argumentation	6
2.3 Theistic ontological disproofs	17
2.5 Conclusion	37
Chapter 3: Apologetic responses	39
3.1 Introduction	39
3.2 Richard Swinburne	40
3.3 Thomas Morris	50
3.4 John S. Feinberg	56
3.5 William Lane Craig	61
3.6 Theological evaluation.....	68
3.7 Conclusion	72

Chapter 4: Anselmian theology and analytic philosophy.....	74
4.1 Introduction	74
4.2 Anselmian theological method.....	74
4.3 Analytic philosophical method	87
4.4 Conclusion	101
Chapter 5: Apophatic theology and analogical God-talk	104
5.1 Introduction	104
5.2 Via affirmativa: kaphatic theology	105
5.3 Via negativa: apophatic theology.....	113
5.4 Via media: analogical theology	141
Chapter 6: A Thomistic response to ontological disproofs	161
6.1 Introduction	161
6.2 Metaphysical Prolegomena	161
6.3 Thomistic theology of God.....	167
6.4 Thomistic resolutions to ontological disproofs.....	171
6.5 Conclusion	184
Chapter 7: Conclusion.....	186
Appendix 1: Protestant doctrinal statements	188
Appendix 2: Thomistic analogy	190
Bibliography	Error! Bookmark not defined.

List of Figures

Figure 1:	Analogy Comparison Chart.....	154
Figure 2:	God's Attributes Chart.....	170

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background: Modern Atheistic Arguments and Apologetic Answers

Arguments concerning the existence of God are nothing new to philosophy of religion. The pre-Socratic philosophers had as part of their project the dismantling of the religious myths surrounding the natural realm (Copleston, 1993a:16), and Socrates himself was killed for (allegedly) denying the existence of gods.¹ Although forms of atheism predate modern Western theistic religions, it was not until after the Enlightenment that atheism really began to come into its own as a system, and begin presenting theists with new and serious challenges.

The most philosophically powerful of these challenges – ontological disproofs – showed a dramatic rise in popularity during the second half of the twentieth century (e.g., Flew and McIntyre, 1955; Kretzmann, 1966; Drange, 1998 and Grim, 2007). The atheist philosopher Michael Martin devoted 70% of his reader *The Impossibility of God* (2003) to arguments based on God's allegedly incoherent attributes. While these sophisticated arguments based on theistic incoherence are not often found at the popular level, some have become well known (e.g., "If God is an all-powerful creator, can he make a rock so big that he cannot lift it?").

The importance of these pioneering arguments (Morris, 1991:11) is that if successful, they would provide not only responses to arguments for God's existence, but also logically tight disproofs of God's existence (viz., that God not only *does not* exist – God *cannot* exist). Further, while the most popular of these disproofs are directed toward theism in general, similar arguments have been used to criticize Christianity in particular – namely the coherency of the incarnation of Jesus Christ (Martin: 1993). This last feature is of great importance to the overall apologetic method of Christian theists who must insist on a Christological reading of Scripture in addition to purely philosophical considerations of bare theism (Morris: 2001).

Scholarly responses have also been given by apologist-philosophers whose approaches often rely on perfect being theology (e.g., Feinberg 2001, or Morris 2001), and / or the methodology of analytic philosophical (e.g., Richard Swinburne, 1977 or Craig and Moreland 2003). The precision with which modern Analytic Philosophy must operate, however, may not be available if apophatic theology or the doctrine of analogical God-talk is correct (see Glock, 2008), and the theological intuitions relied upon by those pursuing so-called Anselmian perfect

¹ Plato *Apology*, 31d-40a-c.

being theology may not yield trustworthy responses. Indeed, Christian apologist and philosopher William Lane Craig has been accused of heresy due to his philosophical allowances on the nature of Christian theology.² Craig's philosophical method has led him to take issue with classical formulations of God's attributes, and reimagine them according to the apologetic need of the moment. Perhaps this is because, as Michael Martin (2003) notes, that "ordinary men tend to understand God in ways that are familiar to them despite the protests of theologians and intellectual ministers. As a result, God tends to be conceived of in the image of a man – a man much more powerful, moral, knowledgeable, and so on than ordinary men." An investigation into this question is thus paramount – it may prove to be a major corrective in responding to philosophical atheists, or at the least a new tool in the apologist's toolbox.

1.2 Problem Statement: Non-Traditional and Unorthodox Theology

Modern approaches to these atheistic arguments are not limited to high-level academia. Some can be found in popular-level writing. Theistic philosopher Paul Copan (2005), for example, responds to the charge that the concept of God's necessary existence involves incoherency, by saying "Theists, however, respond that the appropriation of modal logic and the language of possible worlds supports the idea of divine necessity and undermines the incoherence charge regarding the notion of logically necessary being."

Another example can be found on the internet's top atheistic website, Internet Infidels. Of its library of atheistic arguments, a half dozen or so trade on the idea of ontological disproof.³ Theodore Drange's "Incompatible-Properties Arguments: a Survey" (1998) is listed as well as two critical responses. Joseph A. Sabella (1999) concedes much in his response to Drange: "my comments on omniscience are similar to my comments on immutability. . . . I don't believe God is totally omniscient. I believe, 'If God exists, then He has limited omniscience.'" In another reply to the same article, Ralph Wagenet (2003) writes, "As we can see, much of the argument between Drange and Christians over the nature of God is semantic. It is important, however, to realize that semantics are secondary to the reality of God himself. God has various attributes which are given names that capture the nature of those attributes as accurately as we know how to. Nevertheless, if the term used conveys a sense different from the reality of the God we

² Norman (2010).

³ <http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/nontheism/atheism/arguments.html> Date of access: Aug. 12, 2013.

seek to describe, then we need to refine the term, rather than claim that the concept of God is incoherent.” This, I believe, is closer to the real issue.

Modern apologists may likewise find themselves at odds with traditional theology and may be giving theological ground to the atheist. If apologists are not going to give in on the very grounds that the atheist uses in ontological disproof arguments, a return to these methods may be in order. Because modern analytic philosophical methods require a high degree of linguistic precision, univocal God-talk may be seen as necessary. But this could raise the problem of simply attributing to God the traits of man only bigger. In contrast, apophatic theology and analogous God-talk declare that God's essence is distinct from all created things and that therefore all words referring to created reality will only apply to God in a negative (apophatic) or analogous fashion.

In most cases, however, neither apophatic theology nor analogous God-talk are brought into the apologetic discussion. Edward Feser, an expert in Thomistic doctrine, stated recently that, “I don't know of someone who has replied to atheism at any length on the basis of the doctrine of analogy, specifically.”⁴ As Karen Armstrong notes, however, the scientific “problem-solving” methodology has given way in some quarters to “return to a more apophatic approach to knowledge.” (2010:286).

Because both atheistic ontological disproof arguments and their responses are relatively new on the apologetics horizon (Drange, 1998), deeper investigation into their legitimacy is lacking. Craig (with Moreland) published the most robust collection of responses to ontological disproof arguments in his *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* in 2003, and a decade later no serious answer from the atheistic community nor investigation into Craig's methodology currently exists (Moreland, 2013).⁵

In the light of the possible ramifications of these types of responses, the question is: How should Christians answer atheistic ontological disproofs? This is the problem which this study researched.

Questions arising from this problem include:

1. What are the ontological disproof arguments of the anti-theists?
2. What is the legitimacy of modern apologetic responses to ontological disproof arguments?

⁴ Personal correspondence via email (August 19, 2013).

⁵ Although *Philosophical Foundations* was written by William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland, its citations in this paper are from Craig's material. For the sake of clarity, “Craig, 2003” will be used in these citations.

3. How could classical apophatic theology and analogous God-talk be used to respond to ontological disproof arguments?
4. Which method should be adopted by classical apologists?

1.3 Objective and Methodology

The main aim of this study is to make an investigation into various responses (e.g., modern analytical, apophatic/analogical) to ontological disproof arguments, and to see which approach is more consistent with a classical view of God. The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. study and evaluate the ontological disproof arguments of the anti-theists
2. study and evaluate the responses of modern apologists
3. explain the classical, Thomistic approach to theology
4. suggest the best method to handle atheistic ontological disproof arguments

This study is done from the perspective of the classical Christian tradition as found in various strands of Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant theology, with an emphasis on Thomistic philosophy. The central theoretical argument of this study is that many modern apologetic responses to atheistic ontological disproof arguments violate tenants of traditional Christian theology and classical methodology, which sometimes results in a denial of Christian orthodoxy, and that a return to more traditional methods can provide a better basis for orthodox apologetic responses to these kinds of arguments.

In order to study and evaluate the ontological disproof arguments of anti-theists, a literature analysis is conducted to determine and evaluate past and present viewpoints. This will include academically and popularly influential sources from prominent modern atheist philosophers who devote work to such arguments. These include Theodore Drange's "Incompatible Properties Arguments: A Survey" (1998), Patrick Grim's "Impossibility Arguments" (2007), and Michael Martin's collection of essays in "The Impossibility of God" (1990) as well as his unique work "The Case Against Christianity" (1993).

In order to study and evaluate the responses of modern apologists, a literature analysis is conducted to determine and evaluate past and present viewpoints including respected philosophers from the apologetics field who have interacted with the above-mentioned arguments. These would include works such as Richard Swinburne's "The Coherence of Theism" (1977), Thomas Morris's "Our Idea of God" (1991), John Feinberg's "No One Like Him" (2001), J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig's "Philosophical Foundations for a Christian

Worldview" (2003); Paul Copan's "The Impossibility of God" (2005); and J. P. Moreland and Chad Meister's "Debating Christian Theism" (2013).

In order to explain and evaluate possible responses from the side of apophatic theology and analogous God-talk, a literature analysis is conducted to determine and evaluate past and present viewpoints. Sources will include seminal classic sources such as Anselm's "Monologion" and "Proslogion" (2007), Thomas Aquinas's "Summa Theologiae" (1981); Dionysius's "The Divine Names" (1897); as well as respected modern Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant writings such as Michael Sells "Mystical Languages of Unsayings" (1994), Joshua Hochschild's "The Semantics of Analogy" (2010); James Ross's "Portraying Analogy" (2009); Ralph McInerney's "Aquinas and Analogy" (1996); Francis Turretin's "Institutes of Elenctic Theology" (1997); Herman Dooyeweerd's "In the Twilight of Western Thought" (2012); and Cornelius Van Til's "A Christian Theory of Knowledge" (1969a).

In order to evaluate responses to atheistic ontological disproof arguments in the light of apophatic theology and analogous God-talk, the collected data are selected and categorized through analysis, interpretation and synthesis.

1.4 Content Summary

Having established the basic shape of the work in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 provides a more detailed presentation of the problems raised by atheistic ontological disproofs, as well as several summary expositions of examples of such arguments. Chapter 3 provides a similar exposition of modern apologetic responses to such arguments by Christian philosophers of religion who have devoted considerable material to such a project. In Chapter 4, the methodology behind this dialogue is discussed with an exposition of Anselm's theological method and the tenants of modern Analytic Philosophy. Chapter 5 is concerned with the apophatic theological tradition and analogous God talk, and the difficulties these raise for modern apologetic approaches. Chapter 6 presents the classical apologetic, philosophical, and theological methodology of Thomas Aquinas and evaluate how it might be used to deal with ontological disproofs in a manner that respects the nature of the debate while preserving historic Christian orthodoxy. Finally, Chapter 7 summarizes the issues and the author's recommendations for future encounters with atheistic arguments. The body of the paper is followed by three appendices: (1) Ontological disproofs of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, (2) Protestant doctrinal statements, and (3) the Thomistic doctrine of analogy.

Chapter 2: Atheistic arguments

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter a brief history of atheistic argumentation concerning theistic ontological disproofs will be presented followed by a more detailed look at contemporary issues concerning the existence of God and, more precisely, philosophically sophisticated apologetic arguments concerning God's existence. This background in atheistic argumentation will prepare the way to consider the theistic responses that have been given to these challenges in chapter 3.

Craig (2014) optimistically stated concerning Martin's (2013) book that, "During the previous generation (roughly the third quarter of the twentieth century) the concept of God was often regarded as fertile ground for anti-theistic arguments. . . . however . . . these topics [ontological disproofs] continue to be discussed (witness my own work!), the heat of the battle is largely past. . . . far from undermining theism, the anti-theistic critiques served mainly to reveal how rich and variegated and challenging is the concept of God. Today the discussion continues primarily as an exploration in philosophical theology, not as an apologetic enterprise." However, this "bygone generation" must include writers such as Sobel who used the same kinds of arguments against God in his important *Logic and Theism* in 2009 - calling them "the most important family of atheistic demonstrations" (2009:418). Indeed, in the same year that Craig (2014:vii) made this claim, the atheist philosopher Graham Oppy published a massive work on the subject of God's attributes – a project he describes as one that might "feed into verdicts about the coherence of various conceptions of God".⁶

2.2 Atheistic argumentation

According to atheist philosopher Michael Martin (1990:29-30), positive atheism is distinguished from negative atheism by what conclusion is thought to be justified. Negative atheism seeks to invalidate theistic arguments, thus showing that there is no good reason to think God exists. Positive atheism, on the other hand, offers arguments against God's

⁶ Craig may be correct in noting that ontological disproofs are now of more interest for philosophers of religion than *apologists* of atheism. Indeed, Oppy does not view the issues with God's various attributes as proving their incoherency (2014:311), nor does he include ontological disproofs in his cumulative case argument against theism (2013:5-6). In any case, as will become clear, the specific issues taken up in this paper remain relevant for theology and, therefore, for theistic apologetics as well (Craig's theological conclusions being prime examples).

existence, thus attempting to demonstrate that God does not – perhaps even *cannot* – exist. While mediating positions are possible, the strongest of these arguments are those designed to disprove the very *possibility* of God's existence.⁷ For the better part of the last three millennia, atheistic argumentation has been largely limited to the negative variety.

2.2.1 Historical negative atheism

The rise of Western atheism is often dated to the 6th Century B.C. with the pre-Socratic Ionian philosophers such as Thales, Anaximander, and Anaximenes. These were among the first to be considered philosopher-scientists,⁸ because they were the first individuals to challenge the common mythological accounts of world phenomena, replacing them with completely naturalistic explanations supported by empirical observation and logical argumentation.⁹ The 5th Century B.C. Greek philosopher-poet Diagoras "The Atheist" of Melos satirized the Eleusinian mysteries, and is sometimes referred to as the "first atheist" (Woodbury, 1965:178-211). In the 4th Century B.C., the philosopher Epicurus argued against the possibility of life after death, and is credited with being the first to lay out the logical problem of evil.¹⁰ Philosophical atheism never became popular during this period, and in fact could even be quite dangerous for those that propagate it. Thus intellectual atheism entered a period of stagnation that lasted for over 2,000 years. During this time very little in the way of innovation was seen among atheistic thinkers.¹¹

⁷ Michael Scriven (1966:103) for example, argues that if all positive *theistic* arguments were (negatively) refuted that would establish atheism positively.

⁸ "Philosophy" comes from the combination of two Greek terms (*philos* and *sophos*) meaning "love of wisdom," "Science" comes from the single term (*scientia*) for "knowledge." It would be some time before these two terms were used to refer to distinct areas.

⁹ E.g., Hesiod's *Theogony* and Homer's *Illiad* or *Odyssey*.

¹⁰ Also known as The Epicurean Paradox: "Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil? Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?" (Hospers, 1990:310)

¹¹ This could be the result of the treatment atheists had received. For example, Anaxagoras and Diagoras were both banished from Athens for their work, and Socrates was famously poisoned by the state due to his "atheism." Socrates, of course, was really only disputing the Greek pantheon - an oddly similar judgment would be brought against Christians by the Romans some five centuries later.

Within the next few centuries, Christianity began to erode the remnants of pagan religion. The early Christian apologists primarily worked against internal heresy, misunderstood morality, and government persecution that was ironically based on allegations of atheism (Dulles, 2005:27-89). When the general persecution of Christians ended with the Constantine's Edict of Milan in A. D. 313, so did the safety of attacking Christianity.¹² This respite lasted, and Christianity soon became so entangled with the state, that an attack against it was considered treason. Atheism stood little chance of gaining popularity during this time, and innovative arguments appear to have ceased.

Indeed, nearly 1,000 years later, the preeminent 13th Century theologian-apologist Thomas Aquinas listed only two objections to the existence of God in his massive *Summa Theologiæ* – even though he nearly always considered at least *three* objections to the positions he argued. The two issues Aquinas listed as being a threat to theism were naturalism's explanatory power and the problem of evil. The Enlightenment followed shortly after the time of Aquinas, and yet it was to be several centuries more before the religio-philosophical landscape began to change significantly.

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw the rise of serious rivals to both Christianity and theism in Western thought.¹³ Although Christianity suffered from skeptical attacks, theism seem to remain largely untouched, and even when arguments were brought against it, they were often simply more sophisticated replications of the same two arguments that Aquinas noted and which began some 2,400 years earlier. Indeed, as late as 1988, philosophy professor and Christian apologist Peter Kreeft (1988:54) could still claim that, "The problem of evil is . . . the one serious objection to the existence of God."

2.2.2 Contemporary positive atheism

While Aquinas's responses might have been sufficient for the science and philosophy of his day, and Kreeft may be correct that the problem of evil is still the "most serious problem in

¹² With the 4th Century legalization and national promulgation of Christianity, Atheism stood little chance of getting a fair hearing and did not receive serious philosophical support again until the European Enlightenment period.

¹³ Baron d'Holbach's 1770 writing "Système de la nature" ("The System of Nature" - sometimes called the "Atheists' Bible" and written under the pseudonym Jean-Baptiste de Mirabaud) was the first atheistic publication to gain any real purchase in the culture. His fellow atheist thinkers included Denis Diderot, Voltaire, David Hume, Adam Smith, and Edward Gibbon.

the world,” these objections are no longer the only serious threats to theism. Indeed, an entire class of innovative anti-theistic arguments has arisen in the generation that read Kreeft’s words. Although these arguments go under a variety of names, they can all be categorized under the title *theistic ontological disproofs*.¹⁴ The importance of these arguments is that, unlike the problems of naturalism or evil (which, if successful, only generate probabilistic evidence of God’s non-existence),¹⁵ these ontological disproofs would, if successful, prove not only that God *does not* exist – but that God *cannot* exist.

Before treating these positive atheistic arguments in particular, the question as to whether or not such a disproofs are even possible must be addressed. As we will see, it has been asserted in both scholarly and popular apologetic and philosophical circles that a determinative proof of God’s nonexistence is impossible even in principle.

2.2.3 The problem of atheistic epistemology

2.2.3.1 The possibility of proving a universal negative

It is popular in apologetic contexts to argue that one cannot prove a “universal negative” or, per Mortimer Adler (1990:36), a “negative existential proposition” such as God’s non-existence. In fact, the famous atheist philosopher Bertrand Russell once admitted that, “If I were asked to prove that Zeus and Poseidon and Hera and the rest of the Olympians do not exist, I should be at a loss to find conclusive arguments” (1961:577). Although few atheists have argued against this sentiment, it is a faulty apologetic strategy.¹⁶ This is because the problem of

¹⁴ Aka “Incompatible-Properties” (Drange: 1998) or “Logical Atheological” (Draper: 1998) arguments, “Ontological Disproof” is the most generally descriptive and is taken from the earliest reference to these types of arguments in J. N. Findlay’s “Can God’s Existence Be Disproved?” which was first published in *Mind*, April 1948 and later in *Language, Truth and Value* (Humanities Press, 1963), and numerous Philosophy of Religion collections since.

¹⁵ Naturalistic arguments, being rooted in empirical science, can by their nature only generate probabilistic conclusions, and while solutions offered to the problem of evil are beyond the scope of this writing, it should be noted that since Alvin Plantinga’s publication of *God, Freedom, and Evil* (1977), the logical problem of evil has been generally recognized to have been relegated to inductive (i.e., probabilistic) status as well. Although see James R. Beebe’s (2005) discussion of some responses to Plantinga.

¹⁶ As late as 1998, Jeffery Jay Lowder wrote that, “Only a couple of atheists have directly responded to this objection. See Mark Vuletic, “Is Atheism Logical?”

proving a universal negative only applies to things with the potential for existence. So, for example, it might be impossible to completely disprove the existence of unicorns, simply because of the difficulty of searching out every possible location of such creature (perhaps even on other planets). Thus, it would be extraordinarily difficult to support the conclusion “there are no unicorns in existence.”

When it comes to the existence of Santa Claus, however, it would not be nearly as difficult. This is because the existence of a being answering to the standard description of Santa Claus can be shown to be impossible *a priori*. Rather than surveying all possible locations where such a being might be found, one can simply note what would be required for such a being to exist and show that it is actually *impossible*.¹⁷ In a similar fashion, if one can conclude based on the type of being that God would be if he existed that such a being was impossible, the universal nonexistence of God could be legitimately concluded.¹⁸

This particular objection often comes down to how one sees the difference between inductive and deductive proofs for a universal conclusion. Because inductive arguments are usually identified as those which give only probable support to their conclusion, and are usually based on empirical facts for these support of their premises, the idea that one could use such a method to disprove God is clearly problematic. There are deductive arguments, however which purport (again, by definition) to definitively prove their conclusion. If a deductive argument is given against the existence of God, then it may be able to avoid this objection, as well as the following criticism based on the necessity of possessing godlike powers for gaining such knowledge.

(http://library/modern/mark_vuletic/logical.html), 1996) and Douglas M. Krueger, *What Is Atheism?* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus, 1998).” See http://infidels.org/library/modern/jeff_lowder/ipnegep.html#2.

¹⁷ Such an endeavor has been attempted in a lighthearted manner (e.g., <http://www.tik.ee.ethz.ch/~lubichh/extdoc/jokes/santa.html>).

¹⁸ This analogy is actually used in an introduction to atheistic argumentation in the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <http://www.iep.utm.edu/atheism/#SH3c>.

2.2.3.2 The requirement of omniscience / omnipresence

The idea that one would have to be omniscient (and possibly omnipresent)¹⁹ in order to be sure that God does not exist is a popular, but similarly problematic apologetic tactic.²⁰ According to the argument, one would have to know everything there is to know (or be everywhere there is to be) in order to be sure of God's nonexistence, because anything less would leave the door open for God's existence in a heretofore unknown part of reality. But to know everything or be everywhere are, ironically, godlike traits.²¹ Thus the popular conclusion is that in order to disprove God, one would have to *be* God.²²

The first major issue with such an argument is that it can be turned back on the theist. As Jeffrey Lowder (1998) notes, "the atheist could simply ask the theist, 'Do you think it is logically possible that a knock-down, deductive disproof of your god may exist in the 99.9 percent that is outside your pool of knowledge and experience?' If the theist replies, 'Yes, it is possible that there is such a disproof,' then . . . the theist should not claim to know that God exists. If, however, the theist answers, 'No, it is not possible that there is such a disproof,' then the theist apparently thinks he or she can know a negative existential proposition to be true without being omniscient." Further, many of the attributes of God that theists ascribe to God are

¹⁹ This argument is made by Christian research institute president Hank Hanegraaff (1990): "atheism involves a logical fallacy known as a *universal negative*. Simply stated, a person would have to be omniscient and omnipresent to be able to say "there is no God" from his own pool of knowledge. Only someone capable of being in all places at the same time -- with a perfect knowledge of all that is in the universe -- can make such a statement *based on the facts*. In other words, a person would have to be God to say there is no God. Hence, the assertion is logically indefensible. By using arguments like this, you will often find that an atheist quickly converts to agnosticism and is thus making progress rapidly in the right direction.

²⁰ For example, seminary president and popular apologist Alex McFarland (2007:37) writes, "It is important to realize something about being an atheist that even most atheists fail to acknowledge and that is that atheism requires omniscience (complete knowledge of everything)... An atheist is making a positive assertion that there is no God. The only way that anyone could make such an assertion would be to presume that he knew everything about everything."

²¹ Internationally recognized apologetic lecturer Ravi Zacharias posted the following on his online ministry page as recently as 2013: "to sustain the belief that there is no God, atheism has to demonstrate infinite knowledge, which is tantamount to saying, 'I have infinite knowledge that there is no being in existence with infinite knowledge.'" (<https://www.facebook.com/ravizacharias/posts/10151464540701813> accessed December 5, 2014).

²² This is the conclusion popular apologists Ron Rhodes (1989:7) and, later, Kenneth R. Samples (1991:7) reached in their respective articles on dealing with atheists in the *Christian Research Journal*.

themselves negative existential propositions (e.g., ineffability, infinity, eternity), or could be formulated as such (Lowder, 1998).

Finally, the omniscience requirement objection is really just another species of the previously-discussed problem of proving a universal negative. Only inductive arguments that require as their support the totality of reality (often referred to as “perfect induction”) would fall into such a trap. *A priori* rational deductive arguments do not suffer from this flaw, and therefore it is simply not the case that atheism is logically indefensible.

2.2.4 The problem of theistic linguistics

A more philosophically astute objection to the problem of disproving God’s existence comes (perhaps ironically) from some thinkers on the atheistic side of the debate (e.g., Smith, Flew, Nielsen – see below). The issue is that before one can argue over the existence of God, and regardless of which position one takes, one must know what this God *is* that is being argued. This problem of meaningful God-talk must be taken seriously by the theistic apologist, for if the concept of God is such that it truly cannot be defined, then it seems any argument purporting to prove God’s existence cannot even meaningfully begin.²³ If God-talk is meaningless, then debate over God becomes either impossible or useless. In fact, the difficulty in providing a precise definition of God is often itself used as an argument against God’s existence.

This challenge has not been lost on atheists. Philosopher George Smith (1989:29-30) notes that it would do little good to argue over the existence of some “thing” that is itself unknown or, worse, unknowable. The theist should have little problem agreeing with atheist that “the theist, before he sets out to explain why we should believe in god, must first explain what he means by the word ‘god.’ . . . nothing can qualify as evidence for the existence of a god unless we have some idea of what we are searching for”. Smith (1989:39) goes on to say that the failure to clearly define God actually produce “the major point of controversy between theism and critical atheism”.

²³ This issue will tie in to a major issue discussed below – namely, the use of Analytic Philosophy in theological debate. As Clarke (1963:365) put it: “the fifth edition of the *Socratic* [noted that] ‘nowdays we have to revert to an ancient problem . . . not with truth but with language and meaning . . . “clarification” rather than with argument . . . philosophical developments . . . have not only outdated arguments for the existence of God with modern intellectuals, but have thrown doubt on whether sentences mentioning God can ever have any meaning.’ This note is significant for . . . it introduces one of the earliest public encounters between theology and what has come to be called analytical philosophy.”

Additional examples of this sort of argumentation are not difficult to produce. Antony Flew (Miethe and Flew, 1991:6) opened a debate with the question of just what the atheist has *not to believe*. In his discussion, he wondered whether or not “we have here a concept of a kind that could have a proper object.” Although Flew did not pursue the issue in this debate, others have made the implied difficulties with God-talk their central thesis.

When J. P. Moreland debated Kai Nielsen over the existence of God in 1988, Moreland (Moreland and Nielsen, 1993:35-42) offered several standard theistic arguments such as universal design, morality, the first cause, New Testament reliability, and the evidence for Jesus Christ’s resurrection. His opponent responded with one sustained argument, namely, that belief in God is irrational due to conceptual problems with the very concept of God. “Before we go to the proofs or the evidence for God’s existence,” Nielsen (Moreland and Nielsen, 1993:55) stated, “the believer must show that we know what we are talking about when we speak of God.”

Although Michael Martin (1990:41) does not “put all his eggs in one basket” in his discussion concerning God’s existence, he leads off with the same tactic. Martin argues against the meaningfulness of religious language early on in his discussion when he states that, “It is difficult to understand the logical status of the term ‘God.’ . . . there is no coherent and consistent scheme that can cope with its varied and inconsistent uses.” Citing Nielsen throughout, Martin eventually concludes that the term *God* is meaningless.²⁴

Kai Nielsen “is the best known advocate of the thesis that talk about God is in an important sense meaningless” (Martin, 1990:45). Nielsen (1973:41) states his view of God-talk clearly: “There is nothing to fail or to be proved, for the very concept of God is so incoherent, when not characterized in an anthropomorphic or immanent way, that we cannot make genuine truth claims by its employment”. Martin uses Nielsen’s argument in his chapter concerning the meaningfulness of religious language. Martin explains that while “religious expressions have a use in our language,” and that, “one can make inferences on the basis of these expressions,” it is not the case that such expressions are factually meaningful (Martin, 1990: 45-46).

Consider the following examples:

1. God has no body and yet acts in the world.
2. God is gluberfied.
3. God big impossible.

²⁴Martin (1990:44) reserves the term *incoherent* for “sentences expressing statements that entail a contradiction.”

Statement (1) is not meaningless in the same way that (2) and (3) are, for each word has use in our language and the sentence's grammatical structure is sound. In (2) we have a meaningless term ("gluberfied"), and (3) lacks proper grammatical structure. Martin / Nielsen's claim is that "given the fact, acknowledged by many religious believers, that it is unclear whether in speaking of God one is asserting any statements at all, one may wish a clear criterion of factual significance" (Martin, 1990:48).

It would seem to shipwreck both the theist's and the atheist's projects to simply dismiss the very possibility of meaningful God talk. Unsurprisingly, not all atheists consider God-talk necessarily meaningless. J. L. Mackie, one of the most prominent atheist philosopher of the 20th century, thinks God-talk is useful, if often difficult: "It is sometimes doubted," he writes, "whether such descriptions [of a god] *can* be literally meaningful. But there is really no problem about this" and accepts theistic philosopher Richard Swinburne's understanding of God with "reasonable qualifications" (Mackie, 1988:1).

In the end, even Martin, who concludes that "religious language is unverifiable and hence factually meaningless," does not "assume in the rest of the book that the sentences 'God exists' and 'God does not exist' are factually meaningless."²⁵ In fact, he goes on to write nearly 400 pages of text dealing with God as a meaningful subject. This seeming inconsistency may be due to the fact that Nielsen's conclusion (which Martin purports to share) has more to do with verifiability than linguistic theory per se.

The problem is found in the verifiability criterion of factual significance.²⁶ According to this account of factual statements, "one must have some idea about what counts for or against it; indeed, this is simply part of what it means to understand a statement" (Martin, 1990:47). Martin gives examples such as "colors speak faster than the speed of light" to illustrate utterances that cannot be counted as factual statements because "we have no idea of what evidence in principle would count for or against these sentences" (Martin, 1990:47). Martin concludes that, "putative religious statements are compatible with any conceivable empirical evidence. . . . there can be no conceivable evidence that would count for or against such a claim [that an infinite non-spatial entity exists]" (Martin, 1990:48). Nielsen's / Martin's criteria reveals an underlying assumption of verification theory that demands a closer look.

²⁵Martin (1990:77-78) is aware of this difficulty and attempts, briefly, to justify it.

²⁶This should not be confused with the verifiability theory of Logical Positivism (which will be treated below at §4.3.2.3) although it occasionally sounds similar.

2.2.4.1 Verificationism

Verificationism refers to a methodological paradigm that came into prominence during the early stages of Analytic Philosophy via the logical positivists of the Vienna Circle. Part of its project was to identify criteria that clarified a statements' meaningfulness and assess its truth or falsity. The group attempted to standardize language in such a way that any meaningful statements could be analyzed by either logic or empirical science. The result was the "verifiability principle" which stated that only synthetic statements about the world (essentially limited to those that are empirically verifiable) or analytic statements (logically necessary tautologies) are truly meaningful (Ayer, 1971:16).

The verifiability principle came under fire and was subject to multiple revisions for the first half of the twentieth century, but by the 1960's had been largely abandoned. As can be seen by Martin's quote above, remnants of the theory have continued to remain popular in philosophical circles. Oftentimes discussions of God's existence will revolve around what kind of data is allowable in the discussion. This in turn will largely depend on one's underlying assumptions about the meaningfulness of language in the proper place of different kinds of evidence when it comes to the question of God's existence. For the purposes of this writing, only two major categories need be mentioned: inductive or empirical data, and deductive rational arguments.

2.2.4.2 Inductive empirical data

Richard Swinburne (1977:28) has taken Nielsen to task concerning his limiting of verifiability to empirical evidence. One can imagine statements that would be considered to be factual without having any idea what would count as empirical evidence for them. Swinburne offers an example in the statement, "Once upon a time, before there were men or other rational creatures, the earth was covered by sea," is one example. One need not know what geological evidence would or would not prove such a statement for it to count as factually meaningful. Martin (1990:59) counters by stating that one might know that such statements are *understandable* without being able to know their truth value in any *conceivable* manner. If one accepts Nielsen's requirements for verifiability, it seems that the problem would remain.

There may, however, be a larger issue. Nielsen's principle requires empirical data to confirm or disconfirm any factual statement. But why, it should be asked, should verifiability be limited to empirical data in the first place? The statement, "a triangle's angles add up to 360

degrees” is hardly empirically verifiable.²⁷ In fact, the statement’s truth value is more easily assessed due to the purely rational investigation it requires. The same could be said of statements concerning more abstract objects such as laws of logic or geometry.

Finally, philosophers have made use of empirical data to argue for God’s existence in a manner similar to empirical science. As J. P. Moreland (1993:57) points out, scientists “postulate theoretical entities, and they give theoretical terms meaning as they are embedded in theories used to explain certain effects.” Further, Martin (1990:62) concedes to Swinburne that “to limit observations to so-called sensory qualities is too restrictive.”²⁸ Thus, if empirical data leading to God’s existence is admitted into the project, then Nielsen’s criterion may be satisfied after all.

2.2.4.3 Deductive rational arguments

Even if empirical data is considered to be primary, the investigation of non-empirical objects would seem to demand that allowance be made for non-empirical support. If God is anything like the typical list of His attributes, then this God’s substance is not available to human senses. It would be absurd to demand empirical proof for an object acknowledged to be, by nature, unavailable to empirical investigation.²⁹

If it is admitted that verifiability ought not be artificially limited to the empirical data, it would seem that a theistic conclusion would be more easily supported. Ironically, however, the atheist’s case may be made stronger. This is because if the door is opened to non-sensory “observations,” then rationally deductive proofs would have to be welcomed – and it is exactly in the realm of rational deductive argumentation that the powerful ontological disproofs arise.³⁰

²⁷Because triangles are two-dimensional, none can actually exist within the physical universe. See “Geometry” in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (1972:3.285-290).

²⁸ Non-sensory observational language might include existentially quantified phenomenistic language (e.g., “Jones seemed to see a man bathed in golden light.”).

²⁹ Here “proof” is being used synonymously with something like “definitive evidence.”

³⁰ It could be argued that, given the generally poor reception of the only purely deductive argument for the existence of God (Anselm’s Ontological Argument) among theists and atheists alike, atheists actually have a *better* chance of successfully arguing their position on purely deductive grounds.

2.3 Theistic ontological disproofs

David Blumenfeld (1978:221) writes that two things are required to prove the possibility of God. The first is that each of God's attributes has an intrinsic maximum. The second is that all of God's attributes are compossible. After a brief discussion of why these two requirements are needed, Blumenfeld states that, "these requirements suggest to corresponding avenues for proving the impossibility of God." The idea that God's attributes may not be compossible (or coherent) forms the basis of theistic ontological disproofs.

Theistic ontological disproofs can be divided into two main groups. The first consists of arguments which aim to show an incompatibility between two of God's "attributes," the other group consists of arguments which aim to show an internal incoherency in a single one of them.³¹ In Michael Martin's *The Impossibility of God* (2003), more than half the book contains arguments against God's existence based on the alleged incompatibility of certain divine attributes. These arguments are formally valid according to the standard rules of propositional logic, so to be proven unsound, one or more premises must be shown to be materially false.

The form is as follows:

1. If God exists then he has property X.
2. If God exists then he has property Y.
3. If a being with property X exists then A follows.
4. If a being with property Y exists then $\sim A$ follows.
5. It is impossible that $(A \cdot \sim A)$.
6. Therefore it is impossible for God to exist.³²

³¹ Another term, such as "ascriptions" might be a better term to use here. However, as terms such as "attributes" and "properties" are common in modern and contemporary writing, they will generally be retained here. The difficulty that arises in these common terms is that they might seem to introduce a distinction between God's essence and his attributes which is contrary to classical theism which affirms that God is devoid of composition. For the classical theist, then, there is also no actual distinction between God and his "attributes." Rather, "God is what he has." This will be discussed in §6.3.1.

³² Formalization and proof:

1.	$G \rightarrow (X \cdot Y)$		A
2.	$X \rightarrow A$		A
3.	$Y \rightarrow \sim A$		A
4.	$\sim\sim G$		PA
5.	$X \cdot Y$	1,4	MP
6.	X	5	SIMP
7.	Y	5	SIMP
8.	A	2,6	MP
9.	$\sim A$	3,7	MP
10.	$A \cdot \sim A$	8,9	CONJ
11.	$\sim(\sim\sim G)$	4-10	IP
12.	$\sim G$	11	DN

Single-attribute disproofs seek to generate an incoherency within one attribute of God. In this form, the argument stands or falls on whether or not a given attribute is inherently inconsistent —regardless of what kind of being is said to possess it, or what other attributes such a being might also be said to possess. These sorts of arguments make up seven out of eighteen arguments in Martin’s collection. These arguments take the equally valid form:

1. If God exists then he has property A.
2. If a being with property A exists then $\sim A$ follows.
3. It is impossible that $(A \bullet \sim A)$.
4. Therefore it is impossible for God to exist. ³³

Divine attributes that commonly serve as the basis for these arguments are fairly standard, classical attributes such as God’s being perfect, personal, immutable, free, transcendent, loving, immaterial, light, simple, eternal, self-caused, just, merciful, omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, creator, savior, etc. In general these terms are at least initially defined along the lines of Christian thought in order to assess the coherency of what Graham Oppy (2006:xv) refers to as an “orthodoxly conceived monotheistic god.” In order to illustrate the breadth and depth of these sorts of arguments, several examples and brief explanations follow.

2.3.1 Incoherent Property Disproofs

According to Martin (2003: 323), “a single attribute disproof of God’s existence is a deductive argument based on a self-contradiction within just one attribute of God.” A survey of papers offered from the mid-1960s to the year 2000 show several of these attempts.

2.3.1.1 Smith’s Disproof of Divine Causation

Quentin Smith (1996) offers a rather unique spin on the single-attribute disproof. He begins by asking, whether it is logically possible that the universe has an originating divine

³³ Formalization and proof:

1.	$G \rightarrow A$		A
2.	$A \rightarrow \sim A$		A
4.	$\sim \sim G$		PA
5.	A	1,4	MP
6.	$\sim A$	2,5	MP
7.	$A \bullet \sim A$	5,6	CONJ
8.	$\sim(\sim \sim G)$	4-7	IP
9.	$\sim G$	8	DN

cause. He then notes that virtually all contemporary atheists and agnostics believe that it is at least a logically possible that if there is a God He created the universe. Smith, however, believes that the very idea that the universe has an originating cause is incoherent given all accepted definitions of causality. This leads him to come to the rather surprising conclusion that not only did God not create the universe, but that all arguments for the existence of God based on his creative act (e.g. the cosmological or teleological arguments) actually end up being arguments for the *nonexistence* of God (Smith, 1996:169-170).

Smith (1996) surveys several contemporary definitions of cause beginning with that of Hume which consists of three elements: (1) temporal priority, (2) spatio-temporal contiguity, and (3) nomological relatedness. The problem with the first element is that if time came into existence with the creation of the universe then there was no time before creation for the constant occupy. Thus it could not have temporal priority. Second, there could be no spatiotemporal contiguity if God is spiritual, omnipresent, and timeless. A mere act of willing does not take up space. Third, prior to creation there would be no law in effect that states that God's act of willing is productive. Therefore, concludes Smith, God's creation of the universe would not be considered a cause due to it's failing to fulfill any one of the three elements necessary for it to be considered a cause on Hume's definition.

Smith (1996:175 and *passim*) goes on to consider some recent tweaks to Hume's definition, and finds them all wanting in the case of atheistic cause of the universe. He then notes that if God is omnipotent, that his willing of a thing would be a sufficient condition for that same come into being. The problem, since Smith, is that a logically sufficient condition is not considered to be a cause. For example fire may be a sufficient condition for oxygen, but that in no way makes fire the *cause* of oxygen. Given the definition of an omnipotent being, though, anything willed by that being would *necessarily* take place. Thus if God is the cause of the universe, his will would be a *sufficient* condition for its existence – and therefore, on this understanding of the relationship between causes and sufficient conditions, it could not also be a cause. The resulting contradiction, Smith believes, shows that God cannot be the cause of the universe.

Most objections to these formulations, says Smith, either involve illicit retreats into mystery, unhelpful redefinitions of synonymous terms which only disguise the problem, or special pleading. There simply seems to be no way around the fact that no extent definition of cause can keep God (or any other cause) in the picture when it comes to the creation of the universe. And with no other reason than salvaging theism, there seems to be no reason to

accept any other definition. Thus, conclude Smith, God cannot be the cause of the universe, and if God necessarily is the creator of the universe, then he does not exist.

1. If God exists, then he is the cause of the universe.
2. By all accepted and non-question begging definitions of cause, God cannot be the cause of the universe.
3. Therefore, it is impossible for God to exist.

Smith further notes that any argument purporting to prove the necessary existence of a divine cause of the universe has now been shown to *disprove* the existence of such a God. Therefore, concludes Smith, “since the cosmological and teleological arguments have standardly been thought to be the strongest arguments for God’s existence, and since they support atheism rather than theism, it seems now that the case for theism is very weak indeed” (1996:191).

2.3.1.2 Kortum’s disproof of cosmological design

Richard D. Kortum (2004:81) argues for “the proposition that there is a fundamental incoherence in the idea of a divine designer. Such a being would have to have intentions and thoughts prior to designing and making the world. . . . [which] presupposes possession of language. . . . The divine designer would be impossible exemplar of the private language, whose incoherence was demonstrated by Wittgenstein”. Kortum (2004:81) begins by noting that there are some things even an omnipotent God cannot do – namely create impossible objects like foresighted triangles. The problem, says Kortum, is that God could not have created the heavens and earth – indeed he could not have even uttered the words, “Let there be light”. Indeed, God would not have even sensed the concepts.

The issue for Kortum (2004:82) is a creator God who was alone prior to creation. No individual, he asserts, could possibly master language all alone. And without language, thought itself is impossible. And without thought, there is no such thing as intention. And without intention, there can be no creation”. Kortum then proceeds to present a four step argument to show that this is the case.

Kortum (2004:83) begins with Aristotle’s idea of formal causation. Because the formal cause is the idea in the mind of the causer, thought must precede intentional causation. In the second step, Kortum reliance on Wittgenstein’s notion that thought without words is impossible. It is not that images formed in the mind are possible, rather it is that these images would not count as thoughts. Certain thoughts, argues Kortum, require a higher degree of complexity or

sophistication than can be provided by mere pictures. A dog, for example could be said to have certain “thoughts” that these would be distinct from human thinking precisely at the point where they can be described linguistically. The idea of creating a universe, argues Kortum, is just the sort of thought that would require a linguistically translatable thought: “the idea of a mental state totally devoid of, or totally unconnected to, any ‘physical realization ‘whatsoever is incomprehensible and flies in the face of all plausible theories of mind since the time of Descartes” (2004:87).

In step three, Kortum (2004:87) argues that language is intrinsically a *social* phenomenon. Language is essentially a means of communication, which presupposes both speaker and hearer. Further language is defined as an acquired ability – once again presupposing more than one person involved. Finally Kortum says that it is incoherent for any being to speak a “private language” that only that being is able to understand. Kortum notes that this third step is backed up by the work of Wittgenstein as well as contemporary linguistic philosophers (e.g., Paul Grice and Michael Dummett).

In his fourth step, Kortum brings the previous three borrowed ideas together and combines them with the standard theistic teaching the prior to creation God was alone. This addition results in the following argument against God’s existence (Kortum, 2004:95):

1. If God exists, then he is the creator of the universe.
2. Without thought, one cannot intentionally create anything.
3. Without language, one cannot have higher-order thoughts.
4. Without others, one cannot have language.
5. Before the physical universe existed, God was alone and without others.
6. Thus, God could not language or higher-order thoughts, and so could not have created the universe.
7. Therefore, it is impossible for God to exist.

2.3.1.3 Keller’s disproof of omnibenevolence

J. Gregory Keller (2010:29-36) argues that God’s moral perfection is itself an incoherent notion. Keller begins with the idea that a standard view of God’s attributes in Western thinking is that each of them must have maximal greatness. Further, according to the same standard definition, God is necessarily perfectly good. Therefore, concludes Keller, referring to God as perfectly good is to say that when it comes to his moral perfection, it cannot be exceeded. Keller’s test for what counts as good is indexed to its praiseworthiness. That is, the more morally praiseworthy an agent is, the more morally good the agent should be considered. This, according to Keller, leads to a contradiction.

Keller's argument considers two agents: the first is an agent that always performs perfectly good moral actions of necessity. That is, this agent cannot fail to do the maximally good thing in any situation. The second agent is one that, when he performs morally good actions, he does so freely or contingently. Keller believes that it is morally superior to commit a morally good act freely than of necessity. The problem, then, is that a maximally good agent (i.e., an agent who is always perfectly good of necessity) could be surpassed in his praiseworthiness by an agent who performs morally good acts freely. But a maximally good agent cannot, by definition, be surpassed. Thus, maximal moral goodness is an incoherent notion.

Keller goes on to argue for his basic principles. He notes, for example, that rocks always "do" exactly what they are supposed to, and yet we do not consider it morally praiseworthy because whatever a rock "does" it simply does by nature – that is, by being rock. We only assign praise to beings who might not have done the morally good for which they are being praise, but did so anyway. Keller then takes on the notion of the attainment of virtue. In the classic Aristotelian system of virtue, an agent attains to moral goodness through effort. But, once having attained that virtue, the agent no longer is "free" to pursue moral evil. And a person in the state would certainly be considered more praiseworthy than a basically bad person who just happens to freely choose to perform a good moral act at some point. This, however, only pushes the problem back a step according to Keller (2010:32-34). The very reason that the virtuous person is praiseworthy is not because they are praiseworthy "by nature" *metaphysically*, but because they have attained, through effort, the virtuous state that they now enjoy. This, then, is no rescue for the concept of a necessarily good being acting morally. If God exists, then he never faced any temptation to do evil and therefore never overcame an evil. In other words there was no moral character for God to develop, he is simply doing what he does because of what he is (again, like a rock).

Keller does not, in this argument, conclude that God does not exist. His conclusion is simply that the concept of God's perfect goodness is incoherent. However it is easy to see how such an argument indirectly could support the thesis that God cannot exist. If God is necessarily maximally morally good, and maximal moral goodness is itself an incoherent notion, then God cannot exist.

1. If God exists, then he is necessarily maximally morally good.
2. Because necessary goodness is not as praiseworthy as free will goodness, maximal moral goodness is an incoherent notion.
3. Therefore, it is impossible for a God of maximal moral goodness to exist.

2.3.1.4 Fulmer' disproof of supernaturalism

Gilbert Fulmer (1976:113-116) offers a response to Swinburne who, in his attempt to support the teleological argument, claimed that it is impossible to explain all natural laws scientifically. Fulmer argues that if God's willing a thing creates some effect in nature, then the fact that what God wills creates an effect in nature is itself part of natural law. And if God's willing is part of natural law, then the idea of a *supernatural* act becomes incoherent. By identifying God's power with a natural fact of the universe, Fulmer believes that he has shown God's supernatural agency to be an incoherent idea. He also believes that this disproves the doctrine of creation ex nihilo, for God cannot have created the universe including all the laws that govern it if one of the laws that governs it is the fact of his own power.

1. If God exists, then he is a supernatural agent.
2. God's agency itself would be a fact of the natural universe.
3. Therefore, it is impossible for God to exist.

2.3.1.5 Smith's disproof of supernaturalism

George Smith (1989:39) argues against God's supernaturalism by arguing against the concept of supernaturalism itself: "the first problem with the designation of supernatural (or any equivalent term) is that it tells us nothing positive about a god". Smith objects to the idea that the term supernatural is informative. It seems to tell us what God is not (viz. he is not part of the natural universe), but offers no positive content to fill in the void left behind this negation. A related issue is that, according to Smith (1989:39), "the entire notion of a supernatural being is incomprehensible". Because people cannot be expected to conceive of any kind of being that is not natural, the idea of supernaturalism is too vague to be useful.

Moreover, if God is beyond nature it seems that he would also be exempt from any natural laws, including any that would impose limits upon him. But a being without limits has no nature. Smith then argues that because to be is to be something as opposed to nothing, then if God has no nature then he is actually nothing. Thus for both reasons, if God must be supernatural in order to exist, it seems he must not exist.

1. If God exists, then he is supernatural.
2. To be supernatural is incoherent both epistemologically and metaphysically.
3. Thus, God, if he exists, is not supernatural.
4. Therefore, it is impossible that God exists.

2.3.1.6 Cowan's disproof of omnipotence

J. L. Cowan (1965:104) writes that, "the concept of omnipotence is *itself* self-contradictory and . . . it constitutes in itself something not to be expected of God." Cowan does not argue this, as others have, by pointing to paradoxes that could arise should a being be omnipotent. Rather he argues from the idea that some capacities implies limitations, that is, "there are things one can do only if one cannot do certain other things" (ibid.). Cowan begins his analysis by looking at the argument that God cannot make a rock so big that he cannot lift it.³⁴ He argues that while it may be the case that "a rock so big that an omnipotent being cannot lift it" may be a self-contradictory concept (and therefore not a defeater for God's omnipotence), the fact that "no one can make something he cannot lift unless he cannot lift everything" makes omnipotence *per se* self-contradictory. "That nothing is omnipotent is not merely true, it is a logical truth exactly comparable to the truth that nothing is a square circle." (Cowan, 1965:106).

1. If God exists then he is omnipotent.
2. Either God can create a stone he cannot lift, or he cannot create a stone he cannot lift.
3. If God can create a stone which he cannot lift, then he is not omnipotent.
4. If God cannot create a stone which he cannot lift, then he is not omnipotent.
5. Hence, God is not omnipotent.
6. Therefore, it is impossible for God to exist.

2.3.1.7 Sobel's disproof of omnipotence

Sobel (2009:353) disagrees with, and goes beyond Cowan. After interacting with Swinburne and Morris, Sobel concludes that an omnipotent being could make a stone that it could not lift by limiting its lifting power. The problem for theists, Sobel contends, is not in denying God this task, but rather that to limit his power would rob God of omnipotence – an essential attribute of deity. Thus, God "cannot co-exist with a stone that it cannot lift. It is essentially omnipotent, and when it exists it can lift every stone. An essentially omnipotent being would be omnipotent, but also it would be incapable of diminishing its power, and so, because of this incapacity, it would not be omnipotent." (2009:362). If omnipotence is an essential attribute of God, then eliminating it would eliminate God via "ontological suicide" in Sobel's words. Moreover, to even posit such a state of affairs involves the contradiction that to be

³⁴ E.g., George I. Mavrodes. 1963. Some Puzzles Concerning Omnipotence. *The Philosophical Review* (72): 221-223

essentially omnipotent is not to be omnipotent. But, because being omnipotent requires that such a stone can be created, essential omnipotence is itself impossible. Hence, if God is essentially omnipotent, he cannot exist.

1. If God exists, then he is essentially omnipotent.
2. An omnipotent being can create a stone it cannot lift by limiting its lifting power.
3. An essentially omnipotent being would be incapable of diminishing its power.
4. Hence, essential omnipotence is impossible.
5. Therefore, God does not and cannot exist.

2.3.1.8 Puccetti's disproof of omniscience

An early version of an incoherency argument against omniscience comes from Roland Puccetti (1963). Playing off of Wittgenstein's idea that one cannot set a limit to thought because one would have to be able to think on both sides of such a limit, Puccetti argues that, "the notion of omniscience implies being able to do just this" (1963:92). The problem as stated is that in order for God to be omniscient he would have to know all the facts, but one of the facts he would have to know is that he is omniscient (namely that there is nothing outside of "all facts" that he does not know). This seems to entail that God knows more than all that there is to know. For this reason, then, God can never know his own omniscience – and to not know his own omniscience is to not know all facts, and therefore not be omniscient.

1. If God exists he knows all things.
2. One thing to know is that there are no other things to know that are unknown.
3. To know there are no other things to know that are unknown is impossible.
4. Hence, there is at least one thing God cannot know: his own omniscience.
5. Therefore, it is impossible for God to exist.

2.3.1.9 Grim's disproofs of omniscience

Patrick Grim offers two interesting and philosophically sophisticated arguments against God's (or any being's) omniscience. The first deals with whether or not it is even possible to know all things. Using Cantorian infinite set theory, Grim (1984: 206-208) argues that there cannot be any such thing as the set of all truths. Thus the problem is not so much that God

cannot know all truths, rather the problem is that it is impossible that there is such a thing as all truths.³⁵

Grim argues this by looking at what are known as power sets. A power set is a set of sets. If someone were to define a set as that which contains all truths, then each truth within that set would by virtue of being in the set create another truth – namely that it is a member of the set of all truths. The problem is that, “as Cantor has shown, the power set of all sets will be larger than the original set. Thus there will be more truths than there are members of [the original truth set, which] is supposed to be the set of *all* truths” (Grimm, 1984: 208). Because of the paradox involved in affirming that there can be a set of all truths, Grim concludes that there cannot be. And if to be omniscient means to know all truths, and it is impossible that there exists a set of all truths, then God cannot be omniscient.³⁶

1. If God exists, then he knows all truths.
2. There is no such set as all truths.
3. Hence God cannot know all truths.
4. Therefore it is impossible that God exists.

Grim’s second attempt concerns the kind of knowledge a being might have of another being’s knowledge. After noting that some arguments against omniscience involve pitting omniscience against immutability with regard to indexical statements, Grim (1985: 151-180) asserts that there is a problem with indexicals that attacks the very idea of omniscience directly. Indexicals are words like “I”, “here”, “now”, that reference a given statement to space, time, or to the speaker himself. Indexical utterances, it is argued, change the epistemological status of the statements in which they are used. So, for example, “I am sitting in this chair” has a different sort of truth maker than the statement “Doug Beaumont is sitting in a chair.” While there is a sense in which both statements are referring to the same truth in reality, what needs to be known to affirm their truth is different. An outside observer can affirm the truth of the latter, while he cannot affirm the truth of the former without changing its meaning.

The difference in knowledge requirements for indexical statements is what Grim plays off to show that omniscience is impossible. The problem is that only the subject can know what the

³⁵ The very idea of an infinite number seems incoherent, as quantities are always finite by nature. Grim and Plantinga discuss the application of Cantorian transfinite mathematics and set theory in “Truth, Omniscience, and Cantorian Arguments: An Exchange” (1993).

³⁶ Sobel (2008:ch.10) agrees with this line of reasoning and devotes a chapter to expanding Grim’s themes.

subject is doing from his own perspective. While others might know what Doug Beaumont is doing, they do not know it *as I know it*. Because of this, there is a piece of knowledge that no one – even God – can know (namely, what I know I am doing as I know it). And thus God is not, and cannot be, omniscient.

1. If God exists he knows all things.
2. Indexical statements can only be known by the subject.
3. Hence, God cannot know indexical statements.
4. Therefore, it is impossible for God to exist.

2.3.2 Incompatible properties disproofs

Ontological disproof arguments that rely on pitting two or more attributes of God against one another are quite a bit more popular than the single attribute variety. In his fairly brief article, “Incompatible-Properties Arguments: A Survey” (1998), Theodore Drange provides an impressive list of theistic ontological disproofs based on his list of divine attributes which include perfection, immutability, transcendence, nonphysical, omniscient, omnipresent, personal, free, all loving, all just, all merciful, and being the creator of the universe. After acknowledging that there are certainly additional properties that could have been listed (such as omnipotence), and that he is not necessarily claiming that any one person ascribes all of these properties to God, Drange (1998:186) goes on to attack what he considers to be properties that have been ascribed to God by someone or other. These will be briefly summarized below.

2.3.2.1 Drange’s disproof: Perfection vs. creator

The first set of attributes which Drange looks at are God’s perfection and his being the creator of the universe. Drange (1998:49-51) offers two different arguments purporting to show that God’s perfection and his creation of the universe cannot be reconciled. The first trades on the idea that a perfect being can have no desires, but that God would not have created had he not desired to. It seems that God could not have any desires, because that would imply that he is incomplete and therefore not perfect. Or, if God did not desire that the universe be created it would seem that such a creation was an accident, but a perfect being would also have no accidents. In syllogistic form the argument runs like this:

1. If God exists, then He is perfect.
2. If God exists, then He is the creator of the universe.
3. A perfect being can have no needs or wants

4. If any being created the universe, then he must have had some need or want.
5. Therefore, it is impossible for a perfect being to be the creator of the universe.
6. Hence, it is impossible for God to exist.

2.3.2.2 Drange's disproof: Perfection vs. creation

The second version of the argument that Drange offers against the compatibility of God's perfection and his creation has to do with the intuition that if a being is perfect, then whatever he creates would also be perfect. The imperfection of the universe is then asserted, and it is claimed that this disproves that God is its creator. If God is not the creator of the universe, however, that imply He does not have the attribute of being the creator of the universe and is therefore not God.

1. If God exists, then He is perfect.
2. If God exists, then He is the creator of the universe.
3. If a being is perfect, then whatever he creates must be perfect.
4. But the universe is not perfect.
5. Therefore, it is impossible for a perfect being to be the creator of the universe.
6. Hence, it is impossible for God to exist.

2.3.2.3 Drange's disproof: Immutability vs. creation

In his second major argument, Drange again uses creation against an attribute of God. This time it is God's immutability. As Drange sees it, a being that cannot change cannot at one time intend not to create, and then later intend to create. Yet it seems that this must've been the case with God when he chose to create the universe. Although he acknowledges that challenges exist to this idea on the basis that creation is not a change in God, or that it does not take place in time (for time itself would've been created with the rest of the universe), Drange (1998:188) objects to both on the basis that, "creation is a temporal concept. This is built into the very definition of 'create' as 'to cause to come into being'". In any case, says Drange (1998:189), "there must be a time during which a creator is performing a certain action and a later time (after the action has been performed) during which he is no longer performing that action."

1. If God exists, then He is immutable.
2. If God exists, then He is the creator of the universe.
3. An immutable being cannot at one time have an intention and then at a later time not have that intention.

4. For any being to create anything, prior to the creation he must have had the intention to create it, but at a later time, after the creation, no longer have the intention to create it.
5. Thus, it is impossible for an immutable being to have created anything.
6. Therefore, it is impossible for God to exist.

2.3.2.4 Kretzmann, Drange, and Kenny's disproof: Immutability vs. omniscience

In one of his earlier ontological disproofs, Norman Kretzmann (1966) argued against the compatibility of God's omniscience and immutability. He begins by stating, "it is generally recognized that omniscience and immutability are necessary characteristics of an absolutely perfect being, the fact that they are also incompatible characteristics seems to have gone unnoticed" (Kretzmann, 1966:198). The incompatibility Kretzmann has in mind is generated by the fact that a being that knows everything must always know what time it is, and yet such a being must be subject to change. To the objection that a change in the object of knowledge does not entail a change in the knower of that object, Kretzmann (1966:199) responds that to know something that changes is to know a changing propositional truth values concerning the object in question – which amounts to knowing "first one proposition and then another". But to go from knowing one proposition and then to another is to change.

Drange's third argument (1998:189-190) is one of his most complex, and is similar to Kretzmann's above. What it boils down to is that for God to know everything he would also have to know propositions about the past and the future, but a being who could not change would not be able to know these things. The basic problem here is that any proposition indexed to time has a truth value that is constantly changing depending on what time it "actually is." It is thought, therefore, that a being unrelated to time could never know what time it actually is, and therefore would never be sure which truth value a time-indexed proposition held.³⁷

1. If God exists, then He is immutable.
2. If God exists, then He is omniscient.
3. An immutable being cannot know different things at different times.
4. To be omniscient, a being would need to know propositions about the past and future.
5. But what is past and what is future keep changing.
6. Thus, in order to know propositions about the past and future, a being would need to know different things at different times.

³⁷ Although in this form some substantial objections might seem obvious, it is only fair to mention that many of the same supporting arguments marshaled to defend its contested premises are affirmed by many otherwise conservative theists. See for example William Lane Craig (2001) or Paul Helm (2001).

7. It follows that, to be omniscient, a being would need to know different things at different times.
8. Hence, it is impossible for an immutable being to be omniscient.
9. Therefore, it is impossible for God to exist.

Anthony Kenny (1986:212) continues the argumentation begun by Kretzmann by stating that, “discarding the doctrine of timelessness, however, does not solve the problems about the relation between time and omniscience.” The problem, as Kenny sees it, is that brought about by knowledge of tensed propositions. Omniscience has to be more than simply knowing the truth value of tensed propositions, it must also include knowing at what time tensed propositions change their truth value. Because God is both timeless and immutable, the issue cannot be resolved simply by looking at timelessness. God’s immutability also seems to exclude omniscience. Kenny (1986:218) concludes that “a believer in divine omniscience must, it seems, give up belief in divine immutability”.

2.3.2.5 Drange’s disproof: Immutable vs. loving

Drange (1998:190) also sees immutability as a problem if God is considered to be loving. The problem is that a being that cannot change also cannot be affected by anything outside itself, but it is difficult to imagine how a being in such a state could be considered loving. Certainly no one that we typically consider to be a loving person would be called such if that person was not affected by anything going on around them. Thus, if God is to be considered loving (or, *a fortiori*, to *be love itself* cf. 1 John 4:8), then if he must also be immutable, he must not exist.

1. If God exists, then He is immutable.
2. If God exists, then He is all-loving.
3. An immutable being cannot be affected by events.
4. To be all-loving, it must be possible for a being to be affected by events.
5. Hence, it is impossible for an immutable being to be all-loving.
6. Therefore, it is impossible for God to exist.

2.3.2.6 Drange’s disproof: Transcendence vs. omnipresence

In Drange’s fifth argument (1998:191), he seems to come closest to finding a direct contradiction between God’s attributes. If to be transcendent means not to exist in space, and to be omnipresent means to exist everywhere in space, then no being could possibly be both transcendent and omnipresent. Yet God is said to be both. Attempts to rescue these attributes

by defining transcendence as being both outside space as well as within it, is said to be incomprehensible and incoherent, and it is difficult to think of what “presence” might mean if it does not refer to space. If to be God is to be both transcendent and omnipresent, then God cannot exist.

1. If God exists, then He is transcendent (i.e., outside space and time).
2. If God exists, then He is omnipresent.
3. To be transcendent, a being cannot exist anywhere in space.
4. To be omnipresent, a being must exist everywhere in space.
5. Hence, it is impossible for a transcendent being to be omnipresent.
6. Therefore, it is impossible for God to exist.

2.3.2.7 Drange’s disproof: Transcendence vs. personhood

In his sixth argument, Drange (1998:192) says that because a person must exist and perform actions within time, God cannot be a person because He is transcendent (according to the above understanding). As to any challenge to his definition of a person, Drange replies, “if the concept of personhood is extended that far [to being outside of time], then it ceases to do the work that it was supposed to do, which was to make God into a more familiar figure.” For Drange, considering a person to be totally outside of time robs the term of person of all meaning. Drange adds that for a person to be free he must exist and act within time. If any of these issues are legitimate, then God cannot be both a person and be transcendent.

1. If God exists, then He is transcendent (i.e., outside space and time).
2. If God exists, then He is a person (or a personal being).
3. If something is transcendent, then it cannot exist and perform actions within time.
4. But a person (or personal being) must exist and perform actions within time.
5. Hence, something that is transcendent cannot be a person (or personal being).
6. Therefore, it is impossible for God to exist.

2.3.2.8 Drange’s disproof: Nonphysical vs. personal

Drange (1998:193) continues to leverage God’s personhood against his other attributes in his seventh argument where he considers it impossible to be a person if one is nonphysical. Drange quickly admits that, “this argument turns on the issue of whether the idea of a bodiless person is consistent and coherent,” and lists two prominent atheist philosophers (Kai Nielsen and J. L. Mackie) who disagree with each other over the subject. He does not pursue the issue further, but notes that, “the divine attribute of being nonphysical might also be taken to be incompatible with still other divine attributes, such as being free and being all loving, . . . All such

arguments, though, would lead into the same sort of difficult and controversial issues . . . and so should not be regarded among the most forceful of the various a theological arguments available.”

1. If God exists, then He is nonphysical
2. If God exists, then He is a person (or a personal being)
3. A person (or personal being) needs to be physical
4. Hence, it is impossible for God to exist.

2.3.2.9 Drange’s disproof: Omnipresence vs. personhood

In argument eight, Drange (1998:193) once again attacks God’s personality with another of his attributes. This time it is God’s omnipresence. Again the argument trades on one’s definition of a person. For Drange, anything that could be present everywhere seems to be in a different “category” from persons and thus to call any such thing a person is to “commit a category mistake.” He compares the idea of calling a person omnipresent to calling them “odd or even (in the mathematical sense).”

1. If God exists, then He is omnipresent
2. If God exists, then He is a person (or a personal being)
3. Whatever is omnipresent cannot be a person (or a personal being)
4. Hence, it is impossible for God to exist.

2.3.2.10 Drange’s and Kapitan’s disproof: Omniscient vs. free

Leaving behind the simple looking – but philosophically complex – arguments from personality, Drange (1998:194-195) then turns to his other most complicated argument: that of God’s omniscience versus his freedom. This argument presents something more akin to the popular paradoxical arguments concerning God’s powers. The problem as stated is that if God is omniscient and he knows everything including the sorts of things He will choose to do in the future. But if God knows what He will do in the future – and cannot be wrong about it – then it seems He must lack the freedom to not do those things in the future. But to lack the ability to do something is to not be free. Hence if God is omniscient, then He cannot be free (and vice versa).³⁸

³⁸ Drange's argument here will be familiar to anyone who has struggled with the issue of God's omniscience and human freedom - a struggle that features prominently in the Open Theism debate. See Clark Pinnock (1994) or Gregory Boyd (2000).

1. If God exists, then He is omniscient.
2. If God exists, then He is free.
3. An omniscient being must know exactly what actions he will and will not do in the future.
4. If one knows that he will do an action, then it is impossible for him not to do it, and if one knows that he will not do an action, then it is impossible for him to do it.
5. Thus, whatever an omniscient being does, he must do, and whatever he does not do, he cannot do.
6. To be free requires having options open, which means having the ability to act contrary to the way one actually acts.
7. So, if one is free, then he does not have to do what he actually does, and he is able to do things that he does not actually do.
8. Hence, it is impossible for an omniscient being to be free.
9. Therefore, it is impossible for God to exist.

Tomis Kapitan (1991:294) argues in a similar fashion. Expanding on the idea that freedom requires having open options, he asserts that, “not only is our remarkable ability to forget the past a prerequisite for action, as Nietzsche so aptly observed, so is our imperfect conception of what will be, for our efforts to shape the future in accord with our desires are as parasitic upon our ignorance as they are upon our expectations.” For Kapitan, a free intention requires that one already knows that what is intended is not inevitable – something that does not seem to be available to an omniscient being. Without limitations, it seems that an omniscient agent cannot exist.

2.3.2.11 Drange’s disproof: Justice vs. mercy

Drange’s (1998:195) tenth and last argument is, much like the transcendence versus omnipresence argument, based on the definitions of two attributes that do not seem like they could go together – namely, justice and mercy. In judicial terminology, God is said to be both a perfectly just judge as well as a perfectly merciful judge. The difficulty is that justice is giving that which is deserved, while mercy is not giving that which is deserved. As these two actions are incompatible, then the divine attributes associated with them must also be. As with most of the arguments in this brief article, Drange does not spend a lot of time responding to possible objections. Essentially he argues that the only way around the conflict would be to use justice and mercy in a way that is less accurate in “capturing ordinary language” (Drange, 1998:196). He seems to allow, however, that if the “given Christian way of speaking” is taken into consideration, the conflict could be resolved.

1. If God exists, then He is an all-just judge.
2. If God exists, then He is an all-merciful judge.
3. An all-just judge treats every offender with *exactly* the severity that he/she deserves.
4. An all-merciful judge treats every offender with *less* severity than he/she deserves.
5. It is impossible to treat an offender both with exactly the severity that he/she deserves and also with less severity than he/she deserves.
6. Hence, it is impossible for an all-just judge to be an all-merciful judge.
7. Therefore, it is impossible for God to exist.

In his conclusion, Drange (1998:196) admits that, “as with many of the previous attacks on the incompatible properties arguments, this one turns on semantical issues. . . . The issue of whether or not certain property ascriptions conflict with certain other property ascriptions depends very much on what exactly they mean”.

2.3.2.12 McCormick’s disproof: Omnipresence vs. consciousness

Although it might be expected that God’s omnipresence might be pitted against his omniscience, Matt McCormick (2000: 258) believes that God’s omnipresence is not even consistent with his being conscious – two properties which, when combined, he calls *omniconsciousness*. Relying on Immanuel Kant’s views as expressed in his book *Critique Of Pure Reason*, McCormick considers that, “self-awareness is not possible without awareness of objects external to one’s mind” (McCormick, 2000:259). Next McCormick (2000:259) argues that, “an omnipresent being cannot make object/representation discriminations, so it cannot make a self/other distinction”.

After going through some of Kant’s explanations of representations and judgment, McCormick (2000:264) points out that an omnipresent being would have nothing external to itself, and therefore nothing to think of as external to itself. If this is the case then an omnipresent being cannot make a subject/object distinction – and without that ability a being cannot be said to possess the capacities of consciousness (at least the kind of higher consciousness theists would wish to attribute to a personal God).

1. If God exists, then He is omnipresent.
2. If God exists, then He is conscious.
3. A being with higher consciousness possesses two abilities: A) the ability to discern between the object and a representation of the object, and B) the ability to apply concepts informed judgments about objects.

4. If the being has the ability to discern between the object and a representation of the object, and the ability to apply concepts informed judgments, and that being must be able to grasp the difference between the self and the not-self.
5. A being is omnipresent when that being occupies or is present in all places, far or near, in all times, past, present, or future.
6. There is nothing that is not-self for an omnipresent being by definition of omnipresence.
7. So an omnipresent being cannot grasp the difference between the self and not-self.
8. Hence, an omnipresent being cannot possess higher consciousness.
9. Hence God cannot have a mind because omniconsciousness [1+2] is impossible.
10. Therefore, God cannot exist.

McCormick's argument has implications that go beyond the dichotomy between omnipresence and omniscience (or mirror high consciousness). As he points out, if God lacks a higher consciousness, then it seems he would not be able to love, judge, command, or relate to any of his creatures (2000:271). Further, as omnipotence requires omnipresence (2000:266), this attribute would create a conflict as well. Thus, if McCormick's characterization of consciousness is correct, then it seems to be a multiple attribute disproof. McCormick (2000:272) concludes that, "without those attributes, it is not clear that a being that is only omnibenevolent, if one exists, would be an appropriate object of religious attitude or worship".

2.3.2.13 Blumenfeld's disproof: Omnipotence vs. omniscience

David Blumenfeld (1978:222) begins his ontological disproof by arguing that there are "certain concepts for which a full and complete comprehension requires experience." He then goes on to argue that "in the case of at least some of these concepts the experience which is required is of a type which an omnipotent being could not possibly have." He offers the example of the sensation of red. Blumenfeld (1978:223) argues that while it might be possible for a given being to know all of true propositions about redness, "there is only one way of fully understanding what an experience of redness is like and that is to have it".

Dealing specifically with God's omnipotence, Blumenfeld (1978:224) argues that there are certain experiences that "are possible only if the subject believes that he is limited in power". Among these experiences are fear, frustration, and despair. Unlike the sensation of red, to have these experiences requires a certain set of beliefs that an omnipotent being could never have (in other words, even having firsthand knowledge of the physical feelings associated with fear, frustration or despair, it would not count as actually having those experiences). Blumenfeld (1978:225) argues that for every experience which requires a person to believe that he is lacking in some ability, there is a corresponding concept of which God cannot know in the way

an imperfect person would. He then adds embarrassment, apprehensiveness, forlornness, and regret to the list of notions of this type. Thus he concludes that “there appears to be a great deal an omnipotent being could not understand”.

Blumenfeld (1978:225-226) admits that other philosophical systems such as Platonism or behaviorism would undercut his argument, but he does not take very much time in assessing these (nor does he consider systems that can use the relevant parts of these other systems without embracing their problematic areas). He also briefly treats of the doctrine of analogy, dismissing it as a mere assertion that makes no sense: “it is altogether obscure how an experience could be analogous to a non-experience” (Blumenfeld, 1978:227).

1. If there is a God, then He is omnipotent.
2. If there is a God, then He is omniscient.
3. In order to have knowledge of certain experiences, one must be aware of being limited in power.
4. An omnipotent being cannot be limited in power.
5. Hence an omnipotent being cannot have knowledge of certain experiences.
6. Therefore, it is impossible that God exists.

Blumenfeld also considers a reply based on the fact that God became incarnate, which under certain understandings might give God the opportunity to experience limitation in such a way that He could acquire the concepts of fear, embarrassment, to regret, etc. Blumenfeld (1978:230) dismisses this possibility as it “presupposes the coherence of faith,” but really makes no sense for, “if God is incapable of limitation, then he cannot become finite” (1978:230).³⁹

³⁹ This is a clear misunderstanding of the doctrine of Christ’s Incarnation which denies any admixture of Jesus’ divine and human natures (e.g., The Definition of the Council of Chalcedon, A.D. 451). This fact also keeps Christians from using the Incarnation as a way out of certain ontological disproofs by reference to Jesus’ human nature. The problem with using Jesus’ Incarnation as a solution to purported arguments against the divine nature *per se* is that the Incarnation introduces an *additional* nature to the second person of the godhead - a *human* in nature. Thus, any truths concerning Jesus’ human attributes are moot to the discussion of the divine nature, and those concerning his divine nature do not differ from those concerning God generically.

Moreover, Rosenthal’s objection, is not the only challenge to the Incarnation. In fact, an entire set of ontological disproofs actually revolve around the incarnation itself. In addition to providing the most extensive collections of philosophical disproofs of theism, in Michael Martin’s singular book, *The Case Against Christianity* (1991), he attacks Christianity itself on primarily philosophical grounds. Martin directs one set of arguments against Jesus’ incarnation, and these follow the same form as some theistic ontological disproofs: “If Jesus is the Son of God,” writes Martin (1991:125), “then presumably he has the traditional attributes of God. However, if Jesus is a human being, then he seems to have attributes that are in conflict with divine ones.” Martin, then, sets up the Incarnation for an Incompatible Properties type disproof by pitting Jesus’ two natures against one another.

Martin directs his arguments primarily against the position of Thomas Morris (2001), whose *The Logic*

2.5 Conclusion

As stated above (2.1), although atheistic attacks on the existence of God can be found going back several millennia, the more recent ontological disproofs provides atheists with perhaps their most potent weapon. Martin Gardner of *The Humanist* calls arguments such as these “comprehensive,” “incisive,” and “deadly.” Gordon Stein, of the *American Rationalist*, referred to Martin’s collection of them as, “a tour-de-force for the mind.... the most thorough and vigorous examination of the logical arguments surrounding atheism and theism that has ever been offered.” And *Free Inquiry’s* reviewer states that they, “have the impact of a runaway train,”

of *God Incarnate* remains one of the most extensive contemporary philosophical defenses of the Incarnation. Morris focuses on three major issues arising from Jesus’ dual natures: (1) that of Jesus being the uncreated Creator and the created Son of God, (2) the problem of Jesus being both omniscient as God and possessing limited knowledge as man (as shown in the Bible), and (3) how God’s moral perfection can be squared with Jesus’ temptation. Martin argues that while Jesus was *fully* human (possessing all essential properties of humanity), he could also be *more than* human (possessing all essential properties of deity). Further, Morris proposed that Jesus is a single person with two minds – one divine, one human (2001:102). This was to help explain Jesus seemingly being both omniscient and (at other times) limited in his knowledge. Morris deals with the problem of God’s Goodness and Jesus’ Temptation by distinguishing between logical vs. epistemic possibilities. Morris states that while it would be logically impossible for Jesus to succumb to evil temptation, Jesus would not have known that to be the case. Thus, because He would not see sin as an impossibility (per his human mind’s non-accessibility to his divine mind), he could therefore be tempted to sin (2001:146-149).

Martin (1991:136-145) offers several criticisms. As to Morris’s Two-Minds theory, he argues that because Jesus remains one person throughout the Incarnation, the fact remains that the knowledge he has access to is still (only) limited and thus Jesus remains non-omniscient during his Incarnation. Martin (1991:137) also objects to the very idea that a single person could have two minds. Finally, Jesus’ unknown (to him) inability to actually sin does not explain why he decided not to succumb to temptation. If Jesus was truly tempted, then it seems he would have to desire to perform some sinful action – itself impossible for a morally perfect being (Martin, 1991:144).

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to resolve the problems raised by both Morris and Martin. Suffice to say that the Incarnation is, at bottom, a theological mystery: revealed, but neither fully explained nor penetrable by finite human minds. The Incarnation is without analog in human experience, and so while various facets can be worked out according to divine revelation, a holistic, orthodox explanation is wanting. For example Craig and Swinburne offer other explanations that do not grant Jesus two minds but rather only one mind simpliciter (Craig, 2015b:1) or one mind with dual ranges of partially-overlapping consciousnesses (Swinburne, 2008:39 – for a rebuttal to this idea, see Weinandy 2009). In contrast with the scholars above, Aquinas’s classical understanding is that the union of the soul and body in Jesus’ Incarnation simply did not result in a new person even though a new human nature was created (ST III, Q.3, A.6). A human nature requires a mind (intellect and will), but “in the mystery of Incarnation the union of form and matter, i.e. of soul and body, does not constitute a new suppositum” (ST III, Q.3, A.7). Thus, although Jesus possessed two minds (e.g., Lk. 22:42; Mk. 13:32), He remained single person even when assuming a human nature (ST III, Q.18). Although difficult to account for using an ontology limited to that of created persons, this understanding coheres with the orthodox understanding of the Incarnation: namely, that “although this human nature is a kind of individual in the genus of substance, it has not its own personality, because it does not exist separately, but in something more perfect, viz. in the Person of the Word. Therefore the union took place in the person.” (ST III, Q.2, A.2).

and that they constitute “certainly the best philosophical justification of atheism that I have ever read.”⁴⁰

Although ontological disproofs have (with few exceptions) remained largely outside the popular theism conversation, they are no longer relegated to the halls of academia. Technological advances have made their communication simpler, and popularizers have re-stated the more inaccessible forms of the arguments (to various degrees of accuracy) in ways that neophytes can more easily articulate (even if they do not fully understand them). Because these disproofs function as a positive refutation of theism, and not merely as counter-apologetics arguments, their challenge cannot be taken lightly, nor dismissed as sophistry.

While theists can certainly agree with John Calvin (1978:25) that, “If we find something that is strange and beyond our understanding, do not let us be quick to reject it,” continuing to accept these challenging doctrines in the face of these highly polished arguments may be more difficult than the theist might at first think. As Robert Price (1998) once explained, “After a dozen years of active involvement as a born-again Christian, . . . I finally gave up on Christianity. . . . partly because the beliefs no longer made any sense. Or rather, I could no longer make light of the fact that they made no sense by retreating to claims of ‘mystery’ and ‘divine paradox.’ . . . I found that the great ‘verities’ of the Christian creeds seemed to make sense only so long as you didn’t trouble to think them out too far.”

Fortunately, a few in the Christian apologetics community have accepted the challenge and responded to these disproofs in a manner worthy of their philosophical sophistication. In the next chapter several of these will be presented and discussed.

⁴⁰ All references from Martin (2003) endorsements.

Chapter 3: Apologetic responses

3.1 Introduction

It was roughly during the last quarter of the twentieth century that ontological disproof arguments gained popularity.⁴¹ As with atheist publications, most of the discussion took place in academic journals, thus only a few book length writings on the topic appeared.⁴²

One of the first and most respected writers to deal with the subject was Richard Swinburne, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at the University of Oxford, and an important 20th Century philosopher of religion. Especially influential was his early theological trilogy: *The Coherence of Theism*, *The Existence of God*, and *Faith and Reason*.⁴³ In *The Coherence of Theism* (1977), Swinburne argued specifically against religious language objections and ontological disproof arguments.

Another major contributor to the discussion came about two decades later. Thomas Morris, previous Morehead Scholar at the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill and professor of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame, contributed a book to the subject titled *Our Idea of God* (1991). Although not a rigorous philosophical treatise, throughout the book Morris does deal with several philosophical problems related to God's attributes. His more notable contribution comes in the above-mentioned *The Logic Of God Incarnate* (2001), a book-length treatment of ontological disproofs arising from the doctrine of the Incarnation.

Another important theologian writing in the early 21st Century is John S. Feinberg. Known primarily for his work in divine theodicy, Feinberg is chair of the Department of Biblical and Systematic Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He holds a Th.M. in systematic theology from Trinity, and a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago. Feinberg served on the committee of the Evangelical Theological Society, and has served as president for its sister organization, the Evangelical Philosophical Society. He also serves as a theological consultant for Crossway Books – the publisher responsible for the “Foundations of Evangelical Theology”

⁴¹ This seems to coincide with shifts in the philosophical landscape that will be discussed in the next chapter.

⁴² Flew and MacIntyre (1955) is often cited as the first major collection.

⁴³ In this trilogy, Swinburne moves from the possibility of God's existence, to its probability (the arguments for God's existence), and finally the passion (faith) involved with his existence as experienced by believers.

series of which he is the general editor. It is for this series that his monumental work, *No One Like Him*, was written.⁴⁴

One of the most important contemporary opponents of the ontological disproof atheistic strategy is William Lane Craig, current Research Professor of Philosophy at Talbot School of Theology and Professor of Philosophy at Houston Baptist University. Craig included several articles in his *Philosophy of Religion* (2002) reader that dealt specifically with ontological disproofs, and devoted two chapters of his own to answering them in his and J. P. Moreland's *Philosophical Foundations For Christian Worldview* (2003).

A summary examination of the methodologies and resulting conclusions of these scholars follows. This will set the stage for discussion of their position's philosophical and theological strengths and weaknesses, as well as their usefulness in apologetics.

3.2 Richard Swinburne

Richard Swinburne (1977:1) begins his treatise on the coherence of theism by stating that although he is dealing with belief in the existence of God, he is primarily concerned with what God's existence might mean and whether such belief is *coherent* – not whether we can know it to be *true*.⁴⁵ The God Swinburne is discussing is one that he believes Christians, Jews, and Muslims are able to affirm: “something like a ‘person’ without a body (i.e. a spirit) who is eternal, free, able to do anything, knows everything, is perfectly good, is the proper object of human worship and obedience, the creator and sustainer of the universe”. Swinburne's (1977:2-3) project deals more specifically with the defense of what he calls “creedal sentences”- that is, sentences which purport to affirm the existence of a being with the above godlike properties against some philosophers who have argued that theological statements simply do not make coherent claims.

To this end, Swinburne investigates the conditions under which sentences can be said to make coherent claims, as well as various views of God talk. He then goes on to investigate the specific details of certain creedal claims concerning God's omnipresence, freedom and creation,

⁴⁴ Harold O. J. Brown says of Feinberg's *No One Like Him* that it “is a magisterial work . . . [which] reveals its author as one of the only—perhaps the only—modern scholar whose work, like that of Carl F. H. Henry, can compare in size, detail, comprehensiveness, and intellectual acuity with the accomplishments of the late Karl Barth” (In Feinberg, 2001: xvi–xvii).

⁴⁵ Swinburne acknowledges that the two questions cannot be easily separated, however there is a place for their distinction. The existence question is dealt with in his *The Existence of God* (2004).

omnipotence, omniscience, omnibenevolence, eternity, and immutability.⁴⁶ Swinburne (1977:97) considers these attributes especially as they relate to God's necessity and worthiness of worship. Swinburne's specific claim is that after a consideration of what it means to assert that there is a God with these attributes, that assertion will be shown to be a coherent one given certain qualifications. Swinburne's view of the attributes generative of the most ontological disproofs will be summarized below.

3.2.1 Omnipresence

Swinburne (1977:99) initially defines omnipresence as "everywhere present". Swinburne's concern is the claim that it would be incoherent to refer to an omnipresent *person*. After a discussion of the concept of "person" as it is related to embodiment, and how such a concept might be applied to a spirit being (viz., one that does not have a physical body), Swinburne (1977:104) alters the definition of omnipresence: "God controls all things directly and knows about all things without the information coming to him through some causal chain". Because such a state is imaginable, Swinburne (1977:105) believes it is logically possible.

The arguments against the coherency of such a notion include the impossibility of expressing personal predicates as well as simple definitional criticism. To the first, Swinburne (1977:124) replies that a spirit can give expression without a body, and to the latter he challenges the alleged problems raised by various personal definitions and concludes that the "superficial coherence" of an "omnipresent Spirit" is coherent.

3.2.2 Freedom and Creation

Swinburne considers God's freedom with respect to his also being the creator of the universe. Swinburne points out that although God is said to be the creator of "all things" that this must be qualified to avoid obvious difficulties. He begins by pointing out that God did not create himself, which would make no sense (1977:126). Nor did God create numbers, concepts, or logic – for these are things that exist of logical necessity (1977:127). Swinburne also points out

⁴⁶ These terms represent fairly standard theological terminology for the divine attributes. In an effort to normalize the names of the divine attributes in question, I will use these terms unless quotations force me to do otherwise. One that will come up often is whether to refer to God's relation to time as his "eternity" or "eternality." Since "eternal" seems to be used in Scripture to indicate quality rather than quantity alone (e.g., Jn. 17:3), and because "eternity" is often popularly confused with "infinity" or "forever" (e.g., Ps. 136 in the HCSB), I will refer to the attribute describing God's relation to time as his "eternality" (again, unless I am forced to use "eternity" in a quote).

that the fact that God is ultimately responsible for bringing about the existence of all logically contingent things includes the idea that he allows other beings to occasionally participate in bringing new things about (1977:128). Given that God is both maker and sustainer of his creation, Swinburne offers this description of God as Creator: “[God] either himself brings about or makes or permits other beings to bring about (or permits to exist uncaused) the existence of all logically contingent things that exist (i.e. have existed, exist, or will exist), apart from anything, the existence of which is entailed by his own existence” (1977:130-131).

Having settled on this definition of “creator,” Swinburne moves on to a consideration of God’s freedom. First he distinguishes a scientific explanation from a personal explanation. A scientific explanation is given when an event is explained based on some previous event and a law governing what that previous event entails, while a personal explanation is one that invokes the intention of a rational agent to bring about an effect (1977:131-132). The importance of this distinction is brought out when Swinburne describes God’s action in creation, which he says must be explained personally. “God,” Swinburne says, “is free in a sense in which no other causal factor, such as a state of the world or natural law, in any way influences the intentions on which God acts” (1977:139). In contrast, any scientific explanation relies on natural laws and previous conditions – even when humans “make” something, they could not do so without these created conditions already in place.

It is not enough for Swinburne, however, that God required no previous states or laws to be truly free in choosing to create. For a person to do something freely, there can be no previous cause that makes him do it (1977:142). This should not be taken to mean, however, that God acts for no reason. For Swinburne, free acts require reasons for their being chosen, even if it is only that the agent desired that it be done (1977:145-146). Further, because “a perfectly free agent will never do an action if he judges that overall it would be worse to do the action than to refrain from it . . . He will always do an action if he acknowledges overwriting reasons for doing it rather than for refraining from doing it, if he judges that doing it would be over all better than refraining from doing it” (1977:148). Because of his omniscience, God, knows what would count as a good state of affairs and freely chooses to cause it to come into being. Swinburne calls this a logical limit on the freedom of a free agent. On Swinburne’s understanding, then, God is both free and creator.

3.2.3 Omnipotence

Following his standard philosophical pattern, Swinburne begins his consideration of God's omnipotence with a simple definition and then begins to qualify it in order to avoid difficulties. Noting that theists have often wish to claim that God can do literally anything, Swinburne makes his first qualification of omnipotence by asserting that God cannot be expected to do what is logically impossible, because a logically impossible action is not actually an action (1977:149). Clearly it is no threat to the claim that a being can perform any action that he cannot perform a non-action.

Next, Swinburne notes that it is also a logical impossibility for certain kinds of beings to perform certain kinds of acts (for example, the act of "getting divorced" can only be performed by someone who is married). Because some actions can only be performed by certain kinds of beings, and no single being can be expected to be more than one kind of being, the inability to do certain things is simply a consequence of the logical state of reality. Therefore, certain actions would count as logically impossible for some beings even though they might count as logically possible for other beings. Again, a single being's inability to perform a logically impossible action (even if it would count as a logically possible action for other beings) should not count against the claim that a being cannot do any logically possible thing (1977:150).

Because of the above two qualifications, Swinburne suggests another definition for God's omnipotence. Rather than referring to a beings ability to "do things," Swinburne suggests that omnipotence refers to being able to bring about any logically possible state of affairs (1977:150). By referring to the state which would be the result of an action, both of the above logical impossibilities are avoided, but there is yet another logically impossible state that Swinburne says must be accounted for: that of changing a past state. Because past states are no longer available for modification, it is not unreasonable on Swinburne's thinking to qualify the definition of God's omnipotence to include the component of time. That is, whatever state of affairs a being wishes to cause, it must be compatible with past states (1977:151).

Swinburne continues to qualify this definition by considering whether or not any being may bring about logically necessary states. This is impossible, says Swinburne, because logically necessary states (e.g., that all red things are colored) are what they are no matter what any being does and therefore it would be improper to credit any being with causing them, as it would demand that a being cause and uncaused state, or cause a state that such a being did not cause. In order to avoid these logical conundrums, Swinburne adds the denial of these possibilities to his definition (1977:152).

At this point, Swinburne considers the paradox of the stone (If God can do anything, can he make a stone so large that he cannot lift it?), to see if his definition can resolve it better than previous attempts.⁴⁷ Swinburne believes his modified definition of omnipotence escapes the paradox, because “the omnipotence of a person at a certain time includes the ability to make himself no longer omnipotent” (1977:158).⁴⁸ Thus, while it is possible that God could perform the action of creating a stone so large that he could not lift it, he simply *will* not do so.

Swinburne considers one last potential defeater for his notion of omnipotence. Because God has already been defined as free, on Swinburne’s definition, he could not perform an immoral act (because of his omniscience, God would never believe that it would be over all better to commit an immoral act than to not do so). What this boils down to saying is that God cannot do that which he does not will to do. Thus Swinburne comes to his final definition: “a person *P* is omnipotent at time *t* if and only if he is able to bring about the existence of any logically contingent state of affairs *x* after *t*, the description of the occurrence of which does not entail that *P* did not bring it about at *t*, given that he does not believe that he has overriding reason for refraining from bringing about *x*” (1977:160). Although it may seem that this overly-limits God’s omnipotence, Swinburne believes that such qualifications are legitimate because they do not make God any less worthy of worship (1977:161).

3.2.4 Omniscience

Swinburne next considers omniscience which he initially defines as “knowing all things” and then equates this with “knowing of every true proposition that it is true” (1977:162). The first major difficulty with this definition is that it does not take into consideration certain kinds of tensed statements – namely, “indexical” statements which rely for their truth value on being uttered at certain times (for example, “Today is March 4th, 2015.”). It is argued that propositions

⁴⁷ Such as referring to such an action as self-contradictory non-acts which Swinburne believes fails as a solution. Because the very point of the paradox is to show that omnipotence is incoherent, such a move seems only to prove the point (1977:154).

⁴⁸ Sobel (2009:354) agrees: “No being that is omnipotent has made a stone that it cannot lift, for, if it had, there would be something that it could not do, namely, lift that stone that it had made, and it would not be omnipotent. But an omnipotent being can make a stone that it cannot lift. No problem! To do that it would simply make a stone, and somehow or other diminish its lifting powers, and relinquish its omnipotence.”

such as these cannot be known without being in time, something that an eternal being cannot do (1977:163).

Other indexical statements that pick out other speakers (e.g., “I feel itchy.”) or location in space (e.g., “It is cold here.”) are said to cause similar problems (1977:164). Swinburne’s response to this problem is to introduce a distinction between the *knowing* and *expressing* of facts. Simply because two beings cannot accurately use the same words in a sentence expressing a truth, that does not mean they do not both know it (1977:164-165).⁴⁹ If knowledge is defined as knowing the truth value of a proposition, then it seems that this sort of meta-knowledge would count as knowledge despite the fact that such knowledge is not gained firsthand. God’s ability to answer any question correctly would seem sufficient to designate him as omniscient.

Swinburne then turns to another objection, that there is an incompatibility between God’s omniscience and his being free. The problem here is that if God knows the truth value of all propositions, this would include propositions concerning the future – specifically free actions taken in the future whether by free creatures or God himself. If God knows the truth of such propositions, then neither creatures nor God may act in such a way as to change those truth values. This, it is said, means that God is not free to act in the future contrary to what he foreknows. Although Swinburne doubts whether it is logically possible that God foreknows all things and that creatures remain free, he does not believe that the problem extends to God’s own actions (1977:172).

Swinburne considers the solution that compares God’s knowledge of the future to our knowledge of the past. He notes that we can know of free acts done in the past which are now fixed in such a way that their truth values cannot be changed, and yet this does not affect their state as being free acts when they were committed. If God exists outside of time, then God does not, strictly speaking, *foreknow* anything (1977:173). Rather, he simply knows things in his timeless present. Thus, in the same way that a creature can know the truth value of a proposition concerning a free action in the past, or can know what another person is doing in the present, without impeding freedom, God can know the truth value of propositions concerning things that will be freely done in the future (including his own) without threatening freedom.

⁴⁹ As Swinburne puts it, “the mere fact that one thing which you know cannot be expressed by you in the same words as anything which I know can be expressed by me does not by itself guarantee that I cannot know the thing which you know.” (1977:164-165).

The problem, as Swinburne sees it, is that propositions describing future free actions rely on those actions to ground their truth value. Because, unlike past and present defense, future events have no existence, the only ground for the necessity of their truth value would be the necessity of them taking place. The result, Swinburne believes, is that those future actions must be committed, and therefore that the agents of those actions would not be free (1977:174-175). Swinburne concludes that there is no way to maintain that God is both free and omniscient in the way those attributes are popularly or traditionally understood. Given that either one or both of these attributes need to be qualified in order to avoid this incoherency, Swinburne opts for restricting God's omniscience. He believes that he has precedence for this given that God's omnipotence must also be qualified heavily in order to avoid incoherency. Just as God's omnipotence is restricted in many ways to avoid logical impossibility, so God's omniscience can be restricted (e.g., to possible objects of knowledge). Thus Swinburne settles on the following definition of omniscience: "a person *P* is omniscient at time *t* if and only if he knows of every true proposition about *t* or an earlier time that it is true *and* also he knows of every true proposition about a time later than *t*, such that what it reports is physically necessitated by some cause at *t* or earlier, that it is true" (1977:175).⁵⁰

3.2.5 Omnibenevolence

Swinburne's discussion of God's Omnibenevolence comes under the chapter dealing with God as a source of moral obligation. There Swinburne defines God's perfect goodness in the following manner: "God is so constituted that he never does actions which are morally wrong" (1977:179). In discussing what it means for an act to be moral, Swinburne links it to matters of ultimate importance – that is, God performs acts of overriding importance even if these involve doing something that might be considered immoral on some definitions of morality (1977:181-182).

Much of Swinburne's discussion concerns the objectivity of moral judgments (1977:183-203). This is because, for Swinburne, God's perfect goodness is the necessary result of his omniscience and freedom (1977:182). Because Swinburne sees morality in terms of doing what is of overriding importance, making a moral choice is largely about being correctly informed about the totality of a given set of circumstances. Because God, an omniscient being, will

⁵⁰ Swinburne continues his parallel treatment of omnipotence and omniscience by noting that God's restriction on his own omniscience is something that is *willed by him* – this time in order to preserve both his and his creatures' freedom (1977:176).

always be in the best position to determine the good of any situation, he is therefore in a position to act morally at all times. Owing to Swinburne's discussion of God's freedom (1977:146), such an omniscient being will necessarily do the right thing in any circumstance. Thus, concludes Swinburne, God's freedom and omniscience logically necessitate his being perfectly good (1977:202).

3.2.6 Eternality and Immutability

Swinburne's discussion of God's eternity is combined with his discussion of immutability. Swinburne's initial statement of God's eternity is composed of the fact that God has always existed, and that he has always had the properties which he has – what Swinburne refers to as being “backwardly eternal” (1977:211). God's eternity also points forward. God will go on existing forever, and forever retain the properties he has. Swinburne finds neither of these descriptions to be intuitively incoherent / inconceivable (1977:211). Moreover, because Swinburne includes the retention of properties both backwardly and forwardly, he believes his description of God's eternity dovetails nicely with the traditional understanding of God's immutability.

Swinburne distinguishes between two qualitative senses of the traditional claim that God cannot change. The stronger sense of immutability is identified with the inability to change *at all* – that is, under any understanding of change. Swinburne contrasts this with the weaker sense which would be, in this case, to say of a person that he cannot change *in character* (1977:212). Swinburne takes issue with considering God to be immutable in the strong sense because he believes it would compromise God's freedom. To be perfectly free for Swinburne is to perform actions resulting from one's own choice and nothing else. Yet a being who is immutable in the strong sense would only be able to do what he had once intended to do – thus locking himself into acting at later times (1977:214-215). The problem, as Swinburne sees it, is that if God is immutable in the strong sense, then any future choice would be determined by past choices. Thus Swinburne opts for the weak sense of immutability – namely, that it is only God's *character* that undergoes no change. Swinburne believes that this description is implicit in the Bible, and that there is no philosophically strong reason to overturn it (1977:215).

Swinburne's view of immutability is necessarily reflected in his view of God's eternity. As he further investigates the traditional view, Swinburne notes that it is often tied to the idea that God is *timeless* – that there are no successive temporal states in God (1977:216). Swinburne complains that this idea is not reflected in the Old or New Testaments, and did not

come into serious play until the time of Augustine (where it reigned until the time of Thomas Aquinas). Swinburne then notes that the eternality-as-timelessness doctrine was rejected by Scotus, Ockham, and most Protestant thinkers (e.g., Hegel, Tillich, Barth) (1977:217).

Swinburne considers scholastic arguments for divine timelessness to be poor ones, especially when it is asserted in order to support other traditional doctrines. Given that Swinburne's view of immutability does not require timelessness, he rejects its support for that doctrine (1977:219). In a similar move, Swinburne rejects the support for omniscience that divine timelessness gives, because he also rejects the idea that omniscience requires the knowledge of future free human actions.⁵¹

The biggest problem for Swinburne, however, is that timelessness seems to bring with it an incoherence with regard to many other things that the theist wishes to maintain – namely those relations indexed to temporal procession. It seems to Swinburne that God's acts of forgiveness, punishment, or warnings, are all things that only makes sense when attached to acts which occur at different times. Thus, when the theist speaks of God doing these things at certain times, one would have to be using these words in highly unusual senses to maintain the coherence of the statement (1977:221). Thus, concludes Swinburne, theists have no need of divine timelessness, and will have an easier time with theistic difficulties if it is rejected (1977:222).

3.2.7 Apologetic evaluation

It should be noted at the outset that given Swinburne's early entrance into the ontological disproof debate, it would be surprising to find many of his views adequately responding to some modern developments.⁵² Swinburne's account of God's attributes do cover a wide range of possibilities and creative solutions to various issues arising from popular conceptions of God, though, and some of the more important examples will be briefly discussed below.

Swinburne's definition of omnipotence does answer Cowan's rather simplistic version (which equates omnipotence with all abilities). Given Swinburne's retooling of omnipotence into the power to bring about states of affairs (rather than simply "doing anything"), his view would

⁵¹ See discussion of divine omniscience above at 3.2.4.

⁵² Indeed, it might be a surprise if *any* did given modern philosophy's debt to much of Swinburne's original thinking.

not answer Sobel's assertion of self-contradiction in the very idea of a being giving up his omnipotence – in fact, that just is Swinburne's position. Swinburne's view also seems not to answer Blumenfeld's incompatibility argument against omnipotence given omniscience. God's ability to instantiate any logically possible state of affairs would mean that God would lack knowledge of the *inability* to do so.

On God's omniscience, Swinburne's removal of future free acts from God's knowledge does (indirectly) get around Puccetti's issues with the concept of omniscience, as it is no longer understood as simply "knowing everything." It also answers the problem of God's remaining free (e.g., Drange, Kapitan).⁵³ The numerous arguments based on knowledge of indexical truths (e.g., Grim, Kretzmann, Drange, and Kenny), however, are not treated to the extent required to call them definitively refuted.⁵⁴ Swinburne seems to think he has resolved those issues by reference to a kind of meta-knowledge that would be rejected by many, and would need more argumentation to adequately deal with them.⁵⁵

Swinburne's account of freedom includes the very desire Drange takes issue with (viz., that God's perfection requires that he have no desires).⁵⁶ This is not surprising given that Swinburne was not dealing with this issue, and he might very well have been the one to bring it to the table in the first place.⁵⁷

Finally, Swinburne's view of God's eternity/immutability (attributes he treats together) resolves all ontological disproofs that rely on these attributes being understood in the traditional senses of timelessness and complete unchangeability respectively. Because God can choose to create (Drange), know changing things (Kretzmann / Kenny), and love (Drange), without modifying his character, he can be considered immutable on Swinburne's "weak" view of divine changelessness.

⁵³ See 2.3.2.1.0.

⁵⁴ See 2.3.1.9, 2.3.2.4.

⁵⁵ Kenny, for example, explicitly says omniscience is more than knowing the truth value of propositions – Swinburne's definition.

⁵⁶ See 2.3.2.1.

⁵⁷ Such problem-resolution-problem patterns are the *modus operandi* for the ontological disproof debate: many times new arguments arise from previous solutions.

3.3 Thomas Morris

Thomas Morris, whose work on the difficulties of the dual natures of Christ was mentioned above, has also written on God's attributes with special reference to the difficulties involved in some traditional or popular conceptions – especially those of the kind used in ontological disproofs. He notes that the raising of these philosophical issues (which he considered “pioneering” when he wrote in 1991) can “shed light on theological matters which might otherwise remain obscure” (1991:11). To this end Morris pursues a project of philosophical theology which he describes as the employment of the best philosophical methods and techniques for “gaining as much clarity as possible concerning the content of the major concepts, presuppositions, and tenants of theological commitment” (1991:16).

Throughout his work Morris seeks to provide a logically coherent conception of God – one that is “both philosophically plausible and biblically faithful” (1991:16). Although Morris briefly mentions biblical revelation and Christian tradition as sources for our idea of God, his method is overwhelmingly philosophical in nature.⁵⁸ Morris is explicit when he says that Christian theology is not about being confined to what the Bible says, but rather providing a logically consistent philosophical explanation that is consonant with it (1991:31). Further, Morris believes that philosophical theology “can act as an interpretive constraint on how we read the Bible” (1991:43).

The method Morris says he uses in order to achieve this goal is to work from Anselm's idea of an ultimately perfect being (1991:35), otherwise known as “perfect being theology.” Morris thus begins his theologizing with the axiom that, “God is a being with the greatest possible array of compossible great-making properties” – namely, those attributes which are intrinsically good and give their bearer value regardless of external circumstances (1991:35).⁵⁹ Morris admits that this methodology is intuitional, but it is one that is based on the rather uncontroversial belief that God is the greatest possible being – “the supreme conception of perfection” (1991:38). It is this standard of compossible great-making properties that guides Morris's discussion of God's attributes. This method is seen in Morris's unfolding of God's

⁵⁸ Indeed, Morris seems to use these two sources in a predominantly introductory manner, introducing the Christian tradition and Scripture simply to get the ball rolling on his philosophical project - although when it suits him, he will bring in Scripture as a corrective (e.g. 1991:43). He eschews a “purely biblical theology” (1991:30-32), and when he explicitly mentions the methodology of a tradition, it is often negative, as with his discussion of apophatic theology (e.g. 1991:23).

⁵⁹ Compossibility is the notion that two or more of these attributes may be possessed together at the same time (1991:37).

attributes beginning with his goodness, which is then tied to omnipotence, then to omniscience, etc., as will be seen below.

3.3.1 Goodness

Morris begins his consideration of God's attributes by looking at his goodness. He begins by noting several verses in Scripture that proclaim that God is good, and then begins to analyze what this ascription of goodness means. Morris believes that God is both *wholly* and *necessarily* good – which he defines as acting according to basic moral standards of action (1991:48).⁶⁰

Concerning the idea that God is wholly good, Morris offers three models of divine goodness, the “plenitude of being model,” the “duty model,” and the “benevolence model” (1991:50-51). Morris gives a brief explanation of the plenitude model (where goodness is seen as convertible with God's nature), but has little to say about it. Rather, he focuses on the latter two models which both have to do with God's moral action. In the duty model God is said to act in accordance with moral duties, whereas in the benevolence model God not only does what is expected of a moral agent, he performs good actions beyond moral duty (1991:51).

Morris then considers what it means to say that God's goodness is necessary. Morris believes that for many Christian theologians the idea of God's necessary goodness is not the result of philosophical argumentation, but rather it is “simply an Anselmian intuition” (1991:56). He considers the views of Thomas Aquinas, Richard Swinburne, and William Ockham – concluding that they all fail (1991:51-55). Morris then turns to the problems involved in saying that God is necessarily good and worthy of praise. Morris concludes that if God is necessarily good and praiseworthy, then He must not have any moral duties as these are not compossible (1991:64).

3.3.2 Omnipotence

Morris's consideration of God's omnipotence (the importance of which he believes is impossible to overestimate – 1991:65) is a very good example of this overall methodology. He begins by noting several scriptural verses all making the claim (or something like it) that nothing is impossible for God. Morris then notes that the most common way God's omnipotence is

⁶⁰ Note the contrast with Swinburne's view – this will not be the last time “goodness” takes on contrary definitions in this debate.

approached is by a discussion of the range of things he can actually do. He begins with the idea that God can do everything, and then begins to qualify that statement owing to various problems that arise from such a simple assertion. Noting that God cannot do that which is logically impossible, Morris incorporates logical possibility into his definition (1991:67), then after moving through other such qualifications, Morris reaches an impasse. The problem, he states, is that these qualifications depend on having some prior idea of what is logically possible for a perfect being to accomplish, and this seems circular (1991:68).

In order to avoid the circularity problem, Morris proposes a different method of determining the nature of God's omnipotence. Rather than try to come up with a list of actions that an omnipotent being can do, he notes that the word "can" has numerous functions in the English language (e.g. indicating power, skill, opportunity, practical knowledge, or character), and therefore to say that a being can or cannot perform some act is not necessarily informative of that being's *power* (1991:70-72). Following Anthony Kenny, Morris therefore proposes that God's omnipotence be defined in terms of what power or powers he possesses: "a being is omnipotent if it has every power which is logically possible to possess" (1991:72). Morris believes that this avoids most of the problems that action-based definitions of God's omnipotence often raise, and is also a "view sufficiently exalted to accord with the perspective of perfect being theology" (1991:73).

Morris then applies this definition to two of the most popular ontological disproofs having to do with omnipotence. The first is the paradox of the stone. Morris offers two possible solutions here: the first being that the creation of such a stone may be considered an incoherent act-description given that no possible stone could defeat an omnipotent being (1991:74). The second solution is that God could simply create an ordinary stone and promise never to move it thereby making it true that he cannot (1991:75). Morris does not choose between these, noting that the perfect being theological methodology he espouses could be satisfied by either one.

The second ontological disproof Morris deals with is whether God's omnipotence is compossible with his necessary goodness (viz., if God can do anything, can he also commit sin?). Morris points out that in this argument it is typically considered that the ability to sin is a discrete power, different from that of being able to do other things (1991:77). As Morris points out, however, one can describe two different acts without ascribing more than one power needed to accomplish them (for example the power to lift a red pencil is the same power to lift a yellow pencil). Because what makes an act sinful has to do with the morality of the act and not

its mere accomplishment, God actually does not lack the power to sin - he simply will never do so.⁶¹

Morris also suggests, following Geach, that the problematic term *omnipotence* be jettisoned in favor of *almighty* (which Morris believes properly focuses on God's power rather than a description of *abilities* – 1991:69). By defining God's omnipotence in terms of possession of all powers *vis-a-vis* perfect being theology, Morris believes he has sidestepped the biggest theological issues with God's omnipotence.

3.3.3 Omniscience

In a departure from the previous pattern, instead of beginning with Scripture, Morris launches into his discussion of God's omniscience by first applying his perfect being methodology. Taking knowledge to be a great-making property, Morris asserts that God's knowledge must be as *complete* as possible and also *direct* (i.e., independent of created sources). Morris then cites a number of scriptural sources, concluding that perfect being thinking, creation theology, and the words of Scripture are all in agreement (1991:85). Morris then defines God's knowledge as being both propositional (*de dicto*) and by acquaintance (*de re*), adding that God's knowledge also must be infallible (1991:86-87).

Morris then states that this very strong view of God's omniscience involves a problem, namely one of the ontological disproofs listed above: that between God's foreknowledge and human free will. The issue arises due to God's knowledge of the future. If God's beliefs are infallible, and God believes that some event will occur, then no one is in a position to prevent it from taking place – including free actions. It would seem, then, that there can be no human free acts, and that human free will is an illusion (1991:90).

Morris considers several solutions to this problem: (1) *Compatibilism* – that free will does not require genuine options, (2) *Libertarianism* – that free will does require genuine options, but that (3) per *Ockhamism*, there is a distinction between what one shall do versus what one must do and that God's knowledge of what one shall do does not infringe on their freedom, or that (4) per *Molinism*, God's middle knowledge of what would occur contingent upon the sort of world that he makes grounds his ability to know the future without interfering with human freedom

⁶¹ Morris compares the statement that God cannot sin to say that a certain warrior cannot lose a battle – the real lack is attributed only to the soldier's enemies (1991:80). In the same way, the power to sin is merely the power to act in a way that, because of a given moral lack in certain circumstances, would be immoral.

(1991:92-96). Morris also discusses what he calls (5) *Atemporal Eternalism* – which he describes as the view of Augustine, Boethius, Anselm, and Aquinas – according to which God does not actually *foreknow* anything because, being outside of time, He is unrelated to the temporal world and thus his knowledge is *simultaneous* rather than *advanced* (1991:98). Finally, Morris presents what he calls (6) *Presentism*, which asserts that because the future does not yet exist, it is not an object to be known – and therefore it is no attack on God’s omniscience to say that He does not know the future.

After noting the strengths and weaknesses of each of these responses, Morris once again applies perfect being theology to the issue. He concludes that theists can move forward agreed on the core concept of God’s omniscience (i.e. that his knowledge is perfect, and as complete as possible – whatever that ends up amounting to) without necessarily agreeing on that core concept’s secondary explanations (1991:103-104). Further elucidation of the subject will come as Morris considers God’s eternity.

3.3.4 Eternality

Although all theists agree that God is in some sense eternal, says Morris, there are conflicting interpretations of what that eternity entails. One view says that God is “atemporally eternal,” the other describes God’s eternity as “temporally everlasting” (1991:119). To say that God is atemporally eternal is to say that God is timeless, and that there is no temporal succession in his existence. Just as God transcends space, he also transcends time. In the words of Boethius, God’s eternity is “the complete possession all at once of illimitable life” (1991:121).⁶² Describing God’s eternity as temporally everlasting, on the other hand, is to say that God is related to time, and experiences temporal succession in some sense. God has always existed and will always exist, though, and so God is not limited by time (because he encompasses all of it, not because he transcends it).

Morris considers several atemporalist (1991:121-130), and temporalist (1991:130-138) arguments. After subjecting them to his perfect being analysis, he finds them all to have potential defeaters that call each position into question. Rather than take a position, Morris’s main concern is that God “be ascribed the greatest relation to temporality compatible with his being the creator of this world,” because, “so long as we maintain tight constraints on the kind of resolution we will allow, we can still be said to hold, however incompletely, a determinant idea of

⁶² Citation from Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, Book 1, Prose 6.

God” (1991:138). In the end, Morris concludes that both positions are allowable because the Bible does not settle the matter (1991:121), and because, both the atemporalist and temporalist philosophical views are and can be defended by Christian philosophers (1991:138).

3.3.5 Immutability

Morris’s treatment of God’s immutability follows from his consideration of eternity. His rejection of God’s atemporality necessarily equates to a rejection of immutability in the strong sense, and he is quite clear in his view that the Bible naturally presents God as a changing being (1991:135). He rejects the “argument from perfection” (that all changes must be for the better or worse) as well as the idea that for God to be the “stopping point” for all change, he must himself be utterly changeless (1991:127). Morris also believes that many changes attributed to God are really changes in beings who are related to God (1991:128). In a somewhat confusing move, Morris also rejects Aquinas’s arguments against God’s ability to change based on his being pure act, by criticizing it as a variant of the above argument from perfection.⁶³ Thus, in the end, Morris is content to ascribe to God “the greatest relation to temporality compatible with his being the creator of this world, whichever relation that might be” (1991:138).

3.3.6 Apologetic evaluation

Although Morris is not writing a defense of theism so much as an explication, because he is writing in the early 1990’s, his work can be expected to interact with quite a bit more of the issues arising from ontological disproof arguments. In this Morris does not disappoint. His theologizing often includes consideration of problems brought about by such debates.

Although he does not bring up strictly atheistic objections to God’s goodness in his section on omnibenevolence, it is difficult to see how his position of affirming only that God is the greatest good (though perhaps not “maximally” good) could fend off Keller’s objection (in fact, it is Keller’s use of “greatest possible being” theology in his disproof that causes the problem.⁶⁴ Morris, however also includes the criteria of praiseworthiness and eschews the idea

⁶³ Aquinas’s position concerning divine simplicity has nothing whatsoever to do with “value” as Morris indicates. Rather, it is a purely metaphysical claim on Aquinas’s part (see *ST I*, Q.9 A.1).

⁶⁴ See 2.3.1.3.

that God's goodness produces moral duties in Him, or that "hard-won moral goodness" is better for all beings across the board (1991:64). These considerations free God from Keller's difficulty, while maintaining that God is the greatest possible being.

In his discussion of God's omnipotence, Morris characterizes it as a power more than a skill or ability. In doing so he believes he can answer the classic argument from the infinite stone (in more than one way), as well as resolve the alleged discrepancy between God's omnipotence and his necessary goodness. Cowan is answered by Morris's definition, as is Blumenfeld, since both see omnipotence more as an ability to act in a certain way – but Sobel's assertion of self-contradiction in the very idea of a being giving up his omnipotence given this sort of power seems to escape.⁶⁵

Morris also recognizes ontological disproof challenges in his discussion of God's omniscience. Granting that human freedom seems threatened by God's omniscience, Morris opts for an eclectic collection of possibilities ranging from hard determinism to Open Theism, and leaves the issue there but for his affirmation of a few core concepts.

The discussion continues, however in his section on eternity, where he again considers numerous contrary positions and (once again) determines that they are all possible. Because of Morris's refusal to pick a position, his options may seem to be greater in responding to ontological disproofs. Any arguments that depend on traditional notions of God's omniscience or eternity in their premises could be answered by the more innovative claims of Open Theism or Divine Temporalism.⁶⁶ Finally, Morris's rejection of the strong sense of God's immutability frees him from the charges levied by any ontological disproofs that assumes that view.

3.4 John S. Feinberg

Feinberg's 2001 tome *No One Like Him* was written to give a modern Evangelical view of God that remained true to Scripture yet with modifications of traditional theology to address the challenges brought on by proponents of Open Theism and Process Theology (2001:32-33). In addition to these two primary interlocutors, Feinberg also displays awareness of various controversies surrounding the divine attributes, and seeks to offer a "revisioned" God with "nuanced" attributes that brings him closer to the modern vision without "totally abandoning the

⁶⁵ See 2.3.1.7.

⁶⁶ Neither view grants God knowledge of the future: Open Theism does not view the future as existing, and therefore denies that it is an actual object of knowledge. Divine Temporalism can restrict God (and His knowledge) to time.

traditional concept of God” (2001:xxv). Although the work is not primarily directed toward answering atheistic ontological disproofs, Feinberg shows awareness of them, and interacts with the dialogues that have emerged from their consideration. Indeed, it is many of these considerations that seems to drive several of his theological conclusions. Because of this, less will be said of his overall theology, and only the major attributes of God that bear on the subject of this paper will be directly considered.

3.4.1 Omnipresence

Feinberg believes that God is infinite in his being. Although he asserts that there is plenty of biblical support for God’s omnipresence, he admits that it is also the source of some confusion. He notes that it is odd to speak of a nonphysical being as taking up space in the first place, and asks whether or not God can legitimately be thought of as being present in hell. Further, if God is everywhere, how is it that He indwells believers but not unbelievers? And how can a being who is everywhere moved from heaven to earth? Feinberg notes that, “Questions like these often move atheists and agnostics to question whether the very notion of omnipresence is logically coherent” (2001:249).

Feinberg plays God’s transcendence off of His omnipresence in order to answer these sorts of questions. He points out that in Scripture, God’s presence is often depicted in spiritual, moral, and ethical modes rather than his ontological reality alone – and the former do not detract from the truth of the latter (2001:251-255). In this way, although Feinberg expands on the notion, he holds to standard traditional understandings of God’s omnipresence.

3.4.2 Immutability

Feinberg objects to what he calls the strong conception of immutability – the view he associates with the classical theism of Anselm and Aquinas – which sees God as utterly incapable of change (2001:264). Feinberg agrees with many of the criticisms of this traditional view made by members of both Process Theology and Open Theism – and God’s alleged inability to relate to his changing creation is at the top of the list (2001:265).⁶⁷

⁶⁷ As used in this context, Open Theism is the view that God’s knowledge of the future (at least insofar as it is contingent upon the free actions of creatures) remains “open” because these acts do not yet have existence and are therefore not yet objects of knowledge. See Pinnock, Rice, Sanders (1994). Process Theology views God and creation as two poles of one entity, and that God, therefore, changes.

In response, Feinberg looks at the specific ways in which Scripture says that God cannot change, and finally concludes that the traditional view is unnecessary (2001:276).⁶⁸ Rather, following Swinburne, he asserts only that “God must be immutable in his person, purposes, will (decree), and ethical rules” (2001:266-267, 271). Feinberg believes that this is all that is necessary to safeguard the biblical concept of divine immutability (2001:267), as well as answer the difficulties that the Process and Open views find with the classical definition. Because Feinberg is a divine temporalist, God’s knowledge of indexicals (another common problem for divine immutability) is also not an issue (2001:273).⁶⁹

3.4.3 Omnipotence

In his discussion on God’s omnipotence, Feinberg follows similar patterns as those arguing for or against ontological disproofs (2001:283-293). He agrees that incoherencies exist in the traditional accounts of the doctrine, settles on the definitions suggested by Kenny with a qualification from Devenish, wherein omnipotence consists in God’s possession of all logically possible powers which it is logically possible for a being with the attributes of God to possess (that is, powers that fit with his other attributes as God such as his moral perfection).⁷⁰

3.4.4 Omniscience

Feinberg believes divine omniscience is difficult to define because of the numerous problems most definitions cause (2001:305). Again showing his awareness of ontological disproofs, he lists four of these: foreknowledge of free acts, knowledge by experiences, knowledge of changing indexicals, and divine deliberation (2001:305, 306, 310, and 312 respectively).

See Whitehead (1979). The most important volume available on open theology is the one that launched this new perspective into the academic limelight. It is an academic book, with chapters devoted to the impact of this view on five areas of thought from five different authors.

⁶⁸ Feinberg also rejects the classical notions of God’s impassibility (2001:277), and divine simplicity (2001:335).

⁶⁹ See Feinberg’s view on “Eternality” below.

⁷⁰ This attribute at least in part determines the other attributes God possesses (2001:288). So, for example, God possesses the power to sin, but because of his holiness, He cannot act on it (2001:292).

Following Kenny once again, Feinberg suggests that an *omniscient* being “can only be capable of knowing what can be known by anyone . . . knows the informational content of every proposition and every experience that a being *with God’s attributes* can know.” (2001:315). For Feinberg, this means that contradictions, false propositions thought to be true, other people’s internal sensations, and future indexical propositions, can safely be excluded items from the list of what God knows.

3.4.5 Eternality

Feinberg has so much to say on the nature of God’s eternity, that even after a sizable discussion in the chapter on God’s attributes of omnipresence, omnipotence, omniscience, and immutability, he devotes an entire chapter to this attribute alone.⁷¹ This is justified by the fact that, for Feinberg, the doctrine of divine eternity “is a comfort religiously, and an essential theological doctrine of Christianity, it is also important in that it has significant implications for many other doctrines. Unfortunately, it is also a doctrine fraught with problems.” (2001:375).

Feinberg notes that several questions are raised concerning the idea of God’s eternity. For example, how can a timeless being act within time, as both the Bible and traditional theology agree He does? Further, how could such a being react to creatures who are in time? Feinberg admits that there are no simple answers to these questions, and so proceeds to look at the main arguments for both the temporalist and the atemporalist view of eternity. After his consideration of biblical data, Feinberg concludes that no single word or phrase in itself in Scripture necessitates either view. Because the Bible fails to address the metaphysical nature of eternity, the question cannot be answered from the Bible alone (2001:263-264).

In the end, Feinberg settles on the temporalist view. He does so because, first, he finds it hard to accept the notion of atemporal eternity (2001:428). Second, Feinberg cannot make sense out of atemporal duration and the lack of sequence in God’s thoughts, as this seems to rob the three persons of God of the ability to relate to one another, as well as to creatures (2001:429-430). Third, Feinberg thinks that God’s ability to act in time is threatened when the notion of atemporal eternity is brought in (2001:430-432). Finally, Feinberg notes that his “nuanced” notion of God’s immutability would not fit with atemporality (2001:432). Feinberg

⁷¹ This is, in fact, the only one of God’s attributes that gets its own chapter. Altogether, Feinberg devotes more space to consideration of God’s eternity than to the doctrine of the Trinity!

concludes that divine atemporality “is neither a necessary doctrine nor particularly helpful for theists to hold.” (2001:433).

3.4.6 Apologetic evaluation

Although Feinberg primarily interacts with the challenges of Open Theism and Process Theology, his work does provide material to deal with many ontological disproofs as well. Moreover, his detailed theological methodology utilizes the results of these debates even when not explicitly attempting to provide solutions to them.

Concerning God’s omnipresence, Feinberg holds to the traditional view that although God is transcendent He is somehow present to every point in space. Further, he recognizes the additional spiritual, moral, and ethical modes that this presence often connotes (which would undercut any discipline based on the ontological mode). Further, Feinberg’s (2001:250) distinction between God being both present in some senses (e.g. ontologically) and absent in others (e.g. physically) brings a direct challenge to Drange’s disproof based on the contradiction between transcendence and omnipresence. Whether his view would pose a similar challenge to McCormick’s disproof based on the inability of an omnipresent being to be conscious would depend on whether or not one accepted his assumption of Kant’s view in the first place.

Similar to Swinburne, Feinberg’s rejection of the strong view of divine immutability will get around many of the atheistic ontological disproofs based on such a view. Because Feinberg limits God’s immutability to his person, purposes, will, and ethical rules, disproofs based on mere changes in God’s knowledge (Kretzmann, Drange, and Kenny) will not suffice to introduce a contradiction.⁷² Further, because immutability concerning God’s will is qualified as his *decree*, God’s “change” from not-willing-to-create to willing-to-create (Drange) also does not imply contradiction under Feinberg’s view.⁷³ It also seems that Feinberg’s limiting of God’s immutability would allow God to love (even on Drange’s description).⁷⁴

In his discussion of God’s omnipotence, Feinberg notes the back-and-forth of the debate over its proper definition and settles on something similar to the views of both Swinburne and

⁷² See 2.3.2.4.

⁷³ See 2.3.2.3.

⁷⁴ See 2.3.2.7. Note that the problem of God’s *impassibility* is actually closer to Drange’s concern here, but as that attribute is rarely used in ontological disproofs (and rarely accepted by modern theists), it will not be dealt with here. For a good introduction to this classical attribute see Weinandy (2000).

Morris with the additional qualification that whatever powers God has, they must be compossible with the other divine attributes as well as God's character. Cowan's complaint is certainly answered, as the qualifications given to the notion of omnipotence show it to be non-self-contradictory. Sobel might be answered here as well, for God's character could be said to be such that he would not create a stone he could not lift whether or not such a thing was possible *per se*. As to omnipotence's incommensurability with omniscience (Blumenfeld), it is likely that Feinberg would respond that experiential knowledge of the kind used in the disproofs is something that would not cohere with God's omnipotence but, given Feinberg's definition, it would not pose a problem. Feinberg's further qualifications to omniscience (*viz.*, that it equates to informational content of propositions) simply exclude the kind of indexical and experiential propositions used in some of the ontological disproofs (*i.e.*, Feinberg essentially agrees with Grim, Kretzmann, Drange, and Kenny that these things cannot be known by God).⁷⁵

Feinberg rejects an atemporalist view of God's eternity due to the numerous problems it raises, many of which are, of course, the very ones taken advantage of by atheists. As with his treatment of God's immutability, Feinberg settles on a nontraditional view which sidesteps many of these, thus relieving any ontological disproofs that depend on the traditional attribute definitions of their power.

3.5 William Lane Craig

Like Morris, the Christian philosopher, apologist, and theologian William Lane Craig believes that, "two controls have tended to guide this inquiry into the divine nature: Scripture and Perfect Being theology" (Craig and Moreland, 2003:501). Although Craig believes that, God's revelation in Scripture is paramount in understanding God's attributes, he also notes that "the Anselmian conception of God as the greatest conceivable being or most perfect being has guided philosophical speculation on the raw data of Scripture, so that God's biblical attributes are to be conceived in ways that would serve to exalt God's greatness" (Craig and Moreland, 2003:501). This is not a problem for Craig because he believes that, "the concept of God is underdetermined by the biblical data and since what constitutes a 'great-making' property is to some degree debatable, philosophers working within the Judaeo-Christian tradition enjoy considerable latitude in formulating a philosophically coherent and biblically faithful doctrine of God" (Craig and Moreland, 2003:501).

⁷⁵ See 2.3.1.9 and 2.3.2.4.

Craig remarks that in the past, traditional concepts of God were fertile ground for atheistic arguments because it was thought that the notion of God was incoherent. However, says Craig, “this anti-theistic strategy backfired, however, as it evoked a prodigious literature devoted to the philosophical analysis of the concept of God, thereby refining and strengthening theistic belief.” (2002:203). For Craig, then, the challenge of the ontological disproofs was not only met – Christian theism was actually *strengthened* by the conflict. Craig sums up the victory with these words, “Theists thus found that anti-theistic critiques of certain conceptions of God could actually be quite helpful in framing a more adequate conception. . . . far from undermining theism, the anti-theistic critiques have served mainly to reveal how rich and challenging is the concept of God” (Craig and Moreland, 2003:501).⁷⁶

3.5.1 Omnipresence

Although he will soon turn to philosophy when dealing with problems arising from God’s omnipresence, Craig begins his discussion by noting that the Scriptures (e.g., Psalm 139:7-10) present God as omnipresent in virtue of His incorporeality (Craig and Moreland, 2003:509). As Craig understands omnipresence, it would be improper to think of God as localized in space or as extended throughout space. Comparing God’s presence to the relationship of the soul to the body, Craig says that God must be wholly present to all of space (Craig and Moreland, 2003:509).

The problem with this idea, says Craig, is that such an account implies that God is completely present to two distinct points at the same time – and thus that two points billions of light-years apart would in fact be the same point (Craig and Moreland, 2003:510). In order to deal with this incoherency, Craig holds that omnipresence should simply be understood in terms of “God’s being immediately cognizant of and causally active at every point in space” (Craig and Moreland, 2003:510).

3.5.2 Eternality

Craig says that the question of God’s relationship to space raises the question of his relationship to time (Craig and Moreland, 2003:511). Interestingly, although Craig does not

⁷⁶ Similar statements are made in Craig, 2013:167-168.

believe that God's creation of space places God "in" space, he does think that God's creation of time would necessarily place Him "in" time.

Beginning with the Bible, Craig asserts that God's eternity is clearly taught (e.g., Psalm 90:2). Craig warns, however, that there is considerable disagreement what this term means (Craig and Moreland, 2003:511). After providing a summary of what thinkers from Plato and Aristotle to Whitehead and Hartshorne have asserted regarding the nature of God's relation to time, Craig asks why we should think that God exists timelessly first place. He notes that while "God's atemporality could be successfully deduced from His simplicity and immutability . . . these extra-biblical doctrines are highly controversial and now widely rejected" (Craig and Moreland, 2003:511).

Craig then begins a defense of divine temporality. His basic assertion is that if God is really related to the world, then it seems that God cannot escape the world's temporality (Craig and Moreland, 2003:512). Craig considers Aquinas's assertion that God stands in no real relation to the world "fantastic" given the fact that God is both creator and sustainer of the universe (Craig and Moreland, 2003:512).⁷⁷ He then turns to the position of Stump and Kretzmann which he finds "viciously circular," and criticizes Leftow for arguing that because anything that is temporal is also spatial, then all things are relatively timelessly present to God (Craig and Moreland, 2003:512-513).⁷⁸ Thus, unlike God's relation to the spatiality of the world, Craig believes that if God is related to changing things, there must exist a before and after in God's existence.

Craig's second argument for divine temporality is based on God's omniscience. Craig asserts that God could not know indexicals (tensed facts) if he exists with no relationship to time. As an example, Craig says that if God existed outside of time, while he would know that "Christ dies in A.D. 30," God would not know whether Christ had actually died *yet* (2 Craig and Moreland, 003:513). Craig does not think that this is allowable given God's omniscience (which, for Craig, requires that God know all truths). Such an idea is also incompatible with God's maximal cognitive excellence (Craig and Moreland, 2003:513). The only way out of this, Craig states, is to hold that all facts are tenseless, which requires one to hold to the static ("B-Theory") of time. Craig does not believe that this theory holds given the problem of an infinite past, which

⁷⁷ See Aquinas, *ST I*, Q13, A7 (cf. *I*, Q4, A2).

⁷⁸ Craig believes that Leftow's position represents a category mistake because the category of distance does not apply to a non-spatial being and things in space.

one would have to affirm given that God existed prior to creation (Craig and Moreland, 2003:514).⁷⁹

Thus, Craig concludes that, “it is not only coherent but also plausible that God existing changelessly alone without creation would be timeless and that He enters time at the moment of creation in virtue of His real relation to the temporal universe” (Craig and Moreland, 2003:515). On Craig’s account, then, God existed in a timeless state prior to creation, but by “really relating” to the temporal world of his creation, he now exists within time.

3.5.3 Omniscience

As indicated above, God’s attribute of omniscience is closely tied to one of the main arguments for God’s temporality (viz. God’s knowledge of indexical statements). Craig states that the standard account of omniscience is that “for any person S, S is omniscient if and only if S knows every true proposition and believes no false proposition” (Craig and Moreland, 2003:517). Included in this idea is that some true propositions are those related to the future. Thus, one feature of God’s omniscience is his foreknowledge.

Against this view, Craig first considers the issue of fatalism: If God foreknows that some event will happen, then it will necessarily happen. What, then, of human freedom? Because human freedom presumes the ability to choose between alternate possibilities, it seems that the necessity accruing to an event given God’s foreknowledge would make alternate possibilities illusory. In order to escape this dilemma, it seems one must either deny God’s knowledge of future free acts, or deny that humans have freedom.

Craig says that those who deny God’s knowledge of future free acts must redefine omniscience so that this lack does not count against it (e.g., by defining future free acts as logically impossible to know). Craig, however, says that the argument itself is modally fallacious, for it “illicitly transfers the necessity of the inference to the conclusion itself . . . conflating certainty with necessity” (Craig and Moreland, 2003:519). The result, says Craig, is that God’s foreknowledge indicates that certain actions will not fail to happen, but that they may still happen contingently (Craig and Moreland, 2003:519).⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Cf. various discussion of infinity in Craig (2000).

⁸⁰ In modal terms, this is similar to the Quantifier Shift fallacy, except that it is the modal operator that is being “shifted.” Craig treats this subject in much the same way Aquinas does in *ST I*, Q.13, A14.

Another difficulty concerns God's ability to know the future given that the future does not yet exist to serve as a ground for the truth of future contingent propositions. Here Craig considers the thinking of Process and Open theologians who argue that it is impossible for any being to have knowledge of the non-existent future. Here Craig blames the perceptualist epistemological model that sees knowledge as a kind of sensory phenomena. Obviously on this model one could not possibly know something nonexistent, for it is not there to perceive. However, on a conceptualist model, which sees God's knowledge more like innate ideas, there does not seem to be a problem for God's knowing future events, because this knowledge would exist as propositions in his mind concerning the future which would become true once it becomes actual. Unless the detractor of divine foreknowledge can show some incoherence in the notion of innate knowledge, his objection cannot even get off the ground.

Craig then invokes the thinking of Luis Molina, who taught that God possesses knowledge of everything that *could* happen (natural knowledge) as well as everything that *would* happen given any circumstances (aka "middle knowledge"). This latter knowledge of "counterfactuals" limits the number of possible worlds which God can create.⁸¹ Because God creates the world with a specific set of circumstances he can definitely know everything that will take place in the future prior to any of it being actualized, yet without threat to genuine freedom. Craig concludes that Molinism can resolve both of the major difficulties concerning God's omniscience: "prior to His creative decree God knows all true counterfactuals of creaturely freedom, which is to say that He has middle knowledge. If this conclusion is correct, then we have a theological tool of remarkable fecundity when we come to deal with other questions, such as the nature of divine providence" (Craig and Moreland, 2003:524).

3.5.4 Immutability

Craig begins his section on God's immutability by noting that for both Aristotle and the biblical writers, God is unchangeable (cf. Mal. 3:6; Jas. 1:17). Craig does not believe, however, that the biblical authors had in mind the kind of "radical changelessness contemplated by Aristotle nor the immutability required by the doctrines of essential divine timelessness or

⁸¹ The notion of "possible worlds" was popularized by Leibniz and developed into a semantic system via modal logic to represent the modal adverbs 'necessarily' (symbolized $\Box$) and 'possibly' (symbolized $\Diamond$) by the mid-20th century. For more on possible world semantics and its use in modal logic see "Possible Worlds" in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* available at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/possible-worlds/#ModalLogicAndPWs>.

simplicity” (Craig and Moreland, 2003:526). Craig believes that the proper philosophical and biblical notion of God’s unchangeableness has rather to do with his character – what Craig categorizes as “intrinsic change,” that is, “a non-relational change involving only the subject” (Craig and Moreland, 2003:526).

Limiting God’s immutability to intrinsic change is not a problem for Craig who has already rejected God’s essential timelessness and simplicity.⁸² God’s ability to undergo extrinsic change is, for Craig, a necessary correlate of his omniscience. For Craig, then, like the others mentioned above, God is not immutable in the strong sense. Rather, Craig believes that God is simply unchangeable in his character and essential attributes (Craig and Moreland, 2003:527). Craig believes that this version of immutability is “enough to safeguard God’s perfection without having Him frozen into immobility” Craig and Moreland, (2003:527).

3.5.5 Omnipotence

In considering God’s omnipotence, Craig once again begins with an assertion of biblical teaching followed by the qualification that the concepts involved require analysis. He first notes that very few people have claimed that God’s omnipotence entails that He can do just anything due to the position’s numerous logical incoherencies (Craig and Moreland, 2003:527–528). Taking the notion of God’s omnipotence step further than Swinburne or Morris, Craig, following the insights of Thomas Flint and Alfred Freddoso (1983), defines omniscience as “the ability to actualize certain states of affairs, rather than in terms of raw power” (Craig and Moreland, 2003:528). Understanding omnipotence in this way keeps one from generating the sorts of ontological disproofs which result from considering omnipotence as unlimited ability to produce anything nameable. By defining omnipotence as God’s ability to actualize any logically-possible states of affairs, many of the purported impossibilities vanish.

Craig notes, however, that simply limiting God’s omniscience to logically possible states of affairs does not get omniscience in the clear. There are many logically possible states that are not actualizable, such as those dealing with the past, affairs described by counterfactuals about the free decisions of other agents, or any requiring that God do or experience something contrary to his nature. The problem then becomes the fact that a description of omniscience that is qualified to the point of avoiding all of these problems seems to describe just any creature’s power. Craig settles on the following definition: “S is omnipotent at a time t if and only if S can at

⁸² Craig’s rejection of God’s simplicity will be discussed in (a later) chapter.....

t actualize any state of affairs which is not described by counterfactuals about the free acts of others and which is broadly logically possible for someone to actualize, given the same hard past at t and the same true counterfactuals about creaturely free acts of others” (Craig and Moreland, 2003:529). This, Craig believes, avoids all of the above problems.

3.5.6 Goodness

Craig finishes his discussion of these ontological disproof-producing attributes with God’s goodness (omnibenevolence). He begins by noting that when he speaks of God’s goodness it is with reference to *moral* goodness, and then lists various categories of moral theoretical thought (e.g., normative vs. meta-ethics, particular vs. general, ontological vs. epistemological). He concludes that the correct use of these “distinctions serve to sweep away in a single stroke all those objections to theistic Meta-Ethics based on linguistic or epistemological considerations” (Craig and Moreland, 2003:530).

In claiming that God is all good, then, the theist is asserting that God provides an “ontological grounding for objective moral values and duties” – not that he is beholden to those duties, nor that he may simply decree that any action is good (Craig and Moreland, 2003:530). Rather, God may be said to be good in the sense that He possesses all moral virtues essentially and maximally. This helps explain why God’s commands are not arbitrary, and yet He may perform acts that for his creatures would be immoral without lessening his moral perfection. This must be the case, for God is said to be worthy of worship, and “only a being which is the locus and source of all value is worthy of worship” (Craig and Moreland, 2003:532).

3.5.7 Apologetic evaluation

Craig’s theological method in these and other sources is almost entirely crafted out of his explicit responses to atheistic ontological disproofs, and there is no need to rehearse them again here. The problem solving power of a given doctrine often seems to be a guiding theological principle for Craig. It therefore goes without saying that his positions are offered as answers to these kinds of arguments (or at least they are designed to answer them). Understanding God’s attributes in the qualified senses that Craig affirms, certainly does exclude the generation of many ontological disproofs which might result from holding to them in their traditional formulations. So long as adherence to biblical terminology, and the ideals of “perfection” and “worship-worthiness” form the standards of theological acceptability, Craig seems to have done his job.

3.6 Theological evaluation

As has been shown, the theological method employed by many of these philosopher-apologists often involves affirmation of the traditional wording of Scripture or Christian theology with the understanding of those terms according to nontraditional definitions. In his trenchant analysis of ontological disproof debates, Ralph C. Wagenet (2003) writes, “As we can see, much of the argument . . . over the nature of God is semantic. It is important, however, to realize that semantics are secondary to the reality of God himself. God has various attributes which are given names that capture the nature of those attributes as accurately as we know how to. Nevertheless, if the term used conveys a sense different from the reality of the God we seek to describe, then we need to refine the term, rather than claim that the concept of God is incoherent.” Whether this kind of apologetic solution is worth the theological trade-offs they require is an issue every Christian apologist needs to face. Below, each of the above thinkers’ apologetic responses will be given a brief theological evaluation comparing and contrasting their resultant theological positions with the formulations of the traditional creeds and confessions of Christianity.⁸³

3.6.1 Swinburne

Swinburne’s affirmation of God’s omnipresence, freedom, and goodness fit the typical orthodox understanding of God’s attributes. Concerning omnipotence, however, Swinburne’s definition may seem to die the death of over-qualification. As to omniscience, given that future

⁸³ The ascription “of traditional” here ought not be taken in a contentious or question-begging manner. Rather, it refers here to the objective theological agreement between the major creeds and confessions accepted by the majority of Christendom throughout its history. The Church of the first millennium accepted the resolutions of the first seven “ecumenical” councils, from which the *Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed* and the *Definition of Chalcedon* were the result. Neither of these are contested by any major Christian tradition (the mostly-reconciled Oriental Orthodox churches notwithstanding). The 6th Century *Athanasian Creed* holds a similar status although not made dogmatically binding per se by any major Christian group. Even during the most doctrinally-challenging time in its history – the 16th Century Protestant Reformation – Christendom’s theological commitments concerning God’s nature remained in agreement with these sources (as evidenced by important denominational doctrinal statements such as the 16th Century’s *Augsburg Confession*, *Belgic Confession*, and *Heidelberg Catechism*, or the 17th Century’s *Westminster Confession of Faith* and the *The Baptist Confession Of Faith*). See Pelikan (2005). Since no major Christian group has officially repudiated the relevant assertions concerning the divine attributes found in these sources, it seems safe to assign them the role of historical standard here. (On the growing popularity of *unofficial* repudiation of the traditional divine attributes as described in these sources, however, see Trueman, 2015).

free acts are not, on Swinburne's understanding, objects of knowledge until they come to be, it would not count against God's omniscience to say that he does not know them.⁸⁴ Swinburne believes that such qualifications are legitimate because they do not make God any less worthy of worship (1977:161). Indeed, Swinburne concludes his discussion of God's attributes by declaring that He is worthy of worship. This is the case "both in virtue of his [God's] having such essential properties as I have discussed and also in virtue of his having done of his own free will various actions" (1977:282).

Worthiness of worship is not considered to be a proper attribute of God for Swinburne, so much it is the consequence of God's divine attributes. While Swinburne maintains that some popular conceptions of God are incoherent, he believes that his understanding of God's attributes represents something "very close to the central tradition of theistic thought" (1977:294). This connection between the worshipfulness of God and his attributes is an important one. While Swinburne concludes that his project has shown that traditional theism cannot be defeated by the kind of ontological disproofs that atheists have put forward, he also notes that some theists will have to "face the consequence that they do not have good grounds either for believing that the claim which they make is a coherent or logically possible one" (1977:296). Thus, it seems, Swinburne believes that the coherency of his account of God's attributes not only defeat the atheist who believes God's nature to be inherently contradictory, but it also shows many popular / traditional understandings of God's attributes to be false. In explicating his views of God, Swinburne nowhere allows Christian tradition to overturn his philosophical conclusions.

3.6.2 Morris

Like Swinburne, Morris's system produces a mixed bag of traditional and nontraditional views. His understanding of God's goodness tracks with the former, however his lodging of God's attributes in "Anselmian intuitions" may cause more classical theologians pause. On God's omniscience, Morris not only seems to affirm the classical tradition, but also offers a

⁸⁴ Weinandy (2009) says of Swinburne that, "Swinburne has no clear understanding of the analogy of being when applied to God, and thus he employs concepts and language about God univocally. For him, God's personal manner of existence does not differ in kind from that of human beings, but only in degree. Thus, God's manner of knowing, the mode of his power, the exercise of his freedom, the process by which he makes choices, the extent of his goodness, and the longevity of his life differs from that of human beings only because he possesses more (even if infinitely more) knowledge, power, goodness, and life than we do."

creative way out of many of the difficulties that omnipotence produces among philosophers. Because Morris refuses to take a position in his discussion of God's omniscience and eternity, he avoids what might have been his biggest departures from more traditional views.

Morris claims that his perfect being theology works with – and can even add to – creation theology and biblical theology. A good example of this is his discussion of God's eternity. After presenting the two diverging views, Morris states that, "there are no biblical passages which explicitly and undeniably settle the matter nor are their arguments from the methodology of your perfect being theology or creation theology which clearly uncontroversial present the final word on the issue" (1991:121). As with the rest of the book, Morris apparently does not consider the traditional formulations of God's attributes as being relevant to the solving of the debate. He is even so bold as to say that, "only by looking, however briefly, at most of the arguments which have been brought forth will we put ourselves into a position to understand the dispute and decide for ourselves how it should be resolved, or whether it can be settled at all" (1991:121). Nowhere does he allow traditional Christian views to override his explanations of the biblical or philosophical data.

3.6.3 Feinberg

In responding to his interlocutors (primarily of the Open Theism / Process Theology variety), Feinberg focuses on bringing the Evangelical concept of God up to date with current trends.⁸⁵ In his own words: "In this book, I have argued that we need to reconstruct and revise our conception of the classical God" (2001:800).⁸⁶

⁸⁵ One reviewer summarized Feinberg's theology as the attempt to "restate, reformulate, or reconceptualize the doctrine of God for evangelical/Protestant orthodox theology in light of contemporary cultural, philosophical and theological trends, issues and concerns . . . in the face of prominent contemporary criticisms of 'classical' Christian theism, Feinberg [responded] to this urgent need by altering, or to use Feinberg's own oft used term, 'nuancing' important aspects of the evangelical God-concept in order to answer contemporary needs and questions to make the said God-concept more coherent." (Morrison, 2003:699).

⁸⁶ E.g., Feinberg is very up-front about his theological concerns and innovative methodology: "Theologians and non-theologians alike are clamoring for a God who is engaged in our lives and responsive to our needs. The remote God of classical Christianity seems irrelevant to our contemporaries. Even Christians broadly in the evangelical community sense a need to replace or at least significantly alter the concept of the classical God. . . . the whole discussion must now be framed in light of the issues of our times. In short, the question confronting the evangelical theologian is what to do about the classical conception of God that has been handed down through centuries of church history. . . . Rather than totally

During his theological reconstruction, Feinberg argues that divine immutability should be understood as God not changing in his person, will, or purposes – not necessarily as being free of all change (2001:264-276). Thus, Feinberg also rejects the traditional atemporal understanding of God's eternity (2001:375-436).⁸⁷ Feinberg's "nuancing" of many of God's traditional attributes will affect his view of omnipotence as well, for on Feinberg's system God's "omnipotence [consists] in the possession of all logically possible powers which it is logically possible for a being with the attributes of God to possess" (2001:288). As indicated in the introductory material listed above, traditional Christian views are, for Feinberg, historical positions that are open for revision according to the apologetic and theological challenges of the day.

3.6.4 Craig

With Craig's treatment of God's attributes we see the largest departure from popular / traditional thinking. Craig's philosophical method has led him to take issue with traditional formulations of God's attributes, and reimagine them according to apologetic need. For example, in his response to problems of God's immutability, Craig produces the attribute from the strong sense of complete and changeability to only his being "immutable in the biblical sense of being constant and unchangeable in His character." (Craig and Moreland, 2003:527). Craig also denies that God is eternal in the traditional sense due to the problems that this view creates for God's knowledge of tensed facts (Craig and Moreland, 2003:513).

Beyond these contemporary revisions, other facets of Craig's philosophical theology seems to have led him into heresy.⁸⁸ For example, Craig's adoption of *Monotheletism* – the denial that Jesus had both a human will and a divine will (Craig and Moreland, 2003:611) – is a teaching that was declared heresy at the Third Council of Constantinople in the seventh century. Craig also denies the procession of the Son from the Father (Craig and Moreland, 2003:594),

abandoning the traditional concept of God, a substantial overhaul and reconstruction seems more appropriate. In the pages of this book you will see the results of such modifications." (2001: xxiv-vi).

⁸⁷ Like the others surveyed here, Feinberg rejects divine *impassibility* and *simplicity* as well (2001:277 and 337 respectively).

⁸⁸ Norman (2010). Such a charge is noted by Craig as well (2008a).

which is affirmed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.⁸⁹ Nor is Craig unaware of his conflict with these standards of orthodoxy, for Craig states that he is concerned over the charge of heresy.⁹⁰ However, using a combination of the Protestant principle of *sola Scriptura* and the “wide latitude” Craig believes the Bible allows for defining God’s attributes, Craig believes that his disagreements are warranted.⁹¹

3.7 Conclusion

In many of the specific examples considered above, it seems that theology can become a process of salvaging of biblical or traditional terminology via redefinition in order to avoid atheistic charges of incoherency. Such a practice has not only resulted in nontraditional theology, it has sometimes been said to cross the line into heresy.⁹² One might very well

⁸⁹ Craig’s use of the orthodox creeds appears inconsistent. For example, Mullins (2015:119) says of Craig’s view of God and abstract objects that, “I find it rather odd that Craig appeals so heavily to the Nicene Creed. Craig is someone who denies the doctrine of eternal generation. This is a doctrine that is explicitly taught in the Nicene Creed. Apparently Craig does not see a problem with being orthodox when he denies explicit aspects of the Nicene Creed, but does see a problem when others deny things that are allegedly implied by the Creed. Craig needs to offer a principled way of sorting out which parts of the Creed, if any, Christians can deny and remain orthodox.”

⁹⁰ This is clear in articles where he makes statements such as this (2008a): “No earnest Christian wants to be considered a heretic. . . . one disagrees with the promulgations of an Ecumenical Council only with great hesitancy....” Craig affirms the Church’s creeds as the determiners of orthodoxy (2008b): “The doctrine of Christ’s impeccability (or inability to sin) is not some peculiar doctrine but part and parcel of an orthodox doctrine of Christ. It is affirmed by all the great confessions of Christendom.” Craig also recognizes that the Church has defined heresy when he notes that, “The Father knows, for example, that the Son dies on the cross, but He does not and cannot know that He Himself dies on the cross—indeed, the view that He so knows even has the status of heresy: patipassianism.” (2015). Thus, although Craig might disagree that his views are *actually* heretical, he seems to indirectly agree with his accusers *definitionally* (i.e., if heresy is defined as disagreement with an ecumenical creed). In fact, Craig named his Christology after the heretic Apollinaris when he mentioned it with regard to his book: “*Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* in which I propose and defend a neo-Apollinarian Christology.” (2015b:1).

⁹¹ E.g., Craig (2008a) writes that, “Protestants recognize Scripture alone as our ultimate rule of faith (the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura*). Therefore, we bring even the statements of Ecumenical Councils before the bar of Scripture. While one disagrees with the promulgations of an Ecumenical Council only with great hesitancy, nonetheless, since we do not regard these as invested with divine authority, we are open to the possibility that they have erred in places. It seems to me that in condemning Monotheletism as incompatible with Christian belief the Church did overstep its bounds.” Similar statements are made in *Philosophical Foundations* at relevant points.

⁹² “Heresy” is a difficult term to precisely define in a manner inclusive of all Christian traditions and opinions. According to Brown, “The word ‘heresy’ . . . came to be used to mean a separation or split resulting from a false faith (1 Cor. 11:19; Gal. 5:20). It designated either a doctrine or the party holding the doctrine, a doctrine that was sufficiently intolerable to destroy the unity of the Christian church. In the

question whether an apologetic strategy that results in an unorthodox conception of God has been truly successful in refuting arguments against his existence. For the Christian theist who puts much weight on the orthodox status of one's beliefs (as opposed to, say, focusing on one's feelings of pious devotion or commitment to vague notions of deity), the pragmatic results of such errors may not differ appreciably from that of the atheist.⁹³

Regardless of one's thoughts on the accuracy or acceptability of these nontraditional conclusions, it will be instructive to look at how they came about – and how they might be avoided should one wish to maintain a more traditional stance against ontological disproof arguments.⁹⁴ Given that all of the Christian theists surveyed here hold to the Bible as a primary source of data, it seems that one or more of philosophical / theological presuppositions or methodologies might be behind the acceptance of non-traditional views.

As will be made clearer in the next chapter, a driving force behind the debate over the coherency of God's attributes is the manner in which one should go about answering the issues it raises. Following (or at least be informed by) Anselmian perfect being theology and arguing according to the features and / or methodology of Analytic Philosophy seem to be the norm. Although doing so may pose no problems for many areas of theology, using these techniques to address God's nature may be problematic.

early church, heresy did not refer to simply any doctrinal disagreement, but to something that seemed to undercut the very basis for Christian existence. Practically speaking, heresy involved the doctrine of God and the doctrine of Christ . . . just as there are doctrines that are true, and that can bring salvation, there are those that are false, so false that they can spell eternal damnation for those who have the misfortune to become entrapped by them." (1998:2-4). Between orthodoxy and heresy, then, are numerous subdivisions (e.g., "unorthodoxy" or "heterodoxy"). For an interesting discussion of all these distinctions see Bowman (1992:passim).

⁹³ Again, consider Brown's definition of heresy above. If the heretic threatens the very existence of the faith and faces damnation, he is clearly not within it himself – possibly any more than the atheist.

⁹⁴ For the purposes of this writing (which is not to judge the theological veracity of any particular teaching, but only to contrast some popular modern and conemptory views with more traditional and classical formulations), I aim to use the terms "orthodoxy" and "unorthodoxy" only in their technical sense as objective standards of Christian dogma, and use "traditional" / "nontraditional" more generally to indicate the strong ecclesiastical or historical support.

Chapter 4: Anselmian theology and analytic philosophy

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, attention will be paid to how Anselmian theology and analytic philosophy have often contributed to both the formal and material aspects of the ontological disproof-style debate over God's existence. As will be shown, it is common for the apologetic responses to atheistic arguments to reference or track with what might be called "Anselmian" theological methodology (i.e. "perfect being" or "greatest possible being" theology). This approach has been adopted to greater and lesser extents by most of the modern theologians surveyed here. Whether or not their use of Anselm's method is successful will be discussed below.

Another major factor in both atheistic arguments and their apologetic responses is the adoption of the style and methods of analytic philosophy. In the previous chapters, the arguments and conclusions related to ontological disproof arguments were generally presented without presenting many details of their original expression (e.g., enumerated propositions, stylistic semantics, or logical symbols). Most of the arguments were, however, formulated according to rigorous rules of logic (ranging from classical Aristotelian logic to predicate or modal logic depending on the arguer's background), and often reflected other aspects of analytic philosophy (such as the assigning of lettered or symbolic variables to key terms in regular prose).

As will be shown, these considerations are important because not only are they informative of the kinds of communication chosen to establish theological positions, they also can be seen to draw the boundaries for what counts as acceptable theological speculation. This will set the stage for chapter 5, where the focus will be on more traditional positions concerning the ability of philosophy to delve into the mysteries of God's existence, and of the possibility and proper use of language to communicate them.

4.2 Anselmian theological method

4.2.1 Anselmian methodological claims

As has been noted above, many of the philosophers and theologians who have worked in apologetic responses to the ontological disproofs have made fairly clear claims to their reliance on Anselmian perfect being theology (viz., their use of his method – not necessarily the conclusions he reached). Swinburne alone among those surveyed above seems to eschew the

so-called Anselmian theological method.⁹⁵ However, given the unabashed theological tributes being paid to Anselm by the other writers, it seems clear that an investigation into his theological method (especially with an eye for any departures from it on their part), is in order. This section will evaluate these writers' fidelity to Anselm's theological approach.

4.2.1.1 Morris

Morris believes that the way many people think of God's attributes are not the result of either philosophical or theological arguments, but rather follow from "Anselmian intuition" (1991:56). Morris also thinks that these intuitions are vague enough to be put to use both apologetically and theologically: "the Anselmian conception of God can often be defended without our having to take definitive stands on difficult issues . . . arguments of critics can be very helpful to theists, because if they are good they can steer us away from faulty specifications of the nature of divine perfection" (1991:76-77).⁹⁶

Morris is quite clear from the start that his theological methodology follows from what he thinks of as Anselmian perfect being theology. He reinforces this methodology throughout his writing, often digressing into methodological reflection in the midst of his consideration of God's attributes. Morris writes that, "theists can differ in their beliefs and still be talking about the same thing. . . . We began with a definition or core concept of God as the greatest possible being. This is the first level of theistic concept of building. . . . Perfect being theology is then developed by means of . . . intuitions . . . The precise details at this second level are to some extent open to dispute and negotiable within the practice of perfect being theology. Agreement on the first level of conceptual thinking about God is this compatible with disagreement, and even significant uncertainty, concerning some of the specifications at the second level." (1991:103-104). Thus, although Morris believes the Bible to be of crucial importance for developing our idea of God is, he finds it "compatible with a good deal of disagreement and uncertainty" when it comes to details of biblical interpretation (1991:103-104).

⁹⁵ Although Sobel refers to Swinburne as a "perfect-being theist" (e.g., 2009:296, 402, 419), none of the quotes or citations given in support of that claim back it up. Given Swinburne's comments on God's perfection (2014) and his necessity (1977:263-290), it seems to me he would not ascribe this title to himself. In fact it seems that would likely reject talk of this "greatest possible being" (at least where "greatest" means some kind of quantitatively assessed maximum).

⁹⁶ Craig makes a very similar stance when it comes to atheistic ontological-disproof arguments (see 4.3.1.4 below).

4.2.1.2 Feinberg

Although it is not mentioned as frequently in his writing, Feinberg agrees with Morris who he finds “most helpful” in asserting that, “Anselm’s key insight was that no being could qualify as God if a greater being could be conceived. To say that God is the GCB [greatest conceivable being] means that ‘God is a being with the greatest possible array of compossible great-making properties.’” (2001:210). Indeed, Feinberg follows Morris in several places, even in key areas of departure from traditional theology (e.g., 2001: 255, 291, 329-337). Feinberg affirms Anselm’s view of God as the greatest conceivable being, but, “this doesn’t mean that we must agree with everything Anselm thought made God the greatest conceivable being. It only means that this is an apt definition of what the term means at least for traditions like Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Those traditions view God as infinite/unlimited and superior to any being that exists or could exist.” (2001:40). Feinberg’s use of “greatest conceivable being” theology is found throughout his writing (e.g., 2001:40, 64, 186-187, 190, 289, 382-385), and he defines great-making properties according to Anselm’s understanding.⁹⁷

4.2.1.3 Craig

Craig is also in debt to what he considers the Anselmian theological method. Craig also says, “The best definition of God as a descriptive term is, I think, St. Anselm’s: the greatest conceivable being.” (2011). When Craig deals with atheistic ontological disproof arguments in particular, he begins by asserting that, “God’s self-revelation in Scripture is obviously paramount in understanding what God is like.” (Craig and Moreland, 2003:501). However, when it comes to interpreting scriptural revelation, Craig believes that, “the Anselmian conception of God as the greatest conceivable being or most perfect being has guided philosophical speculation on the raw data of Scripture, so that God’s biblical attributes are to be conceived in ways that would serve to exalt God’s greatness.” (2010). Finally, Craig says, “to say that I tacitly endorse Anselmian perfect being theology is an understatement . . . I see the conception of God as the greatest conceivable being as one of the guides for systematic theology’s formulation of the doctrine of God” (Craig and Gorra, 2013:167).

⁹⁷ “Any property, or attribute, or characteristic, or quality which it is intrinsically good to have, any property which endows its bearer with some measure of value, or greatness, or metaphysical stature, regardless of external circumstances.’ Though we might revise these definitions a bit, they catch Anselm’s main thrust.” (Feinberg, 2001:210-211).

4.2.2 Departures from Anselmian Methodology

Despite the above statements of reliance and appreciation, writers like Morris, Feinberg, and Craig seem to depart from Anselm in their reduction of his theological method to a collection of intuitions built up from the axiomatic idea of God as the “greatest possible being.” As will be shown below, Anselm’s theological method was multifaceted, and contained within it several controls that are lacking in the modern theologians discussed here.

McCord-Adams (2004:52) notes that, “Anselm’s method in philosophical theology is shaped by five fundamental factors: (1) his appreciation of the ontological incommensuration between God and creatures, (2) his commitment to the infallible authority of Scripture as interpreted through the creeds and conciliar pronouncements, (3) his conviction that humans are made in God’s image, (4) his conception of inquiry as essentially a divine-human collaboration, and (5) his understanding of human inquiry as holistic and developmental.” The first factor explains why our understanding of God, and our language concerning him, often remains shrouded in mystery. This is balanced by factors 3-5 which provide hope to those who earnestly seek knowledge of God – and factor 2 forms, for Anselm, a sort of speculative safety zone within which God’s mystery may be fruitfully explored. While factors 3-5 may be relatively theologically neutral among the parties of concern in this paper, factors 1 and 2 bear some analysis. These will be discussed in reverse order after looking at Anselm’s Perfect Being theology.

4.2.2.1 Anselm on Perfect-Being Theology

Although perfect-being theology existed before the work of Anselm (Leftow, 2004: 132), he is generally credited with formulating the modern version as it is found in Christian philosophical theology. Despite his stated reverence for Scripture and the role it should play in correcting a purely philosophical theology, two of Anselm’s projects were purposefully designed to defend the notion of God and his attributes by purely rational means.⁹⁸ The primary works that display this method are his *Monologion* and *Proslogion*.

⁹⁸ “If anyone does not know, either because he has not heard or because he does not believe, that there is one nature, supreme among all existing things, who alone is self-sufficient in his eternal happiness, who through his omnipotent goodness grants and brings it about that all other things exist or have any sort of well-being, and a great many other things that we must believe about God or his creation, I think he could at least convince himself of most of these things by reason alone, if he is even moderately intelligent.” (Anselm, *Monologion* 1)

In *Monologion*, Anselm argues from the goodness of things to an ultimate good (namely, God), and then goes on to deduce God's attributes from the fact that God is the highest good. Leftow notes that Anselm posits four ways to do so. First, God "must not at all be said to be any of those things to which something which is not what they are superior." Second, God "must be said to be any of those things to which whatever it is not what they are is inferior." Third, "do not say that God has any non-perfection," and, fourth, "do say that God has every perfection" (Leftow, 2004:135-138 cf. *Monologion* 15). In *Proslogion*, Anselm sought a means to arrive at the same conclusions following from a *single* argument. This "Anselmian Argument" (typically labeled the "Ontological Argument" after Kant⁹⁹) appears in more than one form in *Proslogion*, but its popular form is well known: If God is that which is greater than can be thought, and if to exist is better than to not exist, then God must exist.¹⁰⁰ The "Anselmian" method the theologians above use seems to be a combination of these two writings. Several problems can be found with this methodology, however – especially when it is divorced from Anselm's theological constraints.

First, while people may certainly have strong intuitions about the kinds of perfections the beings of their common experience possess, they lack the same kind of access to God's nature. How then, do they know what counts as a great-making property and what does not? For example, in rational creatures both *knowledge* and *wisdom* would certainly count as perfections, however it does not seem like these would count as perfections in dogs or rocks. Only by knowing the nature of a thing can we know what would count as its perfection - yet this is the very knowledge that we are trying to attain when doing theology. Further, as Leftow (2004:142) notes, if we only have these arguments to tell us what attributes God has, we cannot learn what attributes God *has* without first knowing what attributes God *can* have - yet Anselm's method does not deliver this information.¹⁰¹ Finally, one's view of what qualifies as "perfect" can end up

⁹⁹ Kant coined the term "ontological argument" although he was actually responding to modern variations on Anselm's argument – e.g., Descartes or Leibniz. See Proops, 2015.

¹⁰⁰ "If that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, exists in the understanding alone, the very being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, is one, than which a greater can be conceived. But obviously this is impossible. Hence there is no doubt that there exists a being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, and it exists both in the understanding and in reality." (Anselm, *Proslogion* 5).

¹⁰¹ Even when the notion of "Greatest" is raised to an "infinite level, problems may persist. Concerning God's infinity, Stephen T. Davis states that an unlimited being is: "(1) a being who possesses all the G-properties that it is possible for a being to possess; (2) a being all of whose G-properties that admit of an intrinsic maximum are possessed to the maximal degree (for example, being omnipotent); and (3) a being all of whose G-properties that admit of no intrinsic maximum are possessed to a degree

guiding the discussion more than is warranted. For example, Feinberg, writing against a robust view of aseity and impassibility in God, asks, “If God hears and answers our prayers, and if he changes his attitudes toward us when we repent of sin, for example, it seems that his mental and emotional states at any given moment must to some extent be influenced by what we do. But, why is that a deficiency in God?” (2001:241). Other theologians and apologists have spent quite a bit of time explaining why such a state would be a deficiency in God¹⁰² – but either way, is one’s theological intuition sufficient to write off pedigreed theological views with a mere rhetorical question?

Second, even if a list of such great-making attributes of deity could be produced using this purported Anselmian method, the method itself does not tell us that all of these properties are compossible in one being. For example, God’s being perfectly *merciful* and perfectly *just* both seem to be intuitively great-making properties - yet it is very difficult to see how they could exist together.¹⁰³ This leads to the related problem that in order to know if any *single* attribute of God is possible, one would have to know if it was compatible with the rest – which is to say that we would have to know all of God’s attributes up front (Leftow, 2004:143). Yet, again, that is the very thing that theological investigation is supposed to accomplish. Now, Anselm was not unaware of these difficulties, as can be seen in his discussions of the attributes that he believes his method picks out for God in both the *Monologion* and the *Proslogion*. In addition to positing God’s existence in *Proslogion* 2, in *Proslogion* 5 Anselm finds God to be the creator and the supreme good (as well as its source), merciful, impassable, and impeccable. In *Monologion* 15-16, Anselm describes God as living, wise, omnipotent, true, blessed, incorporeal, eternal (i.e., atemporal), just, beautiful, immortal, incorruptible, and immutable. In *Monologion* 17 and *Proslogion* 18, Anselm also asserts the doctrine of divine simplicity. Among these attributes, Anselm recognizes that there are sometimes difficulties found in trying to consider them as

unsurpassed by any other being that has ever existed or ever will exist (for instance, being more loving than any other actual being).” (2001:244). What Davis calls “G-properties” are great-making properties. But what makes something a great-making property and another not? This is a question that is constantly being exploited by atheists, as well as the common notion that great-making attributes admit of degrees (i.e., where “infinite” is seen as the “maximal degree” of something instead of being truly *un-limited*).

¹⁰² E.g. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ*, Ia. Q. 9; Charnock, 1996:316; Geisler, 2011:75.

¹⁰³ See Sadler, 2006.

existing in one being, however he works them out according to his additional theological principles (see 4.2.2.2).¹⁰⁴

Finally, perfect being theology was not, for Anselm, the kind of purely rationalistic enterprise it is often depicted as in the examples where it is cited above. As will be shown below, Anselm's method contained presuppositions from, and was circumscribed by, his faith in the authority of the Christian Scriptures and Tradition.

4.2.2.2 Anselm on Reason and Religious Authority

While it is clear that both *Monologion* and *Proslogion* relied solely on Anselm's philosophical method for their data (viz. as opposed to Scripture or tradition), it is also clear that this was simply due to the nature of these projects. Anselm specifically states in the introductions to each of these works that he is trying to produce an apologetical-theological treatise (*not necessarily a method*) that is based solely in reason. What is less clear (due to a lack of similarly direct statements) is that even when Anselm pursued these purely rationalistic projects, he remained beholden to both Scripture and to the traditional authority of the Church.

4.2.2.2.1 Anselm on Reason

As Williams (2007) notes, Anselm's motto "faith seeking understanding" (*fides quaerens intellectum*) can lead to the misunderstanding that he believes faith can be replaced by understanding (where faith is belief based on authority, and understanding is based

¹⁰⁴ In *Proslogion* 7, Anselm considers whether it is possible that God is both omnipotent and impeccable (unable to sin). Anselm believes that the ability to sin is actually a lack of power, for a perfect being would never desire to sin and therefore if you did to sin it would be because he lacked the power to avoid it. Similar solutions could apply to any perceived lack of power. In *Proslogion* 8, Anselm asks whether it is possible that God be both merciful and impassable. It might seem that mercy requires some sort of compassion, whereas impassibility would deny compassion of God. Anselm answers that while compassion is a feeling for humans, when God acts mercifully he is said to do so based on a description of the event – not any internal feeling on his part.

Elsewhere, Anselm also considers God's justice and mercy. If it is the case that justice means giving someone exactly what they deserve, and mercy is not giving them what they deserve (i.e. in the case of judgment for sin), then it seems these two properties could not exist in God at the same time. This dilemma is actually dealt with most extensively in Anselm's consideration of the incarnation of Christ in *Cur Deus Homo* 19, and is not a simple deduction from God's nature. He answers that God can be merciful to people by taking on there just punishment himself (i.e. the penal substitutionary atonement view). He sums up his view in unmistakably Anselmian fashion: "when we were considering God's holiness and man's sin; we have found it, I say, so great and so consistent with his holiness, as to be incomparably above anything that can be conceived" (*Cur Deus Homo* 20).

on philosophy). That this is a mistake can be seen by Anselm's attitude toward someone with "faith" simply based on evidence. For Anselm, merely believing what one ought to believe is a dead faith (*Monologion* 78). It must be remembered that Anselm wrote *Monologion* for his brother monks who were, naturally, already believers, and he wrote *Proslogion* as a sort of sequel based on his self-challenge to reach the same conclusions with a single argument.¹⁰⁵ Given the above facts, it is clear that Anselm would have rejected the replacement of faith with understanding. Far from trying to replace faith (which is an act of the will) with understanding (which is an act of the intellect), Anselm is merely seeing how far one can go with peer philosophy toward reaching the same conclusions that one would reach theologically.¹⁰⁶

Another likely misunderstanding of Anselm's method would be to conclude that, because he does not appeal to Scripture or Church tradition in these particular projects, that he does not regard them as important or necessary for Christian theology. However, even as Anselm is using a purely philosophical method in these writings, there are numerous indications that both Scripture and the authoritative tradition of the Church form a boundary for his conclusions.¹⁰⁷

4.2.2.2.2 Anselm on Scripture

As Mann (2006:258) notes in his discussion of Anselm's methodological constraints, "Anselm takes his enterprise to be guided necessarily by authority, the authority of Scripture (the revealed word of God), the authority of confessional creeds formulated by Church councils (in particular, the Nicene Creed), and the authority of the Church Fathers (in particular, Augustine). It would require a book to document all these influences."¹⁰⁸ The same is found in McCord-Adams who lists several sources of religious knowledge that functioned as authorities for Anselm. These include (1) God, (2) Holy Scripture, (3) the creeds, (4) conciliar findings, (5)

¹⁰⁵ See the prologues of both works.

¹⁰⁶ As Anselm states in *Cur Deus Homo* 1:3: "Although [unbelievers] seek a rational basis because they do not believe whereas we seek it because we do believe, nevertheless it is one and the same thing that both we and they are seeking."

¹⁰⁷ If McCord-Adams is correct, it may not even be the case that have Anselm's own views. The method he adopts in the writings under consideration are meant for meditation, prayer, and logical training – they are not presented as Anselm's preferred theological method (2004:39).

¹⁰⁸ As with Scripture, Anselm is not afraid to go beyond (some might say contrary to) even majority positions found in these extra-biblical resources (for example his penal satisfaction theory of the atonement which he posited against the ransom theory).

the Pope, and (6) the Church Fathers.¹⁰⁹ Again, then, for Anselm, God's revelation (1) is expressed in Scripture (2) as well as through the Church's authoritative tradition (3-4) and its leadership (5-6).

Scripture forms a standard which, for Anselm, cannot be contradicted by any alleged philosophical insight.¹¹⁰ He is clear when he writes, "If I say something which a greater authority [namely, Scripture] does not confirm, then even though I seem to prove it rationally, it should be accepted with no other degree of certainty than that it appears this way to me for the time being, until God somehow reveals the matter to me more fully. For if I say something that unquestionably contradicts Sacred Scripture, I am certain that it is false" (*Cur Deus Homo* I, 18).¹¹¹

Anselm's use of Scripture is not limited to a mere orthodox boundary. Jasper Hopkins (2009:8-9) notes that, "Anselm suspends all direct appeal to them in advancing his overall line of reasoning; but he always has an eye on them. For the Scriptures are what Anselm is trying to buttress rationally." Hopkins notes that Anselm's purely rational method succeeds "to whatever

¹⁰⁹ McCord-Adams lists the following sources for this claim: Creeds: Epistola 136; De Inc. Verbi 4. Councils: De Inc. Verbi 1; De Processione Spiritus Sancti (throughout). The Pope: Commendatio 2; De Inc. Verbi 1. The Church Fathers: Monologion, Prologus; Cur Deus Homo 1. (2004:42 cf. 58 footnotes)

¹¹⁰ Feinberg wishes to use Scripture to keep his view orthodox, yet what he allows as metaphorical / anthropological in Scripture is also at issue. Feinberg's version of PBT is also evident in his arguments against a strong view of divine immutability / omniscience (2001:264-277): "The strong conception of immutability associated with the classical theism of Anselm and Aquinas says that God is utterly incapable of any change whatsoever. Theologians holding this view reason that if anything changes, including God, it must change either for better or for worse. Since God is already perfect, he could not become more perfect, so any change in God would be for the worse. Since that would mean that he would stop being perfect, there would be no point in such change. . . .

It is this strong sense of immutability that process theists and open view proponents find so objectionable. They don't see how such a God matches the biblical portrait of God. . . . the God of classical theism is not a God who attracts worshipers. He is disengaged from his creation, appears unconcerned about what happens in our world, and seems incapable of responding to our needs even if he does care. . . . And there are problems for divine omniscience. For one thing, if God undergoes no changes whatsoever, he could not know from one of our days to the next that it is a different day for us. For him to know such a fact each day would mean a change in his knowledge, but if he is totally immutable, there cannot be any changes in his knowledge."

¹¹¹ Although Anselm's high regard for scriptural authority is apparent, at the same time Anselm does not always seem to feel himself constrained by the literal wording of the biblical text. Because the words of Scripture are dealing with some matters that are beyond human language, it is to be expected that even Scriptures ultimate truth will only be discovered when it is combined with other authoritative sources concerning God. Because Anselm sees all of these sources as necessarily harmonized, there is no problem in interpreting the biblical text in a less than literal way, should revealed truth demand it (McCord Adams, 2004:44).

extent it does, only because of the Scriptural and theological and rational presuppositions that he makes.” Unlike the *Monologion* and the *Proslogion*, scriptural assumptions are present in Anselm’s *Cur Deus Homo* – they simply are not directly appealed to his argumentation.¹¹²

4.2.2.2.3 Anselm on the Church Fathers

Anselm’s respect for the Church Fathers is made evident in passages such as his introduction to *Cur Deus Homo* where he explains that he is writing in response to those who have asked that he do so. He says he will “attempt to present to those who make this request what God sees fit to reveal to me, even though the holy fathers have said what ought to be sufficient on the subject” (245). In his prologue to the *Monologion*, after Anselm explains that in this particular project he would establish nothing but the authority of Scripture but by reason alone, he then goes on to say that he “could not find that I have said anything in it that was inconsistent with the writings of the Catholic Fathers.” Anselm’s dependence upon and respect for St. Augustine is manifest in more than one place as well.¹¹³

4.2.2.2.4 Anselm on Church Tradition

Anselm also saw the tradition of the Church as authoritative when it came to theological speculation. He spends several pages introducing *On the Incarnation of the Word* with warnings to those who would bring challenge to the Christian faith. He asserts that, “no Christian ought to argue that something the Catholic Church believes with her heart and confesses with her lips is not true” (215). He also indirectly cites the Creed when he refers to the Trinity as “that thing in which we profess to be three persons.”

¹¹² Hopkins (2009:10) lists the following: that man was created by God and not by the Devil, that man was created in a state of innocence and fell away from that state, that as originally created, man was meant to be in every respect equal to the good angels, that God created angels in a perfect number, so that fallen angels would have to be replaced (by human beings) so as to maintain the pre-established number of inhabitants of the Heavenly City, and • that if man had never sinned, he would never have died.

¹¹³ Anselm’s response to criticism of his *Monologion* from his teacher, Lanfranc, shows his indebtedness to Augustine: “It was my intention throughout this disputation to assert nothing which could not be immediately defended either from canonical Dicta or from the words of St. Augustine. And however often I look over what I have written, I cannot see that I have asserted anything that is not to be found there. Indeed, no reasoning of my own, however conclusive, would have persuaded me to have been the first to presume to say those things which you have copied from my work, nor several other things besides, if St. Augustine had not already proved them in the great discussions in his *De Trinitate*.” (Matthews, 2004:61).

4.2.2.2.5 Anselm on Church Leadership

Anselm also acknowledges his position with regard to Church leadership in several places. In the prologue to the *Proslogion*, Anselm explains that it was the Archbishop of Lyons who commanded him “by his apostolic authority” to put his name on these works (76). In the first section of his letter *On The Incarnation Of The Word*, Anselm writes to “the lord and father of the whole church in pilgrimage on earth, the supreme Pontiff Urban,” and says that it was, “divine providence which chose your holiness to whom God entrusted the guardianship of the Christian faith and life in the governance of his church there is no one to whom one might more properly appeal if anything contrary to Catholic faith arises in the church, so that it might be corrected by your authority . . . If anything it requires amendment, it will be corrected by your censure, and if anything in it is used to the rule of truth, it will be reinforced by your authority (213). Anselm dedicates *Cur Deus Homo* to Pope Urban II with these words: “my Lord and father, Pope urban, whom all Christians should love with reference and fear with love, whom the providence of God has appointed supreme Pontiff in his church, is that the enclosed work for your holiness to examine . . . So that your authority may give approval to those things and the two that are worthy of acceptance and may correct those things that require amendment.” (238). Anselm also indicates the ability of the Church (via Pope Calixtus I) to pronounce heresy when he begins his response to a Trinitarian issue by saying, “if this reasoning is sound, the heresy of Sabellius is true” (221).

The necessity of these numerous sources for Christian theology flows from the fact of ontological distance between God and humans, but also because of fallen nature of humanity.¹¹⁴ Indeed, for Anselm legitimate theology requires a “holistic preparation” that involves faith, obedience, and virtuous discipline (McCord-Adams, 2004:43) – not simply the intellect or theological “intuitions.” Indeed, the limits to the human intellect *guarantee* that mystery and ignorance will remain. These authoritative sources, then, are part of the way God seeks to overcome human limitations when his faithful seek to know him. They are thus used not only for providing initial information or premises in arguments, they also serve to delimit the number of options the Christian philosopher of religion has available to him. This exalted view of God’s nature feeds directly into Anselm’s view of the nature of God-talk.

¹¹⁴ “For Anselm, authority has a role to play in human inquiry, because often the subject matter exceeds – for whatever reason, however permanently or temporarily – the investigator’s powers.” (McCord-Adams, 2004:39).

4.2.2.3 Anselm on God's Nature and God-Talk

In *Proslogion* 15, Anselm concludes that God is greater than can be described (if this were not the case a greater being could be described thereby making God not be God). Anselm concludes that, the divine nature is beyond our cognitive grasp, fundamentally incomprehensible to us, and inexpressible by human language.¹¹⁵ Anselm believed that God was identical to his properties. If goodness could be ascribed to God, then goodness is what God *is*. The same would be said for wisdom or any other intrinsic attributes. There is “a sense in which Anselm’s God has no intrinsic attributes at all” (Leftow, 2004:134). When this fact is coupled with Anselm’s idea that God is greater than that which can be conceived, he runs into the problem of how to use human terminology to speak of him. If words alone are common to God and other things, then it may seem that perfect being theology is a farce. But if the best attributes we can conceive about God are not those which he actually has, then it is difficult to see what has been accomplished by such a process.

Factors 3-5 of Anselm’s theological method provide positive reasons for continuing with the theological project even though factor 1 might seem to exclude it. The same can be said for theistic linguistics, or “God-talk.” Although human language must obviously be stretched when speaking about God, it is possible to express literal truths concerning the divine nature.¹¹⁶ In *Monologion* 65, Anselm affirms that even in normal speech about common objects, we often do not (or even cannot) speak with perfect precision – yet we can speak *truthfully*.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ See next chapter for details.

¹¹⁶ This admission should not, however, be taken to mean that literal truths about God are expressed literally – even in Scripture. For example, in *De Casu Diaboli* 1, Anselm cautions his interlocutor to “be careful not at all to think – when we read in Scripture, or when in accordance with Scripture we say, that God causes evil or causes not-being – that I am denying the basis for what is said or am finding fault with what is being said. But we ought not to cling to the verbal impropriety concealing the truth as much as we ought to attend to the propriety hidden beneath the many types of expression.”

¹¹⁷ “Thus, we do and do not speak of one and the same thing; we do and do not see one and the same object. . . . So in this manner, if the Supreme Nature is not at all assumed to be expressed in accordance with the reality of its essence but [is assumed to be] somehow or other designated obliquely, then nothing precludes the truth of all that was hitherto argued about the Supreme Nature, and yet nothing prevents this Nature from remaining as ineffable as ever. . . . For by their respective significations [these words] form in my mind something much less than—indeed, something far different from . . . that [Reality] which is far above all things by virtue of its unique loftiness and which is far removed from all things by virtue of its own nature. So, then, this Nature is ineffable, because words cannot at all express it as it is; and yet, if under the instruction of reason we can obliquely, as in a dark manner, I think something regarding it, [this thought] is not false.” (*Monologion* 65).

However, as indicated above, this results in a further difficulty for the modern uses of Anselm's alleged perfect being theological method. When our intellect considers a thing it defines it according to our experiences of the finite world around us. This in turn means that when linguistic precision becomes the *sine qua non* of philosophical discussion, limited concepts must be used univocally in arguments. This issue will be explicated below in the discussion of analytic philosophy.

4.2.3 Anselm: Conclusion

As to the above authors claim to use an Anselmian approach to theology, it should be noted that many of them deny (both implicitly and explicitly) important factors of Anselm's actual theological approach. Summarizing the above concerns, two major issues arise.

First, Anselm's project in *Monologion* and *Proslogion* was undertaken with very specific delimiters that are not reflective of his greater theological method. Specifically, Anselm deliberately left the pronouncements of divine revelation to the side when forming his arguments – yet he never eschewed them as orthodox boundaries. The modern theologian-apologists above, however, do not seem to grant authoritative weight to sources outside of Scripture (which, in turn, is being interpreted according to their philosophical positions – which might be seen as negating its role as a corrective standard).¹¹⁸

Second, Anselm's insistence on the mystery of God's nature and its impact of God-talk seems difficult to square with the detailed analysis proffered by the modern apologetic approaches above.¹¹⁹ Given his commitment to a God that is beyond knowing or describing literally with limited human language, a significant source of difficulty may arise – namely, that the precision with which analytic approaches carried must operate simply cannot be attained

¹¹⁸ Feinberg attempts to deal with this by positing primary and secondary scriptural passages: "Which kind of passage has precedence and should be seen as normative? . . . Since both sets of passages are Scripture, we must treat them all. But are passages that offer didactic information about the concept in question the central passages, or are passages that show us God and man interacting the key? What is the proper way to do theology? The answer should be clear. One should go first to passages that directly address the concept in question, for they are the basis for our fundamental understanding of the concept. We must also address the other passages, but they should be understood in light of the passages that didactively set forth the concept." (2001:691).

¹¹⁹ See "Analytic Philosophy" below.

when speaking of God.¹²⁰ As stated above, the first factor in Anselm's philosophical theology is the vast ontological difference between God and his creatures. As McCord-Adams notes, this factor "is emphasized more by contemporary theology . . . than by analytic philosophy of religion." In *Proslogion* 15, Anselm concludes that God is a being greater than can be described (otherwise, one could conceive of a being so great he could not be described). As noted by Leftow (2006:141), "this casts a pall over Anselm's method. . . . The best qualities we can *conceive* God to have does not seem to count for much once defined inconceivability enters the picture." Anselm's method has, in fact, been used "to support a kind of theological skepticism . . . [and] grounds for reductive construals (e.g. for treating it as a metaphor, myth, or ideology) and/or a license for reconstruction" (2004:53). This factor has been used to ground the kind of skeptical arguments that give rise to ontological disproofs of the kind discussed in Chapter 2, as well as a license to reconstruct theology when defending God, examples of which were given in Chapter 3.

It seems to be the case that neither Anselm's actual theology nor his theological method are often found among the kinds of modern theologians surveyed here. Rather, their methodology reflects an attempt to sustain their philosophical/theological interpretations of Scripture by simultaneously elevating Anselm's theological *thought experiment* to a theological *method*, and reducing it to a self-contained rational-intuitive system uncoupled from his theological constraints.¹²¹ It remains, then, to explore the styles and methods of analytic philosophy.

4.3 Analytic philosophical method

An important facet of the methodologies of many modern philosopher/apologists is the employment of the methods of analytic philosophy. At its most basic, analytic philosophy

¹²⁰An excellent example of this is found in Feinberg (2001:238): "The theologian must use whatever facts about God's nature the biblical writers offer, but frequently we must go beyond the biblical testimony about these attributes to formulate a definition or to resolve problems surrounding them. So long as the definition and/or the resolution to problems in no way contradict Scripture, there is nothing wrong with this methodology. Moreover, we must differentiate the traditional Christian understanding of an attribute from what Scripture actually teaches and warrants. If Scripture doesn't support a traditional understanding, we must side with Scripture and modify or reject the tradition."

¹²¹None of this should be thought to demonstrate the falsehood of their positions, or the illegitimacy of their theological method (indeed, both are reflective of much respectable modern thinking) – only that their unorthodox positions listed above are not derived from a truly Anselmian methodology.

involves the attempt to express and analyze thought in strictly formatted logical propositions.¹²² It is a “mathematical” approach to language which both promises *and requires* a clarity of argumentation which remains unobscured by everyday language. This clarity is achieved by carefully analyzing an argument’s terminology and restating it via variable symbolization, modal logic, possible-world scenarios, etc. Propositions which cannot be analyzed in this fashion are problematic for the method, and may be dismissed as illegitimate philosophical subjects.

4.3.1 Analytic methodological claims

Although not always stated up front, it is clear that the tools of analytic philosophy are being employed by the thinkers surveyed as they go about their apologetic and theological processes. Even when it is only indirect, analytic philosophy’s influence on the arguments offered in the ontological disproof debate remains strong. Even when not made explicit in the examples above, in the debate over ontological disproofs, both atheists and their theist interlocutors regularly present the discussions in terms of modal logic¹²³ and possible worlds –

¹²² The (ironic) difficulty of precisely defining analytic philosophy has been explored by Glock (2008), who concludes that, “analytic philosophy is too wide and diverse to be captured by an analytic definition” (2008: 212). Instead he suggests that there are, “a number of characteristics that capture important strands within the analytic family, strands which overlap partially” (2008: 213), and thus analytic philosophy can be seen as “a tradition that is held together both by ties of influence and by a family of partially overlapping features” (2008: 223). These overlapping features turn out to be the very notions rejected by Glock as being coextensive with all forms of, or persons attached to, analytic philosophy, but which are popularly ascribed to analytic philosophy. It is from the most typical of these that I have drawn this admittedly reductionistic definition.

¹²³ Findlay’s “original” ontological disproof has been called “an extension of the Hume-Kantian modal argument” (Clarke, 1971:247), and this characteristic (although a later development in the overall history of Analytic Philosophy) is part of what might be even seen as the beginning of a break with the old school anti-metaphysicians. One of Modal Logic’s important founders, Saul Kripke, believed in the existence of essences and the possibility of necessary, a posteriori truths (Zimmerman, 2004:xix), however, the tools of Modal Logic and its use of possible world semantics were developed in historical harmony with - and have been described in the same terms as - Analytic Philosophy (Ballarín, 2010:Introduction and 3.1 as well as Konydynk, 1986:12-20).

Sobel, for example, asserts that, “It is a great resource of modern philosophy, of which it does not always take full advantage, that it has as its disposal modern symbolic logic, including the formal development of ‘that paradigm of philosophy, Russell’s theory of descriptions’ . . . Great philosophers of ontological-argument-fame, have sometimes been seriously disadvantaged by being without this logic.” (2009:56).

Finally, the entire discipline of Modal Logic (vis-à-vis Analytic Philosophy) has been roundly criticized as being out of step with classical philosophy in general (e.g., Veatch, 1969), and classical Thomism in particular (e.g., Kerr, 2015b).

both of which are characteristic of (though not necessarily determinative of) modern analytic philosophy.¹²⁴ Examples of such follow.¹²⁵

4.3.1.1 Swinburne

Swinburne extols the virtues of philosophical analysis in theology: “It is one of the intellectual tragedies of our age that when philosophy in English-speaking countries has developed high standards of argument and clear thinking, the style of theological writing has been largely influenced by . . . a very loose and sloppy style of argument. If argument has a place in theology, large-scale theology needs clear and rigorous argument.” (1977:7).

Swinburne’s writing definitely reflects the analytic-logical trend. One example of this influence on Swinburne can be seen when he defines omnipotence as “a person *P* is

¹²⁴ Sobel exemplifies this methodology. A good example is his criticism of Spinoza’s ontological argument concerning God’s existence (2009:47-48) when he writes, “Now come, using this scheme, symbolizations in a monadic quantifier calculus with identity and Russellian descriptions of six sentences featured in my articulation of his reasoning. . . .

(1) If a thing can be conceived not to exist, its essence or nature does not involve existence.

(1') $(x)(Kx \supset \sim \forall x)$

(2) Existence belongs to the nature of a substance.

(2') $(x)(Sx \supset \forall x)$

(-3) The infinite substance can be conceived not to exist.

(-3') $\{\neg x(Ix \ \& \ Sx)\} K \neg x(Ix \ \& \ Sx)$

or equivalently

$(\exists y)((x)[(Ix \ \& \ Sx) \equiv x = y] \ \& \ Ky)$

(4) If an infinite substance exists, then God is the infinite substance.

(4') $(\exists x)(Ix \ \& \ Sx) \supset \{\neg x(Ix \ \& \ Sx)\}[G = \neg x(Ix \ \& \ Sx)]$

or equivalently

$(\exists x)(Ix \ \& \ Sx) \supset (\exists y)((x)[(Ix \ \& \ Sx) \equiv x = y] \ \& \ G = y)$

(5) What cannot be conceived not to exist, exists necessarily.

(5') $(x)[\neg Kx \supset X(x)]$

(6) God, the infinite substance, necessarily exists!!

(6') $\{\neg x(Ix \ \& \ Sx)\}[G = \neg x(Ix \ \& \ Sx)] \ \& \ X(G)$

or equivalently

$(\exists y)((x)[(Ix \ \& \ Sx) \equiv x = y] \ \& \ G = y) \ \& \ X(G)$

¹²⁵ As Glock (2004) shows, nearly all of the alleged markers of analytic philosophy can be found in the works of “non-analytic” philosophers, and are occasionally missing from particular analytic philosophers. Therefore, to call them characteristic of analytic philosophy might seem a mistake. However, these characteristics continue to be typical of what people seem to mean when they refer to analytic philosophy, and there seems to be no equally useful collective label for them. Therefore, I will continue to use the term here. In any case, what really matters for the present discussion is the “family resemblance” of these features, and the fact that they are often found in the writings of the thinkers under discussion here.

omnipotent at time t if and only if he is able to bring about the existence of any logically contingent state of affairs x after t , the description of the occurrence of which does not entail that P did not bring it about at t , given that he does not believe that he has overriding reason for refraining from bringing about x " (1977:160). Although helpful for clarification and completeness given the process that led up to it, this definition hardly comes across as "natural" upon its first reading.

4.3.1.2 Morris

Morris's style is not as reflective of analytic philosophy as some, but his work definitely nods to analytic thinkers such as Kenny (1991:72-75) and Swinburne (1991:53-55, 177-179). Morris also displays his interaction with various modal theories of necessity in his section on the being of God (e.g., 1991:106-110), and possible world semantics (e.g., 1991:87, 107-113, 188-189). Another stylistic example involves Morris's use of seemingly unnecessary variables in otherwise clear statements.¹²⁶ Examples of these can be found in his discussion of God-talk (1991:18), Perfect-being theology (2013:36),¹²⁷ God's power (1991:74),¹²⁸ and God's knowledge (1991:90, 97).

¹²⁶ As some have noted, the analytic style can sometimes seem to be its own end rather than a truly helpful clarifier. Glock (2004:432) says, it can "serve no purpose other than that of adopting an intellectual posture" – especially where (citing Dennet's sarcastic comment), "the author A never puts it to any use U in any formal derivation D ." Another humorous example comes from Cortez (2013:23) when he complains about the "analytic style that frustrates almost everyone else. I have to admit that I have occasionally found myself wanting to say A iff B , where A stands for "I will read your article" and B stands for "You promise not to use logical notation."

¹²⁷ E.g., "When it is said of some object, or property, A that A is extrinsically good, what is really meant is that having A or standing in some particular relation to A is good for standing in some distinct relation R to some object or state of affairs B , something extrinsic or external to A . To say that A is good for this is to say that standing in the right relation to A is conducive to, or productive of, this further relation. But then we will in this way think of A as good or a good only if we also think of standing in R to B as itself a good thing. And if we here again have in mind extrinsic goodness, then standing in R to B must in turn be good for standing in some further relation $R1$ to some object C . That's just what extrinsic goodness requires, as we have seen. Let P' name the property of standing in relation R to object B , and (Pi') name the property of standing in $R1$ to C . In the realm of extrinsic goodness, P will be thought of as good in so far as, and only in so far as, it leads to Pi . But this will make no sense unless Pi is itself judged a good thing. And if this judgment is again one of extrinsic goodness, then Pi must be good in virtue of leading to some further relation $R2$ to some object C , the property of standing in which we - can denote as $P2$."

¹²⁸ E.g., "We can see that from the fact that God cannot act in such a way as to satisfy all the requirements of an incoherent act-description A , we cannot infer under any conditions that there is a power-to- A which God thus lacks. . . . But if he is omnipotent, then, presumably as well, for any possible

4.3.1.3 Feinberg

Feinberg seems to be the least influenced by analytic philosophy in this survey. He rarely writes using analytic terminology, symbolism, or variable-assignation. This is not surprising given that he is also the least philosophically-inclined writer of those included here. Unlike Swinburne, Morris, or Craig, Feinberg is first and foremost a theologian. Philosophy enters in often, although his primary method is purportedly theological. Feinberg is, however, clearly influenced by facets of modern philosophy of religion - as his interactions with the other theologians considered here indicates.¹²⁹ Thus, although analytic philosophy's presence in Feinberg's writing style and methodological claims may be indirect, it is nonetheless influential (even if only indirectly).

4.3.1.4 Craig

Craig's method is not only a self-proclaimed analytic philosopher, he raises appreciation for the method to a celebratory level. Beginning his discussion of ontological disproof arguments, he asserts that, "two controls have tended to guide this inquiry into the divine nature: Scripture and Perfect Being theology" (Craig and Moreland, 2003:501), his philosophical method is clearly his weapon of choice when it comes to apologetics. Indeed, one of Craig's first pieces of advice to budding Christian apologists is to train in analytic philosophy: "The relevance of philosophy to apologetics is so great that even if you do not specialize in philosophical apologetics, but choose to go into some other type of apologetics you would do well to take a strong dose of analytic philosophy . . . [which] lays great worth and emphasis on clarity of definitions, careful delineation of premises, and logical rigor of argumentation. . . . philosophy of religion over the last 40 years has shown that important apologetical issues can be brilliantly illuminated through the light of philosophical analysis." (2004).

Craig does not limit the importance of analytic philosophy to apologetics, however. Craig's apologetic methodology naturally spills over into his theologizing: "By employing the high standards of reasoning characteristic of analytic philosophy we can powerfully formulate

weight n , he can lift stones of weight n . Realizing this has led some philosophers to one of the simplest solutions which has been offered to the stone paradox. They have just claimed that 'creating a stone which even an omnipotent being can't lift,' and all its analytical equivalents, is just an incoherent act-description."

¹²⁹ E.g., Swinburne, 2013:203, 268-270, 287-288; Morris, 2013: 211-212, 256, 292, 336; and Craig, 2013:190, 740-757.

apologetic arguments for both commending and defending the Christian worldview. In recent decades, analytic philosophers of religion have shed new light on . . . arguments for the existence of God, on divine attributes such as necessity, eternity, omnipotence, omniscience, and goodness, . . . and even on peculiarly Christian doctrines like the Trinity, incarnation, [and] atonement The wealth of material which is available to the Christian apologist through the labor of analytic philosophers of religion is breath-taking. If you want to do apologetics effectively, you need to be trained in analytic philosophy.” (2004). For Craig, then, it may be more accurate to say that while Scripture provides the raw linguistic data and controls, it is perfect being theology and analytic philosophy that form his apologetic method and, consequently, his theology.¹³⁰

Clearly the influence of analytic philosophy is an important factor in the debate over ontological disproofs and the theology of those who deal with them. The important impact of analytic philosophy on modern and contemporary apologetic and theological systems is difficult to see without some familiarity with the components that mark its evolutionary stages; so to this we now turn.

4.3.2 Analytic philosophy’s historical evolution

4.3.2.1 Boole, Venn, and Frege: The new logic

In the 19th Century, significant changes in the way logic was being used to translate statements were being made. In 1879, Frege wrote his *Conceptual Notation* which contained his formalization of predicate calculus - inventing a notation for logical quantifiers and variables. Boole created an algebraic notation system for propositional logic, and in 1881 Venn developed his famous circular diagramming method in his book, *Symbolic Logic*. Potter (2008:1) begins his summary of the birth of analytic philosophy with Frege’s work. According to Dummett (1993a:667-669), Frege was one of the first to assert that a theory of language underlied all philosophy. He also gave formulation to Kant’s dictum that “existence is not a predicate.”¹³¹ This

¹³⁰ Like Morris above, Craig seems to introduce analytic variables where they do not necessarily do anything for clarification. For example, it seems difficult to imagine that much clarification is gained by the use of the “S” variable in Craig’s definition of omniscience: “For any person S, S is omniscient if and only if S knows every true proposition and believes no false proposition.” (Craig and Moreland, 2003:517).

¹³¹ Feser (2009a:55) says it is Frege who introduced a new “notion of existence into modern logic . . . [claiming] it is not a predicate of objects (that is to say, a first-level predicate), but rather a predicate of

crossover between modal forms of logic and linguistic theory would soon become a full-fledged philosophical paradigm.

Although these logical precursors and certain facets of analytic philosophy can be found from Plato to Kant (Glock, 2008:21-30), the evolution of the movement proper began at the dawn of the 20th Century. Its subsequent history can be divided into five historical phases each lasting between 10 and 20 years.

4.3.2.2 Moore and Russell: The linguistic turn

Analytic philosophy first took root in the work of G. E. Moore and Bertrand Russell who, in about 1900, offered up a competing view to the widely-accepted philosophical system of British Idealism known as Cambridge Realism. Rather than attempting to create an all-encompassing paradigm, they sought instead to develop a rigorous scientific method of analysis to deal with specific philosophical issues. Moore (and later, Russell) held to a “common sense” or “ordinary” view of the world which he believed could be described in ordinary language - not just philosophical specialists.¹³²

Russell, for his part, sought an ideal language that could bring more precision to philosophical problems. An important facet of Russell’s work was his theory that all meaningful terms referred to real objects. This ideal language came in the form of logic, wherein “the transformation of a sentence into one from which incomplete symbols have been eliminated. Such analysis aims to uncover the true logical form of propositions and facts, a form which can differ substantially from the often misleading grammatical form” (Glock, 2008:34).¹³³ It was to be

concepts (that is to say, a second-level predicate).” This distinction has undergirded much of the confusion in modern philosophy of religion concerning the validity of arguments for God’s existence (cf. 2009a:56-59).

¹³² Russell (1959: 15-16) describes his conversion this way: “G. E. Moore. . . took the lead in rebellion, and I followed, with a sense of emancipation. Bradley argued that everything common sense believes in is mere appearance; we reverted to the opposite extreme, and thought that everything is real that common sense, uninfluenced by philosophy or theology, supposes real. With a sense of escaping from prison, we allowed ourselves to think that grass is green, that the sun and stars would exist if no one was aware of them, and also that there is a pluralistic timeless world of Platonic ideas. The world, which had been thin and logical, suddenly became rich and varied and solid.”

¹³³ In the words of Glock (2008:34), Russell “pursued a *metaphysical aim by logical means*: true sentences properly analyzed are supposed to be *isomorphic* to the facts they express, and therefore logical analysis can reveal the ultimate components and structures of reality.” Thus, for example, just as

in the analysis of complex concepts and the paraphrasing of difficult propositions that the prevailing philosophical conundrums could be worked out. The task of philosophy, then, would be to provide the correct analysis of the terms used in an argument.¹³⁴

Moore and Russell's "logico-linguistic" philosophical method of analysis launched a revolutionary movement that many see as the supplanting of traditional philosophy. It became known as the "linguistic turn" –it signaled the birth of analytic philosophy, the features of which have echoed up to the modern day.¹³⁵

4.3.2.3 Wittgenstein: The ideal language

Within a decade, this "linguistic turn" was worked out further by Russell's student Ludwig Wittgenstein. In his 1922 *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein filled out the "metaphysics" of Russell's logic by introducing Logical Atomism – a view that taught that because thoughts can be completely expressed in language, then the limits of philosophy would be found in language (1922:Preface).¹³⁶ According to this view, propositions are built out of "atomic" elements corresponding to the basic constituents of the world, and therefore

the term "bachelor" might be better described as "unmarried human male," to "see a hand" might be best described as "experiencing a certain external object" (cf. Moore 1939:146-148).

¹³⁴ In this new goal, one can already see the seeds of much modern theologizing being sown, especially as they relate to the ontological disproofs – namely, that the role of the theologian (or apologist) is to argue via analysis of terms.

¹³⁵ According to Preston (s.a.), Moore's system "constituted a radical break not only with the British Idealists but with the larger philosophical tradition itself. . . . [which] seemed to be recast as the practice of linguistic analysis applied to isolated issues. Thus, the rise of Analytic Philosophy, understood as the relatively continuous growth of a new philosophical school originating in Moore's 'linguistic turn,' was eventually recognized as being not just the emergence of another philosophical school, but as constituting a 'revolution in philosophy' at large." See also Clarke (1963:366).

¹³⁶ E.g., "The book deals with the problems of philosophy and shows, as I believe, that the method of formulating these problems rests on the misunderstanding of the logic of our language. Its whole meaning could be summed up somewhat as follows: What can be said at all can be said clearly; and whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent. The book will, therefore, draw a limit to thinking, or rather—not to thinking, but to the expression of thoughts; for, in order to draw a limit to thinking we should have to be able to think both sides of this limit (we should therefore have to be able to think what cannot be thought). The limit can, therefore, only be drawn in language and what lies on the other side of the limit will be simply nonsense."

meaningful words mirror the basic constituents of the world. Consequently, the very structure of reality was, in a sense, reduced to (or at least made *equivalent* to) language and logic.¹³⁷

This work helped Russell deal with a problem in Moore's system, which said that sentences could refer to objects that did not exist such as "negative existential statements" such as, "The golden mountain does not exist." If language were to be object-based, then speaking of a non-existent object as if it were real was incoherent. Russell (1905) dealt with this problem by positing a "theory of descriptions". He argued that what he called "denoting phrases" (those using a noun preceded by direct/indirect articles) are "incomplete symbols" – possessing no meaning on their own, but rephraseable ("analyzable") into meaningful sentences that do *not* refer to nonexistent objects (1905:479). For example, to say, "The golden mountain does not exist" is taken to say, "It is not the case that there is exactly one thing that is a mountain and is golden." Here, the problematic negative existential statement was replaced by one that denies the positive assertion of an object's existence. Many philosophical issues could be resolved by exposing the grammatical sophistry of faulty systems via linguistic analysis, and translating them into clearer statements. In 1910, Russell, with Whitehead developed a symbolic logical notation which was published in their *Principia Mathematica* (Whitehead and Russell, 1963). With this, Russell had found the ideal language with which common statements could be expressed.¹³⁸

Russell's logico-linguistic analysis dovetailed nicely with Wittgenstein's logico-ontology. If all thought could be analyzed and translated into proper logical statements, and if these statements exhausted the possibility of philosophical speculation, then all of philosophy – from metaphysics to epistemology to ethics – should be able to be resolved in a scientific, even mathematical fashion.¹³⁹ Indeed, Wittgenstein felt that with his *Tractatus* he had essentially

¹³⁷ More complex propositions were called molecular propositions, logically constructed following the rules of propositional logic by linking these atomic propositions together using truth-functional connectives "and," "or" and "not" (Preston, s.a.).

¹³⁸ It is important to note that Russell's logical translations were not given in either "common" or "ordinary" language (as were Moore's). In order to gain the precision and clarity he sought, Russell instead used symbolic logical notation to express analytical sentences. For instance, in the above example, the proposition "the golden mountain does not exist" is analyzed to mean, "it is not the case that there is some object such that (1) it is a mountain, (2) it is golden, and (3) all objects that are mountains and golden are identical to it" which could then be symbolized as $\sim((\exists x)(Mx \ \& \ Gx) \ \& \ \forall y((My \ \& \ Gy) \rightarrow y=x))$.

¹³⁹ The *Tractatus* is laid out according to seven propositions: (1) The world is everything that is the case. (2) What is the case, the fact, is the existence of atomic facts. (3) The logical picture of the facts

resolved all major problems of philosophy, and so dropped out of the discipline shortly after its publication (Glock, 2008:36). The *Tractatus*'s influence, however, did not end with this Wittgenstein's philosophical retirement.

4.3.2.3 The Vienna Circle: Logical Positivism

In 1930 the Vienna Circle arose. This was a movement begun by Moritz Schlick but which was popularized by the British philosopher A. J. Ayer (1959:31). The members of the Vienna circle combined the work of Auguste Comte and Ernst Mach with Hume's empiricism and Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* into a system known as Logical Positivism (Preston, s.a. and Glock, 2008:36-38). The Logical Positivists believed (with Hume) that *a priori* propositions (such as those found in pure logic and mathematics) were necessarily true but were useless when it came to gaining knowledge, because they could ultimately do no more than express tautologies (analytical truths such as "All bodies are extended."). In order to be counted as knowledge, then, a proposition would have to be grounded in empirical experience.

This led to the Positivist's principle of verification: "Only those propositions are cognitively meaningful which are capable of being verified or falsified" (Glock, 2008:37).¹⁴⁰ Any philosophical proposition dealing with essences or natures had to be converted into linguistic expressions which could meet the verification principle's criteria. If they could not, they were meaningless. What this meant for philosophical speculation was that the pursuit of metaphysics was pointless, because its conclusions could never be verified either empirically or analytically. Thus, philosophy was reduced to empirical science and logic, and the problems of traditional philosophy were not so much resolved so much as they were simply shown to be meaningless pseudo-problems generated by the kind of unverifiable propositions commonly put forth by the

is the thought. (4) The thought is the significant proposition. (5) Propositions are truth-functions of elementary propositions. (6) The general form of a truth-function is...the general form of a proposition. (7) Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent. (Preston, s.a.). Note that 3-4 make reality and language equivalent, hence Wittgenstein's / Russell's dogma that "All philosophy is a critique of language." (4.0031).

¹⁴⁰ For Hume there were two kinds of meaningful statements: those true by definition ("analytic"), and those known to be true by experience through the senses ("synthetic"). Only definitional and sensible sensory statements, then, are meaningful. A. J. Ayer was a zealous proponent of this view, and reformulated Hume's conclusion into the principle of empirical verifiability. This, in turn, led to the view known today as "Scientism" the position that all true knowledge is scientifically derived. See Carkner (2014:5-7).

philosophers of the past. The linguistic turn begun by Moore and Russell in 1900 was now complete.

4.3.2.4 The Fall of Logical Positivism

Ayer brought the thinking of the Vienna circle and the Logical Positivists to Britain. Ayer's optimism was made manifest in his assertion that with his elucidation of the propositions of logical positivism, he had "explained the nature of truth," and that there was no longer anything "in the nature of philosophy to warrant the existence of conflicting philosophical 'schools'" for he had provided "a definitive solution of the problems which have been the chief sources of controversy between philosophers in the past." Henceforward, "the traditional disputes of philosophers are, for the most part, as unwarranted as they are unfruitful," for Ayer had established "beyond question what should be the purpose and method of philosophical inquiry. And this is by no means so difficult the task is the history of philosophy would lead one to suppose." (Ayer, 1952:31-33). For Ayer, part of the "unfruitfulness" of philosophical inquiry were those subdivisions that traditionally related to God.¹⁴¹

Despite Ayer's assurances, Logical Positivism had already begun to crumble under its own weight as its central point (the verification principle) came under attack from multiple directions. One problem with the verification criteria was that some sentences were not assertions (such as questions or exclamations) and so could not be verified as true or false by any method and yet remained meaningful. Far more devastating, the verification principle was criticized for being unable to fulfill its own criteria. Simply put, it was neither analytic (tautological), nor could it be empirically verified. By its own criterion, if the principle of verification was true, it was meaningless. Attempts to address this suicidal aspect of Logical Positivism, only resulted in widening the criteria to the point where the principle could no longer filter out the kinds of statements that it was originally intended to exclude (Glock, 2008:38-39).

¹⁴¹ As a subject of metaphysics, God is excluded from Ayer's philosophy by default: "I require of an empirical hypothesis, not indeed that it should be conclusively verifiable, but that some possible sense – experience should be relevant to the determination of its truth or falsehood. If a putative proposition fails to satisfy this principle, and it is not a tautology, and I hold that it is metaphysical, and that, being metaphysical, it is neither true nor false but literally senseless. . . . it will be found that much of what ordinarily passes for philosophy is metaphysical according to this criterion, and, in particular, that it can not be significantly asserted that there is a non-empirical world of values, or that men have immortal souls, or that there is a transcendent God." (1971:31)

The effort of Logical Positivism to reduce common speech to logic came to its most extreme in the work of Rudolph Carnap. Carnap did not think it was always possible to convert common language into strictly logical propositions. Instead of trying to eliminate unclear grammar by conversion to logic, he suggested that an entirely new language was required which included the “possible world” semantics (Glock, 2008:38).¹⁴² This represented a break from both Wittgenstein and Russell, as it disintegrated the connection between language and objective reality.

Further problems for Logical Positivism developed as the act of logical translation came under closer scrutiny. It became clear, for example, that even many scientific claims go beyond what can be verified empirically (e.g., future contingent statements), but if future contingent statements cannot fulfill the requirements of the verification principle, then they must be considered meaningless – which would eliminate the scientific enterprise.¹⁴³

The downfall of Logical Positivism continued unabated when Wittgenstein himself came to the conclusion that ordinary language cannot always be expressed in logical propositions. There are, for example numerous sentences that did not admit of truth functional analysis (such as questions, jokes, cursing, or praying - Glock, 2008:41). He further came to realize that not all words refer to objects, and therefore a 1:1 correlation between language and reality could not hold. Thus, in 1929, Wittgenstein returned to philosophy and began a critique of his own work, culminating in his *Philosophical Investigations*.¹⁴⁴

Wittgenstein continued to hold that philosophical problems had to do with the misuse or misunderstanding of language, but he rejected the analytical project as a means of resolving them. Wittgenstein now sought to return to something like Moore’s ordinary-language analysis. Thus, rather than trying to convert ordinary language into some logical system, he sought to give greater precision to ordinary language so that philosophical problems resulting from its misuse would not arise (e.g., Wittgenstein, 1958:43-44). This was to be done by analyzing how language is ordinarily used in “language games” which the philosopher would have to sort

¹⁴² Possible-world semantics now play a large role in many contemporary theologian’s methods (e.g. Plantinga, 1976).

¹⁴³ This issue is known as the “Problem of Induction” (Feser, 2010:62-73).

¹⁴⁴ Wittgenstein (1958).

through in order to eliminate problematic misunderstandings.¹⁴⁵ Part of this analysis involved ridding propositions of metaphysical concepts that did not track with ordinary usage, another part was to refocus on the objects of our grammar rather than words alone.¹⁴⁶ Other philosophers such as John Wisdom, John Austin, Gilbert Ryle, Peter Strawson, and Paul Grice followed suit, and ordinary-language philosophy became dominant once again.

Logical Positivism's internal contradictions coupled with its external criticisms (as well as Wittgenstein's and Quine's proposed solutions to them), resulted in the ultimate demise of Logical Positivism as a distinct movement by about 1965.¹⁴⁷ As will be seen, however, much of its spirit remained in various aspects of analytic philosophy as a whole.¹⁴⁸

4.3.2.5 Modern analytic philosophy

Although it would eventually become diversified the point of virtual unidentifiability, analytic philosophy developed into a more or less singular movement between the 1930's and 1950's (Glock, 2008:44). At this point in its development, several branches existed within the analytic movement as a whole based on different responses to the destruction of Logical Positivism.

¹⁴⁵ Wittgenstein defines language-games this way: "In the practice of the use of language (2) one party calls out the words, the other acts on them. In instruction in the language the following process will occur: the learner names the objects; that is, he utters the word when the teacher points to the stone. . . . We can also think of the whole process of using words in (2) as one of those games by means of which children learn their native language. I will call these games "language-games" and will sometimes speak of a primitive language as a language-game. And the processes of naming the stones and of repeating words after someone might also be called language-games." (Wittgenstein, 1953:5)

¹⁴⁶ "If the formation of concepts can be explained by facts of nature, should we not be interested, not in grammar, but rather in that in nature which is the basis of grammar?" (Wittgenstein, 1953:232).

¹⁴⁷ As Potter (2008) describes it, "Analytic philosophy was, at its birth, an attempt to escape from an earlier tradition that of Kant, and the first battleground was mathematics. Kant had claimed that mathematics is grounded neither in experience nor in logic but in the spatio-temporal structure which we ourselves impose on experience. First Frege tried to refute Kant's account in the case of arithmetic by showing that it could be derived from logic; then Russell extended the project to the whole of mathematics. Both failed, but in addressing the problems which the project generated they founded what is nowadays known as analytic philosophy or, perhaps more appropriately, as the analytic method in philosophy."

¹⁴⁸ Although Glock concludes that "analytic philosophy transcends transient phenomena" (2008:221), he believes it can be described as a tradition trackable by features such as the linguistic turn, rejection of metaphysics, the philosophy/science distinction, reductive analysis, formal logic, scientific orientation, argument, and clarity (2008:218).

It was toward the end of this time that W. V. O. Quine came into prominence when he attacked Logical Positivism's distinction between analytic and synthetic propositions, and rejected the entire project of logical reduction. He collapsed the distinction between philosophy and science, and introduced a radical empiricism that resulted in a thoroughgoing naturalism (Glock, 2008:44-46). For Quine, philosophy was essentially contiguous with natural science, and thus all genuine knowledge was reduced to scientific knowledge – a position later known as “scientism”.¹⁴⁹

Having been founded on the idea that philosophical problems were really linguistic issues in disguise, analytic philosophy found itself in danger of losing its identity. Without linguistic philosophy at its core, there existed no common philosophical method. Although retaining something of a “family resemblance” to Logical Positivism, analytic philosophy could no longer be defined by any singular characteristic (Glock, 2008:205). The movement therefore disintegrated into numerous sub-fields such as philosophy of language, philosophy of mind, philosophy of science, philosophy of religion, philosophy of law, and others. Finally, after suffering much neglect for nearly a generation, the fields of epistemology, ethics, and even metaphysics came back to the foreground of philosophical studies as well.¹⁵⁰

4.3.3 Analytic philosophy: conclusion

Although Glock and others have sought to refute the idea that analytic philosophy can today be defined by its original features of precision, conceptual clarity, or systematic rigor, these certainly were defining characteristics during much of its history (Glock, 2008:168-173).¹⁵¹ Because of its emphasis on language and analysis, analytic philosophy was

¹⁴⁹ Unfortunately for Quine, scientism suffers the same internal contradiction that Logical Positivism did – namely, its premise cannot itself fulfill its own criteria of empirical verifiability.

¹⁵⁰ As Preston (s.a.) notes, however, “Metaphysics has undergone a certain sort of renaissance in post-linguistic Analytic Philosophy. Although contemporary Analytic Philosophy does not readily countenance traditional system-building metaphysics (at least as a respected professional activity), it has embraced the piecemeal pursuit of metaphysical questions so wholeheartedly that metaphysics is now seen as one of its three most important sub-disciplines. (The other two are epistemology and the philosophy of language; all three are frequently referred to as “core” analytic areas or sub-disciplines.)”

¹⁵¹ E.g., Phillips, 2014: 177-178 and Critchley, 2001: 32-35. Dummett notes that although the linguistic turn was the literally-defining moment for Analytic Philosophy, it continues to be influential today: “What distinguishes analytical philosophy, in its diverse manifestations, from other schools is the belief, first, that a philosophical account of thought can be attained through a philosophical account of language, and, secondly, that a comprehensive account can only be so attained. Widely as they differed from one

characterized as a revolutionary “linguistic turn” from metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics – and although the limiting of the subject matter of philosophy to language / logic failed, its echoes are still being heard today. While analytic philosophy *proper* was birthed in the context of a now-defunct philosophical system (Logical Positivism), important elements of that system have remained in the analytic process (e.g., linguistic focus and use of meticulous symbolization, modal logic, possible-world semantics, etc.). Whatever evolutions it has undergone, analytic philosophy today remains loyal to many of the tenants of its previous incarnations – even if indirectly. Moreover, its influence has extended into much of what is offered in the fields of Christian apologetics¹⁵² and theology¹⁵³ today.

4.4 Conclusion

As has been shown, much of the impetus behind the theologizing of the above representatives of modern philosophy of religion is a starting point in a reductionistic version of Anselmian perfect being theology which is worked out according to the practices of analytic philosophy. Besides the problematic conclusions reached by thinkers employing these methods

another, the logical positivists, Wittgenstein in all phases of his career, Oxford ‘ordinary language’ philosophy and post-Carnapian philosophy in the United States is represented by Quine and Davidson all adhered to these twin axioms.” (1993b:4-5). A helpful resource for seeing the continuing tension between Analytic and the more classical philosophical school is O’Callahan, 2003. cf. Phillips, 2014: 177-178 and Critchley, 2001: 32-35).

¹⁵² Sobel’s work bears elegant testimony to this assertion – he devotes numerous pages to providing formal proofs via “quantified modal logic, a theory of possible worlds, notes on Cantorian set theory, and remarks concerning nonstandard hyperreal numbers.” (2009:3). Such methodology is not limited to the ivory tower philosophers of religion, but can be found in popular-level writing as well. For example, the theistic philosopher Paul Copan responds to the charge that the concept of God’s necessary existence involves incoherency by saying, “Theists, however, respond that the appropriation of modal logic and the language of possible worlds supports the idea of divine necessity and undermines the incoherence charge regarding the notion of logically necessary being.” (2005:1). It is interesting that even in a popular-level book, this apologist speaks freely of modal logic and possible worlds semantics – both of which are historical tools of Analytic Philosophy.

¹⁵³ Indeed, the rise of “Analytic Theology” is a direct result of the intentional mingling of analytic philosophical methods and Christian theology (Rea and Crisp, 2011). One of the movement’s progenitors, Michael Rea, defines Analytic Theology as “the activity of approaching theological topics with the ambitions of an analytic philosopher and in a style that conforms to the prescriptions that are distinctive of analytic philosophical discourse.” (2009:7). Many thinkers in this nascent movement thankfully acknowledge many of the potential issues involved with this method. The movement’s titular journal has devoted several articles its own critical evaluation (e.g., Abraham, 2013; Cortez, 2013; and Wood, 2014), and others to the kinds of theological criticisms made in this paper (e.g., Adams, 2014 and Torrance, 2013).

(chapter 3), these approaches seem to have difficulties of their own – especially when they are put to work dealing with God’s attributes.

First, although famous for his “greatest possible being” axiom, it is clear that Anselm’s theological methodology incorporated much more than may at first be clear from his purely philosophical experiments. Anselm went beyond mere “intuitions” and submitted his thinking to both Scriptural teaching and Church tradition.¹⁵⁴ Unbound from these twin adjudicators, it is difficult to see how far one’s theological intuitions may be taken, and the fact that some of these apologetic practitioners have strayed from objective orthodoxy (see 3.6) reveals that this is not merely a theoretical concern.¹⁵⁵

Second, analytic philosophy’s roots in the movement from metaphysical to linguistic methodology in theology may be responsible in part for the riddle of ontological disproofs themselves.¹⁵⁶ Analytic philosophy takes as its starting point the idea that common language is imprecise and therefore potentially philosophically misleading. Thus, many problems of philosophy are considered resolvable if they can simply be expressed with greater clarity. It is possible, though, that the process of translation of terms and propositions into the “ideal language” of symbolic logic involves also a *restriction* of concepts based on theological or philosophical presuppositions.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ Leftow points out that more than mere intuitions must be behind Anselm’s thinking, for, in order to derive a divine attribute in this manner, one would already have to know what attributes God can have in the first place. Contrary conclusions can follow from the same “Anselmic starting point” and, “each conclusion would follow in widely accepted modal logic” (2004:142).

¹⁵⁵ Sobel, in fact, implies that such thinking leads many to skepticism: “Not every perfect-being theist is a skeptic, witness Swinburne, and not every sceptic is a perfect-being theist, witness Hume. So far symmetry. But probably nowadays a greater percentage of perfect-being theists are sceptics than are sceptics who are perfect-being theists for ‘proportional asymmetry’.” (2009:609).

¹⁵⁶ As early as 1961, Ferré had already noted that atheistic philosophical criticism was becoming lodged in linguistic and logical methodologies which threatened theism by definition, or simply dismissed it *a priori* (1961:46-66).

¹⁵⁷ A good example of philosophical presuppositions being read into (or creating) logical systems is found in Feser (2009a:56-57). There he discusses Frege’s difficulty with the idea that existence is a predicate. He gives the example of the sentence “Cats exist.” For Frege, the translation of the sentence into logic would require that one writes, “There is at least one *x* such that *x* is a cat.” The problem here is that “cat” is not being treated as a substance – an actually existing entity – but as a concept.

A similar problem arises when one considers the validity of certain categorical arguments. Some which would be considered valid on an Aristotelian analysis would be invalid according to a Venn diagram. Take, for example, the argument “*All dogs are mammals. Some dogs are brown. Therefore some mammals are brown.*” Aristotle does not consider these so-called existential (“is”) statements to be predicating the actual existence of such things, whereas for Venn and other modern logicians they do. An

From these two concerns arises a third: It may be that the intuitions necessary for a precise concept of the greatest possible being in the Anselmian sense, and the precision with which analytic philosophy must operate, may simply be unavailable. That one may intuit God's attributes and then speak of them with such a high degree of accuracy has historically been seen as questionable if not simply impossible.¹⁵⁸ There is in Christianity a long tradition of apophatic (negative) theology that can be found in pre-Christian philosophers, the biblical writings, and in many of the Christian theologians of the Apostolic, Medieval, Reformation, Modern, and Contemporary eras. This "negative theology," in turn, gave rise to the idea that accurate God-talk is *analogical* (rather than the *univocal* speech that would seem to be required by analytic theologizing). These traditions are the subject of the next chapter (5), to be followed by the concluding chapter (6) which will develop a more traditional response to the ontological disproof arguments as well as some of the apologetic responses offered above (chapters 2-3).

issue arises when there are no existing instances of the subject of a given categorical proposition (such as unicorns). Now we are dealing with "empty sets" – categories which "include" non-existent things. How can we speak of the properties of non-existent things? These cause problems when handling contradictory statements. If the subject of a proposition is an empty category (true of nothing), then "*Some S is P*" would be false. But then its contradictory "*No S is P*" would be true – implying that "*Some S is not P*" is also true (but which is considered false if there aren't any S's).

Thus, most contemporary logic texts have taken to assigning "existential import" only to particular (i.e., non-universal) categorical statements and symbolizing them as such (e.g., "*For all X's if S is an X then P is an X.*"). In this system "*Every S is P*" is true even when there are no S's, but "*Some S is P*" is false when there are no S's. The result is that while the proposition "*All unicorns have horns*" has no existential import (does not imply the existence of unicorns), the proposition "*Some unicorns have horns*" does!

Once again it is not so much a matter of logic *per se* as it is the philosophical presuppositions behind certain logical systems. For the classical logician, logic, like math, properly deals with *form* – not *matter* (1 unicorn + 1 unicorn = 2 unicorns because 1+1=2, not because there are any unicorns). Categorical propositions were never meant to imply existential import. However, in order for the formal rules to work it must be "assumed" that there are no empty categories - but this assumption is not problematic if we remember that we are speaking of *formal (universal) definitions* and not necessarily *material (particular) existences* (which is why modern Venn Diagrams do not track the same validity patterns as do Aristotle's rules – for Venn this is not how logic tracks reality). For more on this issue and similar problems (such as the "Paradox of Material Implication") see Veatch (1969) and Kreeft (2010:16-27).

¹⁵⁸ Taliaferro (2014, 4:1) gives a good summary of the issue of thought experiments with regard to the attributes of God: "We might have a good grasp of what is meant by the claim that a being is omniscient while having little idea of how a being might be so. Thought experiments aimed at giving some sense to the Divine attribute of omniscience have been advanced . . . Utilizing thought experiments and language in this way, philosophical theology has a stake in the soundness and richness of the imagination, picturing the way things might be 'in one's mind's eye,' whether or not this relies on any actual imagery. Philosophers are now more cautious about drawing such inferences as we are increasingly aware of how some features of an imagined state of affairs might be misconceived or overlooked."

Chapter 5: Apophatic theology and analogical God-talk

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter two underlying assumptions were shown to be driving modern responses to ontological disproofs. First, from what has been called the “Anselmian” theological method theology (as it is commonly construed) comes the idea that theology may be pursued by investigation intuition-based “great making properties.” Second, the influence of analytical philosophy can make it appear that discussion of such intuitions can (and should) reach an almost mathematical level of precision. As will be shown in this chapter, two important streams in traditional Christian theology call these two assumptions into question.¹⁵⁹

The first of these is *apophatic theology*. Apophaticism (from the Greek *αποφατικός* - “other-than-speech”) describes a manner of system of “not speaking” resulting in “negative theology” (*via negativa*). This is in contrast with *kataphatic* (“speaking-with”) or “positive theology” (*via affirmativa*). Apophatic theology is said to be a mystery-preserving system (McGuckin, 2014:31-32), teaching that because God exceeds human thinking and language, the best one can do when speaking of God is to say what he is not.¹⁶⁰ The prevalence of apophatic thinking throughout the history of Christian theologizing contrasts with the more kataphatic modern methodologies which rely on intuitions expressed in overly-precise language.

A second important facet of traditional Christian theology provides what might be called a linguistic balance between a purely apophatic or kataphatic theological methodology. For reasons that will be made clear below it seems that for the Christian theologian, neither a completely negative nor completely positive system of theology is legitimate when considering the existence and attributes of the Christian God. Because this is the case, neither a completely equivocal nor a completely univocal means of communicating theological positions can be

¹⁵⁹ It is important to note at this point that whatever criticism this “Anselmian” and analytic philosophy may fall victim to, this should not be construed as concluding that either method is illicit *per se*. Rather, the concern here is their propriety when considering God’s attributes.

¹⁶⁰ As Millsaps (2006:14) notes, “To be effective, the language of apophasis must be employed alongside its antithesis. Kataphatic Theology, or the employment of the discourse of kataphasis, is language whereby positive or affirmative statements are made about the transcendent. In the context of apophatic discourse, once any affirmative statement concerning the transcendent is made, it immediately demands an act of ‘unsaying’. The discourse between apophatic and kataphatic language can reach an intensity such that no single proposition concerning God can remain by itself. The corrective ‘unsaying’ which cancels the previous proposition is in itself a ‘saying’ that must be ‘unsaid’. . . . In that ephemeral moment between the ‘saying’ and ‘unsaying’, thesis and antithesis, the mind knows nothing and encounters that which is beyond knowing.” See Sells, 1994:3.

appropriate. In between these two lies the method of analogical God-talk, which states that while human thought and language can never be adequate to describe God or his attributes, it nevertheless can make true statements concerning him (even if they are only true in a way that exceeds human thought and language). Analogical God-talk, too, would not sit well with a theological system that takes as its starting point the idea that one's theological intuitions and language are, or even can be, highly accurate.

If it is the case that apophatic theology and analogical God-talk are more legitimate means of doing theology, then this would mitigate the value of the modern approaches surveyed above. Further, if these traditional methods yield more traditional results, and departure from them leads to nontraditional, unorthodox, or even heretical conclusions, this too would call into question the legitimacy of the modern methods. What follows is a brief survey and exposition of the contrasting teachings of kataphaticism and apophaticism, as well as the "via media" of analogical theology.

5.2 Via affirmativa: kaphatic theology

5.2.1 Kataphaticism introduction

Kataphatic theology "emphasizes the similarity that exists between God and creatures. Because God can be found in all things, the affirmative way recommends the use of concepts, images, and symbols as a way of contemplating God" (Egan, 1984:31). Kataphaticism can be indexed to one's view of God's immanence in his creation or (for the Christian) Christ in his incarnation. When used in a specifically Christian sense, it most often has reference to knowledge of God resulting from Jesus' incarnation rather than the nature of God *per se*.¹⁶¹

Although not a technically unorthodox practice, kataphaticism has never reached the popularity of the more apophatic movements within Christianity (perhaps due to the influence of pagan philosophy). No pure kataphatic system exists or has existed in Christian theology, even

¹⁶¹ Egan says, "richly incarnational, kataphatic, mysticism is solidly rooted in Jesus life, death, and resurrection." (1984:xvii). To the degree that Christian groups emphasize this aspect of the faith, one might expect a more kataphatic mode of thought. Mark Noll, for example, points out that, "their approach to prayer, as contemporary American evangelicals, is the complete opposite [of Mother Teresa's]. It is kataphatic (from Greek for "to affirm positively"), or prayer engaged as the deliberate effort to fill the mind with images of God, words from the Bible about God, memories about God's presence, and rehearsals of church teaching about God" (Noll, 2012).

if the term is occasionally attached to a given thinker or school.¹⁶² Yet, even in such cases, the labeling of a theology, theologian, or theological method as “kataphatic” is often done as a means of contrasting it with more strongly apophatic persons or positions.¹⁶³ This does not mean that strong kataphatic tendencies do not exist, however. Even among the more strongly apophatic thinkers. This is especially true for Christian theologians who have as part of their source material a written revelation of God. The idea that positive statements must be able to speak accurately about God comes, then, from three primary sources: the Christian Scriptures, theology, and philosophy.

5.2.2 Kataphaticism in Christian scripture

In the Bible there are numerous instances of people said to see God. For example, “when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram” (Gen. 17:1). And later, “the LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, while he was sitting at the tent door in the heat of the day” (Gen. 18:1). In Exodus 6:2-3 God tells Moses, “I am the LORD; and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name, LORD, I did not make Myself known to them.” Note again the interplay between revelation and hiddenness of God – both affirmed in the same statement. Moses, too, seemed to have more than negative experiences of God’s presence: “Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel . . . and they saw God, and they ate and drank” (Ex. 24:9-11). God himself said of Moses that, “he is faithful in all My household; with him I speak mouth to mouth, even openly, and not in dark sayings, and he beholds the form of the LORD” (Ex. 12:6-8).

In Psalm 97, just after his apophatic declaration of God’s “dwelling in darkness,” the psalmist seems to reverse its negative connotations: “His lightnings light up the world; the earth sees and trembles”. In Psalm 139, David speaks of God’s immanence even as he admits that this “knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it,” but David also wrote, “As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness” (Ps. 17:15).

¹⁶² For example, Egan (1984), lists Ignatius of Loyola’s work *The Spiritual Exercises* as something of a kataphatic work, and he labels Saint Teresa of Avila as a “kataphatic mystic” (1984: 32 and xvii respectively).

¹⁶³ I am reminded here of the humorous definition of a “hyper-Calvinist” as “anyone who is more Calvinistic than I am.”

When one turns to the New Testament, God's appearances are affirmed: "The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham" (Acts 7:2). Jesus Himself promised that, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Mat. 5:8). The apostle Paul calls God's attributes "invisible" and yet he is clearly seen (Rom. 1:20), and even as Paul affirms the unknowable mystery of God, he says we have access to it via revelation: "we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. . . . 'no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him' these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit . . . no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 2:7-11). Finally, the apostle John notes that in the eschaton, "The throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve him. They shall see his face." (Rev. 22:3-4).

As will be seen below (§5.3.2), the Bible is also replete with apophatic statements as well. This tension is not surprising given the subject matter (God), and is also reflected in those who have sought to exposit biblical writings and the nature of God as well. While in Christian theology there is, traditionally, a decidedly apophatic bent (see §5.3.4-5.3.6 below), even among Christian theologians a kataphatic acknowledgement can be found as well.

5.2.3 Kataphaticism in Christian theology

While it is not difficult to find individual statements purporting to give positive knowledge of God's nature, it is safe to say that a completely kataphatic system, or even an explicit position, does not exist in the Christian tradition. This is because, as Neville (2015:288) states, "apophatic theology is not a rejection all [sic] theological engagement of the ultimate in favor of disengagement. Rather, it is a rejection of certain kataphatic theology as too limiting for the ultimate. . . . apophatic in kataphatic theology necessarily go hand-in-hand." And, as Egan (1978:405) asserts, "any genuine Christian mysticism must contain apophatic as well as kataphatic elements." This is especially true for Christians, because "God has communicated Himself in a history whose highpoint is the person of Jesus Christ, his life, death, and resurrection is the history of God Himself. The kataphatic tradition underscores that God Himself has had a history and that the way to Him is through that history. The great Christian mysteries, therefore, embody, incarnate, contain, and reveal the history of God Himself." (Egan, 1978:424).

While negation is typically far stronger than any purportedly balancing positive counterexample, even the most apophatic treatise has components of kataphaticism present

(and vice versa).¹⁶⁴ This is evident in the writings of apophatic theologians themselves. Most went on to write voluminous material on the nature of God – an incoherent act for a pure apophaticist. Certainly none, after having made their negative assertions concerning human knowledge of God, simply laid down their pens.

5.2.4 Kataphaticism in Christian philosophy

Indeed, such a pure apophaticism is not only theologically problematic (especially for the Christian who affirms a revelation of God via prophets and apostles), it seems to be philosophically impossible. To get an idea of the kinds of arguments used to support such an assertion, we need look no further than some of the modern apologists surveyed in this work.

5.2.4.1 Morris

Morris devotes most of his first chapter in *Our Idea of God* to the issue of the possibility of God-talk. He notes that many traditional theologians deny that human language is sufficient for describing God, but he believes that they are in error - and that these errors are easy to spot (Morris, 1991:17). Morris's (1991:18-19) first contention is that the idea that terms developed to describe common experience cannot be employed to describe God (who is beyond experience) is mistaken. How else, Morris asks, could we use previously-learned words to describe new experiences? Morris believes that behind such thinking is the flawed assumption that "the sole possible function of at least the descriptive forms of human language is to encode previous experience". Although such an experience of God would be difficult to describe, Morris does not believe that this means it could not be: "it is one thing to say that some experience of God is, or even is bound to be, ineffable, and quite another to say that God is always and altogether beyond human description".

Second, Morris (1991:17) argues that the presuppositions underlying what he calls "theological pessimism" are self-defeating. It is, for example, impossible for God and creatures to share literally no properties in common, because "they would then have to share at least one property in common: (P) The property of having a set of properties not shared by some being with a very different ontological status" (1991:21). Because this "property" would be shared by both God and creature, any theology-blocking claim asserting on God's radical difference would

¹⁶⁴ Even the anonymous paradigm of apophatic theologizing, *The Cloud of Unknowing* has a "kataphatic basis and moments [that] stand out in bold relief (Egan, 1978:409).

necessarily be false. A more straightforward example of the self-defeating nature of theological pessimism is what Morris (1991:21) calls the “main, extreme conceptual claim definitive of theological pessimism: (TP) No human concepts can apply to God.” If (TP) were true, argues Morris, then no human concepts could apply to God. However, if that were the case, then “at least one human concept would have to apply to him, namely, (C) The concept of being such as to escape characterization by human concepts”. In other words, the human concept that no human concepts can apply to God is self-defeating if applied to God – which it must to do its intended work.

Third, Morris (1991:22) argues that theological pessimism has devastating epistemological problems, for “to claim that God escapes characterization by most substantive, informative human concepts is to make a fairly weighty claim which itself seems to imply or presuppose some pretty important knowledge about God”. The issue is that in order to know the truth about God (that we cannot know the truth about God), we must know the truth about God (that we cannot know the truth about God). Such a self-referentially incoherent position is clearly untenable. Morris (1991:23) applies this same thinking to the claims of apophatic theology:

“How can we ever be justified in saying what something is not unless we have some sense of what it is? This one question reveals the weakness endemic to any severely, or exclusively, negative theology. Rational denial seems clearly to presuppose rational affirmation”.

Finally, Morris argues that biblical theism seems to indicate that human concepts can, somehow, attain to the nature of God. “If God is infinite Mind and has brought into existence minded creatures in his image,” writes Morris (1991:25), “then it might be expected that those creatures’ minds could grasp something of his existence and nature. But this tentative expectation is boosted to a degree of confident anticipation by another biblical doctrine—the doctrine that we have been created by a perfectly good and loving God for the purpose of having communion with him”. How can humans commune with a being whose nature and existence are necessarily beyond human comprehension? Morris thinks it is impossible, therefore, “the doctrines of the *imago dei* (the image of God), and the purpose of human creation already presuppose that we can have substantive knowledge of God . . . They seem clearly to do this”.

Morris (1991:23) concludes his consideration of (purely) apophatic theology by stating, “Despite the worries they have caused many thinkers of the past, none of these attempts to debar us from the possibility of engaging in positive, rational discourse about God can be judged a success”. However, even here Morris notes that a certain “intellectual humility” is

called for when dealing with “what is indeed an exalted and ultimate subject.” Thus, in going forward with his “positive” theological project, Morris (1991:24) cautions that, “we most likely will have to stretch our cognitive abilities to their maximum extent. We should not expect it to be very easy. Nor should we be surprised that in order to stretch our cognitive grasp, we may occasionally have to stretch our concepts and our ordinary language far beyond the circumstances of their usual employment”. Morris then offers the analogical God-talk of Thomas Aquinas and the “distinctively religious symbolism, and the role of metaphor in theological language” of other theorists as examples of just such a process. Although Morris does not specifically affirm or deny univocal God-talk, the above affirmation and his further use of analogy/analogies in his work seem to point to his acceptance of analogous God-talk, however imprecise.¹⁶⁵

5.2.4.2 Swinburne

Swinburne (1977:72) points to the necessity of univocal God-talk in theology when he argues that, “If theology uses too many words in analogical senses it will convey virtually nothing”. Indeed, for Swinburne, analogy is only to be used in extreme cases when it is necessary to save one’s theological system from attack: “The claim that he is using a word in an analogical sense must be for the theist a last resort to save his system from a charge of incoherence which would otherwise stick.”¹⁶⁶ Thus, the theologian – especially one engaged in theological apologetics – “must claim that he is using many words in ordinary senses” (Swinburne, 1977:72). The assumption, for Swinburne, is that theologians are using words in their ordinary senses.¹⁶⁷ When acting in his apologetic role, Swinburne (1977:62) notes that “once we give analogical senses to words, proofs of coherence or incoherence become very difficult,” and at the end of his project defending God from charges of incoherence, Swinburne (1977:241) claims he “has in no way relied on supposing that words are used in analogical senses.”

¹⁶⁵ E.g., Morris, 1991:61-62, 162, 170-171, 181-182.

¹⁶⁶ This sentiment is repeated several times throughout *The Coherence of Theism* (e.g., Swinburne, 1977:178, 215, 221, 280, 297

¹⁶⁷ Swinburne’s fullest treatment of linguistic positions is found in his 2007 book, *Revelation: From Metaphor To Analogy*. Swinburne considers analogy to be founded on overlapping, but not identical, “predicate schemas” – thus, the same word can be used of radically different beings so long as a qualification to the word is used (e.g., the man is good, God is *all-good*).

5.2.4.3 Craig

Craig (2012) believes that denial of univocity leaves one in a state of unacceptable agnosticism. He makes his position on God-talk clear when he says, “I agree wholeheartedly with Scotus that there is a univocal concept of being which applies to both God and creatures. One of the aspects of Thomas Aquinas’ thought that I find most disturbing is his claim that we can speak of God only in analogical terms. Without univocity of meaning, we are left with agnosticism about the nature of God, able to say only what God is not, not what He is.”¹⁶⁸

Craig (contra Morris) considers even analogical God-talk to be insufficient to guard against agnosticism. Craig (2012) implies that without the univocity of being between God and creature, theological dialogue is fruitless: “Scotus rightly saw that when we say that God is or exists, we are using the term in the same sense in which we say that a man is or exists. When in discussions with atheists I affirm, ‘God exists’ and they reply, ‘God does not exist,’ we may need to be sure that we mean the same thing by ‘God,’ but there is no equivocation on the meaning of ‘exists.’”¹⁶⁹

As noted above (3.6.4), Craig’s views of God’s nature have come under fire from those espousing a classical view of God’s attributes. In too many cases, Craig’s views seem to be motivated by an overly-anthropomorphic consideration of God’s attributes (another cause/result of univocal predication). Feser (2013) sees Craig’s theology as being close to divine personalism which sees God as a person alongside other persons or a being alongside other beings: “Theistic personalists, by contrast, tend to begin with the idea that God is “a person” just as we are persons, only without our corporeal and other limitations. Like us, he has attributes like power, knowledge, and moral goodness; unlike us, he has these features to the maximum possible degree. The theistic personalist thus arrives at an essentially anthropomorphic conception of God.” Further, as Feser (2009b) notes, in Craig’s denial of the classic doctrine of divine simplicity, he “makes no reference here to the famous Thomistic doctrine of analogy, which from a Thomistic point of view is crucial to properly understanding divine simplicity.”

¹⁶⁸ Like others (see next footnote), Beckwith thinks that in this, Craig goes too far. Concerning this comment, Beckwith suggests that, “the difference between what Bill says here and what LDS [Latter-day Saints / Mormon] scholars say about God is only a matter of degree not kind. If God is not Pure Actuality-- if in fact he has potency - what’s the harm in saying he is in some sense [sic] material. In fact, it almost makes it easier.” (Personal correspondence: https://www.facebook.com/dmbeaumont1989/posts/822055964547450?comment_id=822080654544981&offset=0&total_comments=2¬if_t=share_comment. Date of access: 15, May 2015).

¹⁶⁹ This is an odd example for Craig to use as it does not actually require univocity of being between God and creatures as “exists” is being predicated of God in both instances.

Because Craig is actually speaking in univocal terms, his understanding of divine simplicity is not what the classical view asserts. Feser (2009b) concludes that Craig's belief that the doctrine is unintelligible is only plausible only if "we think of God as having an essence, as existing, and as having power, knowledge, etc. in the same or univocal sense in which we and other creatures have these things."

5.2.5 Kataphaticism conclusion

Voltaire is said to have quipped that, "God has made us in his image, and we have returned the favor." Paul D'Holbach (2003:424) seems to agree, and even believes that this is how man's conception of God arose when he says that man,

"originally borrowed from himself the traits, the colors, the primitive lineaments of which he composed his God, . . . In order to render his divinities still more different from their creatures, it assigned them, over and above the usual qualities of man, properties so marvelous, so uncommon, so far removed from everything of which is mine could form a conception, that he lost sight of them himself. From thence he persuaded himself these qualities were defined because he could no longer comprehend them . . . theology obtained the point of persuading man he must believe that which he could not conceive . . . [which] made mortals implicitly believe that they were not formed to comprehend the thing of all others the most important to themselves. . . . theological metaphysical attributes [which] were in fact nothing but pure negations of the qualities found in man or in those means of which he has a knowledge."

For D'Holbach, then, the genesis of apophatic theology was an imaginative abstraction from creaturely features. The resulting being, however, became so far removed from its creatures that worship became impossible, and so it had to be "brought down to earth" by assigning various creature-like attributes (e.g., causation, immanence). In doing so, man's idea of God became incoherent, and as D'Holbach (2003:425) describes it, "the wonderful properties of this theological being every moment contradicted themselves." D'Holbach (2003:437) concludes that, "the ideas which theology gives us of the divinity will always be confused and incompatible and will necessarily disturb the repose of human nature."

Prescinding from his ultimate conclusion (the non-existence of God), D'Holbach's attack on this sort of theological methodology may also reveal the problem with atheistic ontological disproofs in general. The kind of creaturely knowledge that these arguments presuppose is attainable by their interlocutors may simply be unavailable due to the very nature of the subject (God). This, in fact, is Armstrong's driving point in *The Case for God* (2010) where she argues

that modern atheism fails to account for ubiquitous traditional views of God which lean heavily toward apophaticism.¹⁷⁰

5.3 Via negativa: apophatic theology

5.3.1 Introduction to apophatic theology

Apophatic theology stresses the unknowingness of God, and therefore the inability of language to describe God with accuracy. Zizioulas (1997:90), for example, says that God is “a simple, unknowable existence, inaccessible to all things and completely unexplainable, He is beyond affirmation and negation. And therefore truth lies beyond the choice between affirmation and negation.” Apophaticism recognizes that in describing the transcendent with terms of immanence, a dilemma will always be generated (known as “*aporia*”). Of course, the very formula “X is beyond words” is itself paradoxical – for whatever is used to fill in for ‘X’ will be a word itself, and the statement is made up of words. Thus, for every statement made concerning divinity (whether positive or negative) its opposite must also be affirmed *ad infinitum*. Thus, to the degree that one affirms the “negative theology” of apophaticism, one must deny the “positive theology” of its opposite (kataphaticism). For the apophatic theologian, this Saying-Unsaying dialectic is not a problem. Rather it is the very process which is said to lead to true mystical knowledge of God.¹⁷¹

Armstrong (2009:15-26) points out that apophatic patterns of thought can be found as early as the 5th century B.C. in both Eastern¹⁷² and Western religions and philosophy. For the

¹⁷⁰ E.g., in summarizing her work, Armstrong says (2009:320), “All faith systems have been at pains to show that the ultimate cannot be adequately expressed in any theoretical system, however August, because it lies beyond words and concepts. . . . The process that should have led to a stunned appreciation of and “otherness” beyond the competence of language ended prematurely. The result is that many of us have been left stranded with an incoherent concept of God. . . . Not surprisingly, when we attained intellectual maturity, many of us rejected the God we had inherited and denied that he existed.” She goes on to say (2009:327) concerning the new atheism, “An intelligent atheist critique could help us to rinse our minds of the more facile theology that is impeding our understanding of the divine. We may find that for a while we have to go into what mystics called the dark night of the soul or the cloud of unknowing.”

¹⁷¹ Cf. Sells (1994:2-7), who asserts that three key features distinguish apophaticism: (1) the appearance of the metaphor of overflowing or emanation, (2) an effort at disontological portrayal of the transcendent, and (3) a dialectic between transcendence and immanence. These vary in both quality and quantity, but do serve as markers for apophatic thinking.

¹⁷² This trait is exhibited in the writings of the philosopher-poet founder of Taoism, Lao-Tse who begins his Tao Teh Ching with these words: “The name [the Tao] that can be named is not the enduring

purposes of this writing, a brief historical-theology survey will be given below, beginning with the Judeo-Christian Scriptures.¹⁷³

5.3.2 Biblical authors

Although the Christian Scriptures purport to be God's revelation of Himself to humankind,¹⁷⁴ there is a strong apophatic stream within its pages. While this is especially true of the Old Testament, negative statements concerning man's knowledge of God are not difficult to find in the New Testament. Further, many of the more positive statements concerning knowledge of God concern the Incarnation of Jesus Christ,¹⁷⁵ and thus refer immediately to Jesus' human, rather than divine, nature.

The theophanies of Exodus are classic apophatic texts. Even after Moses's people are ritually cleansed in preparation for God's visitation on Mt. Sinai (Ex. 19:10-15), they are instructed not to touch even the base of the mountain upon which God will manifest (Ex. 19:21-24). The dark cloud that obscures God appears again in Exodus 24, and forms a repeated motif of Israelite worship (e.g., 1 Kgs. 8). Later, Moses himself is denied direct knowledge of God, but

and unchanging name." The Buddhist emphasis on non-duality and emptiness might also be characterized as a form of apophaticism. Mahayana Buddhism in particular affirms the concept of *sūnyatā* ("emptiness") which was later given scholarly extrapolation by Nagarjuna. According to Armstrong (2009:11), even the earliest "nature worship" cults have a more mystical view of the divine that is often supposed. "People did not bow down and worship a rock . . . The rock was simply a focus that directed their attention to the mysterious essence of life." She also speaks of the Aryan tribes of India living in about 4,500 B.C. who believed that everything was a manifestation of an "all-pervading spirit" known as *manya* (renamed Brahman by the tenth century B.C.). This spirit was "a power that was higher, deeper, and more fundamental than the gods," and furthermore it could never be defined because "language refers only to individual beings and Brahman was 'the All.'" (2009:12).

¹⁷³ Biblical quotations in English are from the *New Revised Standard Version* (1989) unless otherwise noted.

¹⁷⁴ E.g., Dt. 6:4, 29:29; Isa. 44; -46; Heb. 1:1; 1 Jn. 4:16.

¹⁷⁵ Probably the most kataphatic statement in the New Testament is made with regard to Jesus' incarnation: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." (Jn. 14:9), yet this seemingly straightforward statement is immediately qualified: "I am in the Father and the Father is in me . . . The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me" (Jn. 14:10-11).

is only allowed to see God's "back" (Ex. 33:22-23).¹⁷⁶ These "hiddenness" motifs in Exodus will become allegories for later apophatic theologians.¹⁷⁷

Besides the Exodus examples, there are direct and indirect declarations of God's unknowability elsewhere in the Old Testament. David describes being rescued from Saul by God in terms reminiscent of His Exodus appearances in darkness and clouds: "He bowed the heavens, and came down; thick darkness was under his feet. . . . He made darkness his covering around him, his canopy thick clouds dark with water." (Ps. 18:9-11). The psalmist says that, "clouds and thick darkness are all around" God (Ps. 97:2). In Psalm 139, David opines about God's greatness and inescapability, yet at the same time admits that even this "knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it" (Ps. 139:6). Indeed, when contemplating God's greatness, David himself is theoretically covered in darkness penetrable only by God's knowledge (Ps. 139:10 cf. 17-18).

Job offers another glimpse into the difficulty of knowing God. He complains that he cannot find God even as he seeks him out: "Oh, that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his dwelling! . . . I would learn what he would answer me, and understand what he would say to me. . . . If I go forward, he is not there; or backward, I cannot perceive him; on the left he hides, and I cannot behold him; I turn to the right, but I cannot see him." (Job 23:3-9). Later, when God finally answers Job's request, His response is hardly comforting: "Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind: 'Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up your loins like a man, I will question you, and you shall declare to me.'" (Job 38:1-3). Note that God is pictured in a *whirlwind* and challenges Job's *darkened* knowledge.

We also see the seraphim covering their faces rather than look upon God during Isaiah's smoke-filled vision (Isa. 6:1-5). Later, Isaiah laments that God remains afar: "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence—as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil—to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence! When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. From

¹⁷⁶ אַחֲרָי (*ahoray*) appears only here in the Bible. *Brown-Driver-Briggs* has "the hinder side, back part" for its root (*achor*), and most English translations use these terms when translating it here.

¹⁷⁷ This might seem to be related to the philosophical problem of "Divine Hiddenness" but the two should not be confused. First, Moses was actually given the kinds of experiences that would count as those demanded by many who see divine hiddenness as an impediment to belief. Second, the text seems to indicate that divine disclosure was not so much impossible as it had deadly consequences (19:21 or 33:20). On the apologetic problem of divine hiddenness proper, see Rea, 2009.

ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him.” (Isa 64:1-4).

The indication of the Old Testament, then, seems to be that access to God’s nature is unavailable to mankind without supernatural intervention. What of the New Testament? As Carabine (2015:225) notes, “Even though a kataphatic outlook is predominate in the texts of the New Testament, an apophatic attitude can also be found there, although it would seem that the central apophatic thrust of the revelation of God in the Old Testament fades into the background.” For the Apostle Paul, God is “invisible” (Col. 1:15; 1 Tim. 1:17). God’s ways are likewise unknown: “no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared” (1 Cor. 2:9). Even God’s love (which He *is* – 1 Jn. 4:8) is beyond knowing for Paul: “the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” (Eph. 3:16-19). An interesting snippet of apophatic dialectic emerges in a single Pauline verse in his letter to the Romans where God’s attributes are said to be “invisible” even though they are “clearly seen” through His creation (Rom. 1:20).¹⁷⁸

Interestingly, in the New Testament God is more often pictured in light than darkness – and yet His obfuscation remains as strong as it was presented in the darkness of the Old Testament.¹⁷⁹ The transfiguration of Christ was accompanied by what Eastern theologians call the Uncreated / Divine Light of Tabor, which they identify with the light that blinded Paul at his conversion.¹⁸⁰ Paul’s use of the light metaphor is apparent in his when Paul replaces the darkness of the psalmist with “unapproachable light” - making God He who “no man has seen or can see” (1 Tim. 6:15-16 cf. Ps. 139:11-12).¹⁸¹

No New Testament writer makes better use of the divine-light connection than the Apostle John, yet John also makes it clear that even considering the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, God-as-such remains unseen: “No one has seen God at any time” (Jn. 1:18).¹⁸² John reminds

¹⁷⁸ It is interesting in this regard that in Acts 17:29-30 (a primary apophatic text), Paul had to caution that, “we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent.”

¹⁷⁹ Carabine, 2015:224-226.

¹⁸⁰ A doctrine extrapolated in the 14th century by Gregory Palamas (See Williams, 1999:114-118).

¹⁸¹ Millsaps, 2006:79.

¹⁸² Cf. John 1:4-9; 3:19-21; 5:35; 8:12; 9:5; 11:9,10; 12:35-46; 1 Jn. 1:5-7; 2:8-10.

his readers of Jesus' words to those who attempted to find eternal life (i.e., knowledge of God – Jn. 17:3) in the Scriptures that, “they have never heard his [God’s] voice or seen his form” (Jn. 5:37). Rather, “Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life.” (Jn. 6:46-47).

Although God is light, for both Paul and John, our knowledge of God is dim at best. Paul describes it in his metaphor of the mirror: “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known” (1 Corinthians 13:12), and John notes that, “it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is” (1 John 3:2). In this life, then, speaking of God in too positive of terms may seem to run counter to the biblical denials of accurate knowledge.

Besides the apophatic statements of the biblical authors, Christian tradition was also strongly influenced by Scriptures interpreters. These, in turn, seem clearly to have often couched their thinking and terminology in the cultural views that surrounded them. Therefore it will be good to look at what influences might have influenced the great Christian tradition.

5.3.3 Pagan Philosophy

The Apostle Paul recognized a certain apophatic acknowledgement when he noticed that amongst the idols of Athens there was a statue made to the “Unknown God” (Acts 17:23). This negativity toward theological knowledge might have been the result of earlier philosophical influence.¹⁸³ In the West, a nascent apophaticism can be found as early as the pre-Socratic philosophers, and extended well into the Christian tradition.

Heraclitus for example, exhibited some apophatic traits in his writings. Generally speaking, Heraclitus embodied a certain apophaticism simply by virtue of being part of the early philosophical movement that challenged the notion of the gods of pagan antiquity.¹⁸⁴ More specifically, Heraclitus did not think people truly perceived either God or reality accurately. Thus, Heraclitus’s apophaticism went well beyond his notion of divinity to the very fabric of perceived

¹⁸³ While not a strictly apophatic example, it does show some acknowledgment of “agnostic” thinking in the theologians of the time. According to Nys (2013:238-239), Thomas Huxley coined the word “agnostic” from this passage.

¹⁸⁴ Early Ionian philosophers were the first to break away from mythical explanations of nature and to pursue knowledge “scientifically”. See Armstrong, 2009:49-53 and Copleston, 1993a:16.

material reality.¹⁸⁵ As Geldard (2000:23) puts it, “Heraclitus embodies the apophatic method. He ‘unsaid’ the myths of the archaic tradition on his way to transforming the ideas of divinity through the divine Logos.”¹⁸⁶

Plato’s view of human knowledge of the transcendent is put forth in his famous analogy of the cave (*Republic*, 514-519), wherein men are kept chained to the floor looking straight ahead at shadows cast by objects behind them in front of the flame. When they are brought out into reality in the light of the sun, their eyes can barely take in the reality that is before them. They suddenly realize that what they thought were the objects of experience were merely shadows. This, says Plato (*Republic*, 517c), is the state man finds himself in - attaining truth of the world only through much difficulty and education. No wonder, then, that when it comes to Plato’s highest level of existence (“The Good”), Plato (*Republic*, 509b) says it is “beyond being” yet is required for true knowledge. The difficulty in knowing even earthly things, then, comes only through much difficulty as one tries to comprehend The Good itself.¹⁸⁷

Aristotle’s conception of God is usually tracked by his consideration of The One or The Prime Mover. Unlike his teacher Plato’s conception of God as ideas, pre-existent forms, or the demiurge, for Aristotle, “God” is the first of all substances, the unmoved mover of all other

¹⁸⁵ E.g., “Men are deceived in reference to the knowledge of manifest things” (cited in Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies*, 9:4).

¹⁸⁶ Although it goes beyond the scope of this paper to go into detail, Heraclitus’s notion of Flux and the Logos as that which underlies the all-changing reality of perception may have influenced the Apostle John to use the term in the first line of his Gospel. Nietzsche quotes Heraclitus (without citation) concerning Flux as saying, “I see nothing but Becoming. Be not deceived! It is the fault of your limited outlook and not the fault of the essence of things if you believe that you see firm land anywhere in the ocean of Becoming and Passing. You need names for things, just as if they had a rigid permanence, but the very river in which you bathe a second time is no longer the same one which you entered before.” (Levy, 1911:98). Heraclitus says, “Men have no comprehension of the Logos, as I’ve described it, just as much after they hear about it as they did before they heard about it. Even though all things occur according to the Logos, men seem to have no experience whatsoever, even when they experience the words and deeds which I use to explain physis, of how the Logos applies to each thing, and what it is.” (in Jämsä, 2008:86).

¹⁸⁷ Cf. *Republic* 508e. The Good is not, however, “God” for Plato – at least not in the monotheistic sense of a personal creator. That role is taken up by the Demiurge, which Plato speaks of in the *Timaeus*. Throughout Plato’s account, however, he notes that it is only likely. As Zeyl (2014) notes, “The account, then, is presented as reasonable, thus meriting our confidence, but neither definitive nor complete (cf. 68b6–8), and thus open to possible revision (cf. 54b1–2, 55d4–6). A definitive account of these matters eludes humans (29d1) and is available only to a god (53d4–7).” Thus, even this godlike character is, for Plato, shrouded in mystery. The inability to proceed with the dialectic is itself an *aporia* – and a common feature of the end of Plato’s early dialogues.

movers. Armstrong (2009:72) says that, for Aristotle, the attainment of knowledge of the divine was possible - but only by "a philosopher who exercised his reasoning powers to the full." Aristotle (*Metaphysics*, 1066) argues that there must be something one, eternal, and unmovable (unchangeable), and the source of all movers. This unmoved mover is later identified as God.¹⁸⁸

The "Neo-Platonic" conception of *The One* of Plotinus is actually a development and synthesis of Plato and Aristotle's views. The transcendent "One" gives rise to, and sustains, all being (which "emanates" from it as a sort of "overflow"). "God" for Plotinus (*Ennead* V, 2) is the transcendent source of all existing things, yet is none of them: "The 'One' is all things and no one of them; the source of all things is not all things." Thus, God can be described only in terms of what he is *not* (*via negativa*). For Plotinus, all being radiated out from the one like the rays of the sun. According to Armstrong (2009:123), this movement was then "balanced by the yearning of all beings to return to the primal Unity." Because all being emanated from the one, to contemplate the universe was to contemplate God (Armstrong, 2009:104). Like Plato and Aristotle before him, Plotinus believes that intellectual ascent to The One requires "rigorous self-discipline in dialectic" – but even so, "the participant arrives at an *aporia* that cannot be overcome with human reason and logic" (Millsaps, 2006:53). Thus, at the end of the day, Plotinus's God was ultimately unknowable. Neo-Platonism eventually gave way to, and strongly influenced, the apophaticism of Christian theology.¹⁸⁹

Proclus was a Neo-Platonic philosopher and strong advocate of apophaticism who affirmed a First Cause he referred to as The One from which the entire universe emanated. Proclus denied the legitimacy of speaking positively concerning The One's attributes, because

¹⁸⁸ Aristotle argues for the existence of God in *Metaphysics* book 12 chapters 7-10. Aristotle (*Metaphysics* 1074) write, "And life also belongs to God; for the actuality of thought is life, and God is that actuality; and God's self-dependent actuality is life most good and eternal. We say therefore that God is a living being, eternal, most good, so that life and duration continuous and eternal belong to God; for this is God." Aristotle's "God" is not the personal creator of later monotheism, however. Rather, The One is pure actuality, without measure / size, immaterial, eternal, indivisible/simple (without parts), and infinite. Later, the Neo-Platonists used these features of Aristotle's metaphysics to argue that "the One" must be absolutely simple, indivisible, and a numerical unity. These notions, in turn, would figure into the unknowability of God. Adamson (2013) notes that Aristotle's influence of this idea spread to Plotinus, the Arabic philosophers, and most famously to Thomas Aquinas in the 13th Century A.D. An emphasis on apophatic theology is found in all of them.

¹⁸⁹ Millsaps notes that Neo-Platonism "influenced the negative theology of the Cappadocian Fathers and Pseudo-Dionysius and have helped to mold the whole apophatic tradition of Western Civilization from Maximus the Confessor in Eastern Christianity, to John Scotus Eriugena, Meister Eckhard, and the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* in Western Christianity" (2006:67).

to do so would add to The One, which would be to diminish it (1816:138). The One transcends existence itself – such that it is not even “different” from other beings (1816:142-143). Proclus (1816:146) concludes, therefore that, “All knowledge, and all instruments of knowledge, fall short of the radical transcendence of the One, and beautifully end in the ineffability of that God who is beyond all things.”

5.3.4 Patristic Theology

As Millsaps (2006:67) notes, Plotinus and Proclus are the last great Neo-Platonic pagan philosophers. The closure of the Neo-Platonic Academy of Athens by Emperor Justinian in 529 A.D. marks the end of the pagan-led philosophical era in the Eastern Roman Empire. From this point forward, its influence would be mostly mitigated through Christian theologians.¹⁹⁰ While it would be beyond the scope of this work to provide a detailed analysis of apophaticism in the history of Christian thought, it will do well to at least survey some of the more important figures within that tradition that have shown apophatic tendencies.¹⁹¹

The very earliest Christian writers showed more concern with the life of the Church than theology proper. But as Christianity became a persecuted entity, some of its greatest thinkers came to the Church’s defense, and theology literally became a life or death endeavor. Irenaeus was among the first of the Christian apologists. His most famous work in this area is *Against Heresies* – his treatise against Gnosticism. Contrary to the Gnostic claims to specialized knowledge of God, Irenaeus argued that the God’s nature is beyond human understanding. Irenaeus (*AH*, 3:XXIV) taught that although God had “come within reach of human knowledge,” this knowledge is “not with regard to His greatness, or with regard to His Essence, for that has no man measured or handled.” Here we see something of the dialectical apophatic style which affirms both God’s transcendence and His immanence at the same time but in different ways.

Clement of Alexandria (*Stromata*, 6.124.3) believed that God sometimes withheld knowledge of Himself except “for those who could accept the mysteries and be conformed to

¹⁹⁰ As will be shown below (5.2.4.8), this influence is greatest in the work of Dionysius, which in turn would prove a major influence on Thomas Aquinas.

¹⁹¹ I use “tendencies” here to indicate an important point: that “although Christianity uses the terminology of prior negative philosophies, it is wholly distinct in its application of it. It is with [the early Eastern Christian fathers] that apophatic philosophy ends and apophatic theology, properly speaking, begins.” (Millsaps, 2006:25). As will be shown (5.3), the kind of purely apophatic-agnostic thinking of the pagans was balanced by the kataphatic-revelatory theologizing of the Christian Fathers.

them.” This, he believed, was why Jesus taught in parables.¹⁹² In his discussions on the concept of God, Clement (*Stromata*, 5.46.1) affirms the inadequacy of language to communicate theological truth, preferring what he calls the “mode of symbolic interpretation,” what Hägg (2006:147) calls “wrapping divine things up in enigmas, allegories, or figures.”¹⁹³ Why is this necessary? Because, for Clement (*Stromata*, 5.65.2), “the ultimate principle is indeed ineffable, or inexpressible: ‘For the God of the universe who is above all speech, conception and thought, can never be the object of writing, as he is inexpressible.’”¹⁹⁴ God cannot be expressed by man since he is above both human speech and human thought; his being cannot be expressed within the realm of senses.¹⁹⁵

Origen was taught by Ammonius Saccas, the teacher of Plotinus. In one of his homilies, Origen (2010:40) cautions that, “It is dangerous even to speak truly about God. For not only are the false things said about Him dangerous, but likewise things that are true and that are brought forth at the wrong time give rise to danger to the one who speaks them.” Origen (*De Principiis*, 1.1.5) sought to refute “every notion which might suggest that we were to think of God as in any degree corporeal, we go on to say that, according to strict truth, God is incomprehensible, and incapable of being measured. For whatever be the knowledge which we are able to obtain of God, either by perception or reflection, we must of necessity believe that He is by many degrees far better than what we perceive Him to be.” Although not as radically apophatic as some, Origen (*Contra Celsum*, 7.42) found Plato’s arguments difficult to overcome, and concluded that, “human nature is in no way able to seek after God, or to attain a clear knowledge of Him

¹⁹² Jesus Himself gives the reason why He taught in parables in Mark 4:10-12. “The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that, ‘they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding.’” Despite popular explanations involving Jesus’ desire to be clear, or memorable, or evangelistic, Jesus was using parables to make sure people did not understand him. It should be borne in mind that Jesus did not begin teaching in parables until well into His ministry – *after* He had been rejected by Israel. See Thomas, 2000:90-91.

¹⁹³ See Hägg, 2006:148. “Clement’s persistence in using this indirect, symbolic expression as a prerequisite for transmitting the Christian truth is evident all through the *Stromateis*. It is the only way of conveying the message of the Scriptures and the ‘barbarian philosophy’ which is consistent with the message as well as with its recipients, or audience. . . . ‘The mysteries are transmitted mysteriously’ (*Stromata*, 1.13.4).”

¹⁹⁴ This is perhaps owing to Clement’s Neo-Platonic influences. See Hägg, 2006:153-154.

¹⁹⁵ Per Hägg (2006:155), Clement finds this theme both Plato and Moses, whose writings are used to demonstrate this aspect of his view of God.

without the help of Him whom it seeks.”¹⁹⁶ Origen believed that only for persons who have been freed from this material world would true knowledge of God be possible.¹⁹⁷

In the 4th Century Cappadocian Fathers we find important development of the apophatic tradition of the philosophers in the theological writings of the Church. As Millsaps (2006:25) notes, “the Cappadocian Fathers [were] the major artery for the conveyance of apophatic philosophical terminology into Christian orthodoxy. . . . the primary bridge between Late Neo-Platonism and the Christian Patristic Age. . . . their incorporation of the language of Neo-Platonism only further refined the already existing apophatic theology present in the early Christian fathers.” Basil uses apophatic language in response to the question- do Christians worship the known or the unknown? Basil (*Letter* 234:1) makes the distinction between the essence and operations of God: “the operations [of God] are various, and the essence simple, but we say that we know our God from His operations, but we do not undertake to approach near to his essence. His operations come down to us, but His essence remains beyond our reach.”

Gregory Nazianzen (*Oration* 27) cites Plato (*Timaeus*, 28E) approvingly when the latter says that, “It is difficult to conceive God, but to define Him in words is an impossibility,” yet Gregory’s own opinion was even stronger: “It is impossible to express Him, and yet more impossible to conceive Him.” In a significant example of the Cappadocian tendency to use Platonic and Neo-Platonic apophatic notions to “unpack” or elaborate upon Christian themes, Gregory (*Oration* 27) continues: “to tell of God is not possible, so my argument runs, but to know him is even less possible. For language may show the known if not adequately, at least faintly.” Gregory (*Oration* 27) states that the only way to understand God is to use a dual language of apophatic and kataphatic terms: “The point of this is that comprehension of the object of knowledge should be effected both by negation of what the thing is not and also assertion of what it is...it is much simpler, much briefer, to indicate all that something is not by indicating what it is, than to reveal what it is by denying what it is not.”

Augustine of Hippo was the first great Christian philosopher – one whose work never lost its high status among Christian theologians.¹⁹⁸ One of Augustine’s major contributions was to

¹⁹⁶ Origen believed that once persons have been freed from this material world, knowledge of God would be possible (Young, 1979:56).

¹⁹⁷ See Young, 1979:56.

¹⁹⁸ Augustine’s preeminent philosophical status in the Church continued to be evident even when he was surpassed by Thomas Aquinas (who did the same thing using Aristotelian philosophy).

explain Christian doctrine using Neo-Platonic philosophy. Augustine states his view of God early in the opening line of his *Confessions* (I.4), which presents a paradoxical affirmation concerning God's nature: "What, therefore, is my God? . . . Most high, most excellent, most potent, most omnipotent; most merciful and most just; most secret and most truly present." Augustine (*Confessions*, I.4) goes on to list numerous attributes of this "secret" God, many of which exhibit similar paradoxical pairings: "stable, yet not supported; unchangeable, yet changing all things; never new, never old; . . . always working, ever at rest . . . seeking, and yet possessing all things."

Even after painting his beautiful picture of God, Augustine (*Confessions*, I.4) hedges: "Yet, O my God, my life, my holy Joy, what is this that I have said? What can any man say when he speaks of thee? But woe to them that keep silence--since even those who say most are dumb." Augustine (*Confessions*, I.6) continues: "Still, dust and ashes as I am, allow me to speak before thy mercy. Allow me to speak, for, behold, it is to thy mercy that I speak and not to a man who scorns me." Although his theology was primarily positive, when it came to God's exact nature, Augustine recognized the limitations of human thought.¹⁹⁹

It is with Dionysius the Areopagite (often referred to as "Pseudo-Dionysius" based on the author's use of a pseudonym taken from Acts 17) that Christian apophatic theology reached a pinnacle. Dionysius was a Christian philosopher "transposed in a thoroughly original way the whole of Pagan Neo-Platonism from Plotinus to Proclus, but especially that of Proclus and the Platonic Academy in Athens, into a distinctively new Christian context" (Corrigan and Harrington, 2015).²⁰⁰ When Dionysius (*On the Divine Names*, I.1) takes up a consideration of the attributes of God, his opening line is theologically revealing:

¹⁹⁹ One can also detect varying emphasis during Augustine's early and late views, as well as his changing foci. For more see van Geest (2011).

²⁰⁰ Marshal (2011) notes that, "Modern scholars hold that the works of Dionysius are a Christianized version of Proclus. They even claim that the 'Pseudo-Dionysius' borrows directly from the pagan philosopher Proclus. This entails that the traditional dating of the Dionysian books cannot be placed during the time of the Apostles. Rather, the "Pseudo-Dionysian" books would need to be dated after Proclus – sometime around AD 500.

If Thomas Aquinas figured out that the *Liber de Causis* derived from Proclus, why didn't he figure out that Dionysius also derived from Proclus? . . . many of the so-called Proclian elements in the Dionysian works can be traced straight to Aristotle's authentic works. If this is always the case, then perhaps we need not claim that a Pseudo-Dionysius was borrowing from Proclus. This would allow us to follow Thomas Aquinas who believed that Dionysius is none other than the true Dionysius converted by St Paul in Acts 17."

“I will pass to the interpretation of the Divine Names, as best I can. But, let the rule of the Oracles be here also prescribed for us, viz., that we shall establish the truth of the things spoken concerning God, not in the persuasive words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit-moved power of the Theologians, by aid of which we are brought into contact with things unutterable and unknown, in a manner unutterable and unknown, in proportion to the superior union of the reasoning and intuitive faculty and operation within us. By no means then is it permitted to speak, or even to think, anything, concerning the superessential and hidden Deity, beyond those things divinely revealed to us in the sacred Oracles”

Dionysius (*Divine Names*, I.1) believed that “the One above conception is inconceivable to all conceptions; and the Good above word is unutterable by word” because God’s essence and mind are inconceivable, and thus unutterable. ” For Dionysius (*Divine Names*, I.2), God is a “hidden Deity, it is not permitted to speak or even to think beyond the things divinely revealed to us in the sacred Oracles.” In the end, then, God is “superior to every expression and every knowledge, and is altogether placed above mind and essence,—being . . . altogether incomprehensible to all, and of It, there is neither perception nor imagination, nor surmise, nor name, nor expression, nor contact, nor science;—in what way can our treatise thoroughly investigate the meaning of the Divine Names, when the superessential Deity is shewn to be without Name, and above Name? . . . it is not possible either to express or to conceive what the One, the Unknown, the Super-essential self-existing Good is,—I mean the threefold Unity, the alike God, and the alike Good.” (Dionysius, *Divine Names*, I.6).

Dionysius’s thinking represents the extreme of apophatic theology. As with the other theologians and philosophers above, however, Dionysius did not simply set aside his pen after writing these words. Indeed, he had quite a bit to say about the nature of God. In the next section (5.3) this paradox will be explored. First, though, the influence of apophatic thought will be traced into the medieval, Reformation, and modern periods. As we will see, although his work is generally unfamiliar today, Dionysius’s apophaticism was influential well into the Scholastic period.²⁰¹

²⁰¹ Dionysius’s work would be of major influence nearly a millennia later in the work of Thomas Aquinas. After Aristotle, Dionysius was the author whom Thomas Aquinas quoted most frequently.

5.3.5 Scholastic Theology

Anselm of Canterbury was one of the first Christian theologians to significantly add to Augustine's philosophy. Much has already been said of Anselm's theology and theological method, here only his apophatic thinking will be considered.²⁰² Rather than positing *theosis* as the goal of human life (e.g., Palamas), Anselm (*Monologion*, 68) held that "a rational creature is made for this: to love the Supreme Being above all goods, inasmuch as It is the Highest Good." Salvation, then, is for mankind to enjoy seeing God's face.²⁰³ As McCord-Adams (2006:33) notes, Anselm sees two major obstacles to reaching this goal: "First and sufficient, is the ontological incommensuration between a simple, immutable, and eternal God and fleeting creatures that 'scarcely exist' by comparison. [*Monologion*, 28]. . . . [therefore] the divine nature is permanently partially beyond our cognitive grasp, [*Proslogion*, 1, 9, 14, 16 and *Cur Deus Homo* 1.2] . . . In some aspects fundamentally incomprehensible to us [*Monologion*, 36, 66] . . . and inexpressible by human language [*Monologion* 15, 28 and *Proslogion*, 17]." Here we see much of the standard apophatic theology expressed by the thinkers above. When the fact that "man's nature has suffered as a result of the Fall" is brought in (e.g., *Monologion* 15, 28 or *Proslogion* 1, 17-18), the situation only worsens.²⁰⁴ Anselm does not give up hope, however. For if God made man to understand him, and there must be a way for it to take place. In *Proslogion* 150-151, Anselm praises God: "Lord, I am not trying to make my way to your height, from my understanding is in no way equal to that." He then issues his famous statement that he does not seek to understand in order that he may have faith, but rather in order that he may understand.²⁰⁵ Thus can Anselm subtitle even his most "rationalistic" work "*fides quaerens intellectum*" ("faith seeking understanding"). Within 200 years, these twin ideals would find perhaps their highest expression in the work of Thomas Aquinas.

²⁰² See 4.2 above.

²⁰³ Cf. *Proslogion*, 1 and *Cur Deus Homo*, 2.1

²⁰⁴ It is no surprise that Anselm extends human fallibility to Scriptural interpretation: "Be careful not at all to think – when we read in Scripture, or when in accordance with Scripture we say, that God causes evil or causes not-being – that I am denying the basis for what is said or am finding fault with what is being said. But we ought not to cling to the verbal impropriety concealing the truth as much as we ought to attend to the propriety hidden beneath the many types of expression." (*De Casu Diaboli*, 1).

²⁰⁵ This is not some irrational leap of faith. As Armstrong points out (2009:132), "Anselm is still using the verb *credere* in its original sense: it is an affair of the 'heart,' the center of the human being, rather than a purely notional act and, as for Augustine, inseparable from love."

As Augustine brought Neo-Platonic philosophy to Christian theology, Thomas Aquinas applied Aristotelian categories of thought to the doctrine of the church. Much more will be said concerning Thomas Aquinas below (§5.4), for now it is enough to note the strong apophaticism present in his theology – the *via negativa* sometimes ignored by his critics. Although Aquinas (*ST*, 1a Q.12 A.1) believed that God is “supremely knowable,” he does not thereby conclude that unaided natural reason can know the essence of God. In fact he is clear that it cannot. Rather than the used to affirmations been seen as a sort of apophatic dialectic, both statements are true due to the nature of God and the nature of creatures.

Borrowing an illustration from Dionysius, Aquinas (*ST*, 1a Q.12 A.1) explains that “what is supremely knowable in itself, may not be knowable to a particular intellect, on account of the excess of the intelligible object above the intellect; as, for example, the sun, which is supremely visible, cannot be seen by the bat by reason of its excess of light.” Aquinas goes on to argue that the divine essence cannot be seen through any image,²⁰⁶ by physical vision or any created intellect.²⁰⁷ Aquinas then goes on to explain why this remains true despite seeming counterexamples in Scripture (*ST*, 1a Q.12 A.11).²⁰⁸ Like his philosophical and theological predecessors, however – and despite his firm conviction that no creature can know God in his essence - Aquinas does not lose hope of being able to say true things about God. Indeed, after this introductory section thousands of pages of theology (which many consider to be the height

²⁰⁶ “As Dionysius says (Div. Nom. i), ‘by the similitudes of the inferior order of things, the superior can in no way be known;’ as by the likeness of a body the essence of an incorporeal thing cannot be known. Much less therefore can the essence of God be seen by any created likeness whatever.” (Aquinas, *ST*, 1a Q.12 A.2).

²⁰⁷ “It is impossible for any created intellect to see the essence of God by its own natural power. For knowledge is regulated according as the thing known is in the knower. But the thing known is in the knower according to the mode of the knower. Hence the knowledge of every knower is ruled according to its own nature. If therefore the mode of anything's being exceeds the mode of the knower, it must result that the knowledge of the object is above the nature of the knower. Now the mode of being of things is manifold. For some things have being only in this one individual matter; as all bodies. But others are subsisting natures, not residing in matter at all, which, however, are not their own existence, but receive it; and these are the incorporeal beings, called angels. But to God alone does it belong to be His own subsistent being.” (Aquinas, *ST*, 1a Q.12 A.4. See also *ST* 1a, Q.12, A.3).

²⁰⁸ Aquinas does not mean by this that human intellect is forever cut off from the knowledge of God – indeed, that is man's very end. What is required for this to take place, though, is a special act of God's grace which will be given to the faithful in heaven – the beatific vision (*ST*, 1a Q.13 A.5). Even then, however, the creaturely intellect can never fully comprehend God's nature (*ST*, 1a Q.12 A.7).

of Christian thinking) follow. How Aquinas justifies this will be taken up below (in §5.4). But before this, attention must be given to the waning of apophatic theology in the 14th Century.²⁰⁹

According to Armstrong (2009:152), due to the influence of Scotus (and, later, Ockham), apophatic theology ceased to develop. The philosophical system of John Duns Scotus actually represents something of a bridge between the end of classical scholasticism and the critical modernism of the fourteenth century and beyond.²¹⁰ Two of the major contributions of Scotus to the subject at hand is his belief that being is the object of the intellect, and his insistence on its univocal character. Scotus's predecessor, Henry of Ghent, was an eclectic philosopher – neither Augustinian nor Aristotelian, but seeming to borrow from both.²¹¹ He believed (with Aquinas) that it could be proven metaphysically that God exists – and that His existence is necessary, identical with his essence. Following from this, it had to be the case that contingent being (the only kind of being that we have direct knowledge of), is of a sort that is so different that nothing said of the former can be accurately said of the latter. In other words, there is no univocal concept of being common to God and creatures.²¹² Scotus saw Henry's view of pure univocity as problematic - for if there was no common concept between the being of God and the being of man, and how could the arguments from contingent being too necessary being prove anything?

²⁰⁹ The last of the important apophatic scholastic theologians was Meister Eckhart, a Dominican preacher who lived through the transition to the fourteenth century. Contrary to the experiential mysticism that was developing in his day, Eckhart believed that the intellect was still the touchstone between the human and the divine (Armstrong, 2009:154). When this union occurs, a state of nothingness begins: "it is neither this nor that, and yet it is something which is higher above this and that is heaven above Earth. . . . It is free of all names, it is bearable forms, wholly empty and free, as God in himself is empty and free. It is so utterly one and simple, as God is one and simple, the man cannot in any way look into it." (Sermon 2 in Edmund College and Bernard McGinn, translators. Meister Eckhart: the essential sermons, commentaries, treatises and defense. New York, 1981:180). When our intellect emptied itself, it made room for God. This was the opposite of the experiential spiritualism being preached by the mystics. Eckhart believed that detachment of the intellect was required to eliminate the images and concepts that got in the way of true knowledge of God. Eckhart even went so far as to say that God is only properly loved when he is loved as "nonGod" (Armstrong, 2009:155). Thus, in Eckhart, we see what Hart refers to as "one of the more provocatively counterintuitive ways of expressing the difference between God and every contingent reality," namely, that "God, as the source of all being, is, properly speaking, not himself a being" (2013:107). It is difficult to imagine a more apophatic position than that one must think of God as non-God. Having reached what must be considered the limits of apophatic theology, it is perhaps no surprise that the difficult and more kataphatic theology of Scotus and Ockham arose among the schoolmen.

²¹⁰ See Copleston, 1993b:485.

²¹¹ See Copleston, 1993b:465-469.

²¹² See Copleston, 1993b:471.

Further, without univocal concepts of being, it would seem that metaphysics is impossible, for its object is being.²¹³

Scotus defines a univocal concept as one that involves a contradiction should one both affirmed and denied it to the same subject at the same time. He further stated that a univocal term could be used to legitimately as the middle term in a syllogism without introducing the three term or “equivocation” fallacy.²¹⁴ In this, he is arguing directly against Henry of Ghent’s complete separation of divine in creaturely being.²¹⁵ The above considerations would make it seem that Scotus was in direct conflict with the apophatic theologians before him and especially Aquinas who all would deny the univocity of being between God and his creatures (hence, human language’s inability to speak accurately of God). However, it can be argued that what Scotus has in mind is a logical - not a metaphysical - understanding of univocity, and that this brings his thought more in line with apophatic thinkers.

That Scotus might have been limiting univocal God talk to logic (i.e. an act of the intellect). In *Questions on the Freedom of the Soul* (21, 14), Scotus says that when considering various conceptions of God and mankind, “there can be abstracted from all of them one common concept which is expressed by this word *being*, and is one logically speaking, although it is not naturally and metaphysically speaking.”²¹⁶ If univocity is limited to intellectual abstraction, then it seems Scotus might be open to analogical predication in God talk. As Copleston (1993b: 508) points out, what is univocal for the logician is equivocal for the philosopher. For Scotus, then, there may be, “no separate or separable thing, existing extramentally, which corresponds to the univocal concept of being; but there is an objective foundation for the concept nonetheless.” The objective foundation is found in the fact that God, who is existence, gives existence to all contingent things. Thus, univocity of being is not *merely* a mental construct (imagination), but rather a logical one (abstraction).

²¹³ See Copleston, 1993b:484, 489, 501.

²¹⁴ Scotus, *Ordinatio* 1, d. 3, pars 1, q. 1–2, nn. 26–55.

²¹⁵ See Copleston, 1993b: 503.

²¹⁶ Cited in Copleston, 1993b:506.

Following from this, Scotus (*Ordinatio*, I. 1-2) believed that many of God's essential attributes can be proved by philosophy without the need of revelation.²¹⁷ The human intellect gathers data from creation and forms an accurate conceptual knowledge of God by consideration of these objects of experience. Once the intellect has formed a (univocal) concept from the objects of experience, it can then form what Williams (2015:2.1) calls a "composite quidditative idea of God" by alloying that univocal concept with the concept of preeminence or, more precisely, infinity. Thus, it seems, the human intellect can form precise concepts of God which only differ by their modes (viz. finite or infinite).²¹⁸ Armstrong (2009:150) describes it this way: "God simply had a more intensive mode of being, and rather the same way as bright red is more thoroughly red and pink There was no ontological abyss separating God from his creatures." In the end, says Armstrong (2009:150), Scotus exchanged "traditional apophatic caution" for "a theological language that was clear and distinct, based on certain and demonstrable grounds."

Scotus's philosophical system can be regarded as the last of the great medieval speculative systems.²¹⁹ In so far as it represents the development of medieval thinking, Scotus's thought opened the door for the critical movement of the fourteenth century which, in turn, paved the way for the "radical and destructive criticism" of the Franciscan monk, William of Ockham.²²⁰ Ockham is credited with the radical break from the above thinkers that began in the 14th Century. While at the close of the 13th century the scholastics (Scotus included) dealt with universals by the theory of Moderate Realism,²²¹ William of Ockham believed that the universal

²¹⁷ Scotus reveals this in very first line of his *Ordinatio* (I, 1): "It is asked whether for man for his (present) state it be necessary that any special doctrine supernaturally inspire (him), to which he could not attain by the natural light of the intellect. And that (it is) not (so), I argue thus: Every power [*potentia*] having anything common for its first object, can naturally (act) upon [in] anything contained under it just as upon a per se natural object."

²¹⁸ Per Williams (2015:2.3), "Scotus thinks we can have a positive conception of infinity, according to which infinity is not a negative, relational property, but instead a positive, intrinsic property." As Scotus puts it, "If an entity is finite or infinite, it is so not by reason of something accidental to itself, but because it has its own intrinsic degree of finite or infinite perfection" (*Ordinatio* 1, d. 1, pars 1, q. 1-2, n. 142). This is contrary to the view of Aquinas where infinity is a negative predicate. On infinity as quantitative in Scotus, see Cross, 1999:39.

²¹⁹ See Copleston, 1993b:566.

²²⁰ See Copleston, 1993b:485.

²²¹ The problem of universals concerns how our concepts of things correspond to those things existing outside our intellect (extramentally). The problem arises when one considers that while these

concept corresponded only to names made up by people and attributed to radically individual objects of experience.²²² This view became known as Nominalism.²²³

From the Nominalist perspective, focusing as it does on concrete and individual realities to the exclusion of the immaterial aspects of material things, and *a fortiori* anything purely immaterial, metaphysics as the study of being *qua* being (i.e., not necessarily material and therefore distinguishable from the empirical or sensible reality) could only appear as the height of speculative arrogance. And the logical outgrowth of this is evidenced in later thinkers such as Hume and Kant, who have influenced all of subsequent philosophy, for better or for worse.²²⁴ As Bainton (1995:169) recounts: “The Ockhamists had wrecked the synthesis of Thomas Aquinas whereby nature and reason lead through unbroken stages to grace and revelation. Instead, between nature and grace, between reason and revelation, these theologies introduced a great

external objects are singular, they also seem to be grouped under a single concept. What, then, grounds this single concept? There are four historical solutions: “Exaggerated Realism” holds that these universal concepts exist in both the mind and in reality (e.g., Plato). Contra Realism, “Conceptualism” (e.g., Zeno) says we only know our mental concepts and do not know if they correspond to extramental objects or not. The *via media* is “Moderate Realism” (E.g., Aristotle, Aquinas) teaches that the intellect has the power to abstract a universal concept from individual things in reality, and thus the universal is grounded in extramental reality without any assertion of its own existence. “Nominalism” will be covered in the body of the paper.

²²² Turner (1903) is more precise when he says, “Ockam is best known by his renewal of nominalism. It would, however, be more correct to describe his doctrine of universals as a modified conceptualism . . . nevertheless, it is true that Ockam is, in a certain sense, a nominalist. He maintains, for example, that propositions, not things, are the objects of scientific knowledge . . . Ockam, therefore, is a conceptualist who uses the language of nominalism . . . But, although Ockam did not profess the cruder form of nominalism, he may justly be considered the forerunner of the nominalists who appeared at the close of the fourth period of the history of Scholasticism.” Schaff (1910) also notes that Nominalism proper began with “the principle Roscellinus advocated more than two hundred years before. The Nominalists were also called Terminists, because they represent words as terms which do not necessarily have ideas and realities to correspond to them. A universal is simply a symbol or term for a number of things or for that which is common to a number of things. Universality is nothing more than a mode of mental conception.”

²²³ In the 14th Century, “there arose and spread in the fourteenth century a new movement, associated for ever with the name of William of Ockham. The thinkers of this new movement, the *via moderna*, which naturally possessed all the charm of ‘modernity’, opposed the realism of the earlier schools and became known as the ‘nominalists’.” (Copleston 1993:11). A good illustration for Nominalism is currency. While coins can be made of metals with intrinsic value, paper currency has only extrinsic value. According to classical philosophy, by contrast, given the link between particular, concrete things and corresponding ideas or universals (whether these ideas or universals were thought to exist independently of the concrete individual or in conjunction with it), the ideal was seen to be something objective, rather than a result of extrinsic imposition.

²²⁴ Cf., Bainton, 1995:166-79.

gulf. So much so indeed that philosophy and theology were compelled to resort to two different kinds of logic and even two different varieties of arithmetic.”

Copleston (1993c:59-60) teaches that Ockham sought to “purge Christian theology and philosophy of the theory of essences, which in his opinion endangered the Christian doctrines of the divine liberty and omnipotence” Schaff (1910, V.2:180) records that “A characteristic feature of the scholasticism of Durandus and Ockam is the sharper distinction they made between reason and revelation. Following Duns Scotus, they declared that doctrines peculiar to revealed theology are not susceptible of proof by pure reason. The body of dogmatic truth, as accepted by the Church, they did not question.”

By the end of the fourteenth century, apophatic theology had been largely eclipsed in the West and would shortly give way to the Modernism to follow.²²⁵ Apophatic and philosophical theology gave way to mysticism and superstition – neither of which could withstand the coming storm of modernism. Armstrong (2009:158) describes the theology of the time as “aridly theoretical; without the discipline of the apophatic, it was in danger of becoming idolatrous. Europe was on the brink of a major social, cultural, political, and intellectual change. As it entered the modern world, spirituality was at a low ebb.” That spiritual low ebb continued to recede until the sixteenth century theological tidal wave that was to become known as the Protestant Reformation.

²²⁵ Although the theologians of Western modernism came to dominate Christian thinking for some time, one significant development in the East should be remembered. As Augustine was a watershed theologian for the West, Gregory Palamas was for the East. Originally a monk at Mount Athos in Greece, Palamas later served as Archbishop of Thessalonica. His Triads in defense of the Holy Hesychasts was written to defend his fellow monks against Barlaam who (extrapolating from the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite) forcefully affirmed the unknowability of God and valued philosophy above prophecy. In reply, Palamas asserted that experience of God would bring one greater knowledge of Him than the rationalizations of the philosophers.

As a result of this position, Palamas had to explain how it is that one could attain experiential knowledge of a completely transcendent God. In order to do this, he made a distinction God’s essence (οὐσία) which was transcendent and unknowable, and His energies (ἐνέργειαι) – God’s revelatory works in creation which were able to be experienced. Palamas believed that these energies were experienced by the apostles as the uncreated light of God at the transfiguration of Jesus on Mount Tabor. Palamas’s essence/energy distinction was not simply a useful tool for justifying God-talk. It became the foundation for the Orthodox understanding of God’s nature and mankind’s salvation: theosis (Lossky, 2005). Several local councils followed with Palamas’s views being affirmed, and his influence on Eastern Orthodox theology has not waned.

5.3.6 Protestant Theology

From the close of the 14th Century forward, apophatic theology began to be replaced with mystical religious ruminations, and kataphaticism crept insidiously to the forefront in both Enlightenment and Renaissance thinking.²²⁶ Traces of apophatic theologizing were not completely absent, however, even in the thinking of those Reformers influenced by these philosophical movements.²²⁷

The nominalist foundations of some portions Luther's theology seem undeniable.²²⁸ Historian and theologian Heiko Oberman asserts this quite forthrightly: "Martin Luther was a nominalist, there is no doubt about that." (2006:122). Beiser (2014:34) says that Luther's "debt to the nominalist tradition is not a matter of conjecture or inference, for it was explicitly acknowledged by Luther himself, who called Ockham his *Magister*."²²⁹ However, although Ockham's nominalism has been blamed for many of the modern theologies ills, and despite the fact that his influence on Luther has been well-noted (and deeply criticized²³⁰), to say that Luther completely repudiated apophatic thinking would be a mistake.

²²⁶ Armstrong (2009:159-161) divides theological history between "The Unknown God" and "The Modern God" at the close of the 14th Century.

²²⁷ Beiser says that both Luther and Calvin are in debt to Ockham and the nominalist tradition: "it is only by returning to Ockham's 'nominalism' that we can fully appreciate the philosophical rationale behind it Luther and Calvin's distinction between reason and faith." (2014:34). Concerning Luther, Calvin, and Melancthon, Thomas Meyers, in his *Concluding Remarks on John Calvin's Commentary on Daniel* (Calvin, 2012:497), says, "These two classes of mental cultivation still govern the theological studies of mankind, and will probably do so till the end of our Christian dispensation. The theology of Rome is the growth of the scholastic philosophy built up by the Realists; the teaching of the Reformers springs entirely from that of the Nominalists. All leanings to Rome have in them the essence of Realism, made manifest by some Romanizing tendencies; and all Ultra-Protestantism verges towards a series of negatives based upon Nominalism. We have already alluded to the first nominalist, to whom Luther and Melancthon own their deep obligations. 'The real originator of the Protestant principle,' says the author of *The Vindication of Protestant Principles*, 'the first man who truly emancipated himself from the trammels of Popish ecclesiolatry, the first, in fact, who referred everything to Scripture, and asserted the right of private judgment in its interpretation, was our own countryman, William of Ockham.'"

²²⁸ For varied accounts of the relationship between Nominalism and the Reformation, see Gregory 2012, MacIntyre, 2007, Taylor, 2007, and Gillespie, 2009.

²²⁹ Although note that Luther himself said, "I demand arguments not authorities. That is why I contradict even my own school of Occamists, which I have absorbed completely." (Martin Luthers *Werke* 6.195, 4f. quoted in Oberman, 2006:120).

²³⁰ Louis Bouyer writes that, "No phrase reveals so clearly the hidden evil that was to spoil the fruit of the Reformation than Luther's saying that Occam was the only scholastic who was any good. The truth is that Luther, brought up on his system, was never able to think outside the framework it imposed,

Although in a very different form than the apophaticism of the patristic or Scholastic fathers, Luther still maintained a cautious theology when it came to the nature of God. “That person,” Luther said in the *Heidelberg Disputation* (19-20), “does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened.” On the contrary, only the one who “comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through the suffering and the cross,” can be called a theologian” (*Heidelberg Disputation*, 19-20). In his theology, Luther (*On the Bondage of the Will*, 6) affirmed that “since he is the one true God, and is wholly incomprehensible and inaccessible to human reason.”

Whereas Luther often indexed his apophaticism to cross (citation needed parentheses, Calvin could dispense with much of it in his focus on the incarnation of Jesus Christ.²³¹ However, when speaking of God’s nature as expressed through human language, Calvin retains an apophatic style. Calvin (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1:47) finds, “in seeking God, miserable [people] do not rise above themselves as they should, but measure [God] by the yardstick of their own carnal stupidity.” Calvin (*Institutes*: 1.13.1) explains that, “who even of slight intelligence does not understand that, as nurses commonly do with infants, God is wont in a measure to ‘lisp’ in speaking to us? Thus such forms of speaking do not so much express clearly what God is like as accommodate the knowledge of him to our slight capacity. To do this you must descend far beneath his loftiness.” In line with Calvin’s thoughts above, his successors were committed to the inability of man to come to know God’s essence directly or perfectly through speculation as well.

The work of Francis Turretin falls within the “trajectory from the Middle Ages and through the Reformation” (Fesko, 2001:16). Turretin recognizes an important difference between God’s and man’s knowledge. According to Turretin, “theology treats of God and his infinite perfections,

while this, it is only too evident, makes the mystery that lies at the root of Christian teaching either inconceivable or absurd.” (1956:184).

²³¹ Alister McGrath, has argued that, “Calvin’s thought is thoroughly Christocentric, not merely in that it centers upon God’s revelation in Jesus Christ, but also in that this revelation discloses a paradigm which governs other key areas of Christian thought. Wherever God and humanity come into conjunction, the incarnational paradigm illuminates their relation. If there is a center of Calvin’s religious thought, that center may reasonably be identified as Jesus Christ himself.” (1993:149.) Wilhelm Niesel has stated that, “More decisive is the appreciation of the fact that the form of Calvin’s theology was shaped by the axis on which it revolves. Jesus Christ controls not only the content but also the form of Calvinistic thought.” (1956:247).

not as knowing them in an infinite but in a finite manner; nor absolutely as much as they can be known in themselves, but as much as he has been pleased to reveal them.”²³² Turretin (*Institutes*, 1.2.6) uses the terms *archetypal* and *ectypal* theology to describe this crucial difference; the former refers to God’s infinite and essential knowledge of himself which is then communicated to man in a finite manner - resulting in the latter type of knowledge which is in its “image”. It follows that because there is a gulf which separates these two kinds of knowledge, human reason can in no way be considered the foundation for knowledge of God - nor can it ever be considered to have reached the heights of God’s infinite essence.²³³ Indeed, “it would be impious for a finite mind to circumscribe within narrow limits the infinite power of God” (Turretin, *Institutes*:1.8.20). Thus, supernatural theology “treats certain entities not as they are known by nature, but by revelation” (Turretin, *Institutes*:1.2.2). Although the sciences of man can aid in reasoning about this revelation, “when God is set forth as the object of theology, he is not to be regarded simply as God in himself (for thus he is incomprehensible to us), but as revealed.” (Turretin, *Institutes*:1.5.5 cf. 1.3.1-10).

For Jonathan Edwards (*Miscellaneous Observations*, 1:13), “men are capable of understanding as much as is revealed [by God].” Similar to Turretin, though, Edwards recognizes an enormous ontological gap between finite human nature and infinite deity. He therefore similarly acknowledges that there is a mysterious element to divine revelation to humanity.²³⁴ Even though God’s revelation comes from his own infinite knowledge, Edwards (*Miscellaneous Observations*, 1:12), “difficulties and incomprehensible mysteries are reasonably to be expected in a declaration of God . . . [and are] very mysterious involved much more in darkness, attended with more mystery and difficulty to the understanding.” Mystery, then, should be expected from the revelation of truth concerning an infinite Being.

Charles Hodge (2001:3) notes that just as God “does not teach men astronomy or chemistry, but He gives them the facts out of which those sciences are constructed. Neither does He teach us systematic theology, but He gives us in the Bible the truths which, properly

²³² Turretin’s thinking is reflected in the title of his systematic theology which references a more indirect method of knowledge acquisition than would sit well with more kataphatic systems. “Elenctic” is originally from ἔλεγχος meaning “argument of disproof or refutation; cross-examining, testing, scrutiny esp. for purposes of refutation” (Liddell, Scott and Jones, 9th ed.), and was used to describe indirect modes of proof such as the Socratic method.

²³³ See Turretin, *Institutes*: 1.8.5.

²³⁴ Edwards’ idealism and mental phenomenalism have a lot to do with his epistemology as well. See Bombaro (2011).

understood and arranged, constitute the science of theology.” However, the Bible is not the only source for knowledge of God: “The Scriptures clearly recognize the fact that the works of God reveal his being and attributes. This they do not only by frequent reference to the works of nature as manifestations of the perfections of God, but by direct assertions . . . it cannot, therefore, be reasonably doubted that not only the being of God, but also his eternal power and Godhead, are so revealed in his works, as to lay a stable foundation for natural theology.” (Hodge, 2001:24-25). Hodge (2001:25) is quick to point out, though, that natural theology cannot replace supernatural theology, especially with regard to salvation. This, Hodge says, is affirmed “by every historical branch of the Christian Church. On this point the Greek, the Latin, the Lutheran, and the Reformed Churches are unanimous.”

Even when supernatural revelation is given, though, mystery remains. Hodge (2001:50) points to the difference between *knowing* and *understanding*: “A child knows what the words ‘God is a spirit’ mean. No created being can comprehend the Almighty unto perfection.” For Hodge, neither supernatural nor natural revelation are fully comprehensible by finite man.²³⁵ The plan of salvation and the dual natures of Jesus are incomprehensible mysteries, as is plant growth and muscle control. Even if the former are far more difficult to comprehend than the latter, “here as everywhere we are surrounded by the incomprehensible.” (Hodge, 2001:50). While this is the case, though, finite man “is not called upon by his Creator to believe without knowledge, to receive as true propositions which convey no meaning to the mind. This would be not only irrational, but impossible.” (Hodge, 2001:50). These true propositions, variously understood, will always fall short of comprehensiveness. Thus, when treating of the attributes of God, even these terms are subject to imprecision.²³⁶ Similar to Aquinas and others, Hodge

²³⁵ For Hodge, theology and philosophy overlap: “Philosophy and Theology occupy common ground. . . . While their objects are so far identical, both striving to attain a knowledge of the same truths, their methods are essentially different. Philosophy seeks to attain knowledge by speculation and induction, or by the exercise of our own intellectual faculties. Theology relies upon authority, receiving as truth whatever God in his Word has revealed. Both these methods are legitimate. . . . God is the author of our nature and the maker of heaven and earth, therefore nothing which the laws of our nature or the facts of the external world prove to be true, can contradict the teaching of God’s Word. Neither can the Scriptures contradict the truths of philosophy or science. . . . As these two great sources of knowledge must be consistent in their valid teachings, it is the duty of all parties to endeavor to exhibit that consistency.” (2001:56). Even though the Bible ultimately is in greater authority than philosophy or science, these fields can yield knowledge that demonstrates the proper interpretation of Scripture (2001:58-59).

²³⁶ “When we say we can define God, all that is meant is, that we can analyze the idea of God as it lies in our mind; or, that we can state the class of beings to which He belongs, and the attributes by

believes that when speaking of God, one must negate what is predicated of God with reference to creatures while affirming its unlimitedness.²³⁷

Thinkers in the Dutch Reformed tradition have affirmed the inability of man to know God fully whether naturally, or even (to some extent) when special revelation is involved.²³⁸ Herman Dooyeweerd (2012:84) teaches that, “the true knowledge of God and of ourselves . . . surpasses all theoretical thought,” and that, “real self-knowledge is dependent on the knowledge of God.” The latter, then, must be rooted in God’s Word.²³⁹ However, when speaking of the central themes of God’s revelation, Dooyeweerd speaks in primarily soteriological terms.²⁴⁰ Dooyeweerd (2012:87-92) notes that posits the limits of various scientific “horizons” as a block to natural comprehension of God. Because all human experience is mitigated through limited “modal aspects,” they elicit logical unification by the human mind which will, inevitably, obscure

which He is distinguished from all other beings. . . . The objection to this and most other definitions of God is, that they do not bring out with sufficient fullness the contents of the idea.” (Hodge, 2001:366).

²³⁷ E.g., “All we have to do in reference to the divine essence, as a Spirit, is to deny of it, as we do of our own spiritual essence, what belongs to material substances; and to affirm of it, that in itself and its attributes it is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable.” (Hodge, 2001:367-368).

²³⁸ Some kind of incompatibility between the human state (whether due to finitude or sin) and true knowledge of God is a common feature of Reformed epistemology from Dooyeweerd to Van Til. For a summary of positions within the Dutch Reformed camp regarding the applicability of various apologetic systems, see Boa and Bowman, 2006:290-303.

²³⁹ “This knowledge cannot be the theoretical object either of a dogmatical theology or of a Christian philosophy. It can only be acquired by the operation of God’s Word and the Holy Spirit in the heart – that is to say, in the religious center and root of our entire human existence and experience. True knowledge of God and self-knowledge are the central presuppositions both of a biblical theology (in its scientific, theoretical sense) and, of a Christian philosophy insofar as the latter has a truly biblical starting-point.” (Dooyeweerd, 2012:84).

²⁴⁰ For example, in his section on the knowledge of God, Dooyeweerd (2012:86) writes that, “the redemption by Jesus Christ and the communion of the Holy Spirit, which makes us into members of His body, has a central and radical sense. In Christ, mankind and the whole temporal world have received a new religious root in which the imago Dei is revealed in the fullness of its meaning. Thus the central theme of the Holy Scriptures, namely, that of creation, fall into sin, and redemption by Jesus Christ in the communion of the Holy Spirit, has a radical unity of meaning, which is related to the central unity of our human existence. It effects the true knowledge of God and ourselves, if our heart is fully opened by the Holy Spirit so that it finds itself in the grip of God’s Word and has become the captive of Jesus Christ. So long as this central meaning of the Word-revelation is at issue, we are beyond the scientific problems both of theology and philosophy.”

the fullness of truth. The finite sciences simply cannot take in all that is necessary to form a true picture of God.²⁴¹

Dogmatic theology, then, is a “very dangerous science” open to misconception and even idolatry (Dooyeweerd, 2012:93). Thus, “the divine Word-revelation can never become the theoretical object of theological research in the full reality wherein it presents itself to us. . . . it is much rather the supra-theological starting-point of all truly biblical Christian thought, the key to the knowledge of God and of ourselves” (Dooyeweerd, 2012:94). Further, even God’s “Word-revelation” (which transcends the temporal order of experience) must reveal itself to mankind within the finite, temporal order – and so it is the Scriptures which are investigated by theology. In the end, then, both general revelation (which Dooyeweerd refers to as “*phanerosis*” – 2012:95) and special revelation fall short of the fully transcendent “Word-revelation” (Dooyeweerd, 2012:99),²⁴² and can easily become corrupted by false presuppositions from other theoretical starting points (Dooyeweerd, 2013:46-51). Only when the central basic motive of biblical revelation is taken as a starting point can theology begin to operate accurately,²⁴³ but even then it is only these central themes that seem to be safeguarded from distortion (Dooyeweerd, 2012:101).²⁴⁴

²⁴¹ “But within the temporal order of our experience this Word-revelation manifests itself in the same modal diversity of aspects we find in our own temporal human existence. God’s Word has entered our temporal horizon, just as it has become flesh in Jesus Christ, our Savior. And it is only within the temporal diversity of experiential aspects that the divine revelation can become an object of theological thought.” (Dooyeweerd, 2012:94).

²⁴² This leads Dooyeweerd (2012:103) to conclude that God-talk is analogical: “It is of primordial concern that the theologian realizes the proper faith-sense of these analogical concepts in their theological use and does not confound this particular signification with that ascribed to them in other sciences. For such confusion cannot fail to give rise to erroneous ways of posing theological problems.” With respect to the thesis of this dissertation, Dooyeweerd (2012:104) goes on to say that, “Theological pseudo-problems always arise when the analogical basic theological concepts are used in a non-theological sense.”

²⁴³ See also Dooyeweerd, 2013:161.

²⁴⁴ Concerning other theological debates, Dooyeweerd (2012:101) says, “They are certainly legitimate problems of theological dogmatics, but as specifically theological problems they do not concern the central basic motive of the Holy Scriptures as it is operative in the religious center of our consciousness and existence. This spiritual basic motive is elevated above all theological controversies and is not in need of theological exegesis, since its radical meaning is exclusively explained by the Holy Spirit operating in our opened hearts, in the communion of this Spirit. This is the only really ecumenical basis of the Church of Christ, which in its institutional temporal appearance is otherwise hopelessly divided.”

Cornelius Van Til's position on human knowledge is described by Sproul, Gerstner, Lindsey (1984:312) as the claim "to know anything only because God knows everything and allows believers to know after their own mode—*analogically*."²⁴⁵ The distance between God and man is infinite and therefore *naturally* incommunicable.²⁴⁶ God, therefore, must communicate His knowledge to man (special revelation)²⁴⁷ - yet even then there is the additional problem of the mind's (whether regenerate or unregenerate) ability to understand anything,²⁴⁸ let alone God.²⁴⁹ Van Til, however, does not discount God's ability to truthfully communicate his thoughts

²⁴⁵ What Van Til describes here as "analogy" is reminiscent of the medieval distinction between the *res significata* (what is said / signified) and the *modus significandi* (the mode / manner in which it is said).

²⁴⁶ In Van Til's epistemology, this is not the driving issue though. Indeed, for Van Til (1969b:103), *all* knowledge requires special revelation: "the struggle between Christian theism and its opponent covers the whole field of knowledge. It is not as though we are at the outset dealing with the question of the knowledge of the world about us and that the only point in dispute is whether or not God can be and need be known. We may indeed make the question whether God need be and can be known so inclusive that it coincides with the question whether anything can be known. Christian theism's fundamental contention is just this, that nothing whatsoever can be known unless God can be and is known."

²⁴⁷ E.G., Van Til (1925:39) asks, "How can a creature of space and time can get valid notions of an eternal being? . . . If space and time are concreated with man, and God is not necessarily related to them, but the eternity in which He dwells is a totally different category than time, the very existence of which would seem beyond the comprehension of spatio-finite creatures, then it becomes necessary that God reveal himself to man if man is to have knowledge of Him at all."

²⁴⁸ This is a more subtle position than it might seem. Van Til is not simply saying that man cannot arrive at any truth without first having awareness of God's special revelation (as if one must know 3 John in order to perform long division!). Rather, Van Til is referring to the ultimate incoherence of any system that denies God's existence. He makes this clear in both his theological (e.g., 1978:14) and apologetic (e.g., 1967:69, 120, 257, 298, 292) writings.

²⁴⁹ Van Til's (1925:49-50) conclusion to the question of man's knowledge of God (and its validity for apologetics) is based on this distinction: "It is due to a failure to observe the first and most fundamental rule of epistemology, namely that validity can have no meaning except for consciousness. If we speak of reason as a general something, without stating to what consciousness it belongs, we speak for a vague type of universal validity that can have no meaning for any consciousness but hangs in the air. reason does not exist except (a), in connection with and as part of non-regenerate consciousness and (b), in connection with and as part of the regenerate consciousness. Hence the reason of the regenerate consciousness can and must display the truth that it experiences in intellectual form and, as such, it will correspond formally to the intellectual aspect of the non-regenerate consciousness, but more it cannot do. Arguments for Christianity? The more the better. Kuyper with all his opposition to apologetics has by virtue of his genius perhaps presented more arguments for Christianity than any other Reformed theologian. But in every case the Holy Spirit makes them effective. Bare belief in the knowledge of God as existent without a knowledge of Him through Christ gives no validity. Such, I believe, to be the general viewpoint and some of the weaknesses of present Reformed Apologetics. It is essentially the same for all leading Reformed theologians."

(so long as “truthfully” is understood in the restricted sense that the human recipient of said knowledge will not know as God knows²⁵⁰). Indeed, unlike man’s derivative knowledge, “God’s knowledge of the facts comes first. God knows or interprets the facts before they are facts. It is God’s plan or his comprehensive interpretation of the facts that makes the facts what they are” (Van Til, 1967:27, cf. 1967:57-58 and 1978:12).

Concerning man’s natural knowledge of God, Van Til did not deny that it was available to unbelievers, but that truth concerning God’s existence and attributes are communicated via the *sensus divinitatis*.²⁵¹ The problem, rather, is that (in accordance with Romans 1:18-21) these truths are suppressed due to sin (Van Til, 1967:111). Van Til’s concerns, then, often revolved around what he saw as the illegitimate presupposition of intellectual autonomy and neutrality when engaging in theological discussions.²⁵² (This is why the presupposition of Christian revelation was paramount to Van Til’s special breed of apologetics.²⁵³)

Relevant to the present theological-apologetic issue of God’s attributes, Van Til (1967:262) has said, “Anyone who says, ‘I believe in God,’ is formally correct in his statement, but the question is what does he mean by the word God? The traditional view assumes that the natural man has a certain measure of correct thought content when he uses the word God. In

²⁵⁰ For Van Til (1978:165), “the knowledge of God and the knowledge of man coincide at no point in the sense that in his awareness of meaning of anything, in his mental grasp or understanding of anything, man is at each point dependent upon a prior act of unchangeable understanding and revelation on the part of God. . . . Moreover, no amount of enriching human knowledge can contribute to ‘semantic overlap’ between human and divine knowledge; for no amount of such enrichment implies] that there is any coincidence, that is, identity of content between what God has in his mind and what man has in his mind.”

²⁵¹ “Reformed theology, as worked out by Calvin and his recent exponents such as Hodge, Warfield, Kuyper and Bavinck, holds that man’s mind is derivative. As such it is naturally in contact with God’s revelation. It is surrounded by nothing but revelation. It is itself inherently revelational. It cannot naturally be conscious of itself without being conscious of its creatureliness. For man self-consciousness presupposes God-consciousness. Calvin speaks of this as man’s inescapable sense of deity . . . We thus stress Paul’s teaching that all men do not have a mere capacity for but are in actual possession of the knowledge of God” (Van Til, 1967:107-109).

²⁵² “Disagreeing with the natural man’s interpretation of himself as the ultimate reference-point, the Reformed apologist must seek his point of contact with the natural man in that which is beneath the threshold of his working consciousness, in the sense of deity which he seeks to suppress. And to do this the Reformed apologist must also seek a point of contact with the systems constructed by the natural man. But this point of contact must be in the nature of a head-on collision. If there is no head-on collision with the systems of the natural man there will be no point of contact with the sense of deity in the natural man” (Van Til, 1967:115-116).

²⁵³ Viz., “Presuppositional apologetics.” See Van Til, 1967 and Bahnsen, 1998.

Whereas apophaticism keeps one from anthropomorphism, kataphaticism keeps one from agnosticism. Because our knowledge of God is neither completely accurate nor completely devoid of accuracy, both complete agnosticism and anthropomorphism are to be avoided. Fortunately, in between apophatic (via negativa) and kataphatic (via affirmativa) theology lies a third system: the *via media* of analogy.

5.4.1 Introduction to analogical theology

²⁵⁶ George Smith (1989:39) says that the failure to clearly define God actually produces “the major point of controversy between theism and critical atheism.” Antony Flew opened a debate with a discussion concerning just what the atheist has “not to believe”. (Miethe and Flew, 1991:1-6). When J. P. Moreland debated Kai Nielsen over the existence of God in 1988, Moreland offered several standard theistic arguments, yet his opponent responded with only one argument: that belief in God is irrational due to conceptual problems with the word “God.” (1993:49-56). Nielsen himself (1971:115) states that, “if a concept is incoherent, one ought not, even as an article of faith, to take it on trust that the concept in question has application.” The problem, as he sees it, is that, “we have no idea how to identify, pick out, a Being so characterized [as an incorporeal / unlimited agent]” (Nielsen, 1971:116). The reason for this contention is that, “the concept of God is incoherent because God is not—where God is used non-anthropomorphically—identifiable,” and this makes statements concerning God (not to mention arguments) to be “senseless collocation[s] of words.” (Nielsen, 1971:118). See also Antony Flew (Flew and McIntyre, 1955:97), who decries the entire enterprise of arguing for or against an “overqualified” God.

141

case with God, how is it that the theologian or apologist can claim to make true assertions about God's nature and existence?²⁵⁸

Between pure apophaticism and kataphaticism lies analogy. Simply put, the doctrine of analogy is that predications concerning God are neither the same as, nor completely different from, but rather *similar to* the objective reality which they communicate. As can be seen from the survey above, there is a sense in which analogy might be an appropriate description of the actual positions of most every Christian theologian in history. Even the most apophatic has much to say about God (even if claiming that it is all negative), and none of the most kataphatic have equated the Creator with creation (even if claiming that the words they use mean the same thing).²⁵⁹ Where the real differences are found is in how various theologians ground their manner of speaking about God.

When it comes to analogical theology, probably the most important practitioner is Thomas Aquinas, who stands at the pinnacle of classical theology. Aquinas acknowledges both of the above truths concerning our knowledge of God, and resolves them by positing analogy as the proper theological method. For Aquinas, analogy is no *ad hoc* "punt to mysticism" or "retreat into analogy" to avoid the difficulties of his theological position.²⁶⁰ Rather, analogy flows from Aquinas's theology which is grounded in his philosophy.²⁶¹

the two ideas of God's knowability and incomprehensibility "were always held side by side in the Christian Church." Charles Hodge (2001:335) begins his article on the knowledge of God by stating, "It is the clear doctrine of Scriptures that God can be known," but quickly follows this declaration up with an important qualification: "This does not mean that we can know all that is true concerning God."

²⁵⁸ The issue of the use of analogy in apologetics is briefly taken up by Lamar, 2008:20-21.

²⁵⁹ Even Clendenin (1994:61), who seems to think that Western Christianity in general gives only a "hat tip" to apophaticism, admits that, "the apophatic element, as the consciousness of intellectual failure, is present in most Christian theologians" (1994:150).

²⁶⁰ Swinburne (1977:72) seems to agree with critics of analogy when he notes that "The claim that he is using a word in an analogical sense must be for the theist a last resort to save his system from a charge of incoherence which would otherwise stick" Likewise, Craig (Craig and Moreland, 2003:524) bemoans the problem of analogy when he writes about divine simplicity: "While we can say what God is not like, we cannot say what He is like, except in an analogical sense—which must in the end fail, since there is no univocal element in the predicates we assign to God—leaving us in a state of genuine agnosticism about the nature of God. Indeed, on this view God really has no nature; He is simply the inconceivable act of being. Why should we adopt so extraordinary a doctrine?" As was shown above, Aquinas devotes considerable space to why we should adopt "so extraordinary a doctrine," and in doing so he seems to point out some of the very errors that are being made today.

²⁶¹ While the raw data for theology comes from Scripture and the teachings of the Church, the considerable remainder must be "unpacked" philosophically. This is not simply the scholastic position, it is

5.4.2 Thomistic methodology

In order to obtain a full understanding of Aquinas's theological position, one must understand it in the context of his understanding of metaphysics with its resulting epistemology, along with his linguistic conclusions. As will be shown, Aquinas's theology (and his apologetics) begins with metaphysical considerations based on creation, viz. finite, empirically-known, contingent beings reveal an infinite, rationally-affirmable, necessary *Being*.²⁶² The nature of this necessary Being is such that, given Aquinas's epistemology, it cannot be directly known. At the same time, however, Scripture, tradition, and nature seem to make a true affirmations of God possible. Therefore, Aquinas's linguistic position is that God-talk must be at all times *analogical*: communicating truths in such a way that approaches – but never reaches – exactitude. This summary of Aquinas's method will be unpacked below.

5.4.3 Thomistic metaphysics

Nielsen (1973:52) rightly notes that “the concept of God is not only attitude-expressing and attitude-evoking, but that it is a metaphysical concept as well.” One of the only writings of Thomas Aquinas generally considered to be purely philosophical is his book on metaphysics, *On Being and Essence*.²⁶³ In this short text, Aquinas considers what it means to *be* or to *exist*. In order to answer this issue, he begins with what it means to be an *essence* or a *being*. As

demanding by the nature of the case. The Bible, for example, describes God as both spirit (e.g., Jn. 4:24) and embodied (e.g., Dt. 33:27), all-knowing (e.g., 1 Jn. 3:20), and yet can forget (e.g., Isa. 43:25), immutable (e.g., Num. 23:19) and changeable (Gen. 6:6), etc. The resolutions to these paradoxes, if they are not found in supernatural revelation, must be found in natural philosophy (as the term is being used here). Aquinas begins his theological tome with this methodological explanation: “Sacred doctrine is a science. We must bear in mind that there are two kinds of sciences. There are some which proceed from a principle known by the natural light of intelligence, such as arithmetic and geometry and the like. There are some which proceed from principles known by the light of a higher science: thus the science of perspective proceeds from principles established by geometry, and music from principles established by arithmetic. So it is that sacred doctrine is a science because it proceeds from principles established by the light of a higher science, namely, the science of God and the blessed. Hence, just as the musician accepts on authority the principles taught him by the mathematician, so sacred science is established on principles revealed by God.” (ST I, Q.1, A.2)

²⁶²E.g., the famous “Five Ways” found in the beginning of *Summa Theologica*, (I. Q. 2, A. 3). Aquinas also begins his discussion of God's attributes after showing that God exists in *Summa Contra Gentiles* (I. 1. 14).

²⁶³One might say that Aquinas was such a good theologian, that he was also considered a great philosopher.

Aquinas (*OBE*, 1.3) will use the terms, a being is “that which signifies the essence of a thing,” and, “can be divided by the ten categories [of Aristotle].” This usage limits being to existing things and not simply that which can be used as subjects in predication.²⁶⁴ Simply put, essences are the “whatnesses” of things – the answer to the question, “What is it?”²⁶⁵

Aquinas divides being into necessary and contingent. Necessary being is that which must exist, while contingent being is that which exists but need not exist (e.g., substances composed of form and matter). Aquinas (*OBE*, 5.10) explains that, in contingent beings, existence “is received and limited, because they have being from another.” The essence / existence distinction comes into play here. Contingent beings can be thought of – *and completely defined* – without reference to existence. So, for example, one may think of a triangle as “a two-dimensional polygon with three sides joined at three corners” without including any reference to any triangles actually existing. Indeed, one may go on to perform intricate mathematical operations on such a thing without there being any existing triangles in extra-mental reality.²⁶⁶

The necessary/contingent distinction is important to what was said above concerning the distinction between being (“*what* something is”) and existence (“*whether* something is”). The distinction between necessary and contingent beings can be located in the source of their existence. While contingent beings by definition must receive their existence from another, necessary beings possess their existence by their very nature – existence is part of their definition. The result is that necessary beings have existence as a feature of their essence.²⁶⁷ Thus, it is clear that existence cannot simply be added to a thing’s definition, for then that thing would *have to exist* in order to *be what it is*. That this is not the case can be shown by another

²⁶⁴ So, for example, privations (e.g., “blindness,” or “hole”) may be named but are not to be properly considered as “beings.” This does not mean they have no existential import, or cannot function as subjects of sentences—only that they are not given metaphysical status as substances.

²⁶⁵ For the purposes of this paper, Aquinas’s other distinctions (e.g., quiddity, form, nature, definition, etc.) will only be brought up as necessary.

²⁶⁶ And indeed they do not. Because triangles are two-dimensional, none can actually exist within the physical universe.

²⁶⁷ “Everything that does not belong to the concept of an essence . . . comes to it from outside and enters into composition with the essence. . . . Now, every essence can be understood without knowing anything about its being. . . . from this it is clear that being is other than essence . . . unless perhaps there is a reality whose [essence] is its being.” (Aquinas, *OBE*:4.6)

example—that of a unicorn. We can define a unicorn without knowing if one exists (and indeed we must, for how else would we know what thing's existence we were considering?). Defining is based on *what* a thing is (its essence), not *whether* it is (its existence). But if a thing's existence is its essence (as would be the case with a necessary being), then by definition that thing could not be defined without including existence.²⁶⁸ This insight forms the basis of one of Aquinas's most powerful apologetic arguments for the existence of God.

5.4.4 Thomistic apologetics

Aquinas's metaphysical principles lead to a powerful argument for God's existence (and attributes).²⁶⁹ In summary: Given the existence of contingent being (any example from creation will do), there must be a necessary being. The basic steps are as follows: (1) Contingent beings are those which receive their existence from another. (2) This cannot go on to infinity of contingent beings giving existence to others, or else no explanation for the whole is forthcoming. (3) This chain can only terminate in necessary being. Thus, the very existence of created things that cannot account for their own existence demand the existence of a thing that can—and from what was said above, this thing's essence would be its existence. And this is God.²⁷⁰

Aquinas's metaphysical argument results not only in the affirmation of God's existence, but the definition of the divine attributes as well.²⁷¹ These attributes are discovered indirectly, however. They are, for Aquinas, the outworking of God's *simplicity*, which is proved thus: (1)

²⁶⁸ This may sound like the lead-in to an Anselmian Ontological Argument but this is not the case. Aquinas, in fact, specifically rejected Anselm's argument (*ST* I. Q.2. A.1). As will be shown below, what Aquinas is doing is building up a case for God based on these metaphysical principles – not “defining God into existence.”

²⁶⁹ Aquinas affirms “a twofold mode of truth in what we profess about God. Some truths about God exceed all the ability of the human reason. Such is the truth that God is triune. But there are some truths which the natural reason also is able to reach. Such are that God exists, that He is one, and the like” (*SCG*, I.3.2). Here we see Aquinas's distinction between natural and supernatural theology affirmed even when the two overlap in their subjects.

²⁷⁰ See *OBE* 1.79-83. As Aquinas puts it, “Everything whose being is distinct from its nature must have being from another,” and therefore, “there must be a reality that is the cause of being for all other things, because it is pure being. . . . and this is the first cause, or God.” (*OBE*, 4.7). Aquinas's “Third Way” (*ST*, I. Q. 2, A. 3) uses these insights as well in arguing for God's existence.

²⁷¹ Unpacking divine simplicity and defining God's attributes accordingly will be the task of chapter 6.

God, as a necessary being, has existence as His essence. (2) Existence is only limited by essence. (3) If God's essence is existence, then He is unlimited (for there is no finite essence to limit His existence). (4) Unlimited existence is undivided (for it can only be divided by essence). Therefore, God is without parts, he is "simple."²⁷²

Because of God's simplicity, there necessarily remains an element of "agnosticism" with regard to His essence and attributes. Indeed, for Aquinas (SCG, I.30.4), "we cannot grasp what God is, but only what He is not and how other things are related to Him." This is because "the divine substance surpasses every form that our intellect reaches." (Aquinas, SCG, I.14.2). Therefore, "God cannot be seen in His essence by a mere human being, except he be separated from this mortal life. The reason is because . . . our soul, as long as we live in this life, has its being in corporeal matter; hence naturally it knows only what has a form in matter" (Aquinas, ST, I, Q.12, A.11).

It may seem paradoxical – even contradictory – that Aquinas would structure both his theological and apologetical "summas" by beginning with proofs of God's existence, affirming God's unknowability based on the proofs, and then going on to list God's attributes based on the same proofs.²⁷³ But as will be shown next, this is a necessary consequence of his epistemology.

5.4.5 Thomistic epistemology

Unlike most modern philosophers, Aquinas does not define knowledge in terms of proposition affirmation.²⁷⁴ Rather, knowledge is defined as a metaphysical event that takes

²⁷² See OBE, 1.74-77.

²⁷³ In the *Summa Theologiæ*, he begins with God's simplicity (I. Q.3), while in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, he begins with God's immovability (I.14.4).

²⁷⁴ The most common modern definition of knowledge (which harkens back to Plato) is that discussed by Gettier in his infamous (1963) article: *justified true belief* (JTB). As Gettier points out, this common definition is open to counterexamples which call it into question (examples of which earned him a place in epistemological nomenclature: "Gettier problems"). For example, suppose a man (Smith) has been told that another man (Jones) will get a job offer. Smith, having seen Jones put ten coins in his pocket earlier, forms the belief that "whoever will get the job has ten coins in his pocket." This belief seems justified and, as it turns out, is true – but Jones does not get the job. Rather, Smith himself gets the job (and Smith himself has ten coins in his pocket). The problem is that while Smith's proposition fulfills JTB, it does not seem to count as knowledge. What Smith really thought (whether formed into a mental proposition or not) was not simply that "a man with ten coins in his pocket" will get the job - but that *Jones* would. The usual response from epistemologists is not so much to re-evaluate JTB, but to tweak it to overcome Gettier-type problems (much the same as apologists tweak God's attributes to avoid

place within the intellect of the knower. Indeed, it is when the knower in the thing known become one.²⁷⁵ In contrast to epistemological systems that present knowledge as a sort of picture in the mind, or the affirmation of certain propositions, for Aquinas, to know a thing requires that its form come to exist in the mind.²⁷⁶ It should be clear, then, that, for Aquinas, a human's finite intellect can in no way be said to "know" the infinite God (an essence which, by definition, is without form or matter).²⁷⁷

Although Aquinas taught that men cannot come to know God through the same means that they use for other objects, this does not mean that man is forever lost in complete agnosticism regarding God's existence and attributes. For Aquinas (SCG, 1. 3. 3), "beginning with sensible things, our intellect is led to the point of knowing about God that He exists, and other such characteristics that must be attributed to the First Principle." Thus, God's existence and attributes can be known to be the case via intellectual reasoning based on the empirical data available from creation. This is not the same thing as knowing God directly. Indeed, for Aquinas (ST, I. Q. 12, A. 1), God is unknowable *per se*, "since everything is knowable according as it is actual, God, Who is pure act without any admixture of potentiality, is in Himself supremely knowable," but, "what is supremely knowable in itself, may not be knowable to a particular intellect, on account of the excess of the intelligible object above the intellect; as, for example, the sun, which is supremely visible, cannot be seen by the bat by reason of its excess

ontological-disproof problems - examples of both can be found in Craig and Moreland, 2003: chapters 3 and 25-26).

²⁷⁵ "Intelligent beings are distinguished from non-intelligent beings in that the latter possess only their own form; whereas the intelligent being is naturally adapted to have also the form of some other thing; for the idea of the thing known is in the knower" (Aquinas, ST I, Q.14, A.1).

²⁷⁶ The form/matter distinction (introduced to explain change) is another important feature of Aquinas's metaphysics. These twin principles refer to limiting factors in a thing's being. The *form* is the cause of a thing's being what it is, while *matter* is what makes it be *this* rather than *that* thing. So, the form of "treeness" might be what makes a thing a tree, but matter is what individuates one tree from another. A tree, then, can be defined according to a hylemorphic (from Greek *hyle* and *morphe*) compound of form and matter. See Feser, 2014:160-164.

²⁷⁷ "According to its manner of knowing in the present life, the intellect depends on the sense for the origin of knowledge; and so those things that do not fall under the senses cannot be grasped by the human intellect except in so far as the knowledge of them is gathered from sensible things. Now, sensible things cannot lead the human intellect to the point of seeing in them the nature of the divine substance; for sensible things are effects that fall short of the power of their cause." (Aquinas, SCG I. 3. 3).

of light.”²⁷⁸ In this life, one cannot experience God’s essence empirically, and so he is left with rational deductions from what can be empirically known.²⁷⁹

When doing theology, therefore, the method Aquinas suggests is that of “remotion” which refers to the removal of differences between created being and the *Being* of its Creator. Aquinas (SCG, 1. 1. 14) says, “For, by its immensity, the divine substance surpasses every form that our intellect reaches. Thus we are unable to apprehend it by knowing what it is. Yet we are able to have some knowledge of it by knowing what it is not. Furthermore, we approach nearer to a knowledge of God according as through our intellect we are able to remove more and more things from Him.” In this way we can approach a true understanding of God’s nature although it will never be perfect.²⁸⁰

Imperfect knowledge of God’s nature does not mean, however, that we cannot truly and meaningfully affirm or deny things of God. First, it would be self-defeating to say that one knows that he cannot know anything about God. Doing so is made possible by the fact that God, as creator, “contains the effects He creates and . . . their perfections can be attributed to Him. We know that they are in Him but we do not know how. All we know is that in Him they are what he is.” (Gilson, 1994:105). While the concept a person has in mind when he speaks of God does not correspond to God according to His essence, it can nevertheless be used in a true *judgment*.²⁸¹ The distinction between concept and judgment is based on the distinction between the acts of the intellect. Kreeft lists these acts as (1) apprehension, (2) judgment, and (3) reasoning.²⁸² The

²⁷⁸ Such a position is to be distinguished from mere puzzles or mysteries. Knowledge of God is not simply *unknown* because it has yet to be worked out (a puzzle) or is currently unrevealed (a mystery), it is *unknowable* by man in his current condition full stop.

²⁷⁹ Aquinas believes that the blessed in heaven do experience God directly, yet even in this blessed state, they never come to know him exhaustively. See *ST*, I. Q. 12, A. 1.

²⁸⁰ The reason for this is that “in the case of the things whose definitions we know. . . . We locate them in a genus, through which we know in a general way what they are. Then we add differences to each thing, by which it may be distinguished from other things. In this way, a complete knowledge of a substance is built up. However, in the consideration of the divine substance we cannot take a what as a genus.” God is said to not be in a genus because there is no other thing like Him – for He transcends all other things (Aquinas, SCG I. 25).

²⁸¹ “We can further consider what it is possible to say or not to say of God, what is said of Him alone, and also what is said of Him and other things together.” (Aquinas, SCG I. 30. 1).

²⁸² That apprehension precedes judgment may seem backward, for how can we speak of what something is if we do not even know that it exists? A simple illustration should make it clear why this is the case. In order to answer the question, “Do flubars exist?” one must first know what counts as a flubar. So

products of these acts are (1) concepts, (2) judgments, and (3) arguments. These, in turn, are the basis for (1) terms, (2) propositions, and (3) premises/conclusions.²⁸³

These distinctions are important to one's understanding of how language communicates truths about God. If it is the case, as shown above, that men cannot apprehend the essence of God then no concept can be formed.²⁸⁴ Thus, to speak of God using terms referring to concepts derived from creation (i.e., non-God) must be a mistake. For Aquinas, "God's epistemic transcendence is based upon God's ontological transcendence, which is equated with the infinity of divine being and with the fact that God's essence and being are the same in reality" (Gilson, 1952:69). Therefore, our words cannot refer to univocal concepts derived from finite reality when they are used with reference to God for the simple fact that we cannot form a concept of God in our natural state.²⁸⁵

It would seem that man is left in complete agnosticism. Aquinas (SCG, I.36.1) does not think that this is the case, however, for "it is not futile for our intellect to form enunciations concerning God." This is because analogical predication focuses on *being* rather than on *concepts*.²⁸⁶ Gregory Rocca (2004:355) explains that Aquinas' doctrine of analogy "finds its unity not in an abstract concept but in a concrete reference to one reality; and his analogy is more a matter of judgment than of concept in the traditional narrow sense, for it arises out of those extensions of meaning that occur and must be understood in order for certain truths to be assertable." Rocca (2004:193-194) goes on to say that,

flubars must be apprehended before a judgment about their existence can be made. Thus, apprehension must precede judgment or we will not know of what we are speaking.

²⁸³ See Kreeft, 2010:28. Consider the argument, "All men are mortal. Socrates is a man. Therefore Socrates is mortal." Here we have the *concepts* of man, mortality, and Socrates. These are used in the *judgments* "Men are mortal," and "Socrates is a man." These judgments are then combined to form the *argument*.

²⁸⁴ As Gilson (1952:4) notes, "actual existence cannot be represented by, nor in, a concept."

²⁸⁵ Aquinas believes that the blessed in heaven will know God directly. See ST, II.1, Q. 3, A. 8.

²⁸⁶ "This occurs when several things are equally matched in the intention of some common note even though that note does not have a being of one and the same sort (*esse unius rationis*) in each of them. An instance of this is that all bodies are made equal in the intention of "body." As a result the logician, who considers only intentions, says that this term body is predicated univocally of all bodies. In reality, however, this nature exists with a being of a different sort in corruptible and incorruptible bodies. Thus, in the eyes of a metaphysician or a philosopher of nature, who considers things according to the being they have, neither body nor any other term is predicated univocally of corruptible and of incorruptible things" (Aquinas, *Commentary on The First Book of Sentences of Peter Lombard*, Id.19.5a.2ad.1).

Whereas all judgments dealing with a reality that can be bodily experienced are comprised of terms whose objects, in principle at least, are able to be apprehended by direct insight, judgments about God use creaturely names in the very act of claiming something beyond their mundane referents, without at the same time ever having any direct apprehension or insight into the divine reality now meant by the divine name. The divine name is always tied to its source in creatures, can be understood only in relation to our knowledge and naming of creatures, and can never gain one iota more of intuitive content (since we cannot see or define God). But if we understand concept broadly, then the divine name can be conceived in a way that transcends its creaturely meaning, but only on the grounds of and by constant reference to the truth of the judgments in which it is used of God.

So it is not in the *concept* derived from finite reality that we find our ability to speak meaningfully of God. Rather, we predicate according to a *judgment* made in the second act of the intellect resulting in a meaningful *proposition* regarding God. This proposition is, of course, composed of finite concepts that we must attempt to strip (viz. *remotion*) of their inherent inaccuracy in various ways.

In summary: By apprehending the empirical data of reality (first act of the intellect), the intellect forms finite concepts. The concepts are placed into propositions during judgment (the second act of the intellect), and arguments are formed. These concepts, propositions, and arguments can be used to communicate truths even when their subject is infinite. How this linguistic feat can be accomplished may now be examined.

5.4.6 Thomistic linguistics

There are essentially three ways that terms can be used in predication: (1) equivocally, (2) univocally, and (3) analogically (Aquinas, *ST Ia.*, Q.13, A.5). When Aquinas considers the last of these, analogy, it is in the context of equivocity and univocity as extremes with analogy being a middle way between them.²⁸⁷ In order to understand analogy's value one must first understand these two extremes. Terms are said to be equivocal when "though they have a common name, the definition corresponding with the name differs for each." (Aristotle, *Categories*, 1A1-2). With equivocity the same word is used to pick out completely distinct things in reality. "Bark" when used of a dog and a tree means completely different things. The fact that they share a common name is accidental to their meaning.

This use of terms is a logical description—it has no bearing on extra-mental reality, for it is an act of a rational mind. "To be named equivocally is not a property things possess

²⁸⁷ McNerny, 1996:86.

independently of our thinking about them” (McInerny, 1996:86-87). Because of this, we should not expect to be able to learn anything about the subject of equivocal predication in light of another use (e.g., the nature of a dog’s *bark* is not informative of the nature of a tree’s *bark*). Herein lies the beginning of the problem of equivocal God-talk. Unless there is some common meaning of words used to speak of God and creation, then those words are not informative of God’s nature.

Aquinas believes that positive knowledge was required to speak in meaningful ways about a thing. Aquinas (*Commentary on Aristotle’s Posterior Analytics*, 1.2.17) points out, “Before knowing whether something exists we cannot properly know what it is, since there are no definitions of nonbeings. Hence the question whether something exists precedes the question what something is. But we cannot show whether something exists unless we first understand what is signified by the name.” Aquinas, however, believes that this is possible (as indicated above), and from this we can know of divine things.²⁸⁸

Further, Aquinas (SCG, I .33. 5) argues that because creatures are the effects of God, that there must be some likeness to God in creatures: “If, then, nothing was said of God and creatures except in a purely equivocal way, no reasoning proceeding from creatures to God could take place. But, the contrary is evident from all those who have spoken about God.”²⁸⁹ If equivocal God-talk were all we had available to us then “nothing could be known or demonstrated about God at all; for the reasoning would always be exposed to the fallacy of equivocation.” (Aquinas, *ST*, I, Q. 13, A. 5).

Finally, purely negative God-talk requires, in some sense, positive knowledge. “Should it be replied that through such names we know only what God is not, namely, that God is called living because He does not belong to the genus of lifeless things, and so with the other names, it will at least have to be the case that living said of God and creatures agrees in the denial of the lifeless. Thus, it will not be said in a purely equivocal way.” (Aquinas, SCG, I.33.7). In other words, denying some predicate of God is itself an affirmation.

For all of these reasons, then, it must be that “not everything predicated of God and other things is said in a purely equivocal way.” (Aquinas, SCG, 1. 33. 1). As was said above, the

²⁸⁸ See also Aquinas, SCG, I. 33. 4.

²⁸⁹ See Aquinas, SCG, I. 33. 3.

opposite extreme from equivocal God-talk is found in predicating univocally. Problems plague this form of predication as well, however.

Things are said to be named univocally when they have both the same name and the same definition is shared by that name.²⁹⁰ This would be the case when, for example, “man” is said of Plato and Aristotle. The name is the same both in its symbol or sound and, more importantly, it means the same thing. Both Plato and Aristotle are equally “man.” It might be thought, especially given the problems raised by equivocal God-talk, that univocal predication is required if our language is to truly say anything of God. Aquinas (*ST*, I, Q. 13, A. 5), however, disagrees as indicated by his unambiguous response to the issue: “I answer that univocal predication is impossible between God and creatures.”

The problem here is that univocal concepts can only be predicated of essences that are the same (e.g., “man” predicated of Plato and Aristotle). Following Aquinas, Maurice Holloway (1959:208) teaches that “since God’s perfections are identified with his existence, no perfection can be found in any creature the way it exists in God.” Due to the uniting of essence and existence in God, nothing said of God that has as its basis a creaturely concept can apply univocally to God for Aquinas (*ST*, I, Q. 13, A. 5):

When any term expressing perfection is applied to a creature, it signifies that perfection distinct in idea from other perfections; as, for instance, by the term “wise” applied to man, we signify some perfection distinct from a man’s essence, and distinct from his power and existence, and from all similar things; whereas when we apply to it God, we do not mean to signify anything distinct from His essence, or power, or existence. Thus also this term “wise” applied to man in some degree circumscribes and comprehends the thing signified; whereas this is not the case when it is applied to God; but it leaves the thing signified as incomprehended, and as exceeding the signification of the name.

The fact that creatures are made in the likeness of God does not make univocal predication appropriate, for “the forms of the things God has made do not measure up to a specific likeness of the divine power; for the things that God has made receive in a divided and particular way that which in Him is found in a simple and universal way” (Aquinas, *SCG*, 1. 32. 2). The effect’s (creation’s) attributes “will not receive the univocal predication of the name unless it receives the same specific form according to the same mode of being” (Aquinas, *SCG*, 1. 32. 3). Therefore univocal predication between God and creatures is impossible. This is also seen in the genus/species distinction mentioned earlier. “Whatever is predicated of many things univocally is either a genus, a species, a difference, an accident, or a property” (Aquinas, *SCG*,

²⁹⁰ See Aristotle, *Categories*, 1a6-7.

1. 32. 4). Since God is not a genus or a species of a genus, no univocal predication can take place between the divine being and any created being. Aquinas (SCG, 1. 32. 4) concludes that “nothing is predicated of God and creatures as though they were in the same order.” If this is so, it seems that something between univocal and equivocal God-talk is the only option, but between pure equivocation and univocation there exists a middle ground.

To predicate “bark” of both a dog and a tree may be merely an accident of language. To say “man” of both Plato and a painting of Plato seems to be a different sort of statement. “Man,” as used in this example, is not simply a chance similarity of sound or symbol. Rather, “man” here is intending to be informative of what something is (i.e., its essence). This can be seen by the fact that should one contest that the painting is of a man, they would not try to redefine the term “man,” but rather point out that the painting does not bear a likeness to “a real man.” While it is clear that a man and a painting do not share a common essence, and that therefore univocal terms cannot be applied to both, it is also the case that this is not an instance of pure equivocation. As will be shown, Aquinas saw this kind of middle-of-the-road equivocation as an instance of analogy.

In an analogy there is both similarity and difference in predication. This, Aquinas (SCG, 1. 34. 1), concludes, must be how language works with regard to God.²⁹¹ “From what we have said, therefore, it remains that the names said of God and creatures are predicated neither univocally nor equivocally but analogically.” Because God is the creator He can be named from creatures because we come to our knowledge of God from creatures.²⁹² Analogy is not, however, a mere likeness. According to Aquinas, analogical names are either as many things are proportionate to one thing or as one thing is proportionate to another.²⁹³ So analogy communicates a relation (whether metaphysical or merely logical) of one object to another. There are several means by which this can take place depending on the types of objects (analogates) being compared.

²⁹¹ From early on there has developed a rather large body of literature devoted to Aquinas’s exact view of analogical God-talk, resulting in various schools of thought and noted champions within each. It is not the purpose of this dissertation to referee these discussions, nor is their resolution necessary for the overall position taken in this writing. For more on the various schools of thought, see Appendix 2.

²⁹² See Aquinas, SCG I.34.6.

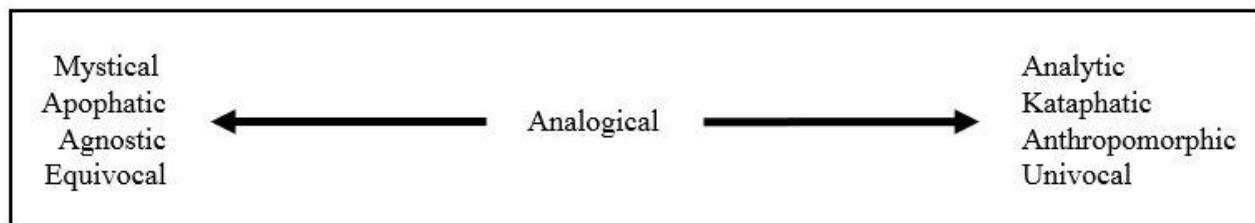
²⁹³ See Aquinas, ST, I. Q. 13, A. 5.

God can be named from His effects, but this is not as simple as it might at first sound.²⁹⁴ Even in mundane matters analogy is often required simply because of the efficiency of language. People instinctively know that words do not always apply in univocal nor equivocal ways to their subjects. For example, when one says that a knife is “good” and a shoe is “good” there must exist some similarity in the concept of goodness or else the statements are non-informative. If the concepts were univocal then what makes the shoe good and the knife good would have to be the same thing (sharpness or comfort), but this is clearly not what is being said. Further, the term “goodness” cannot be equivocal because then it could mean anything. The analogy comes from the fact that the knife is ordered to its sharpness as the shoe is to its comfort. This does not make sharpness and comfort univocal terms (because they refer to different properties), nor are they entirely equivocal terms (since these different properties give rise to the same judgment).²⁹⁵

5.4.7 Thomistic theology

Analogical theology, then, resides between pure mysticism / apophaticism / agnosticism / equivocation and pure analyticism / kataphaticism / anthropomorphism / univocation. In proper analogy, statements share in the strengths of the extremes while avoiding their weaknesses.

Figure 0: Analogy Comparison Chart



²⁹⁴ Indeed, even analogy only works in cases where it is proper to use words at all. Words that signify an imperfection, for example, cannot be said of God at all (e.g., “composed,” “finite,” “ignorant,” or “evil”). Words that signify pure perfections can be said of God properly (more properly even than of creatures, because these perfections preexist in an eminent way in God) so long as they are qualified as such (e.g., “existence,” “wisdom,” “goodness,” or “life”). Words that signify neither a pure perfection, nor something simply imperfect can be said of God only metaphorically (e.g., “God is a lion” or “God is a rock”). See Aquinas *ST* I. Q.4 A.2 and I. Q.13 A.3 and I.Q13.A.6)

²⁹⁵ There are several schools of thought concerning further distinctions within Aquinas’s view of analogy; however, such detailed analyses are not necessary for the argument of this paper. Appendix 2: Thomistic Analogy briefly discusses the primary texts where Aquinas treats of analogy, as well as a summary of Thomistic positions that have emerged from his writings.

The result is that classical (i.e., Thomistic) definitions of God's attributes often sound rather unintelligible compared to more popular notions (see chapter 6). This should not be seen as a problem for the system, however. After all, when describing the infinite, simple essence of God (existence itself!), one should expect its descriptions to be rather obscure.²⁹⁶ Indeed, one should be suspect of any description of God's essence that is easily grasped.²⁹⁷

While popular understandings may not always involve problems when taken as purely logical concepts, they most always involve metaphysical problems once those concepts are considered as actually-existing realities. When the terms are used as *ontologically* (not merely logically²⁹⁸) univocal predicates, they necessarily reduce God's attributes to that of His creatures. To say that such concepts need only be "stripped of their finitude or imperfection" does no good - for once so stripped, these terms no longer refer to the same thing. The resulting paradoxes of the above methods have fueled atheistic divine attribute incoherency arguments. After all, it is not difficult to see how contradictions can be discovered when an attribute of God is defined as an unlimited version of a necessarily limited concept!²⁹⁹

These paradoxes, however, should be excluded on a Thomistic methodology. Aquinas begins his theology with metaphysics – not "great-making attributes," nor by attempting to remove finitude from (necessarily finite) univocal concepts. As Przywara (2014:48) warns, "there is nothing absolutely common between God and creature. On the contrary: in the very thing in

²⁹⁶ Even Swinburne (1977:297), who typically decries analogy in all but the most extreme cases (see 5.2.4.2), finally acknowledges at the very end of *The Coherence of Theism* that it "would not be surprising if there were a lot more to God than could be described, even analogically, by words which men can understand. Maybe some truths about God are ones which involve concepts which only a personal ground of being can grasp."

²⁹⁷ As McKenzie (1966:176) says, "In all theological reasoning the danger of rationalism is always present. It would not be too grossly simplified to say that all heresies ultimately were efforts to reduce the mystery to something reasonable."

²⁹⁸ The distinction between an ontological and merely logical univocal use would be to assign a term an abstract "dictionary definition" and then apply it to two different beings. So, for example, calling a shoe and knife "good" is fine so long as "good" is understood abstractly as "that which attains to its purpose." Once "good" is understood in relation to its ontological referent, though, it becomes nonsensical: the shoe is "good" because it is comfortable, while the "good" of the knife is its sharpness – but sharpness is not comfort.

²⁹⁹ Holloway notes: "An even greater mistake would be to confuse mathematical proportionality with metaphysical proportionality or the analogy of being." (1959: 220).

which they correspond, namely, in being, they are separated from one another by an abyss.” However kataphatic Aquinas might sound, his entire theology is predicated on this analogy of being (*analogia entis*) between Creator and the creature (even those fashioned in the *imago dei*).³⁰⁰ As Przywara (2014:48) so eloquently puts it: “the summit of all creaturely knowledge of God is: to comprehend God’s incomprehensibility.”³⁰¹ “The point,” says Betz (in Przywara, 2014:49), of Aquinas’s analogical theology is to “*loosen* our grasp upon being (whether this grasping be in the form of reductive naturalism, logical positivism, or absolute idealism) and to humble every proud system of thought, in order to make way for silent adoration of the *Deus totum ignotus*, the God who is revealed in creation as infinitely beyond it.”³⁰² Aquinas’s use of analogy is based on judgments that are themselves the result of metaphysical insights from principles discovered through reason and empirical observation. By maintaining the necessarily mysterious and apophatic nature of divine investigation (even while affirming the possibility of true judgments concerning that mysterious divinity), univocal concepts are avoided (along with their resulting finite/infinite paradoxes).³⁰³ It is when the infinite distance between Creator and creature is ignored that proper theology collapses into an illogical (and idolatrous) system.³⁰⁴

5.4.8 Conclusion to analogical theology

It is not the case that all of the problems arising from Christian theology may be laid on the shoulders of its academic representatives. Michael Martin (2003:238) notes that, “ordinary

³⁰⁰ E.g., Millsaps (2006:15 citing Williams, 1999:21) labeled Thomas Aquinas an essentially kataphatic theologian: “for Aquinas, apophatic discourse becomes simply a corrective to his essentially kataphatic theological construct.”

³⁰¹ Thomistic scholar Etienne Gilson echoes this idea when he says that, “we must not forget that because God’s act of existing eludes our grasp, all our knowledge about him is inadequate. We can conclude, therefore, with Dionysis the Areopagite, that the highest knowledge we can acquire about the divine nature in this life is the certainty that God transcends everything we know about him.” (2002:126).

³⁰² Emphasis in original. Elsewhere Betz, has written that “following Augustine, theology is precisely a *reductio in mysterium*, ‘an entry into the mystery of God in order more deeply ‘to grasp his incomprehensibility as such’. . . . theology is, properly speaking, a reduction to the *Deus tamquam ignotus* of Aquinas and to the ‘superluminous darkness’ of the Areopagite.” (2011:65, quotes are from Przywara, 2014:87).

³⁰³ Whether or not this is the case will be the subject of chapter 6.

³⁰⁴ As Betz puts it, the point of the employment of analogical theology “is to break to pieces every conceptual idol” (in Przywara, 2014:57).

men tend to understand God in ways that are familiar to them despite the protests of theologians and intellectual ministers. As a result, God tends to be conceived of in the image of a man – a man much more powerful, moral, knowledgeable, and so on than ordinary men.” The difficulty for any univocal predication is that even when eminence-affirming prefixes are attached to univocal terms, the terms themselves remain finite in the intellect, and finitude cannot become infinitude by multiplication.³⁰⁵

At the end of the day, both analytic philosophy and perfect being theology suffer from the same problematic methodology. When linguistic precision becomes the *sine qua non* of philosophical discussion, univocity is the only allowable means of predication. And this is exactly the way many divine attributes are defined. For example, if God’s omniscience is defined as knowing all true propositions – as if making man’s limited knowledge of true propositions unlimited is all that is necessary to describe God’s knowledge. This would be the same mistake as saying that God’s omnipresence is “unlimited location.” But these methodologies can end up doing is essentially defining God’s attributes as being both finite and infinite in the same way and in the same sentence. It is not difficult to imagine how atheistic ontological disproofs can arise when it is Christian theologians who are themselves asserting logical contradictions.³⁰⁶

“When all is said and done,” writes Maurer (1982:169), “our judgments of analogy between God and creatures do not yield a positive concept of God in himself.” Because of the infinite “distance” between God and creatures, “man reaches the peak of his knowledge of God when he realizes that he does not know him” (Maurer, 1982:170). When theologians embrace this truth, as well as the fact that, paradoxical as it may sound, this does not spell the end of theology proper, many of the errors of analytical and atheistic philosophers may be resolved. Further, the more pervasive confusion over God’s nature and the content of our knowledge of Him.

To do so may sound impious, but if “man has, then, no other recourse here below than to return to God by way of thought, beginning with the sensible knowledge coming from His effects,” then in doing so, “we do no more than give philosophical meaning to the words of the Apostle: The invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen (Romans

³⁰⁵ E.g., see Craig’s discussion of this possibility in relation to Zeno’s paradoxes (2000:175-188).

³⁰⁶ For example, “when people have tried to read into ‘God can do everything’ a signification not of Pious Intention but a Philosophical Truth, they have only landed themselves in intractable problems and hopeless confusions.” (Geach, 1977:4).

1:20). Certainly all theologians and Christian philosophers who have spoken about the existence of God have quoted these words, but St. Thomas took them in all their living force.”³⁰⁷ Using Aquinas’s metaphysical method, one can prove not only *that* God is, but *what* He is, starting from the same point that all men must—creation itself. So long as one does so carefully, he may honor Romans 1:20 without violating Romans 1:21-23.

5.5 Conclusion

Concerning developments in Western thought after Aquinas, Armstrong (2009:152) notes that, “the abstruse speculations of philosophers like Scotus and Ockham led to a rift between theology and spirituality that persists to the present day.”³⁰⁸ Indeed, there several important rifts in Western Christianity to follow. One was a more thorough division between philosophy and theology, in which philosophy, which used to be considered the “handmaiden” to theology - the “Queen of the sciences,” was often pitted against the claims of supernatural revelation (viz., the very debate in question in this work). Another schism was between science and religion, exemplified by the so-called Enlightenment (named in contrast to the so-called Dark Ages) period wherein theology was gradually relegated to a lower and less a respected epistemological category than empirical science. Rounding out these philosophical and scientific divisions, came a religious one: the Protestant Reformation, which challenged the institutional Church’s role in defining theological dogma.³⁰⁹ It is not the purpose of this dissertation to referee the numerous debates that led to, and followed, from these divisive battles. What is important to note for the present purpose is that their impact on classical theistic formulations was rather insignificant for Christians.³¹⁰

³⁰⁷ Gilson, 1994:52. Unfortunately, Aquinas’s work was brought into disrepute early on, and his doctrine of analogical predication was quickly confused by the univocation of Scotus and the nominalism of Ockham.

³⁰⁸ Hyman (1990:42) notes that, “If Aquinas’s conception of the task of analogy was to steer a precarious but necessary middle way between univocity on the one hand and equivocation on the other, in the wake of Duns Scotus, we see conceptions of analogy slowly shifting away from a Thomistic middle way toward a more modern univocity.” This modernistic trend was a direct antecedent to the situation reached in the 20th Century.

³⁰⁹ For an interesting take on the interrelatedness of these various divisions, see Gregory, 2012.

³¹⁰ There was no important evolution of these themes within Eastern Orthodoxy after Palamas, and none of it was influenced by modernistic thought. See Florovsky, 1961.

Not surprisingly, the East remained unaffected by these Western philosophical developments. Eastern Orthodox dogma has remained true to the Creedal / Conciliar decrees of the first millennium, as well as the theology of Palamas (which, although introducing the theological innovation of the essence/energies distinction, did not overturn “classic” theological formulations).³¹¹ The same fidelity to the dogmatic decrees of the ecumenical councils and creeds can be said of Roman Catholicism. Despite its continuous theologizing (which extends to the holding of several ecumenical councils, as well as declarations of both orthodoxy and heresy), its commitment to the classical attributes of God remains. As for most Reformation theologians, even if anti-scholastic, modernistic philosophical trends were said to underlie their theological thinking, none departed from the classical doctrinal formulations of Western Christianity. This same faithfulness is reflected in the great Reformation confessions that guide the largest Protestant denominations today,³¹² as well as many respected Reformed theologians.³¹³

Because of this “quirk” of theological history, it becomes unnecessary to consider here the doctrinal development that continued after the period ending with Aquinas who remains one of its greatest (if not the greatest) expositors.³¹⁴ Given the respect (both direct and indirect) that

³¹¹ Further, Eastern Orthodoxy has remained largely outside of modern anti-atheistic apologetics being dealt with in this dissertation. Two exceptions to this general assertion might be Richard Swinburne and David Bentley Hart. As shown above, although Swinburne interacts with the kinds of arguments of concern here, his theological views depart significantly from standard Orthodox understandings. Hart, on the other hand, has focused much of his work on taking the so-called “New Atheists” to task (e.g., *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies*).

³¹² See Appendix 1 for an annotated sampling of Protestant confessions and catechisms.

³¹³ A good example of this is found a decidedly anti-scholastic source. Oliphint (2012:10) suggests that those interested in “a classical Christian doctrine of God” read the works of theologians such as Herman Bavinck, Francis Turretin, Richard A. Muller, and John Calvin.

³¹⁴ After a short time of neglect, the Roman Catholic Church fully embraced Aquinas’s theology, and officially continues to hold his work in the highest of esteem today. Pope John XXII, for example, said that Aquinas’s “life was saintly and his doctrine could only be miraculous ... because he enlightened the church more than all the other doctors. By the use of his works a man could profit more in one year than if he studies the doctrine of others for his whole life.” Pope Pius V declared Aquinas a Doctor of The Church, saying he was “the most brilliant light of the Church,” whose works are “the most certain rule of Christian doctrine by which he enlightened the Apostolic Church in answering conclusively numberless errors”. Pope Pius X called Aquinas “the leader and master of theology, whose divine genius fashioned weapons marvelously suited to protect the truth and destroy the many errors . . . one may not desert Aquinas, especially in philosophy and theology, without great harm; following him is the safest way to the knowledge of divine things.” (See McArthur, “The Formation of the Catholic Mind”). More recently, Pope John Paul II said that, “the Church has been justified in consistently proposing Saint Thomas as a master of thought and a model of the right way to do theology.” (Cited in Egan, 2009:91).

Christian theologians on both side of the Catholic-Protestant divide have given (and continue to give) Aquinas, it will be instructive to see if Aquinas's analogical theology can adequately answer the challenges of the ontological disproofs. If these can be met without threatening classical theism, it would be a victory for all orthodox Christians (especially in the West). This will be the subject of the next and final chapter.

Chapter 6: A Thomistic response to ontological disproofs

6.1 Introduction

It has been argued that atheistic ontological disproof arguments are grounded in the kind of analytic philosophy and kataphatic theology that results in anthropomorphic, univocal God-talk, which, in turn, actually produces the paradoxes that give rise to them.³¹⁵ In contrast to the apophatic theological tradition of the majority of the Christian Church, many modern apologetic responses to these arguments often share these methodologies, sometimes resulting in unorthodox (and even heretical) views of God. Analogical theology, on the other hand, resides between these methods and a pure *via negativa* that would result in agnosticism and equivocal God-talk.³¹⁶ Further, it seems to better track with classical formulations of Christian theism.

It remains, then, to see if this theology can provide adequate answers to atheistic ontological disproofs while remaining true to the orthodox Christian doctrine of God. While a thorough discussion of every atheistic argument levelled against God's nature would not be possible here, it seems fair to say that if the major concerns of the most powerful of these arguments can be answered, then it is likely that the less popular could be as well. Thus, below will be presented a Thomistic view of the primary attributes under attack, followed by how this understanding could be used to respond to standard ontological disproofs.

6.2 Metaphysical Prolegomena

In order to understand some of the fine points of Thomistic theology, one must be familiar with his philosophy – specifically his use of Aristotelian metaphysics.³¹⁷ Aquinas

³¹⁵ There is an analytic strain of Thomism often referred to, appropriately, as “Analytical Thomism.” Adherents are generally identified by their philosophical style more than their agreement with Aquinas. For more see Feser, 2009c.

³¹⁶ Holloway describes the situation succinctly: “*First*, God can be named because God can be known. . . . *Secondly*, God must be named in the same way that he is known. . . . *We simply have no name for what God is*, for we have no concept of what God is. . . . *Thirdly*, . . . a purifying process has to take place in our knowledge before it becomes proper and distinct knowledge of God . . . This will be done when we discuss predication by way of analogy.” (1959:196-197. Emphasis in original.)

³¹⁷ The term “metaphysics” has been unfortunately co-opted in some areas by New Age Mysticism (e.g., in many American book stores, these sorts of books are in the section of the store labelled “Metaphysical”). According to the standard account, the word derives from Aristotle’s unnamed works on “first philosophy” (aka, “first science”, “wisdom”, or “theology”). After Aristotle’s death, an editor referred to these books as the “*meta ta phusika*” or “after the physics.” The *Physics* are Aristotle’s books

rediscovered Aristotle in the West, and found his philosophy helpful in working out the theological truths found in Scripture and the trusted traditions of the Church. Indeed, it is difficult to understand Aquinas without a basic knowledge of Aristotle – for in Aquinas’s time, one did not study theology (the Queen of the sciences) without first being grounded in philosophy (her handmaid).³¹⁸

The basic principles necessary to grasp Aquinas’s unpacking of Christian theology will be explained below. It is important to note at the outset that these principles-as-such defy definition, for definitions require a genus and species, and these principles cannot be speciated.³¹⁹ Further, they are not “things” in their own right. Rather, they are principles invoked to explain certain features of reality – and often only in relation to one another. A further difficulty is that many of these terms have been co-opted by other philosophical schools (or even other disciplines), and so readily admit of mistaken notions.³²⁰ Therefore, it is often better to explain them via those features they are used to explain. This explanation will begin with the highest level of metaphysical composition: that of Act and Potency.³²¹

6.2.1 Act / Potency

If there is a primary principle of Aquinas’s metaphysics it is that, “Potency and Act divide being in such a way that whatever is, is either pure act, or of necessity it is composed of

about the changing things found in the natural world. Meta-physics, therefore, concerned the study of things that do not change: being-as-such, and first causes. (Van Inwagen and Sullivan, 2015). In its philosophical use, the term came to refer to the principles underlying the physical reality around us.

³¹⁸ For example, although often treated as if they were the pinnacle of his thought, Aquinas’s famous “Five Ways” of proving God’s existence are mere summaries coming at the very beginning of his theological tome (*ST* 1a, Q.2, A.3). He clearly assumed that the reader was already familiar with the philosophical categories that underlie them.

³¹⁹ See Lauer, 1941:32.

³²⁰ For example, the term “substance” as found in Kant or Leibniz or modern science is radically different than its scholastic use: “The fact that [substance] cannot be strictly defined is perhaps responsible for the many false definitions which have been given for it. We must always bear this in mind when we read modern philosophers who speak of substance. . . . According to St. Thomas substance is ‘an essence or thing to whose nature it belongs not to exist in a subject.’” (Lauer, 1941:32).

³²¹ To avoid confusion, I will capitalize the terms which denote these principles, since they all have popular usage that does not track well with their classical meaning.

potency and act as primary and intrinsic principles.”³²² The twin principles of Act and Potency underlie many of Aquinas’s most important metaphysical distinctions (which are basically the outworking of applying these two notions to various subjects).³²³ As Van Roo (1940:1) puts it: “Act and potency is the skeleton key to the Thomistic house of metaphysics.”³²⁴

Aristotle posited these twin principles as a means of resolving the debate between the Eleatic and Heraclitan schools on the answer to one of the earliest issues in the history of philosophy: the explanation of *change*. Parmenides of Elea denied that change was real – for a change would require that being could arise from non-being (Feser, 2014:31). For example, if an apple changed from green to red, either the redness already existed (in which case the apple was already red) or it came into being from nothing (which is impossible). This position was taken up by Zeno who described the problem in a series of famous paradoxes that continue to be of interest today. Heraclitus took the extreme opposite position and made change the very fabric of reality – limiting being to change itself (Feser, 2014:33). For Heraclitus, “all things pass and nothing stays, and comparing existing things to the flow of a river, he says you could not step twice into the same river” (per Plato, *Cratylus* 402a). Neither of these positions sit well with basic human intuitions of course. An apple really does change (contra Parmenides), and it is the same apple throughout the change (contra Heraclitus). But it would be some time before the exact natures of these errors could be accounted for metaphysically.

³²² This is the first of the “Twenty-four Thomistic Theses” (see Lumbreras, 1923) – a summary of Aquinas’s teachings approved by the Sacred Congregation of Studies in 1914. It is based on *ST* Ia. Q.77, A.1 (using principles from Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* VII, 1 and IX, 1 and 9).

³²³ Lauer (1941:31) elegantly sums up the importance of these principles for Aquinas’s system: “To deny one of the major principles in the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas is tantamount to denying the whole organic unity. So closely interwoven are the premises of one argument with the conclusion of another, so constant is he in his appeal to first principles, so closely is the whole philosophy bound up with the co-principles of potency and act that the acceptance of one conclusion demands the acceptance of a host of others, while a denial of one vitiates the power of numberless other arguments. Potency and act, matter and form, essence and existence-- they are not merely so many theses to be conveniently pigeonholed and taken out for inspection when needed. Rather they are the enunciation of principles upon which is based an entire metaphysics, and without which we can find no satisfactory explanation for a body of conclusions which are the property of Scholastic Philosophy.”.

³²⁴ Van Roo (1940:1) continues in a line suited to the topic of the present work: “The positivists and scientists who try to make their physical principles the last word in all discussions have never entered the house. They stand and shout in the courtyard. They have seen only green lawn and concrete, and they mock those who have come from within the house and speak of carpets and polished floors.”.

It was Aristotle who posited that “being” could be described as either *potential* (what a thing could be) or *actual* (what a thing is). Both are real, but in different ways. Change, then, was the actualizing of a potency. Because both actualities and potentialities are features of being, a single, distinct, being could change without the resulting paradoxes ensuing.³²⁵ Act describes actual-being. A thing that exists is a “being in Act,” whereas a thing that only *could* exist is a “being in potential.” So for example, tan skin exists in me only potentially – I could become tan, but I am not. On the other hand, having granite skin neither exists in me potentially nor actually – I am not, and cannot become, granite. “Tan-ness” exists in me in potential, while “granite-ness” does not. The basic Act/Potency relationship exists in all created beings, and it is the basis for several pairs of principles that are used to account for various kinds of changes.

6.2.2 Essence / Existence

A thing’s essence is the principle describing *what* a being is, while existence concerns *whether* a being is.³²⁶ Consider the nature of Doug Beaumont and Sherlock Holmes. “What” these things are is the same – both are human beings (that is their definition, and it would be false to say they are pencils or aardvarks). The important difference between these two things is not *what* they are, but *whether* they are. Doug Beaumont is an actual human – he exists, Sherlock Holmes is a potential human – he does not exist, but he could. Another way to look at why essence and existence are distinct in created things is that they can go out of existence without becoming something else. The difference between a live triceratops and a dead one is one of existence, not essence. Simply because there are no existing triceratops today, that does not change what they are (otherwise, how could we know what we were talking about?). The essence of a created thing does not indicate anything about whether or not that thing really exists. Essence and Existence, then, are related as Act and Potency. Existence is the act of being – it actualizes essences that are in potential to being.³²⁷

³²⁵ See Feser, 2014:31-36.

³²⁶ See chapter 4 of Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*.

³²⁷ Renard (1951:26-29) provides a helpful summary explanation of how this becomes an argument for the existence of God in. For an in-depth explanation, see Kerr, 2015a.

6.2.3 Form / Matter

Form and Matter are another set of principles posited to explain the Act-Potency relationship, this time as it relates to individuation. Form is the principle by which a thing is what it is, and Matter is what makes one of these things distinct from another thing of the same kind. So all trees are trees due to their possessing the form of “tree” – yet there can be more than one tree because those forms are *informed* by different Matter.³²⁸ Form “organizes” Matter into an existing thing. Form is the actualizer of Matter, and Matter only exists in potential to Form (Matter is *potentially* anything, whereas Forms are always what they are). Form and Matter are often treated as part of the last metaphysical pair related to Act and Potency: Substance and Accidents.

6.2.4 Substance / Accidents

Whereas Form and Matter are used to explain individuals and their kinds, Substance and Accidents are posited to explain how a thing can change. Change of a thing requires that a thing change (not that it be destroyed and another thing come into existence to take its place). Change, then, can occur in two ways: either a single thing is modified, or it becomes another thing altogether. A tree can grow, change color, and gain or lose leaves while remaining a tree (and not just a tree, but the same tree among other trees). That tree can also die and become *wood*. In the first instance, the change is said to be only *accidental* to the tree, in the latter change, the tree became a *substantially* different thing.³²⁹

A more striking example of substantial change is that of a cow. A cow can grow and move without ceasing to be a cow – but if it dies it becomes meat (and if the meat is eaten by a man, it becomes human flesh). This is known as *substantial change* – when given Matter loses its Substantial Form and receives another. The other kind of change (modification) is *accidental*

³²⁸ It is tempting to think of Form as “shape” and Matter as “stuff” but this is incorrect. As used here, both are metaphysical (i.e., not *physical*) principles – they do not exist “out there” as such. A lump of clay is not un-*Formed* because it has the Form of clay – it is not just a clump of Matter waiting to be “Formed” by a potter.

³²⁹ This kind of change cannot be explained by Form and Matter alone, because the same Matter remains informed by the same accidental forms – else it would not have the same physical properties as a tree when it died.

change – when a thing receives or loses Forms without affecting its Substance.³³⁰ Substance, then, can be said to be to Accidents as Act is to Potency.³³¹

6.2.5 The Analogia Entis

The importance of the above distinctions can also be revealed by a consideration of the ground of their similarities: the *analogy of being*. Because being itself is analogous, it can be described in various terms or principles which are invoked to explain different kinds of compositions –all related proportionally as Act and Potency.³³²

Van Roo (1940:3-5) provides a good summary explanation of the three major Act/Potency relations. First in the order of being is God himself, who is Pure Act with no limiting Potentials whatsoever (see 6.3.1 below). What God *is* (essence) *is* existence.³³³ Creation, which is other *things* (essences) coming into *being* (existence), then, requires that a metaphysical distinction be introduced between essence and existence. The participation of potential essences in the act of existence is their creation. If essence and existence were the only principles of being available, though, every single created thing would have to be of a radically different kind than any other – for there would be no principle to distinguish them. Every being would have to have a different essence.³³⁴

The second distinction in being, then, makes it possible to create more than one individual (*species*) member of each kind (*genus*). At this level, essence itself is divided by Act/Potency into Form and Matter. Now, beings of one kind (Form) can be multiplied into

³³⁰ Substantial Forms bring a new *substance* into existence by informing Matter, whereas Accidental Forms inform an *already existing substance* and so is said only to modify a Substance.

³³¹ This relation holds given the description it has been given, but the analogy is sometimes convertible depending on exactly what kinds of accidental potencies are in view. For example, “Both the act (*agere*) and the ability to act (*potentia*) are accidents (they are not parts of the essence of the subject). The act may be absent from the subject; the ability to act may never be absent. As accidents, both equally fulfill the office of perfecting the capacity of the substance. But as different types of accidents one performs the function of a potency, while the others have the role of act.” (Lauer, 1941:33).

³³² “Potency and act, matter and form, essence and existence . . . [are] after all, no more than an extension of the analogy of proportionality which we understand in all being. The similarity comes from the like proportions of potency and act. The difference is in the way the various potencies are related to their acts.” (Lauer, 1941:31).

³³³ God’s identification of Himself as “I AM” in Exodus 3:14 comes to mind here.

³³⁴ This “level” of creation is filled, according to Aquinas, with the angelic beings – each of which is ontologically distinct from the other. See Aquinas, *ST* 1a, Q.50, A.4.

individual instances by Matter. Form accounts for the “this-ness” of a thing, while Matter accounts for its individuality (“that-ness”). So a tree is a tree by virtue of its Form, whereas it is *that* tree by virtue of its Matter. At this point creation can consist of numerous things of the same basic kind, but they cannot change or have minor differences. If Essence/Existence or Form/Matter were the only principles of being, change would be reduced to destruction-and-creation, and minor modifications would result in this kind of change.

The third distinction in being, provides the principles needed for changes and modifications of different types in beings. The Substance/Accident distinction explains how a single thing can be changed or modified either substantially or accidentally. A substantial change is when Matter receives a new substantial Form resulting in a new Essence (e.g., a cow dying and turning into meat and meat being consumed and turning into a man). An accidental change is when the essence is modified but remains the same throughout the change (e.g., a man going from pale to tan).

In summary, the Act/Potency principles account for three major distinctions in being. Essence/Existence distinguish what can be from what is, Form/Matter distinguish what kinds of things there are from individual instances within those kinds, and Substance/Accidents distinguish the changes those individual things can undergo. An apple (Essence) is given being (Existence) as one (Matter) of many apples (Form) that are red (Accident) until it is consumed and becomes the consumer (Substance).

6.3 Thomistic theology of God

6.3.1 God’s Simplicity

In all of the above twin principles of being, we see Potency functioning as a limit to Act. Essence limits Existence to certain things (the cow’s existence does not extend beyond what it is to be that particular cow). Form limits Matter to being a certain kind of thing and not another (the cow’s Matter does not extend past it’s cow-ness). Substance limits Accidents by being the very thing Accidents inhere in (the cow’s brown-ness does not extend past the cow itself). This limiting relationship between Act and Potency becomes a primary feature of Thomistic theology.

The second Thomistic thesis is informative of Aquinas’s theology of God: “Act, because it is perfection, is not limited except by Potency, which is capacity for perfection. Therefore, in the order in which the Act is pure, it is unlimited and unique; but in that in which it is finite and

manifold, it comes into a true composition with Potency.”³³⁵ Without Act’s corresponding principle of Potency, it is unlimited. Pure Act (Existence-as-such) has no inherent limit. To give a physical analogy, the three dimensions of height, width, and depth are only limited once they measure a given thing. None of these dimensions have a limit built in as such – rather each is made finite by the fact that anything they can be applied to will itself be limited of necessity.

The cause of being is unlike all created things in that in it there is none of these metaphysical distinctions.³³⁶ Aquinas gives numerous arguments for why this is the case,³³⁷ but a simple explanation is that all composed things require a principle or cause for their composition. Because all created things are composed (viz., of the various aspects of Act/Potency), all created things require a composer. This could not go back infinitely, or else there would be no cause for created being. Thus, the ultimate composer of all composed things cannot itself be composed.³³⁸ Since Potency is a merely capacity for Act, an uncomposed being would be pure Act. Further, given that Potency limits Act, pure Act would be unlimited. This, in turn, is to say that a being is Pure Act is to say that its Essence *is* Existence-as-such. It simply *is*. And, because Essence limits Existence, in a being where Essence and Existence are one, Essence cannot function as a limit as it does in created things. This means that this Being is unlimited in its being.

This unlimited creator is, of course, God. Because God is not made up according to any of the limiting principles of being, He is both uncomposed and unlimited.³³⁹ Aquinas calls this

³³⁵ Lumberras, 1923. See also Garrigou-LaGrange, 2012:43-51.

³³⁶ In God, “composition in every order of being [logical and physical] is excluded.” (Holloway, 1959:231).

³³⁷ E.g., Aquinas, *ST* 1a, Q.3, A.2-7.

³³⁸ This argument is not technically one of Aquinas’s famous “Five Ways” but underlies them all (see Klubertanz and Holloway, 1963:299).

³³⁹ See Garrigou-LaGrange, 2015:191-194.

God's *simplicity*.³⁴⁰ For Aquinas, all of God's "attributes" flow from, and are really only reflections of our limited understanding of, this singular metaphysical description.³⁴¹

Further, because God's being is simple and unlimited, anything attributed to His essence must itself be simple (because a simple essence is not dividable into parts) and unlimited (because only Potency limits God's being, and God is pure Act). Thus, when God's essence is described as various attributes – each must be understood as being without limit.³⁴² These "divine names" as they are called, must be understood according to the *triplex via*: by relationship of principle (the effect of God as cause), by way of excellence (God as ultimate), and by way of remotion (God as unlimited).³⁴³ This is why many of the titles of God's attributes traditionally are formed by prefixing the principle attribute in such a way as to highlight its lack of limit either positively (e.g., *omni-*, *all-*,) or negatively (e.g., *a-*, *e-*, *im-*, *in-*).

³⁴⁰ Following Aquinas (*ST* 1a, Q.3), Thomistic theological texts typically deal with divine simplicity first, as it is the attribute by which all others must be understood (e.g., Holloway, 1959:231; Renard, 1951:79; Garrigou-LaGrange, 2007:26). Modern theologians who disagree with any of Aquinas's characterization of God's attributes will, of necessity, disagree with him over divine simplicity as well (see Dolezal, 2011:xvii-xviii). For an historical survey of proponents and critics of divine simplicity, see Dolezal, 2011:1-30.

³⁴¹ See Aquinas *ST* 1a, Q.13, A.4 and 12. The Westminster Confession (ch. 2) says it this way: "There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions..."

³⁴² Indeed, they must be understood to be a single unity. As Garrigou-LaGrange puts it, "Absolute perfections are contained *formally and eminently* in God, and yet they are only virtually distinguished from each other." (2007:151. Emphasis in original.).

³⁴³ Aquinas (*ST* 1a. Q.13. A.1) states it this way: "words relate to the meaning of things signified through the medium of the intellectual conception. It follows therefore that we can give a name to anything in as far as we can understand it. Now . . . in this life we cannot see the essence of God; but we know God from creatures as their principle, and also by way of excellence and remotion. In this way therefore He can be named by us from creatures, yet not so that the name which signifies Him expresses the divine essence in itself." Renard (1951:103) divides the process into three steps: Each attribute is established by (1) negative (connatural knowledge) denial of material essence, (2) positive (non-proper knowledge) attribution of spiritual perfection, and (3) analogical predication according to mode of being (by way of causality, remotion of imperfection, and supereminence).

6.3.2 God's Attributes

The result of Aquinas's philosophy³⁴⁴ is a theology which is explained in (Aristotelian) metaphysical terms.³⁴⁵ These do not always track well with popular theological terminology, and are even more rarely found in modern theological discussions (see chart below for some examples). But, as argued above, this is not surprising given that the object under discussion (God) transcends the common reality from which mankind derives what knowledge we have.³⁴⁶

Figure 2: God's Attributes Chart

	Popular Understanding	Classical (Thomistic) Understanding ³⁴⁷
Immutable	God cannot change.	God has no passive potency.
Eternal	God is outside time.	God possesses perfect, all-at-once, unending life.
Infinite	God has no limits.	God is an un-received act of existing.
Omnipresent	God is everywhere.	God is whole and entire in each and every place as an agent who is acting in all places.
Omniscient	God knows everything.	Being the cause of all that comes to exist, gives God knowledge of all existing things.
Omnipotent	God can do anything.	God can actuate all potentials which do not involve being and non-being together.

³⁴⁴ It is important to note that although Aquinas is a superior philosopher, he is first and foremost a theologian (indeed, only one of his many writings, *On Being and Essence*, is considered to be "purely" philosophical – and even it ends up having God as its subject). Aquinas did not invent his doctrine of God by philosophical, but rather described the data of Christian theology using philosophical categories. For example, Aquinas used the Aristotelian categories of substance and accident to explain the change of the elements in the Eucharist (viz. "transubstantiation") in *Summa Theologiæ* Q.75-77. But this was not a new doctrine. Discussion concerning that term had already been going on for centuries (Schaff, 1910:564-570), and the Eastern Orthodox Church – hardly friendly toward scholastic thought – has sometimes used the term (*metousiosis*) as well. More important, however, is the *idea* behind the terminology, and the doctrine Aquinas defined and defended goes back to the earliest Church Fathers (e.g., Ignatius, *Epistle to the Romans* 7 and Justin Martyr, *First Apology* LXVI).

³⁴⁵ "The doctrine on act and potency is the soul of Aristotelian philosophy, deepened and developed by St. Thomas." (Garrigou-LaGrange, 2012:32). The practice of using non-biblical philosophical terminology to explain Christian theology is nothing new, of course – witness the important use of the Greek term "*homooúsios*" ("consubstantial") in the Nicene Creed (which also settled the debate over which the council was called).

³⁴⁶ Garrigou-LaGrange (2015:164-170) provides a helpful summary of various attribute classifications.

³⁴⁷ Thomistic definitions are from Holloway, 1959:267, 271, 285-266, 260-264, Aquinas *ST* I, Q. 14, A. 5, and Holloway, 1959:380-384 respectively.

Of paramount importance when reading Aquinas, then, is not only careful unpacking of his terminology, but also keeping always in mind Aquinas's affirmation of the impenetrable mystery of God.³⁴⁸ Even when defining God's attributes in seemingly exhaustive detail, Aquinas (*ST* I. Q.1, A.9) qualifies his theology by asserting that, "what God is not, is clearer to us than what God is." Indeed, "we cannot know what God is, but rather what He is not, we have no means for considering how God is, but rather how He is not." (Aquinas, *ST* I. Q.3). Accordingly, there remains even in Aquinas's formulations a remainder of mystery that cannot be overcome – not due to a lack of imaginative "intuition," nor due to imprecision of language – but rather due to the very nature of the subject of theology – the uncreated creator Himself.³⁴⁹ Mystery lies at the bottom of all Christian theological truths.³⁵⁰

Below are presented several key attributes of God as defined by the classical Thomistic system. Each will be presented and then evaluated according to its ability to resolve corresponding ontological disproof arguments. Space does not permit a complete analysis of even those arguments mentioned in this paper (§ 2.3); however, if the strongest and / or most common of these arguments can be satisfactorily answered, it will provide good evidence that the weaker / less popular arguments can be as well.

6.4 Thomistic resolutions to ontological disproofs

6.4.1 Omniscience

Several of the ontological disproofs have to do with God's knowledge. Again, if God "has" knowledge, then He *is* knowledge, and that knowledge must be unlimited. Does this mean that (per Puccetti §2.3.1.8) God's knowledge can be quantified as "infinite" or that (per Grim §2.3.1.9) it results in an infinite regress of God's knowing that he knows that he knows? Does it threaten God's immutability or His freedom (per Drange et al. §2.3.2.4 and 2.3.2.10)? Finally, can God know what it is like to be non-God (e.g., Grimm §2.3.1.9)

³⁴⁸ This is often revealed in what Aquinas does *not* say – see Pieper's *The Silence of St. Thomas*.

³⁴⁹ One may wonder the point of going forward with such a low view of human understanding. Aquinas offers this answer from Aristotle: "the slenderest knowledge that may be obtained of the highest things is more desirable than the most certain knowledge obtained of lesser things" (*ST* I. Q.1, A.5).

³⁵⁰ Scheeben offers a book-length treatment of this very principle in his *The Mysteries of Christianity* (1964).

In *ST* 1a, Q.14, Aquinas discusses God's knowledge. Not surprisingly, he defines knowledge metaphysically, as when a substance contains more than its own Form.³⁵¹ For Aquinas, knowledge just is the existence of a thing's Form in the mind of the knower – the “union of the knower with the known” (Holloway, 1959:277).³⁵² What we know is not just ideas or images in our minds, but the actual things as they exist formally (i.e., when we come to know a thing, we are said to be *in-formed*).³⁵³ Because God knows His essence perfectly, He knows in what ways His power can extend to the actuation of His ideas.³⁵⁴ In other words, He knows things as their Creator.³⁵⁵ Therefore, “So we say that God sees Himself in Himself, because He sees Himself through His essence; and He sees other things not in themselves, but in Himself; inasmuch as His essence contains the similitude of things other than Himself.” (*ST* 1a, Q.14, A.5).

This understanding of knowledge is radically foreign to the kinds of definitions often found in the modern discussions (e.g., “justified, true, belief” or “knowledge of the truth value of propositions”).³⁵⁶ Because knowledge, for Aquinas, is metaphysical, his view sidesteps many

³⁵¹ “Intelligent beings are distinguished from non-intelligent beings in that the latter possess only their own form; whereas the intelligent being is naturally adapted to have also the form of some other thing; for the idea of the thing known is in the knower” (Aquinas, *ST* 1a, Q.14, A.1). As Holloway explains, “the human soul is in a way all things. . . . The intellect is what it knows.” (1959:278, 284. Emphasis in original.)

³⁵² For Aquinas, we possess knowledge of a thing when we have its Form in our mind. In this case, however, the Form does not inform matter so as to make that thing physically exist inside our skulls! This requires that a being be free, to some extent, from matter (i.e., a rock cannot know anything because no object can in-form it). God, then, being immaterial in the highest degree, can know in the highest degree. (Aquinas, *ST* 1a, Q.14, A.1).

³⁵³ Thomistic epistemology is basically a subset of his metaphysics. For more on the actual process, see Wilhelmsen, 2011.

³⁵⁴ See Renard, 1951:120-122 for a more detailed discussion of the distinction between subjects and objects of knowledge.

³⁵⁵ In fact, because (in God) subject and object are most perfectly united, God's knowledge is perfect. See Renard, 1951: 112-113 and Garrigou-LaGrange, 2007:50-52.

³⁵⁶ Although for Aquinas, God knows these as well – He simply does not know them the way creatures do. God knows all propositions that are made, and he knows their truth value due to His single act of knowing. That is, God's knowledge of propositional truth is through the essences of things – not through the proposition itself. (*ST* 1a, Q.14, A.14). As Pohle states: “By virtue of His infinite comprehension of His own Essence, God in and through Himself also knows all extra-divine truths, in such manner that truth is dependent on Him, not he on truth.” (1941:333).

modern epistemological issues.³⁵⁷ It also exposes several ontological disproofs as wrongheaded.

If God knows everything, can His knowledge be quantified as “infinite”? According to Aquinas, the answer is yes. “Since God knows not only things actual but also things possible to Himself or to created things, as shown above (Article 9), and as these must be infinite, it must be held that He knows infinite things.” (ST 1a, Q.14, A.12). This can refer to either of the two meanings of “infinite” – whether of unending series (an accidental infinite) or of a simple infinite (an essential infinite). This is possible because God’s intellect (being His essence) is itself infinite.³⁵⁸ This does not mean that God knows an actually infinite number of things, for there are none (such a “number” would be a contradiction as numbers are by nature finite).³⁵⁹

Such an understanding of God’s knowledge does not result in an infinite regress of God’s knowing that he knows that he knows – for His omniscience extends to Himself directly, and not to an infinite series of meta-propositions (for the same reason as above).³⁶⁰ The same sort of thing can be said regarding Grim’s concern over God requiring personal meta-knowledge (i.e., knowledge of some other being’s knowledge). If an object of knowledge exists, then God knows it. God would, as cause of all things, certainly know in what ways His creatures could know things. Thus, God knows all actual and potential thoughts that rational creatures have or can have. Knowing *what* a creature knows, and knowing *what* a creature knows as a creature

³⁵⁷ Such as those raised by Gettier and Representationalism (Gettier, 1963:121-123). For Aquinas, who does not define knowledge as “justified, true, belief,” the Gettier examples simply are not instances of knowledge. Therefore, each one can be broken into what is actually known (viz., the objects of simple apprehension) vs. the false opinion expressed by the “true” statement (viz. the mistaken judgment). It also answers to the skeptical problems raised by representationalist epistemology, which defines knowledge in terms of “images” of reality in the intellect. If such a view is accepted, all we have access to are representations of reality which we can never get beyond in order to compare to reality in order to judge the veracity of our thoughts. See Howe, 2015:210-226. (This problem was entertainingly exposed – but never resolved – in the 1999 movie *The Matrix*. See Lawrence, 2004:20-30).

³⁵⁸ “Equality suffices for comprehension, because that is said to be comprehended which has nothing outside the comprehender. Hence it is not against the idea of the infinite to be comprehended by the infinite. And so, what is infinite in itself can be called finite to the knowledge of God as comprehended” (ST 1a, Q.14, A.12).

³⁵⁹ See Aquinas, ST 1a, Q.7, A.4.

³⁶⁰ Pohle lists four categories of things God knows which are “outside” of himself: (1) the possible but not actual, (2) the actual (including things whose existence lies in the past), (3) creaturely free acts, and (4) conditional free acts (what might have been). (1941:350).

knows it are not two distinct pieces of knowledge – and therefore God’s knowing only as He knows does not threaten God’s possession of knowledge.³⁶¹

As to omniscience’s threat to God’s immutability or His freedom, both of these revolve around a view of God’s knowledge that misses its analogical nature. While humans come to know things by encounter with the things themselves, God’s knowledge is as eternal as He is and thus does not interfere with His freedom (for all His actions are willed eternally – viz., all at once), nor His immutability (as he does not “come to” know anything).³⁶² Clearly these modes of knowledge are beyond human comprehension, and “comparisons taken from human knowledge tend to lead us into error,” that is why we must “leave to one side whatever is essential to human knowledge and keep only what is essential to knowledge as such.” (Holloway, 1959:295). Thus, God knows changing things and the change of things, but His knowledge does not change.³⁶³

6.4.2 Omnipotence

One of the, if not *the*, most popular of the ontological disproofs concerns God’s power. As stated above, if God “has” power, then His essence is unlimited power. This attribute is often positively referred to as “omnipotence” and popularly understood to mean that God can do anything. This unfortunate misunderstanding is the typical starting point for a popular ontological disproof – the paradox of the stone (per Cowan §2.3.1.6).

The difficulty in correcting this error is admitted by Aquinas: “It seems difficult to explain in what His omnipotence precisely consists: for there may be doubt as to the precise meaning of the word ‘all’ when we say that God can do all things.” (*ST* 1a, Q.25, A.3). After noting some objections similar to modern ontological disproofs, Aquinas gives this definition of omnipotence: “God is called omnipotent because He can do all things that are possible absolutely . . . [viz.] possible if the predicate is not incompatible with the subject, as that Socrates sits; and absolutely impossible when the predicate is altogether incompatible with the subject, as, for instance, that a man is a donkey.” (*ST* 1a, Q.25, A.3). God, then, has the power to make actuate

³⁶¹ See Aquinas, *ST* 1a, Q.14, A.12.

³⁶² See Garrigou-LaGrange, 2015:448-459 and Holloway, 1959:294-302.

³⁶³ See Holloway, 1959:305-306.

all potencies.³⁶⁴ But the potential for any being comes with that being, thus many logically non-contradictory things are actually impossible due to the nature of the thing in reality.³⁶⁵ If a *logical* possibility would involve an *ontological* impossibility (being and non-being together), then that thing has no potential to actuate.³⁶⁶ It cannot be done, not due to a lack of power, but due to simple impossibility.³⁶⁷ The unlimited ability to actuate *possibility* is not limited by *impossibility*. Thus, any argument that posits God's actuation of an impossibility fails to threaten His omnipotence.³⁶⁸

This understanding of omnipotence answers several ontological disproofs. The definition of God's omnipotence is not circular, for it is stated in terms of God's relation to possible beings and not simply a statement that "God can do what God can do." Because God is pure Act with no potential for limit, He cannot limit His power (contra Sobel §2.3.1.7 and Swinburne §3.2.3). God also cannot do that which implies defect – such as sin: "to sin is to fall short of a perfect action; hence to be able to sin is to be able to fall short in action, which is repugnant to omnipotence" (Aquinas, *ST* 1a, Q.25, A.3). Finally, God cannot make a rock so big that He

³⁶⁴ Renard puts it this way: "A being is able to act, to produce an effect, inasmuch as it is in act. God is pure act. Hence, not only must we say that there is power in god, but we must add that His power is infinite. He is omnipotent." (1951:193).

³⁶⁵ "He has the power to cause whatever is capable of existence, whatever is intelligible." (Renard, 1951:190).

³⁶⁶ "God has power over being, not over non-being, which is nothing." (Holloway, 1959:382).

³⁶⁷ As Pohle explains, although God "can do whatever He can will, it is limited, on the other hand, by an insuperable barrier, in that God can neither will nor do that which is intrinsically impossible." "The impossible," then, "does not limit but rather perfects God's almightiness." Pohle lists five classes of these impossibilities: God cannot (1) create logical contradictories, (2) alter the past, (3) commit sin, (4) act contrary to His nature, and (5) revoke His decrees. (1941:282-283). All of these, in one way or another, involve self-contradiction. "The only thing that is opposed to being is non-being. And so the only thing that is opposed to the absolute possible, over which god has power, is that which involves at one and the same time both being and non-being." (Holloway, 1959:383).

³⁶⁸ "Whence, whatsoever has or can have the nature of being, is numbered among the absolutely possible things, in respect of which God is called omnipotent. Now nothing is opposed to the idea of being except non-being. Therefore, that which implies being and non-being at the same time is repugnant to the idea of an absolutely possible thing, within the scope of the divine omnipotence. For such cannot come under the divine omnipotence, not because of any defect in the power of God, but because it has not the nature of a feasible or possible thing. Therefore, everything that does not imply a contradiction in terms, is numbered amongst those possible things, in respect of which God is called omnipotent: whereas whatever implies contradiction does not come within the scope of divine omnipotence, because it cannot have the aspect of possibility. Hence it is better to say that such things cannot be done, than that God cannot do them." (Aquinas, *ST* 1a, Q.25, A.3).

cannot lift it, because such a rock cannot exist. It could only be an immovable rock, and rocks (being finite bodies) are moveable by nature. Thus, simply because a thing can be stated, that does not make it a thing that can be. This understanding fits with the biblical affirmation that “nothing is impossible with God” (Lk. 1:37) – for whatever implies a contradiction cannot be a *thing*.³⁶⁹

6.4.3 Omnipresence

God’s all-presence is often described as His being “everywhere” or (less often) “in all things.” Difficulties arise from this description, both from a Christian and atheistic point of view. For example, if God is everywhere, is he in Hell? Or, if God is in everything, then why is worship of created things considered idolatry? Further, how can God be present everywhere / in everything, yet also transcend all things? Once again, Aquinas is aware of these kinds of difficulties and addresses them in his exposition of this attribute of God.³⁷⁰

Aquinas first allows that God is “in” all things, but qualifies this when he points out that His presence is “not, indeed, as part of their essence, nor as an accident, but as an agent is present to that upon which it works” (*ST* 1a, Q.8, A.2).³⁷¹ Because God’s creative causation is ongoing in the existence of all contingent beings, and because cause and effect go together, as long as a thing *has* being, God must be *present to* it (and a thing’s being is that which is “innermost” to it). This answers to the problem of God’s transcendence (per Drange §2.3.2.6): “God is above all things by the excellence of His nature; nevertheless, He is in all things as the cause of the being of all things” (*ST* 1a, Q.8, A.2). The second way in which God can be properly said to be in all things is by his power. God is “in things as the object of operation is in the operator” (*ST* 1a, Q.8, A.3). Aquinas gives the analogy of a human king who is said to be

³⁶⁹ As C. S. Lewis put it, “nonsense remains nonsense even when we talk it about God.” (Lewis, 2001:18).

³⁷⁰ God’s omnipresence is also described as His immensity, both describe the same attribute but with differing relations to creation: “God would be absolutely eternal and immense even if there were neither time nor space. . . . assuming that there is actual space, immensity becomes omnipresence” (Pohle, 1941:308-309).

³⁷¹ See also Garrigou-LaGrange, 2007:39.

“in” his kingdom due to his rule (even when he is not physically present). Therefore God is in all things as their efficient cause and by His operative power.³⁷²

Aquinas then considers how it is that God can “be everywhere.” Once again, analogical language is at play: “to be in place can be understood in a twofold sense . . . in some way God is in every place” (ST 1a, Q.8, A.3). First, as stated above, God is in all things as their creator. If “place” is in any sense a “thing” (or defined by relation to things), then God is present as their creator and sustainer. Further, things fill the place they are in - and as such, God fills every place. The disanalogy arises when “presence” is equated with *physical* or *bodily extension* into place. God has no body, indeed has no “place limit” whatsoever. Neither is god’s presence exclusive – although bodies exclude by their presence any other body, God’s presence does not exclude the presence of other beings (indeed, as their cause, God’s presence makes other being’s existence in a place possible). Because God is not a body, saying He is “in a place” is a category mistake. Rather, God is “in a place, as giving it whatever being and local function it possesses.” (Holloway, 1959:263). In this sense, God is whole and entire in each and every place.³⁷³

Drange complains that God seems to be in a different “category” from persons and thus to call any such thing a person is to commit a category mistake (1998:193). However, this begs the question concerning the definition of persons (cf. §2.3.2.7 and §2.3.2.9). Aquinas agrees with Boethius’s definition of personhood: “an individual substance of a rational nature” (ST 1a, Q.29, A.1). More specifically, persons are “rational substances which have dominion over their own actions; and which are not only made to act, like others; but which can act of themselves” (ST 1a, Q.29, A.1). God is both rational and free, therefore, He is properly said to be a person. Once again, however, the word is used analogously: “this name ‘person’ is fittingly applied to God; not, however, as it is applied to creatures, but in a more excellent way; as other names also, which, while giving them to creatures, we attribute to God” (ST 1a, Q.29, A.3). Because being an individual substance of a rational nature in no way conflicts with being the creator / sustainer of other beings, no contradiction arises in the concept of God which brings these two

³⁷² This analogical understanding of “presence” provides the answer to the question of whether God is in Hell. God can be said to be present two ways: (1) by His power, and (2) by His essence. In heaven, God is present in both ways – His essence is present (and visible!) to the blessed in the Beatific Vision who he keeps in existence by His power. In hell, God is present by His power only - because He maintains the existence of those in hell. (Interestingly, the Eastern Orthodox have a view of Hell that it consists of the presence of God’s love which makes those who hate Him suffer. See Kalomiros, 1980.)

³⁷³ See Aquinas, ST 1a. Q.8, A.3.

attributes together. Rather than disprove the existence of God, Drange's complaint that divine and human persons are in different categories simply underscores the reality and necessity of classical theology and analogous God-talk – as well the mistakes that are made when one disregards them.

6.4.4 Immutability / Eternality

Drange uses God's immutability in two of his ontological disproofs (cf. §2.3.2.3 and §2.3.2.5). The first attacks God's unchangeable nature by pointing out that for God to at one time not create and then to create at another requires that He change. The second issue is that Drange thinks a being that cannot change also cannot be affected by anything outside itself and therefore cannot be considered loving. There are also difficulties encountered by a simple reading of the Bible which, although it proclaims God's unchangeable nature (e.g., Num. 23:19; Mal. 3:6; or James 1:7), also describes God as changing (Gen. 6:6; Ex. 32:14; Jon. 3:10). This makes a biblistic appeal to Bible verses unhelpful to the debate, and may seem to exacerbate the very problem under discussion

For Aquinas, God's immutability is proved by His being pure Act which makes change impossible under three different considerations (*ST* 1a, Q.9, A.1).³⁷⁴ First, because change requires Potentiality, and a being of pure Act has none, that being cannot change. Second, to change requires parts (substance and accidents), but God is simple – therefore God cannot change.³⁷⁵ Finally, because all movement involves both the loss and the gaining of properties, God cannot change, because a being of pure Act is infinite, and the infinite cannot be subtracted from, nor added to. This position helps the Bible reader to pick out the literal from the metaphorical descriptions, as well as deal with ontological disproofs.

God's immutability figures into the notion of eternity. Sometimes confused with endless time (i.e., "everlasting"), eternity is rather "the perfect and 'all at once' possession of unending life."³⁷⁶

³⁷⁴ See also Garrigou-LaGrange, 2015:268-272 and Holloway, 1959:265-266.

³⁷⁵ See also Garrigou-LaGrange, 2007:40-41.

³⁷⁶ This is from Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy* 5.6 and is the classical definition of eternity (Holloway, 1959:270-271). This tracks well with the biblical understanding found in John 17:3 – "And this is eternal life [αἰώνιος ζωή], that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." If eternal life were just everlasting existence, then both the saved and the damned could be said to have "eternal life." Rather, eternal life is knowing God, who is eternal, and sharing in his life. "Among

When this understanding of immutability is combined with Aquinas's definitions of creation and love, Drange's issues become moot. As to creation, for Aquinas this does not involve change (ST 1a, Q.45, A.1).³⁷⁷ Change requires that a thing go from one state to another – but creation is *ex nihilo*, from no-thing.³⁷⁸ Thus, creation is not properly said to be a change.³⁷⁹

This has implications for the idea that God went from one state to another, which would require that God be in time. For Aquinas, to speak of “before’s and after’s” in God, is a category mistake.³⁸⁰ Following Aristotle and Augustine, time, for Aquinas, is the mind’s measurement of change, which cannot be applied to an eternal being (ST 1a, Q.10, A.4).³⁸¹ Although as limited beings we can hardly avoid thinking in terms of change and time, both of these are excluded for a being of pure Act for whom time and change are necessarily extrinsic. Thus, “things are said to be created in the beginning of time, not as if the beginning of time were a measure of creation, but because together with time heaven and earth were created” (ST 1a, Q.46, A.3). Thus, God’s willing of creation is not a change, because it does not take place in time (for God

living activities the highest is the activity of the intellect, which is to understand. And thus the activity of the intellect is living activity in the highest degree. Now just as the sense in act is identified with the sense-object in act, so also the intellect in act is identified with the thing understood in act. Since then intellectual understanding is living activity, and to understand is to live, it follows that to understand an eternal reality is to live with an eternal life. But God is an eternal reality, and so to understand and see God is eternal life.” (Aquinas, *Commentary On The Gospel of St. John*, Ch.17, Lecture 1:2186).

³⁷⁷ See Holloway, 1959:338-340.

³⁷⁸ “When anything is said to be made from nothing, this preposition ‘from’ [ex] does not signify the material cause, but only order; as when we say, ‘from morning comes midday’ – i.e., after morning is midday. But we must understand that this preposition ‘from’ [ex] can comprise the negation implied when I say the word ‘nothing,’ or can be included in it. If taken in the first sense, then we affirm the order by stating the relation between what is now and its previous non-existence. But if the negation includes the preposition, then the order is denied, and the sense is, ‘It is made from nothing--i.e. it is not made from anything’--as if we were to say, ‘He speaks of nothing,’ because he does not speak of anything. And this is verified in both ways, when it is said, that anything is made from nothing. But in the first way this preposition ‘from’ [ex] implies order, as has been said in this reply. In the second sense, it imports the material cause, which is denied.” (ST 1a, Q.45, A.1).

³⁷⁹ See Pohle, 1941:302.

³⁸⁰ Eternity is the “direct contradictory of time, [and so] must not be thought of as ‘endless time’ or ‘absence of duration,’ but as limitless duration,’ without beginning or end.” (Pohle, 1941:306-307).

³⁸¹ “Eternity is simultaneously whole; which cannot be applied to time: for eternity is the measure of a permanent being; while time is a measure of movement” (ST 1a, Q.10, A.4). “The mind grasps the notion of time insofar as it observes (“numbers”) the succession of a thing in motion.” (Holloway, 1959:269).

is eternal even when the effects of His will are in time), and creation itself is not a change in time (because time comes into being with creation). This may be a different understanding than others posit for the notion of creation (see §2.3.1.1), but it is not been shown to be an impossible one.³⁸²

Although only mentioned briefly above, and not in the context of an ontological disproof, the issue over God's knowledge of tensed facts (time indexicals) is a hoary one and numerous solutions have been offered based on one's notion of time as well as epistemic theory. In the Thomistic vein, Stump and Kretzman (1981), for example, see God as outside-of, yet simultaneous-to all points in time.³⁸³ God's knowledge is thus eternal - "from" eternity – of the temporal. Some object, however, that this entails a "B-theory" or "static" view of time (rather than an active or "A-theory"). Shanley (1997:200) thinks that Aquinas's heuristic devices are often being taken too literally (e.g., Aquinas's image of God on the "summit" of eternity in *Commentary on Aristotle's On Interpretation*, I, L14, 20), and suggests that, "God has immediate eternal knowledge of everything in its real temporally determinate esse because he is the immediate eternal cause of that temporal esse." Aquinas himself puts it quite simply: "since the knowledge of God is His substance, . . . just as His substance is altogether immutable, . . . so His knowledge likewise must be altogether invariable. . . . from the fact that He knows some things might be which are not, or that some things might not be which are, it does not follow that His knowledge is variable, but rather that He knows the variability of things" (ST Ia, Q.14, A.15). The frustrating vagueness such comments engender are likely just another example of Aquinas's method; that is, it is likely that Aquinas said all that he thought could be said on the subject, and attempts to take his view further will necessarily depart from it to the

³⁸² Note that Smith (§2.3.1.1) does not consider Aquinas's version of the "cosmological argument" which would remain sound whether or not the cosmos was beginningless.

³⁸³ "Eternity abstracts from actual time, just as immensity abstracts from actual space. God would be absolutely eternal and immense even if there were neither time nor space. However, just as, assuming that there is actual space, immensity becomes omnipresence; so, assuming there is real time, eternity must co-exist with every time or instant of time. . . . We may call it 'sempiternity.'" (Pohle, 1941:308-309).

degree that they introduce novelty.³⁸⁴ In the end, though, the issue itself is nothing new, and classical solutions exist whether they are completely analytically satisfying or not.³⁸⁵

Finally, God's love must also be understood in a different (but not *altogether* different) manner than human love.³⁸⁶ Aquinas defines love as the willing of good to another (*ST* 1a, Q.20, A.1).³⁸⁷ It is an act of the *will* – not a passive emotion of the *body* (which God does not have).³⁸⁸ For Aquinas, “every passion of the appetite takes place through some bodily change . .

³⁸⁴ Staley (2006:16) sums the situation up nicely: “What is interesting here [Aquinas, *De Veritate* 2, 12] is that Aquinas does not assign to the eternal knower a special perspective. In this passage, God is not likened to a man located high atop a tower. The parade does not stretch out before Him as a coexistent whole. What is important about the eternal knower is not a privileged perspective on reality that we lack; rather, it is that His knowing is not itself divided by time. Because his knowing is simple and partless, real succession in the object known does not give rise to succession in God's knowledge of the known. Aquinas' account of God's eternal knowledge of time does not, therefore, require that eternalism be true. It requires only that the privileged actuality of the present when it is present be present to the whole of God's simple eternity. And this it cannot fail to do, for it is impossible to be present only to a part of that which is without parts. God's eternal knowledge of the temporal remains paradoxical; it would appear that although the future is not present to God, when it is present to Him, it will never be and will never have been absent from Him. Tensed verbs, even future perfects, fail us when thinking about God.”

³⁸⁵ It cannot be overstated that while this talk may be said to approach the kind of kataphatic, univocal predication often demanded by analytic philosophy, this simply cannot be accomplished due to the nature of the object under discussion: “Since the human intellect is enmeshed in time and matter, the only way at its disposal to an understanding of the non-temporal and immaterial is by way of analogy.” (Holloway, 1959:269).

³⁸⁶ See Garrigou-LaGrange, 2015:595-605.

³⁸⁷ “We must needs assert that in God there is love: because love is the first movement of the will and of every appetitive faculty. For since the acts of the will and of every appetitive faculty tend towards good and evil, as to their proper objects: and since good is essentially and especially the object of the will and the appetite, whereas evil is only the object secondarily and indirectly, as opposed to good; it follows that the acts of the will and appetite that regard good must naturally be prior to those that regard evil; thus, for instance, joy is prior to sorrow, love to hate: because what exists of itself is always prior to that which exists through another. Again, the more universal is naturally prior to what is less so. Hence the intellect is first directed to universal truth; and in the second place to particular and special truths. Now there are certain acts of the will and appetite that regard good under some special condition, as joy and delight regard good present and possessed; whereas desire and hope regard good not as yet possessed. Love, however, regards good universally, whether possessed or not. Hence love is naturally the first act of the will and appetite; for which reason all the other appetite movements presuppose love, as their root and origin. For nobody desires anything nor rejoices in anything, except as a good that is loved: nor is anything an object of hate except as opposed to the object of love. Similarly, it is clear that sorrow, and other things like to it, must be referred to love as to their first principle. Hence, in whomsoever there is will and appetite, there must also be love: since if the first is wanting, all that follows is also wanting. Now it has been shown that will is in God (19, 1), and hence we must attribute love to Him.”

³⁸⁸ See Renard, 1951:163-166.

. none of this can take place in God, since He is not a body.” (SCG: 1.89, 3).³⁸⁹ Thus, while it is true that God cannot change (James 1:7), this does not mean He cannot “draw near” to His beloved (James 4:8) – it simply means that for God, “drawing near” is not the same as it is for embodied beings. Once again, Drange’s problems rely on the (understandable) intuition that what is true of embodied beings must also be true of God (see also §2.3.2.8).³⁹⁰

6.4.5 Omnibenevolence

Keller’s argument concerning God’s goodness relies on God’s goodness being indexed to His moral perfection (see §2.3.1.3). Because God is necessarily perfectly good, and this means maximal moral greatness, the problem arises that God, precisely because He is necessarily good, cannot achieve maximum moral praiseworthiness (acting, as He does, out of metaphysical necessity, rather than a virtuous free will formed by heroic effort). If God’s all-goodness, then, means that God’s moral goodness cannot be exceeded, it seems that God cannot be all-good.

For Aquinas, though, goodness is not a moral judgment.³⁹¹ Goodness, rather, is found in a thing’s *being* and *desirability* (ST 1a, Q.6, A.1).³⁹² To the degree that a thing is desirable in

³⁸⁹ See also SCG 1.90, 4 and 1.91, 2, - this is not the only line of enquiry that Aquinas considers. There are certain emotions which, body or not, would be improper for God to have. Any emotion that has evil as its object could not be found in God because of his perfection, and any emotions which have non-possessed goods as their object would not be fitting for God for the same reason. This eliminates hate, aversion, sadness, fear, anger, despair, hope, etc. The difficulty that arises from this list is that the Bible itself ascribes these very things to God in various places. In these cases, answers Aquinas, the biblical writers are using metaphor to communicate God’s actions. Other emotions, such as love and joy that are said to be in God are literally true, however, for they are not found as emotions in God. Rather, they are found as dispositions of His *will*: Love being the willing of good to another, and joy being a resting of the will in its object (which for God is himself).

³⁹⁰ Again Aquinas foresees the problems inherent in denying proper theology and God-talk: “The occasion of all these errors was that, in thinking of divine things, men were made the victims of their imagination, through which it is not possible to receive anything except the likeness of a body.” (SCG 1.20).

³⁹¹ The only “moral code” God could possibly be said to be under would be Himself: “the sanctity of God, being essential to Him and deeply rooted in His divine nature, must be substantial. For as the will of God is absolutely one with His Essence, from which flows the *lex aeterna*, God cannot *acquire* sanctity; He must be holy by His very nature and in His proper essence. Nor is sanctity an ethical perfection superadded to the Divine essence; it is absolutely identical with God’s Substance. Therefore God *is* Sanctity” (Pohle, 1941:255. Emphasis in original.).

³⁹² “For a thing is good according to its desirableness. Now everything seeks after its own perfection; and the perfection and form of an effect consist in a certain likeness to the agent, since every

and of itself, it is considered a good. Further, being itself is goodness, for “a thing is desirable only in so far as it is perfect; for all desire their own perfection. But everything is perfect so far as it is actual. Therefore it is clear that a thing is perfect so far as it exists;” (ST 1a, Q.5, A.1). God, then, is the *supreme good* – for all being and its perfections “flow from Him as from the first cause . . . [and] as good is in God as in the first, but not the univocal, cause of all things, it must be in Him in a most excellent way; and therefore He is called the supreme good” (ST 1a, Q.6, A.2).³⁹³

Goodness, then, is analogous between God and man just as are all the other predications of God (ST 1a, Q.5, A.6). When speaking of the goodness of God, then, moral judgment does not come into view. Moral judgments, rather, flow from a consideration of a thing’s *actions* in relation to its *purpose*.³⁹⁴ One and the same action can be predicated morally depending on numerous factors, not the least of which is the essence of the actor. So while an irrational beast killing and eating another one of its own species is not determined to be immoral (nor even considered to be judged according to morality at all), a human being doing such a thing would be unquestionably immoral. In a similar way, God may act in or out of accord with *human* moral laws and yet not be judged according to them.³⁹⁵ Thus, when God’s actions are

agent makes its like; and hence the agent itself is desirable and has the nature of good. For the very thing which is desirable in it is the participation of its likeness.” (ST 1a, Q.6, A.1). See also Garrigou-LaGrange, 2007:35-38 and Pohle, 1941:241-248.

³⁹³ Another way to come at this understanding of goodness is via the classical understanding of evil. Augustine defined evil as a privation (N.B., not just the *absence*) of good (see *Confessions*, 7.5.7 and *The City of God*, 11.9 cf. Aquinas, ST 1a, Q.48, A.1 and *On Evil*, Q.1). “Pure evil,” then, cannot exist, for it would literally be pure privation (i.e., nothing). Because goodness is convertible with being, God (Who *is* being) is supreme goodness. See Holloway, 1959:234-247.

³⁹⁴ On the inherent goodness of actions, Aquinas says, “We must speak of good and evil in actions as of good and evil in things: because such as everything is, such is the act that it produces. Now in things, each one has so much good as it has being: since good and being are convertible . . . But God alone has the whole plenitude of His Being in a certain unity: whereas every other thing has its proper fullness of being in a certain multiplicity. Wherefore it happens with some things, that they have being in some respect, and yet they are lacking in the fullness of being due to them. Thus the fullness of human being requires a compound of soul and body, having all the powers and instruments of knowledge and movement: wherefore if any man be lacking in any of these, he is lacking in something due to the fullness of his being. . . . We must therefore say that every action has goodness, in so far as it has being; whereas it is lacking in goodness, in so far as it is lacking in something that is due to its fullness of being; and thus it is said to be evil: for instance if it lacks the quantity determined by reason, or its due place, or something of the kind.” (ST II.I, Q.18, A.1).

³⁹⁵ As Aquinas puts it, “just as the being of a thing depends on the agent, and the form, so the goodness of a thing depends on its end. Hence in the Divine Persons, Whose goodness does not depend on another, the measure of goodness is not taken from the end. Whereas human actions, and other

described as being “good” in a moral sense, these must be understood analogously.³⁹⁶ God is not, then, to be judged as a moral agent – whether that judgment finds Him to be good or bad.³⁹⁷ Thus, Keller’s objection is moot.³⁹⁸

6.5 Conclusion

While perhaps not always attaining to the degree of theological comprehensiveness needed to satisfy many modern apologists, the classical Thomistic responses to atheistic ontological disproofs seem to do a better job dealing with them while respecting the Church’s traditional methods and doctrinal orthodoxy. It is interesting, then, that in the modern debate, atheists typically offer such insufficient interaction with Aquinas - classical orthodoxy’s most prolific and philosophically-astute representative.³⁹⁹ Unfortunately, apologists of the modern schools often dismiss and depart from Aquinas’ views as well.⁴⁰⁰

things, the goodness of which depends on something else, have a measure of goodness from the end on which they depend, besides that goodness which is in them absolutely.” (ST II.I, Q.18, A.4).

³⁹⁶ This is similar to God’s actions being described as His attributes, such as when “wrath” is predicated of God. Such a statement is properly seen as a description of God’s *actions* in relation to how those actions would manifest from a human *attribute* (i.e., passion). See SCG 1.89,14 and ST II.II Q.158, A.8.

³⁹⁷ Davies (2011) defends this rather provocative thesis by arguing that moral agents are under obligation to a moral law, and God is under no such law – therefore God cannot be judged as a moral agent. For Davies (2006), if God is not a moral agent, this nullifies the problem of evil (which is, in its way, another form of ontological disproof).

³⁹⁸ None of this should be taken to mean that God can be the cause of evil. All that God wills is good, for His will (like all His other attributes) is perfect, and evil is by definition lack of perfection: “the name of evil is signified the absence of good” (Aquinas, ST 1a, Q.48, A.1). God can, however, permit evil to be caused by others in order to bring about a greater good (ST 1a, Q.49, A.2). See also Garrigou-LaGrange, 2015:528-532; Renard, 1951:158-161; and Pohle, 1941:253-258.

³⁹⁹ This is evidenced not only by lack of citations and interactions with Thomistic theology, but by the presentation of objections Thomas includes in his own theological discussions as if they were recently developed problems.

⁴⁰⁰ The most popular modern apologist who claims to affirm classical theology with a Thomistic basis is Norman Geisler. Pinnock (2002:13) writes that “practically all evangelicals who work on the doctrine of God today (except maybe Geisler) are suggesting revisions to classical theism.” Yet even Geisler departs from Aquinas on significant theological issues such as God’s impassibility (Geisler holds that God has “unchanging emotions” - e.g., 2001:186 cf. Aquinas, SCG 89), God’s sovereignty (Geisler holds something like Origen’s view that “God creates the fact of freedom but not the acts of freedom” - e.g., 1999:22-23 cf. Aquinas, SCG 89.), and even the doctrine of analogy itself (where Geisler defines analogy in more Scotistic terms as being univocal concepts qualified according to God’s infinite nature - e.g., 2011:109-111). Geisler also disagrees with Aquinas on numerous doctrinal issues related to faith and practice (which should be expected from Geisler’s Baptist background – see 1995:157-358).

The result is that atheistic ontological disproofs appear much stronger than they actually are, and unorthodox theology is offered in response to them. Those who tend to allow their theology and/or philosophy to follow from their apologetic projects have shown themselves susceptible to affirming non-traditional and even heretical views of God's nature - all in the name of allegedly protecting God from criticism. The price for doing so is that theological terminology is often defended by changing its traditional definitions – a move that does not seem necessary given that a full-orbed Thomistic theology can deal with the atheistic arguments while being true to classical, orthodox formulations of the doctrine of God.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

With the decline of scholastic theology and the rise of modernism (e.g., Logical Positivism and its offspring, analytic philosophy), atheistic argumentation turned from the age-old problems such as the existence of evil and naturalism's explanatory power to deductive ontological disproofs that were believed to have disproven the very possibility of God's existence. In response, many of today's apologists have accepted the atheists' starting point and attempted to respond in like kind. Using a combination of analytic philosophy and intuitional quasi-Anselmian methodology, many apologists working with these sorts of difficulties were often at odds with the methodological traditions of apophatic theology (which affirms the mystery of God) and analogous God-talk (which attempts to reconcile the mystery with the revelation of God). In doing so, they may actually have given theological ground both to atheists (by following their methodology) and to heretics (by denying the importance of theological orthodoxy).

The ironic result is that the God being defended by many modern apologists is not the God being attacked by modern atheists. At times this works to the Christian's favor – for when atheists attack God's attributes on non-classical grounds, they may be overturned by simply noting that it is not the traditional God they are attacking.⁴⁰¹ However, when apologetic responses themselves rely on non-traditional, unorthodox, or even heretical understandings of God's attributes, the initial problem can hardly be considered resolved. As Sheeben (1964:3) eloquently put it: "Even friends and zealous defenders of Christianity could not always suppress a certain dread when they stood in the obscurity of its mysteries. To buttress belief in Christian truth and to defend it, they desired to resolve it into a rational science, to demonstrate articles of faith by arguments drawn from reason, and so to reshape them that nothing would remain of the obscure, the incomprehensible, the impenetrable. They did not realize that by such a procedure they were betraying Christianity into the hands of her enemies." In attempting to answer modern atheists according to their own philosophical principles, it was forgotten that true theology "*cannot* result in confronting us with real antimonies, but only with obscurities or incomprehensible mysteries; moreover it *must* finally bring us to mysteries." (Garrigou-LaGrange, 2007:153).⁴⁰²

⁴⁰¹ In other words, they have "attacked a straw man."

⁴⁰² Emphasis in original. Garrigou-LaGrange concludes that, "If this Thomistic solution seems inadmissible to our adversaries, . . . to them a contradiction and not a mystery, it is because [of] . . . an

Moreover, as has been shown above, such moves away from orthodoxy are not necessary in the first place. Thomas Aquinas provides the Christian apologist with a robust, classical, orthodox understanding of God's attributes, as well as a means of communicating them that does justice to both mystery and revelation. Far from being an *ad hoc* retreat to mystery in the face of theological challenge, Aquinas's views are grounded in his biblically-based philosophical theology which begins with the great *Ehyeh* of Moses⁴⁰³, the *Ego Eimi* of the Apostle John⁴⁰⁴, and the *Primum Movens* of Aristotle,⁴⁰⁵ concluding with *Actus Purus* – “to which everyone gives the name of God.”⁴⁰⁶

God as described by Aquinas is then, both known and unknowable *due to His very nature*. Thus what is said of Him must be understood analogically and not as communicating God's very essence (which is beyond the ability of the created intellect to know perfectly).⁴⁰⁷ Without this balance between the kataphatic and the apophatic, the equivocal and the univocal, the analytical and the analogical, Christians can easily fall into irrational fideism or intellectual rationalism – both of which (like all heresies), are more easily-understood (but false) extremes, rather than the more mysterious truth that falls in the mean between them.

If Christian apologists are not going to give up the classical attributes of God, a return to the venerable theology of Aquinas and other classical thinkers seems to be in order. This is true even if doing so results in a more “mysterious” view of God that proves less satisfactory to atheist critics. For over 1,800 years, the classical view of God was successfully defended on the highest of intellectual grounds, and its low status among many today does not overturn this historical fact. Substituting heresy for orthodoxy is too high a price to appease the enemies of Christianity – and it is unnecessary. Potential apologetic success cannot justify actual theological failure.

equal misunderstanding of of the profound and even infinite difference separating analogy from univocation.” (2007:152. Emphasis in original.).

⁴⁰³ Exodus 3:14

⁴⁰⁴ John 8:58

⁴⁰⁵ *Physics*, Book 7. More popularly known as the “unmoved mover” (*ὁ οὐ κινούμενον κινεῖ, ὁ οὐ κινούμενον κινεῖ* - “that which moves without being moved”).

⁴⁰⁶ Aquinas ends each of the “Five Ways” with a variant of this statement (*ST* 1a, Q.2, A.3).

⁴⁰⁷ For Aquinas's robust presentation of this feature of his theology, see *On the Power of God* Q.7, A.5-7.

Appendix 1: Protestant doctrinal statements

Below are presented standard theological statements from the Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican, and Baptist traditions. Their conformity with the attributional statements of classical theism are highlighted.

Lutheran: The Augsburg Confession (1530): *Article I: Of God*

“Our Churches, with common consent, do teach that the decree of the Council of Nicaea concerning the Unity of the Divine Essence and concerning the Three Persons, is true and to be believed without any doubting; that is to say, there is one Divine Essence which is called and which is God: eternal, without body, without parts, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, the Maker and Preserver of all things, visible and invisible.”⁴⁰⁸

Reformed: Belgic Confession (1561): *Article 1*

“We all believe in our hearts and confess with our mouths that there is a single and simple spiritual being, whom we call God -- eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, unchangeable, infinite, almighty; completely wise, just, and good, and the overflowing source of all good.”⁴⁰⁹

Reformed: Heidelberg Catechism (1563): *Question 26*

“the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who out of nothing created heaven and earth and all that is in them,[1] and who still upholds and governs them by His eternal counsel and providence . . . He is able to do so as almighty God”⁴¹⁰

Reformed: Westminster Confession (1646): *Chapter II:1-2*

“There is but one only, living, and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions; immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute; working all

⁴⁰⁸ <http://bookofconcord.org/augsburgconfession.php>

⁴⁰⁹ Note also the sources for these truths found in the next Article (2: The Means by Which We Know God): “We know him by two means: First, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe, since that universe is before our eyes like a beautiful book in which all creatures, great and small, are as letters to make us ponder the invisible things of God: his eternal power and his divinity, as the apostle Paul says in Romans 1:20. All these things are enough to convict men and to leave them without excuse. Second, he makes himself known to us more openly by his holy and divine Word, as much as we need in this life, for his glory and for the salvation of his own.”
<http://www.wts.edu/resources/creeds/belgicconfession.html>

⁴¹⁰ <http://www.wts.edu/resources/creeds/heidelberg.html>

things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for his own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek him; and withal, most just, and terrible in his judgments, hating all sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty. God hath all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and of himself; and is alone in and unto himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which he hath made, nor deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting his own glory in, by, unto, and upon them. He is the alone fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things; and hath most sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them whatsoever himself pleaseth. In his sight all things are open and manifest, his knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent upon the creature, so as nothing is to him contingent, or uncertain.”⁴¹¹

Anglican: Thirty-Nine Articles (1571): *Of Faith in the Holy Trinity*

“There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body, parts, or passions; of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the Maker, and Preserver of all things both visible and invisible.”⁴¹²

Baptist: The Baptist Confession of Faith (1689): *God and the Holy Trinity*

The Lord our God is the one and only living and true God; Whose subsistence is in and of Himself. Who is infinite in being and perfection; Whose essence cannot be comprehended by any but Himself; - Who is a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions - Who only has immortality - Who dwells in the light which no man can approach, Who is immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, in every way infinite, most holy, most wise, most free, most absolute; - Who works all things according to the counsel of His own immutable and most righteous will, for His own glory;
 . . . God, having all life, glory, goodness, blessedness, in and from Himself, is unique in being all- sufficient, both in Himself and to Himself, not standing in need of any creature . . . He is the only fountain of all being; from Whom, through Whom, and to Whom all things exist and move. - He has completely sovereign dominion over all creatures, to do through them, for them, or to them whatever He pleases. - In His sight all things are open and manifest; His knowledge is infinite, infallible, and not dependant on the creature. . . . In this divine and infinite Being there are three subsistences, the Father, the Word or Son, and the Holy Spirit.⁴¹³

⁴¹¹ <http://www.wts.edu/resources/creeds/westminsterconfession.html>

⁴¹² Modern: “Articles of Religion” (1809). <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/creeds3.iv.xi.html>

⁴¹³ <http://www.spurgeon.org/~phil/creeds/bcof.htm#part2>

Appendix 2: Thomistic analogy

Thomas on Analogy

Whole books and dissertations have been written detailing various schools of Thomistic thought concerning the doctrine of analogy. Unfortauntely, Aquinas never wrote a detailed exposition on the subject that could adjudicate the discussion. Below are presented the primary passages in Aquinas's writings that gave rise to these diverse views, as well as some representative Thomist's positions on the doctrine.

The Sentences

In what Mondin says is the "best known of Aquinas' passages on analogy,"⁴¹⁴ Aquinas says there are three ways in which something can be said analogically: (1) according to intention and not according to being, (2) according to being and not according to intention, and (3) according to intention and according to being.⁴¹⁵ So first, some things are predicated only according to what is in the mind but not in the thing, such as when health is said of anything other than an animal (e.g., food or urine), for health is only properly said to be found in animals.

⁴¹⁴ Mondin, 9.

⁴¹⁵ See Aquinas, *Commentary on The Sentences of Peter Lombard* Lib. I, Dist. 19, Q. 5, a. 2, ad.1.
"Ad primum igitur dicendum, quod aliquid dicitur secundum analogiam tripliciter: vel secundum intentionem tantum, et non secundum esse; et hoc est quando una intentio refertur ad plura per prius et posterius, quae tamen non habet esse nisi in uno; sicut intentio sanitatis refertur ad animal, urinam et dietam diversimode, secundum prius et posterius; non tamen secundum diversum esse, quia esse sanitatis non est nisi in animali. Vel secundum esse et non secundum intentionem; et hoc contingit quando plura parificantur in intentione alicujus communis, sed illud commune non habet esse unius rationis in omnibus, sicut omnia corpora parificantur in intentione corporeitatis. Unde logicus, qui considerat intentiones tantum, dicit, hoc nomen corpus de omnibus corporibus univoce praedicari: sed esse hujus naturae non est ejusdem rationis in corporibus corruptibilibus et incorruptibilibus. Unde quantum ad metaphysicum et naturalem, qui considerant res secundum suum esse, nec hoc nomen corpus, nec aliquid aliud dicitur univoce de corruptibilibus et incorruptibilibus, ut patet 10 Metaphys., ex philosopho et Commentatore. Vel secundum intentionem et secundum esse; et hoc est quando neque parificatur in intentione communi, neque in esse; sicut ens dicitur de substantia et accidente; et de talibus oportet quod natura communis habeat aliquod esse in unoquoque eorum de quibus dicitur, sed differens secundum rationem majoris vel minoris perfectionis. Et similiter dico, quod veritas et bonitas et omnia hujusmodi dicuntur analogice de Deo et creaturis. Unde oportet quod secundum suum esse omnia haec in Deo sint, et in creaturis secundum rationem majoris perfectionis et minoris; ex quo sequitur, cum non possint esse secundum unum esse utrobique, quod sint diversae veritates." (*Corpus Thomisticum Sancti Thomae de Aquino: Scriptum Super Sententiis*, Lib. I, Dist. 19, Q. 5, a. 2, ad.1).

Second, some things are predicated only according to what is in the thing but not in the mind, such as when “body” is said of material things and celestial bodies. Both may be bodies but they are not thought of in a similar manner. Third, there are those things which are predicated both according to what is in the mind and what is in the thing, such as “goodness” applied to both God and man. Here, goodness is truly meant and found in both, only not in exactly the same way.⁴¹⁶

In both the *Sentences’ Prologue* and I. Dist. 35, Q. 1, A. 4,⁴¹⁷ Aquinas makes a two-fold distinction when things are related to a third thing and predicated according to priority and posteriority (such as the sharing of both act and potency in being), or when two things are related as an imperfect imitation to another (the relation between creator and creature). With regard to the latter, Mondin notes that according to Aquinas’s *Sentences* IV. Dist. 49, Q. 2, A. 1, ad 6 that while there may be an infinite distance between the infinite and the finite, they can be proportioned to each other via proportionality.⁴¹⁸

Truth

In *Truth* 2.11, Aquinas again divides analogy into proportion and proportionality, but here he adds the idea of *proper* and *improper* proportionality:

In those terms predicated according to the first type of analogy, there must be some definite relation between the things having something in common analogously. Consequently, nothing can be predicated analogously of God and creature according to this type of analogy; for no creature has such a relation to God that it could determine the divine perfection. But in the other type of analogy, no definite relation is involved between the things which have something in common analogously, so there is no reason why some name cannot be predicated analogously of God and creature in this manner. But this can happen in two ways. Sometimes the name implies something belonging to the thing primarily designated which cannot be common to God and creature even in the manner described above. This would be true, for example, of anything predicated of God metaphorically, as when God is called lion, sun, and the like, because their definition

⁴¹⁶ These explanations and examples follow from Mondin, 10.

⁴¹⁷ “Et ideo dicendum, quod scientia analogice dicitur de Deo et creatura, et similiter omnia huiusmodi. Sed duplex est analogia. Quaedam secundum convenientiam in aliquo uno, quod eis per prius et posterius convenit; et haec analogia non potest esse inter Deum et creaturam, sicut nec univocatio. Alia analogia est, secundum quod unum imitatur aliud quantum potest, nec perfecte ipsum assequitur; et haec analogia est creaturae ad Deum.” (Aquino, *Scriptum Super Sententiis*, I. Dist. 35, Q. 1, A. 4).

⁴¹⁸ Mondin, 11.

includes matter which cannot be attributed to God. At other times, however, a term predicated of God and creature implies nothing in its principal meaning which would prevent our finding between a creature and God an agreement of the type described above. To this kind belong all attributes which include no defect nor depend on matter for their act of existence, for example, being, the good, and similar things.⁴¹⁹

Mondin notes that here we have the analogies of proportion, proper proportionality, and improper proportionality. As will be seen below, from this early writing forward, Aquinas abandons the language he used in the *Sentences* and follows this “more definite terminology” with respect to analogy.⁴²⁰

Later in *Truth*, Aquinas introduces *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* denomination:

A thing is denominated with reference to something else in two ways. (1) This occurs when the very reference itself is the meaning of the denomination. Thus urine is called healthy with respect to the health of an animal. For the meaning of healthy as predicated of urine is “serving as a sign of the health of an animal.” In such cases what is thus relatively denominated does not get its name from a form inherent in it but from something extrinsic to which it is referred. (2) A thing is denominated by reference to something else when the reference is not the meaning of the denomination but its cause. For instance, air is said to be bright from the sun, not because the very fact that the air is referred to the sun is the brightness of the air, but because the placing of the air directly before the sun is the cause of its being bright. It is in this way that the creature is called good with reference to God.⁴²¹

⁴¹⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Truth*, Tr. Robert W. Mulligan (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1952), Full text: “Quia ergo in his quae primo modo analogice dicuntur, oportet esse aliquam determinatam habitudinem inter ea quibus est aliquid per analogiam commune, impossibile est aliquid per hunc modum analogiae dici de Deo et creatura; quia nulla creatura habet talem habitudinem ad Deum per quam possit divina perfectio determinari. Sed in alio modo analogiae nulla determinata habitudo attenditur inter ea quibus est aliquid per analogiam commune; et ideo secundum illum modum nihil prohibet aliquod nomen analogice dici de Deo et creatura. Sed tamen hoc dupliciter contingit: quandoque enim illud nomen importat aliquid ex principali significato, in quo non potest attendi convenientia inter Deum et creaturam, etiam modo praedicto; sicut est in omnibus quae symbolice de Deo dicuntur, ut cum dicitur Deus leo, vel sol, vel aliquid huiusmodi, quia in horum definitione cadit materia, quae Deo attribui non potest. Quandoque vero nomen quod de Deo et creatura dicitur, nihil importat ex principali significato secundum quod non possit attendi praedictus convenientiae modus inter creaturam et Deum; sicut sunt omnia in quorum definitione non clauditur defectus, nec dependent a materia secundum esse, ut ens, bonum, et alia huiusmodi.” (*Corpus Thomisticum Sancti Thomae de Aquino: Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, 2.11).

⁴²⁰ Mondin, 13. Cf. Rocca 116.

⁴²¹ Aquinas, *Truth*, 21.4. “quod dupliciter denominatur aliquid per respectum ad alterum. Uno modo quando ipse respectus est ratio denominationis, et sic urina dicitur sana per respectum ad sanitatem animalis. Ratio enim sani, secundum quod de urina praedicatur, est esse signum sanitatis animalis. Et in talibus, quod denominatur per respectum ad alterum, non denominatur ab aliqua forma sibi inhaerente, sed ab aliquo extrinseco ad quod refertur. Alio modo denominatur aliquid per respectum ad alterum, quando respectus non est ratio denominationis, sed causa sicut si aer dicatur lucens a sole: non

Here we see that something can be analogously predicated when one is both the cause and meaning of the other (extrinsic attribution), or when one is only the cause of the other (intrinsic attribution).⁴²²

Summa Contra Gentiles

In his famous apologetical work *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Aquinas devotes five chapters (30-34) to the issue of God-talk. First, Aquinas establishes that there are three different ways in which names are predicated of things: (1) to express a perfection in a supereminent mode (those properly said of God), (2) to express a perfection in a creaturely mode (those said according to likeness or metaphor), and (3) to express a perfection *sans* mode. At this point Aquinas expresses a principle that flows from his previous metaphysical work (viz., chapters 1-29):

I have said that some of the aforementioned names signify a perfection without defect. This is true with reference to that which the name was imposed to signify; for as to the mode of signification, every name is defective. For by means of a name we express things in the way in which the intellect conceives them. For our intellect, taking the origin of its knowledge from the senses, does not transcend the mode which is found in sensible things, in which the form and the subject of the form are not identical owing to the composition of form and matter. . . . As a result, with reference to the mode of signification there is in every name that we use an imperfection, which does not befit God, even though the thing signified in some eminent way does befit God. . . . And so with reference to the mode of signification no name is fittingly applied to God; this is done only with reference to that which the name has been imposed to signify. Such names, therefore, . . . can be both affirmed and denied of God. They can be affirmed because of the meaning of the name; they can be denied because of the mode of signification.⁴²³

quod ipsum referri aerem ad solem sit lucere aeris, sed quia directa oppositio aeris ad solem est causa quod luceat. Et hoc modo creatura dicitur bona per respectum ad Deum" (Aquino, *de veritate*, 21, 4).

⁴²² Mondin, 15.

⁴²³ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 30.3. "Dico autem aliqua praedictorum nominum perfectionem absque defectu importare, quantum ad illud ad quod significandum nomen fuit impositum: quantum enim ad modum significandi, omne nomen cum defectu est. Nam nomine res exprimimus eo modo quo intellectu concipimus. Intellectus autem noster, ex sensibus cognoscendi initium sumens, illum modum non transcendit qui in rebus sensibilibus invenitur, in quibus aliud est forma et habens formam, propter formae et materiae compositionem. . . . Et sic in omni nomine a nobis dicto, quantum ad modum significandi, imperfectio invenitur, quae Deo non competit, quamvis res significata aliquo eminenti modo Deo conveniat: . . . Et quantum ad hoc nullum nomen Deo convenienter aptatur, sed solum quantum ad id ad quod significandum nomen imponitur. Possunt igitur, . . . et affirmari de Deo et negari: affirmari quidem, propter nominis rationem; negari vero, propter significandi modum." (*Corpus Thomisticum Sancti Thomae de Aquino: Summa contra Gentiles*, 30.3).

Here Aquinas brings out one of the central issues with regard to predication of divine names: the meanings of words are first found in composite, finite reality and they remain finite when they are considered by man. Thus they must be denied of God, Who is simple and infinite.⁴²⁴ This practice leads to the affixing of negative prefixes on to terms of finitude when they are predicated of God (e.g., *infinity*, *eternal*, *aseity*). On the other hand, words can be affirmed of God so long as this is done according to the correct mode (viz., *eminence*). This might be said to be accomplished by attaching eminence-affirming prefixes to terms when they are predicated of God (e.g., *omnipotence*, *omnipresence*, *omniscient*).

Aquinas argues in chapter 31 that because God is the cause of the effects used to name Him that it is necessary that this be done, for “since we cannot know Him naturally except by arriving at Him from His effects, the names by which we signify His perfection must be diverse, just as the perfections belonging to things are found to be diverse. Were we able to understand the divine essence itself as it is and give to it the name that belongs to it, we would express it by only one name.”⁴²⁵ He follows this with an inspiring promise from Zechariah 14:9, “On that day the Lord will be one, and His name one.”

In chapter 32, Aquinas argues against univocal predication based on the fact that both meaning and mode are distinct between creatures and God:

[Even if] an effect should measure up to the species of its cause, it will not receive the univocal predication of the name unless it receives the same specific form according to the same mode of being. For the house that is in the art of the maker is not univocally the same house that is in matter, for the form of the house does not have the same being in the two locations. Now, even though the rest of things were to receive a form that is absolutely the same as it is in God, yet they do not receive it according to the same mode of being. For, as is clear from what we have said, there is nothing in God that is not the divine being itself, which is not the case with other things. Nothing, therefore, can be predicated of God and other things univocally.⁴²⁶

⁴²⁴ See Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, ch. 18.

⁴²⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 31.4. “Quia enim eum non possumus cognoscere naturaliter nisi ex effectibus deveniendo in ipsum, oportet quod nomina quibus perfectionem ipsius significamus, diversa sint, sicut et perfectiones in rebus inveniuntur diversae. Si autem ipsam essentiam prout est possemus intelligere et ei nomen proprium adaptare, uno nomine tantum eam exprimeremus.” (Aquino, *Summa contra Gentiles*, 31.4).

⁴²⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 32.3. “Si aliquis effectus ad speciem causae pertingat, praedicationem nominis univoce non consequetur nisi secundum eundem essendi modum eandem specie formam suscipiat: non enim univoce dicitur domus quae est in arte, et in materia, propter hoc quod forma domus habet esse dissimile utrobique. Res autem aliae, etiam si omnino similem formam consequerentur, non tamen consequuntur secundum eundem modum essendi: nam nihil est in Deo quod

Aquinas goes on to discuss the issue of *priority* and *posteriority*:

What is predicated of some things according to priority and posteriority is certainly not predicated univocally. For the prior is included in the definition of the posterior Now nothing is predicated of God and creatures as though they were in the same order, but, rather, according to priority and posteriority. For all things are predicated of God essentially. . . . It is impossible, therefore, that anything be predicated univocally of God and other things.⁴²⁷

Because God is being itself, what He is called He simply *is*; while creatures are called what they are called because they participate in that which is predicated of them. Socrates, Aquinas says, is said to be a man, “not because he is humanity itself, but because he possesses humanity.”⁴²⁸ Thus, even when one might think that he means the same thing by the names applied to God and creatures, what the name refers to in reality is two distinct things. Thus, the names cannot be univocal.⁴²⁹

For several reasons Aquinas denies that names are said purely equivocally in chapter 33. Not the least of the reasons given is that “if names are said of God and creatures in a purely equivocal way, we understand nothing of God through those names; for the meanings of those names are known to us solely to the extent that they are said of creatures. In vain, therefore, would it be said or proved of God that He is a being, good, or the like.”⁴³⁰ It would be self-

non sit ipsum esse divinum, ut ex dictis patet, quod in aliis rebus non accidit. Impossibile est igitur aliquid univoce de Deo et rebus aliis praedicari.” (Aquino, *Summa contra Gentiles*, 32.3).

⁴²⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 32.7. “Quod praedicatur de aliquibus secundum prius et posterius, certum est univoce non praedicari: nam prius in definitione posterioris includitur: . . . Nihil autem de Deo et rebus aliis praedicatur eodem ordine, sed secundum prius et posterius: cum de Deo omnia praedicentur essentialiter, . . . Impossibile est igitur aliquid de Deo et rebus aliis univoce dici.” (Aquino, *Summa contra Gentiles*, 32.7).

⁴²⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 32.7. “Socrates dicitur homo non quia sit ipsa humanitas, sed humanitatem habens.” (Aquino, *Summa contra Gentiles*, 32.7).

⁴²⁹ Mondin notes concerning this passage that in the *Sentences* “Aquinas rejected the view that the predication of divine names is a predication according to priority and posteriority. Here in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* he seems to adopt the opposite view.” But this is because in the *Sentences* “he means analogy of two to a third,” while here Aquinas means one to another. (Mondin, 18.)

⁴³⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 33.6 “Sed si nomina dicuntur de Deo et creaturis omnino aequivoce, nihil per illa nomina de Deo intelligimus: cum significationes illorum nominum notae sint nobis solum secundum quod de creaturis dicuntur. Frustra igitur diceretur aut probaretur de Deo quod Deus est ens, bonus, vel si quid aliud huiusmodi est.” (Aquino, *Summa contra Gentiles*, 33.6).

defeating to claim (using words) that words cannot be used with reference to God.⁴³¹ Thus, in chapter 34 he concludes that they must be said analogically (specifically, via intrinsic attribution based on causality): “Because we come to a knowledge of God from other things, the reality in the names said of God and other things belongs by priority in God according to His mode of being, but the meaning of the name belongs to God by posteriority. And so He is said to be named from His effects.”⁴³²

On the Power of God

Aquinas makes many of the above arguments for analogy in Question 7 of *On the Power of God*, concluding that although what the intellect conceives or asserts about God, truly exists in God inasmuch as they are all like him,

this species does not perfectly reflect the divine essence, as stated above, and therefore although these terms which our intellect attributes to God from such conceptions signify the divine essence, they do not signify it perfectly as it exists in itself, but as it is conceived by us. Accordingly we conclude that each of these terms signifies the divine essence, not comprehensively but imperfectly. . . . Simply because the perfections which are in creatures by reason of various forms are ascribed to God in reference to his simple essence: without limit, because no perfection found in creatures is equal to the divine essence, so as to enable the mind under the head of that perfection to define God as he is in himself.⁴³³

Again Aquinas notes that analogy works because God is creator and creation is the effect of His causation. Words referring to these effects can be attributed to the cause but not

⁴³¹ Additional arguments against univocity were presented above.

⁴³² Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 34.6 “Sic igitur, quia ex rebus aliis in Dei cognitionem pervenimus, res nominum de Deo et rebus aliis dictorum per prius est in Deo secundum suum modum, sed ratio nominis per posterius. Unde et nominari dicitur a suis causatis.” (Aquino, *Summa contra Gentiles*, 34.6).

⁴³³ Thomas Aquinas, *On The Power of God*, Tr. the English Dominican Fathers (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1952), Q. 7, A. 5. “Non autem perfecte divinam essentiam assimilant species praedicta, ut dictum est; et ideo licet huiusmodi nomina, quae intellectus ex talibus conceptionibus Deo attribuit, significant id quod est divina substantia, non tamen perfecte ipsam significant secundum quod est, sed secundum quod a nobis intelligitur. Sic ergo dicendum est, quod quodlibet istorum nominum significat divinam substantiam, non tamen quasi comprehendens ipsam, sed imperfecte: . . . Simpliciter dicit, quia perfectiones quae in creaturis sunt secundum diversas formas, Deo attribuuntur secundum simplicem eius essentiam: incircumfinite dicit, ad ostendendum quod nulla perfectio in creaturis inventa divinam essentiam comprehendit, ut sic intellectus sub ratione illius perfectionis in seipso Deum definiat.” (*Corpus Thomisticum Sancti Thomae de Aquino: Quaestiones disputatae de potentia*, Q. 7, A. 5).

under the same meaning or mode. Aquinas gives the example of a brick hardened by fire. The brick is like the fire when it is heated by the fire which is heat by nature. However, it is also hardened due to the nature of the brick. If we ascribe heat to the brick and fire, we do so properly although we must recognize that heat is said in a more eminent way and with priority regarding the fire. Not only is the fire hotter than the brick, the brick is only hot by being *made* hot, while the fire is hot by nature. Further, if we predicate hardness of both the brick and the fire it will be untrue unless used only metaphorically.

Accordingly in creatures there are certain perfections whereby they are likened to God, and which as regards the thing signified do not denote any imperfection, such as being, life, understanding and so forth: and these are ascribed to God properly, in fact they are ascribed to him first and in a more eminent way than to creatures. And there are in creatures certain perfections wherein they differ from God, and which the creature owes to its being made from nothing, such as potentiality, privation, movement and the like. These are falsely ascribed to God: and whatsoever terms imply suchlike conditions cannot be ascribed to God otherwise than metaphorically, for instance lion, stone and so on, inasmuch as matter is included in their definition. They are, however, ascribed to him metaphorically by reason of a likeness in their effects.⁴³⁴

The difficulty with the latter mode (metaphor) is that one must know the subject and predicate of metaphor in order to recognize its use. For example, if one says, "My wife is a rose," it would be properly concluded that he means that his wife is beautiful, is soft, smells nice, or something of that nature. The method by which "rose" is understood as "beautiful" will probably happen so quickly that it is unlikely to be considered. It seems, however, that a few steps would be required: (1) the hearer would consider the natures of both a "wife" and a "rose" (viz., "married human female" and "flower"), then (2) recognizing that the former and latter are distinct by nature the hearer should compare the known attributes of both, looking for similarities. Finally, (3) the hearer would pick out which of the similar attributes the speaker meant (possibly narrowed down by context). Thus, it would be improper to take "My wife is a rose," as meaning "My wife grows in the ground and photosynthesizes light for food." But

⁴³⁴ Aquinas, *On the Power of God*, Q. 7, A. 5, ad 8. "Similiter consideranda sunt in creaturis quaedam secundum quae Deo simulantur, quae quantum ad rem significatam, nullam imperfectionem important, sicut esse, vivere et intelligere et huiusmodi; et ista proprie dicuntur de Deo, immo per prius de ipso et eminentius quam de creaturis. Quedam vero sunt secundum quae creatura differt a Deo, consequentia ipsam prout est ex nihilo, sicut potentialitas, privatio, motus et alia huiusmodi: et ista sunt falsa de Deo. Et quaecumque nomina in sui intellectu conditiones huiusmodi claudunt, de Deo dici non possunt nisi metaphorice, sicut leo, lapis et huiusmodi, propter hoc quod in sui definitione habent materiam. Dicuntur autem huiusmodi metaphorice de Deo propter similitudinem effectus." (Aquino, *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia*, Q. 7, A. 5, ad 8.)

without knowledge of both subject and predicate this process would break down. This would seem to be a problem for Aquinas who stated, profoundly, that, “it is because human intelligence is not equal to the divine essence that this same divine essence surpasses our intelligence and is unknown to us: wherefore man reaches the highest point of his knowledge about God when he knows that he knows him not, inasmuch as he knows that that which is God transcends whatsoever he conceives of him.”⁴³⁵ This difficulty must also be overcome in a satisfactory doctrine of analogy.

The Commentaries

In his various commentaries on the works of Aristotle, Boethius, and Pseudo-Dionysius, Aquinas follows the above patterns depending upon which kinds of analogy “are necessary to solve the problems at hand.”⁴³⁶ The liberty with which Aquinas uses analogy is made possible by the fact that “analogy as a *form of predication* is a logical category and the human mind is free to take many different standpoints in its analysis of the relations between different things.”⁴³⁷

Mondin points out that “things univocal for the logician, and equal in their participation in a common notion, can be unequal for the *naturalis* [philosopher of nature, or, metaphysician] who looks at *genus subiectum*, the matter.”⁴³⁸ That is, when man defines a thing he does so according to genus (commonality) and species (specific difference[s]). Thus, “human” is defined as “rational animal.” Here, “animal” might be predicated equally of man and horse because the genus is, logically, equivalent between the two. This is because for the Thomist genus is only

⁴³⁵ Aquinas, *On the Power of God*, Q. 7, A. 5, ad 14. “Quod ex quo intellectus noster divinam substantiam non adaequat, hoc ipsum quod est Dei substantia remanet, nostrum intellectum excedens, et ita a nobis ignoratur: et propter hoc illud est ultimum cognitionis humanae de Deo quod sciat se Deum nescire, in quantum cognoscit, illud quod Deus est, omne ipsum quod de eo intelligimus, excedere.” (Aquino, *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia*, Q. 7, A. 5, ad 14).

⁴³⁶ Mondin, 28.

⁴³⁷ Ibid. (Emphasis in original).

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

logical – there is no “horseness” out there.⁴³⁹ Clearly, even the “animal-ness” of the horse and man are not ontologically equivalent.

Summa Theologica

Aquinas’s *Summa Theologica* is his “most mature theological work.”⁴⁴⁰ Question Thirteen specifically deals with the nature of analogical God-talk. Having defended the project of Sacred Doctrine, proved the existence of God and several of His attributes, Aquinas moves on to how God is known to us and, finally, to the naming of God.

He starts the discussion with a consideration of language. “Words are,” for Aquinas, “signs of ideas, and ideas the similitude of things,” therefore, “it is evident that words relate to the meaning of things signified through the medium of the intellectual conception. It follows therefore that we can give a name to anything in as far as we can understand it.”⁴⁴¹ Of course this does not alleviate the tension that has been present all along, for “The reason why God has no name, or is said to be above being named, is because His essence is above all that we understand about God, and signify in word,” and so, “names fail to express His mode of being, forasmuch as our intellect does not know Him in this life as He is.”⁴⁴²

Once again we have the problem of language being rooted in creaturely modes from which they cannot escape in the human intellect. From arguments demonstrating God’s existence we can know *that* a creator God exists. Being the cause of all created things we can

⁴³⁹ See Maurer, “Analogy of Genus.”

⁴⁴⁰ Mondin., 29.

⁴⁴¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I. Q. 13, A. 1. “Voces sunt signa intellectuum, et intellectus sunt rerum similitudines. Et sic patet quod voces referuntur ad res significandas, mediante conceptione intellectus. Secundum igitur quod aliquid a nobis intellectu cognosci potest, sic a nobis potest nominari. Ostensum est autem supra quod Deus in hac vita non potest a nobis videri per suam essentiam; sed cognoscitur a nobis ex creaturis, secundum habitudinem principii, et per modum excellentiae et remotionis. Sic igitur potest nominari a nobis ex creaturis, non tamen ita quod nomen significans ipsum, exprimat divinam essentiam secundum quod est, sicut hoc nomen homo exprimit sua significatione essentiam hominis secundum quod est, significat enim eius definitionem, declarantem eius essentiam; ratio enim quam significat nomen, est definitio.” (*Corpus Thomisticum Sancti Thomae de Aquino: Summa Theologiae*, I. Q. 13, A. 1).

⁴⁴² Ibid. “dicendum quod ea ratione dicitur Deus non habere nomen, vel esse supra nominationem, quia essentia eius est supra id quod de Deo intelligimus et voce significamus,” “nomina deficiant a modo ipsius, sicut intellectus noster non cognoscit eum ut est, secundum hanc vitam.” (*Aquino, Summa Theologiae*, I. Q. 13, A. 1).

also know that there is a relation of effect to cause between creatures and their creator. From this we can judge it appropriate to ascribe words referring to finite things in reality to the infinite God, but at the same time we also must judge them to be inadequate. Thus, this lack must be indicated somehow in God-talk. Simple negation works to get rid of the difference between creature and creator but, "Negative names applied to God, or signifying His relation to creatures manifestly do not at all signify His substance, but rather express the distance of the creature from Him, or His relation to something else, or rather, the relation of creatures to Himself."⁴⁴³ Affirmative names are another issue.

Aquinas considers a few opinions as to how names of affirmation might apply to God. Some think it only conceals an implicit negation. Others say that these only refer to a relationship of God toward creatures. Aquinas denies that either can be the case:

First because in neither of them can a reason be assigned why some names more than others are applied to God. For He is assuredly the cause of bodies in the same way as He is the cause of good things; therefore if the words "God is good," signified no more than, "God is the cause of good things," it might in like manner be said that God is a body, inasmuch as He is the cause of bodies. So also to say that He is a body implies that He is not a mere potentiality, as is primary matter. Secondly, because it would follow that all names applied to God would be said of Him by way of being taken in a secondary sense, as healthy is secondarily said of medicine, forasmuch as it signifies only the cause of the health in the animal which primarily is called healthy. Thirdly, because this is against the intention of those who speak of God. For in saying that God lives, they assuredly mean more than to say the He is the cause of our life, or that He differs from inanimate bodies.⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I. Q. 13, A. 2. "De nominibus quae de Deo dicuntur negative, vel quae relationem ipsius ad creaturam significant, manifestum est quod substantiam eius nullo modo significant; sed remotionem alicuius ab ipso, vel relationem eius ad alium, vel potius alicuius ad ipsum." (Aquino: *Summa Theologiae*, I. Q. 13, A. 2).

⁴⁴⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I. Q. 13, A. 2. "ed de nominibus quae absolute et affirmative de Deo dicuntur, sicut bonus, sapiens, et huiusmodi, multipliciter aliqui sunt opinati. Quidam enim dixerunt quod haec omnia nomina, licet affirmative de Deo dicantur, tamen magis inventa sunt ad aliquid removendum a Deo, quam ad aliquid ponendum in ipso. Unde dicunt quod, cum dicimus Deum esse viventem, significamus quod Deus non hoc modo est, sicut res inanimatae, et similiter accipiendum est in aliis. Et hoc posuit Rabbi Moyses. Alii vero dicunt quod haec nomina imposita sunt ad significandum habitudinem eius ad creata, ut, cum dicimus Deus est bonus, sit sensus, Deus est causa bonitatis in rebus. Et eadem ratio est in aliis. Sed utrumque istorum videtur esse inconveniens, propter tria. Primo quidem, quia secundum neutram harum positionum posset assignari ratio quare quaedam nomina magis de Deo dicerentur quam alia. Sic enim est causa corporum, sicut est causa bonorum, unde, si nihil aliud significatur, cum dicitur Deus est bonus, nisi Deus est causa bonorum, poterit similiter dici quod Deus est corpus, quia est causa corporum. Item, per hoc quod dicitur quod est corpus, removetur quod non sit ens in potentia tantum, sicut materia prima. Secundo, quia sequeretur quod omnia nomina dicta de Deo, per posterius dicerentur de ipso, sicut sanum per posterius dicitur de medicina, eo quod significat hoc tantum quod sit causa sanitatis in animali, quod per prius dicitur sanum. Tertio, quia hoc est contra intentionem

Aquinas concludes from this that, “these names signify the divine substance, and are predicated substantially of God, although they fall short of a full representation of Him.”⁴⁴⁵ Because creatures are effects, and these effects preexist in their cause, they do represent God in some inferior way. “So when we say, ‘God is good,’ the meaning is not, ‘God is the cause of goodness,’ or ‘God is not evil’; but the meaning is, ‘Whatever good we attribute to creatures, pre-exists in God,’ and in a more excellent and higher way.”⁴⁴⁶

Another distinction is found Aquinas’s *Summa*, this one pertaining to names that can be said of God as the primary analogate and ones that cannot.

All names applied metaphorically to God, are applied to creatures primarily rather than to God, because when said of God they mean only similitudes to such creatures. For as “smiling” applied to a field means only that the field in the beauty of its flowering is like the beauty of the human smile by proportionate likeness, so the name of “lion” applied to God means only that God manifests strength in His works, as a lion in his. Thus it is clear that applied to God the signification of names can be defined only from what is said of creatures. But to other names not applied to God in a metaphorical sense, the same rule would apply if they were spoken of God as the cause only, as some have supposed. For when it is said, “God is good,” it would then only mean “God is the cause of the creature’s goodness”; thus the term good applied to God would included in its meaning the creature’s goodness. Hence “good” would apply primarily to creatures rather than to God. But as was shown above, these names are applied to God not as the cause only, but also essentially. For the words, “God is good,” or “wise,” signify not only that He is the cause of wisdom or goodness, but that these exist in Him in a more excellent way. Hence as regards what the name signifies, these names are applied primarily to God rather than to creatures, because these perfections flow from God to creatures; but as regards the imposition of the names, they are primarily applied by us to creatures which we know first.⁴⁴⁷

loquentium de Deo. Aliud enim intendunt dicere, cum dicunt Deum viventem, quam quod sit causa vitae nostrae, vel quod differat a corporibus inanimatis.”(Aquino: *Summa Theologiae*, I. Q. 13, A. 2).

⁴⁴⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I. Q. 13, A. 2. “quod huiusmodi quidem nomina significant substantiam divinam, et praedicantur de Deo substantialiter, sed deficiunt a repraesentatione ipsius.” (Aquino: *Summa Theologiae*, I. Q. 13, A. 2).

⁴⁴⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I. Q. 13, A. 2. “Unde ex hoc non sequitur quod Deo competat esse bonum in quantum causat bonitatem, sed potius e converso, quia est bonus, bonitatem rebus diffundit.” (Aquino: *Summa Theologiae*, I. Q. 13, A. 2).

⁴⁴⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I. Q. 13, A. 6. “omnia nomina quae metaphorice de Deo dicuntur, per prius de creaturis dicuntur quam de Deo, quia dicta de Deo, nihil aliud significant quam similitudines ad tales creaturas. Sicut enim ridere, dictum de prato, nihil aliud significat quam quod pratum similiter se habet in decore cum floret, sicut homo cum ridet, secundum similitudinem proportionis; sic nomen leonis, dictum de Deo, nihil aliud significat quam quod Deus similiter se habet ut fortiter operetur in suis operibus, sicut leo in suis. Et sic patet quod, secundum quod dicuntur de Deo, eorum significatio definiri non potest, nisi per illud quod de creaturis dicitur. De aliis autem nominibus, quae non metaphorice dicuntur de Deo, esset etiam eadem ratio, si dicerentur de Deo causaliter tantum, ut quidam

Returning to the acts of the intellect mentioned above, Aquinas makes it clear here that even the divine names come from creatures first in the order of knowing, for it is creatures that are known and named prior to the application of these words to God. When it comes to names properly said of God, though, one is to recognize that their meaning derives ultimately from God as the cause of their being.

Some Thomists on Thomas

It seems that the following can be concluded from the above texts: First, for Aquinas there is an ontological, not merely logical, ground for analogical God-talk based on God's causality. That is to say that the relation between the analogates is not limited to the intellect even if analogy is a logical exercise. Second, the ontological basis for similarity in naming does not justify univocity in either meaning or mode of predication. Third, the ontological basis for difference in naming does not justify pure equivocity in meaning. Fourth, God's complete transcendence means that analogy in God-talk is neither two to a third, nor many to one, nor of mathematical proportion, for this would be to place God in a genus and put Him on the level of created things. Fifth, God's knowability (in some sense) removes extrinsic attribution from possible analogical God-talk for this would reduce to complete agnosticism. Sixth, the analogy of proper proportionality is between beings of different species without respect to their relation to God. Seventh, metaphor may be used when speaking of God when mixed perfections are involved. Even if one agrees with these general conclusions, there is still much to discuss.⁴⁴⁸

Etienne Gilson notes that Aquinas's "texts on the notion of analogy are relatively few, and in each case they are so restrained that we cannot but wonder why the notion has taken on such an importance in the eyes of his commentators. Perhaps it is due to a secret longing to redeem from an all too-apparent misery the knowledge of God which St. Thomas will concede

posuerunt. Sic enim. Cum dicitur Deus est bonus, nihil aliud esset quam Deus est causa bonitatis creaturae, et sic hoc nomen bonum, dictum de Deo, clauderet in suo intellectu bonitatem creaturae. Unde bonum per prius diceretur de creatura quam de Deo. Sed supra ostensum est quod huiusmodi nomina non solum dicuntur de Deo causaliter, sed etiam essentialiter. Cum enim dicitur Deus est bonus, vel sapiens, non solum significatur quod ipse sit causa sapientiae vel bonitatis, sed quod haec in eo eminentius praeexistunt. Unde, secundum hoc, dicendum est quod, quantum ad rem significatam per nomen, per prius dicuntur de Deo quam de creaturis, quia a Deo huiusmodi perfectiones in creaturas manant. Sed quantum ad impositionem nominis, per prius a nobis imponuntur creaturis, quas prius cognoscimus."(Aquino: *Summa Theologiae*, I. Q. 13, A. 6).

⁴⁴⁸ Many of these are Mondin's (34-35), and not all will agree with all of them.

us.”⁴⁴⁹ From this “secret longing” concerning these “relatively few texts” have come multiple interpretations of Aquinas’s view on analogy and its role in God-talk. Some of this development will be considered below.

Cajetan’s View

Thomas De Vio Cardinal Cajetan “put the interpretation of what St. Thomas has to say about analogous names onto a path it still travels today.”⁴⁵⁰ Some modern Thomists have taken his three-fold explanation of Thomistic analogy to task, however. Cajetan saw analogy as divided into (1) *inequality*, according to being but not understanding, (2) *attribution*, according to understanding but not being, and (3) *proportionality*, according to both being and understanding. This last included both metaphor and what was called proper proportionality above.⁴⁵¹ Cajetan rejected the first two as not being proper analogies and, rejecting metaphor as well, left only proper proportionality.

Gilson points out that this division is based on a reply to an objection in Aquinas’s commentary on the *Sentences of Peter Lombard*. Cajetan built these “accidental differences into ‘types’ of analogous name, a fateful move which continues to haunt Thomistic interpretation.”⁴⁵² Ralph McInerny notes that, “there are many texts which treat the analogy of names in a way that calls into question Cajetan’s opusculum considered as a statement of St. Thomas’ doctrine on the subject.”⁴⁵³ He concludes that, “Cajetan far too readily rejects what to all appearances are formal statements by St. Thomas on the analogy of names.”⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁴⁹ Gilson, *Christian Philosophy of Aquinas*, 105.

⁴⁵⁰ Gilson, *Christian Philosophy of Aquinas*, 3. Indeed, in a very recent work that includes a discussion of Aquinas’s views, proportionality is used to describe analogical God-talk with little discussion of alternate views. See William Edgar and K. Scott Oliphint. *Christian Apologetics Past and Present: A Primary Source Reader (Volume 1, To 1500)* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2009), 398-401.

⁴⁵¹ Rocca, 113.

⁴⁵² Gilson, *Christian Philosophy of Aquinas*, 11.

⁴⁵³ Ralph McInerny, *The Logic of Analogy: An Interpretation of St. Thomas* (The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), 13.

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

Rocca similarly accuses Cajetan of error, pointing out that beginning in the mid-20th Century some Thomists began to abandon Cajetan's interpretation. Citing Hampus Lyttkens and Santiago Ramírez, Rocca notes that "the two terms dealing with God on one side of the proportionality are themselves analogous, and there can only be an infinite regress if proportionality itself attempts to establish their anologicity."⁴⁵⁵ Then, citing George Klubertanz, Rocca states that "after 1256-57 Thomas totally abandoned proportionality."⁴⁵⁶

It should be noted, however, that there remain significant Thomists who continue to follow Cajetan's understanding.⁴⁵⁷ Proportionality is not completely abandoned even by Rocca who concludes that, "What analogy of proportionality can do is help us understand better the nature of the divine attributes by comparing them to various human or creaturely qualities and characteristics that we comprehend more fully."⁴⁵⁸ It seems, however, that its usefulness will depend on other considerations if an infinite regress is to be avoided.

Mondin's View

According to Battista Mondin's (1963:52-53), classification, there are two fundamental modes of analogy: (1) *intrinsic denomination*, in which there is a causal relation between two objects such that the primary analogate is related to the secondary as cause to effect and the attribute is actually found in the secondary analogate, and (2) *extrinsic denomination*, where "the relation to the primary analogate is both the cause (*causa*) and the meaning (*ratio*) of the secondary analogate," (Mondin, 1963:15). and so the characteristic or attribute predicated properly belongs only to the primary analogate.

The classic examples used to help distinguish these two types of analogy are the words "healthy" and "good." In reality, "health" is said properly only of animals, as it is a property of a sound body. However, "health" can be used to describe many things that are not animal bodies. Food is said to be healthy because it causes health in a body, and urine is said to be healthy in that it indicates health in a body. "Health" as it describes urine or food is only understandable in relation to an animal body. Because "health" is only proper to the primary analogate (animal

⁴⁵⁵ Rocca, 116.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁷ Rocca lists Eric Mascall, James Anderson, and Jacques Maritain among others. See Ibid., 115.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid., 127.

body) this is extrinsic attribution. Here, “health” is being used univocally as to its logical definition, but it is being predicated in different ways (*is* as “causes,” and *is* as “a sign of”).

With the word “good,” however there is a different relation being expressed. When “good” is predicated of creatures it is because they are caused by God who is the supreme Good *and* because they are good in themselves. Because “good” is proper to both the primary and secondary analogates, this is intrinsic attribution, yet even here “good” is being predicated in different ways. Further, “good” is not being used univocally (except perhaps in a logical, viz., non-ontological, sense).⁴⁵⁹ As was said above, when speaking of God and creatures there can be no properly univocal terms.

In analogies of proportion there are two major divisions: (1) where two objects are related to a third object, or (2) where two objects are related to each other. This second sort of analogy is twofold: (2a) where the two things are related by a direct proportion of measure (e.g., degree or distance, such as 4 being in proportion to 2 by doubling). This called analogy is called *analogy of proportion*. Or, (2b) the two objects are related to each other by another relation (i.e., a proportion of proportions, such as the proportion of 4 to 2 being itself proportioned to the proportion of 6 to 3). This kind of analogy is called *analogy of proportionality*.

Given the above divisions, Mondin suggests four analogical modes to describe Aquinas’s thinking. The two fundamental modes of intrinsic and extrinsic denomination can each be subdivided resulting in four types.⁴⁶⁰ According to Mondin (1963:53), all the other modes of analogy mentioned by Aquinas may be identified with one of these four:⁴⁶¹

1. ***Intrinsic Attribution*** is a one-to-another analogy based on intrinsic denomination regarding a relation of efficient causality between the analogates. *Example: God is good and man is good.*

⁴⁵⁹ Armand Maurer argues that in we can have univocal concepts in purely logical predication. This is when “something is predicated analogically . . . according to *esse* and not according to conception.” This, he says, is due to the difference between the projects of the metaphysician and the logician. “The metaphysician considers things in their actual existence. . . . The logician, on the other hand, considers conceptions or intentions alone.” Thus, while the word “body” may be considered univocal with relation to terrestrial and celestial bodies by the logician, the metaphysician would say the term is being used equivocally. See “St. Thomas and the Analogy of Genus.” *The New Scholasticism* 29, no. 2 (April, 1955): 127-129.

⁴⁶⁰ See Appendix: “Analogy According to Aquinas.”

⁴⁶¹ Note that this is qualified by excluding “the solitary classification of analogy of *In I Sententiarum* Dist. 19, Q. 5, A. 1 ad 2, for which he [Aquinas] uses a terminology entirely abandoned in Aquinas’ later works.”

2. **Proper Proportionality** is a many-to-many analogy based on intrinsic denomination regarding a similarity of relations between the analogates.
Example: The Captain steers the ship and the Emperor steers the nation.
3. **Extrinsic Attribution** is a many-to-one analogy based on extrinsic denomination using proper signification concerning the analogates.
Example: A man is healthy and medicine, urine, and food are healthy.
4. **Improper Proportionality** is a metaphorical analogy based on extrinsic denomination using improper signification concerning the analogates.
Example: A woman is a rose.

Having surveyed Aquinas's thought as it developed through his writings (considered chronologically),⁴⁶² Mondin concludes that the ontological ground for the analogy between God and creatures is one of efficient causality. This being the case, Analogy of Proportionality fails because it "does not indicate either the causal nexus between God and creatures or God's priority over His creatures."⁴⁶³ Univocity, analogies of both two to a third and many to one, measurable proportion and extrinsic attribution, must all be rejected as well.

If this is the case then Analogy of Intrinsic Attribution is the only correct mode for analogical God-talk. Thus, "only the analogy of one to another does justice to the facts. According to this mode of analogy the same absolute perfection is predicated both of God and His creatures, but it is predicated according to priority and posteriority: the same perfection belongs to both of them but not in the same way."⁴⁶⁴ In cases such as these, the names "are analogous not because of a variation in the meaning of the copula "is" (which has always the same meaning: the possession of the perfection of being by the subject) but because of a variation in the meaning of the concept signified by the word."⁴⁶⁵ This is in contrast to extrinsic denomination in which "the predicate attribute is not analogous, since it signifies a univocal concept."⁴⁶⁶ Because Mondin sees analogy as a mode of predication, it is analyzable in terms of judgments—placing the issue in the second

⁴⁶² Primarily in *Commentary to the Sentences*, 1.19.5.2.1; 1.35.1.4; 4.49.2.1; *Truth*, 2.11; 21.4; *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1.30-34; *De Potentia* 7.5-7; the *Commentaries on Aristotle*, *Boethius*, and *Pseudo-Dionysius*; *Summa Theologica* 1.12.1; 1.16.6; 2a.88.1; and *Compendium Theologiae*, 27. Note that this process is similar to Rocca's.

⁴⁶³ Mondin, 50.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

act of the intellect.⁴⁶⁷ The importance of this is made clearer by considering another view that mistakenly attributes the use of univocal concepts to Aquinas.

Geisler's View

Evangelical apologist and self-proclaimed Thomist, Norman Geisler writes that, “every term used properly of God must be *defined* the same way (i.e., univocally); however it cannot be *affirmed* the same way.”⁴⁶⁸ Geisler thinks this is true because “an analogous concept would lead to agnosticism.”⁴⁶⁹ Geisler is so convinced of his interpretation that he works it into quotations of Aquinas. When Aquinas writes on analogy in the *Summa Theologica* (1.13.5), he is quoted by Geisler as saying: “For in analogies the idea is not, as in univocals, one and the same [in its application]; yet it is not totally diverse as in equivocals.”⁴⁷⁰ In case there is any doubt that Geisler is out of line with Aquinas, he specifically notes that “Scotus was right that the concept that is applied to both God and man must be univocally understood; but Aquinas was correct in arguing that this concept must be analogically affirmed of God and creatures.”⁴⁷¹

Analogous predication for Geisler is located in what seems to be a proportion of measure. He states that, “when a perfection taken from the finite world is applied to God, it must be applied to God infinitely, since He is an infinite Being.”⁴⁷² Geisler qualifies his view somewhat by stating, “we can’t attribute things to God univocally; [because] there is an infinite difference between an infinite Being and a finite being.”⁴⁷³ Geisler makes this clear when he goes on to say

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., 58.

⁴⁶⁸ Geisler, *Systematic Theology Volume Two*, 23 (Emphasis in original).

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁰ Norman L. Geisler and Winfried Corduan. *Philosophy of Religion*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 261. Insertion in original.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid. 263.

⁴⁷² Geisler, *Systematic Theology Volume One, Introduction and Bible* (Bloomington: Bethany House, 2002), 145.

⁴⁷³ Geisler, *Systematic Theology Volume Two*, 22.

that “negative attribution is simply to assure that all finitude is negated of an attribute before it is predicated of God. . . . the negation only removes the limitation from the perfection.”⁴⁷⁴

However, it is clear that for Aquinas, God is not simply *infinitely more than* man. The issue is not, as Geisler has it, simply that “if any attribute were predicated in the same way (i.e., univocally) of both God and creatures, then it would either imply the finitude of God or else the infinitude of creatures.”⁴⁷⁵ For Aquinas at least, God is not merely *different* from creatures, as if He exists on some continuum with His creatures.⁴⁷⁶ Aquinas makes this clear when he says, “names applied to God and to other beings . . . cannot be predicated univocally *because the definition of what is said of a creature is not a definition of what is said of God*” (emphasis added).⁴⁷⁷ It is therefore better to say, with Aquinas, that God is utterly *distinct* from them and that univocal concepts cannot apply to God regardless of their mode of predication.⁴⁷⁸ It is in the very definition (i.e., concept) of the predicate that causes univocal predication to fail, not simply the mode of predication.⁴⁷⁹

Rocca’s View

In the case of God and creatures, Aquinas believes that “because we come to a knowledge of God from other things, the reality in the names said of God and other things belongs by priority in God according to His mode of being, but the meaning of the name belongs

⁴⁷⁴ Geisler, *Systematic Theology Volume Two*, 26.

⁴⁷⁵ Geisler, *Systematic Theology Volume One*, 145.

⁴⁷⁶ See Thomas Aquinas, *Truth*, trans. Robert W. Milligan (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994), 2.11.

⁴⁷⁷ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Light of Faith: The Compendium of Theology*, trans. Cyril Vollert (Manchester, New Hampshire: Sophia Institute Press, 1993), 1.27. “nomina de Deo et aliis rebus dicta, non omnino univoce, nec omnino aequivoce dicuntur. Univoce namque dici non possunt, cum definitio eius quod de creatura dicitur, non sit definitio eius quod dicitur de Deo” *Compendium Theologiae*. 1.27.

⁴⁷⁸ See Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1.32. cf. Geisler, *Systematic Theology Volume One*, ch. 9; and Geisler, *Systematic Theology Volume Two*, 21-27. Gilson correctly notes that, “God is not more good, just, wise, powerful than the healing remedy is healthy” (*Christian Philosophy of Aquinas*, 106).

⁴⁷⁹ Geisler cites Armand Maurer for support for his view, but he leaves out Maurer’s crucial distinction (made at the end of the very sentence that Geisler partially quotes) between logical and metaphysical concepts. See Geisler and Corduan, 263; cf. Maurer, 143. Note that Geisler somewhat corrects this mistake in *Systematic Theology Volume Two* (e.g., 148-149) – but he still maintains that the difference between the concept and the judgment is based on mere removal of finitude.

to God by posteriority. And so He is said to be named from His effects.”⁴⁸⁰ But this naming involves a process:

When any name expresses such perfections along with a mode that is proper to a creature, it can be said of God only according to likeness and metaphor. . . . for as to the mode of signification, every name is defective. For by means of a name we express things in the way in which the intellect conceives them. For our intellect, taking the origin of its knowledge from the senses, does not transcend the mode which is found in sensible things, As a result, with reference to the mode of signification there is in every name that we use an imperfection, which does not befit God, even though the thing signified in some eminent way does befit God. . . . Such names, therefore, . . . can be both affirmed and denied of God. They can be affirmed because of the meaning of the name; they can be denied because of the mode of signification.⁴⁸¹

Rocca states that Aquinas employs a three step method in speaking of God. “For Aquinas the threefold way is primarily a human method at arriving at the knowledge of God.”⁴⁸² This threefold way reflects the formula found in Romans 1:20 in Paul’s discussion of God’s attributes which are (1) invisible, (2) powerful, and (3) divine. These, in turn, require three ways of consideration: (1) negation, (2) causation, and (3) excellence.⁴⁸³ This is how Aquinas can utilize finite concepts in meaningful predication concerning the infinite God.

Negation refers to the removal of that which is improper in a predication. This can be done through negative propositions with positive predicates (e.g., “God is not a body.”), affirmative propositions with negative predicates (e.g., “God is incorporeal.”), or affirmative propositions with positive predicates which are actually negative in meaning (e.g., “God is simple.”). In each case what is being said of God really tells us what He is not. This is standard negative God-talk.

Because God is the first cause of all other being, there is a relation as cause to effect between God and creatures. Creatures are related to God as being effects of God’s causality. Because this is the case, “Aquinas thinks that words used analogously of God and creatures

⁴⁸⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I. 34. 6. “Sic igitur, quia ex rebus aliis in Dei cognitionem pervenimus, res nominum de Deo et rebus aliis dictorum per prius est in Deo secundum suum modum, sed ratio nominis per posterius. Unde et nominari dicitur a suis causatis.” (Aquino, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I. 34. 6).

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., 1.30.2-3.

⁴⁸² Rocca, 49.

⁴⁸³ Rocca, 52.

apply primarily to God and secondarily to creatures.”⁴⁸⁴ Because the perfections in creatures derive their being from God, words applying to them are not merely being applied externally to God. God’s transcendence does not negate this relation. Because God is the creator of everything it is not “unqualifiedly false that he is thus and so.”⁴⁸⁵ But it is inadequate, for God is above all. And so, “negations concerning God must themselves, in a sense, be negated.”⁴⁸⁶ This is done by asserting God’s eminence over creation.

Although it may sound at first incoherent, our “consciousness of God’s preeminence is the primary source of theological negation in Aquinas’ eyes.”⁴⁸⁷ Because we know that God transcends all creation we know that He does not have the same ontological status as anything in the created order. As the creator, however, we can name Him according to His effects provided that we keep in mind both that God is not literally described by the concepts to which our words refer (negation) but that He excels them. Thus we see that “names are often removed from God not because God is lacking in the perfections they signify but because he is above and exceeds all creatures.”⁴⁸⁸ Thus, in this final step our words must indicate complete removal of imperfection as well as limit. How this is accomplished will take up the final consideration of Aquinas’s doctrine of analogical God-talk.

An Attempt at Resolution

At this point the basic issue of how one can communicate truths regarding a non-conceivable Being may be resolved. The solution must account for more than logically satisfactory modes of God-talk, which rob man of ontological truths. Yet it must do so in a way that does not reduce God to creaturely thoughts and definitions. The key may be found in the distinction between concepts and judgments, and how these relate to propositional truth.

⁴⁸⁴Brian Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 71.

⁴⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 72.

⁴⁸⁶*Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁷Rocca, 66.

⁴⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 67.

Conception and Judgment

Following from the above considerations we can see that Aquinas believes that man has the ability to make meaningful statements concerning God via analogical God-talk. Theological reflection can form meaningful concepts based on prior judgments that are clarified by analogous God-talk that meets the demands of theology that “between God and creature there be difference without equivocity and likeness without univocity.”⁴⁸⁹ Thus, we can indeed make meaningful statements about God in a way similar to how we do so for creatures.

We cannot, however, on Aquinas’s account, have knowledge of God’s essence. “We cannot grasp what God is,” Aquinas writes, but we can know what He is not, and the relation other things have with Him.⁴⁹⁰ We can in no way conceive of God’s essence (in the first act of the intellect), and so “to make St. Thomas say that we have at least an imperfect knowledge of what God is is to betray his expressly stated thought.”⁴⁹¹ Yet Gilson notes that, “Commentators have gradually come to the stage where they speak of analogy as an almost positive source of knowledge giving us a more or less confused insight into a quasi-quidditative being of God.”⁴⁹² Rather than attempting to find some positive concept in place when speaking of God, Gilson notes, “it is quite enough to interpret them as St. Thomas himself did, not in the order of the quidditative concept, but in that of the judgment.”⁴⁹³ While it is the case that, “on the plane of quiddity, there is no mean between the univocal and the equivocal . . . this is not the case if we transfer the question to the plane of the judgment.”⁴⁹⁴

The God that Aquinas proves from creation turns out to be a being whose existence is his essence. But this act-of-existing is itself unknown. “The illusion that the case can be otherwise,” Gilson writes, “comes from the fact that we think we know of what *esse* it is a question when we prove that God exists.”⁴⁹⁵ Because our knowledge of God “is not that of his

⁴⁸⁹Holloway, 180.

⁴⁹⁰ See Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 1.30.4.

⁴⁹¹ Gilson, *Christian Philosophy of Aquinas*, 107.

⁴⁹² *Ibid.*, 106.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.

essence . . . the concept which we form of this effect [i.e., creation] cannot at all be transformed for us into the concept of God which we lack. . . . Nevertheless . . . we attribute all of them to the same object by way of judgment.”⁴⁹⁶

What Gilson is getting at here is that our “knowledge” of God is not conceptual but is rather found in the fact that we can form valid propositions about Him (the second act of the intellect). To put it simply, when we affirm things of God “since God’s essence or being is unknown to us, we cannot know how they exist in God, but we can assert them properly of God.”⁴⁹⁷ Thus, analogical God-talk “is not a way of discovering the nature of the divine being by moving from creaturely perfections to divine ones, but of knowing that certain perfections are to be attributed to God.”⁴⁹⁸

Reply to the Objection Based on Univocity

Rocca acknowledges that the doctrine of analogy has come under serious attack in the history of philosophy and theology when he says that, “various critiques have been directed at analogy, one of the most devastating of which sees analogy as blasphemously derogating from God’s transcendence on the grounds that analogy is ultimately reducible to a univocal common being shared by God and creatures.”⁴⁹⁹

Thomas Howe notes Carl F. H. Henry’s position that analogy’s “denial of univocal predication seems to many scholars to result not in analogical knowledge but rather in equivocal assertion, and hence excludes valid knowledge of God.”⁵⁰⁰ Howe says that, “Those evangelicals who deny analogical predication universally opt for univocal predication. The most common

⁴⁹⁶ Gilson, *Christian Philosophy of Aquinas*, 108.

⁴⁹⁷ Diogenes Allen, *Philosophy for Understanding Theology* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 143.

⁴⁹⁸ Allen, 144.

⁴⁹⁹ Rocca, 93.

⁵⁰⁰ Carl F. H. Henry, *God Who Speaks and Shows: Fifteen Theses, Part One, vol. 2, God, Revelation and Authority* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1999), 115; in Thomas Howe, *PH1015 Course Notes* (Charlotte, NC: 2009), 143.

argument against analogy is that it must, of necessity, employ univocal concepts, in which case analogical predication is merely a smoke screen.”⁵⁰¹ Howe goes on to state that,

It is difficult to see how analogical predication espoused by Mondin, Geisler, and others can escape the charge of univocal predication since the concept is univocal even though the predication is according to being. If the concept is univocal, then what is being predicated is the same quality. It is only infinite with reference to God and finite with reference to man, but nevertheless it is still the exact same (i.e., univocal) quality. How can man and God have univocal qualities?⁵⁰²

There seems to be a failure in the above views to distinguish between *logical* and *ontological* modes of concepts. “All analogical predication occurs ‘according to an order or reference (*respectus*) to something one.’ This ‘one’ is not specifically or conceptually one, but one as an individual reality or nature is one.”⁵⁰³ “The ‘one’ proper to univocity is a *ratio*, a meaning, but the ‘one’ characteristic of analogy is a nature or even an *aliquid*, a something.”⁵⁰⁴ Analogy would “eventually draw analogy back to a common core of univocity if that ‘partially same meaning’ were on the same conceptual level as univocal meanings; but it is not, for what Thomas is attempting to show is that the moment of identity in an analogical term’s various meanings is not a meaning at all but an individual reality to which all the different meanings necessarily refer.”⁵⁰⁵

Maurer makes this issue clear when he says that analogical predication is “according to *esse*, and not according to conception.”⁵⁰⁶ He explains that this occurs when “several things equally receive the attribution of some common concept, but in reality the perfection designated by the concept does not possess an *esse* of the same character as all of them.”⁵⁰⁷ What the metaphysician and the logician consider when they predicate are two different things, and as

⁵⁰¹ Howe, 144.

⁵⁰² Ibid., 146.

⁵⁰³ Rocca, 139.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., 150.

⁵⁰⁵ Rocca, 151.

⁵⁰⁶ Maurer, 128.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid., 128.

Maurer warns: “It is important to keep the order of logic distinct from that of reality.”⁵⁰⁸ The logician uses terms to predicate according to their definitions (which are necessarily abstract), while the metaphysician considers the terms as referring to actual things.

The logician’s process clearly requires concepts that accord with a thing’s genus, which as has been shown is a product of the intellect not found in extra-mental reality. Generic concepts “cannot be abstracted from *esse*, and hence they are intrinsically analogical. . . . On the other hand, genera can be abstracted from existence and its modes by the logician and the mathematician, both of whom are not concerned with existence but only concepts.”⁵⁰⁹ For example, the term “body” can be said univocally of anything corporeal, but “‘bodiness’ does not exist equally in all bodies. . . . For the philosopher of nature, then, who considers bodies as they actually exist, ‘body’ is predicated analogically, not ‘according to conception’ but ‘according to *esse*.’”⁵¹⁰ Thus, what the logician means is not what *is* (*esse*).

It is the logician, then, who predicates univocally of God, not the metaphysician.⁵¹¹ However, generic concepts “can become analogical when they enter into the context of judgment in metaphysics.”⁵¹² This is why Maurer can agree with Rocca and Gilson that analogy “must be grasped in judgment and not in an act of apprehension, which is properly directed to the understanding of essences.”⁵¹³ This is why Aquinas’s doctrine of analogy “is above all a doctrine of the judgment of analogy, and not the analogy of concept—at least if we mean by ‘concept’ the expression of an act of simple apprehension.”⁵¹⁴

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid., 131.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., 143.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., 129.

⁵¹¹ Maurer believes that Cajetan made his mistake precisely here. “Nowhere in his description does he bring out the role of *esse* in this analogy [of inequality]” (Maurer, 141).

⁵¹² Maurer, 144.

⁵¹³ Ibid., 143.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid. cf. Rocca, 166-173.

Judgment and Truth

All this might seem to create a difficulty in ascertaining what would count for or against the truth of a given proposition. But for Aquinas, “the nature of truth consists in two things: in a thing’s being, and in the apprehension of a cognitive power proportioned to a thing’s being.”⁵¹⁵ If truth is based on existence and not essence, then it is discovered in the second act of the mind and not the first. To call a proposition true, then, is to say that there is a correspondence between the thought expressed by a proposition and the state of affairs in reality.⁵¹⁶ But how, if one cannot form an accurate concept through apprehension, can the truth of any proposition be asserted?

Rocca answers that Aquinas has a broader meaning for “concept” and “apprehension” that allows for a concept to be not only the *root* of a judgment, but also its *fruit*.⁵¹⁷ In an understanding of apprehension that goes beyond mere sensual power to “any act of cognition whatsoever,” the intellect can be said to conceive of a proposition.⁵¹⁸ In this case, the concept is a conclusion flowing from previous judgments. “For Aquinas, then, the mind’s concept in the broad sense can be a definition, a judgment, or anything at all in which the intellect speaks its interior word.”⁵¹⁹

If this is the case, then true propositions can be formed on the basis of intellectual judgments. This not only satisfies the requirements mentioned above: it accounts for knowledge (and hence, speakability) of ontological truths about God without reducing Him to creaturely thoughts and definitions. This also can help theists deal with an entire category of atheistic arguments that trade in confusion over theistic attribution.

⁵¹⁵Rocca, 160.

⁵¹⁶“The correspondence theory is often traced back to Aristotle’s well-known definition of truth (*Metaphysics* 1011b25): ‘To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true.’” (“Correspondence Theory of Truth” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*).

⁵¹⁷Rocca, 166.

⁵¹⁸*Ibid.*, 168.

⁵¹⁹*Ibid.*, 173.

CHART: Analogy According To Aquinas

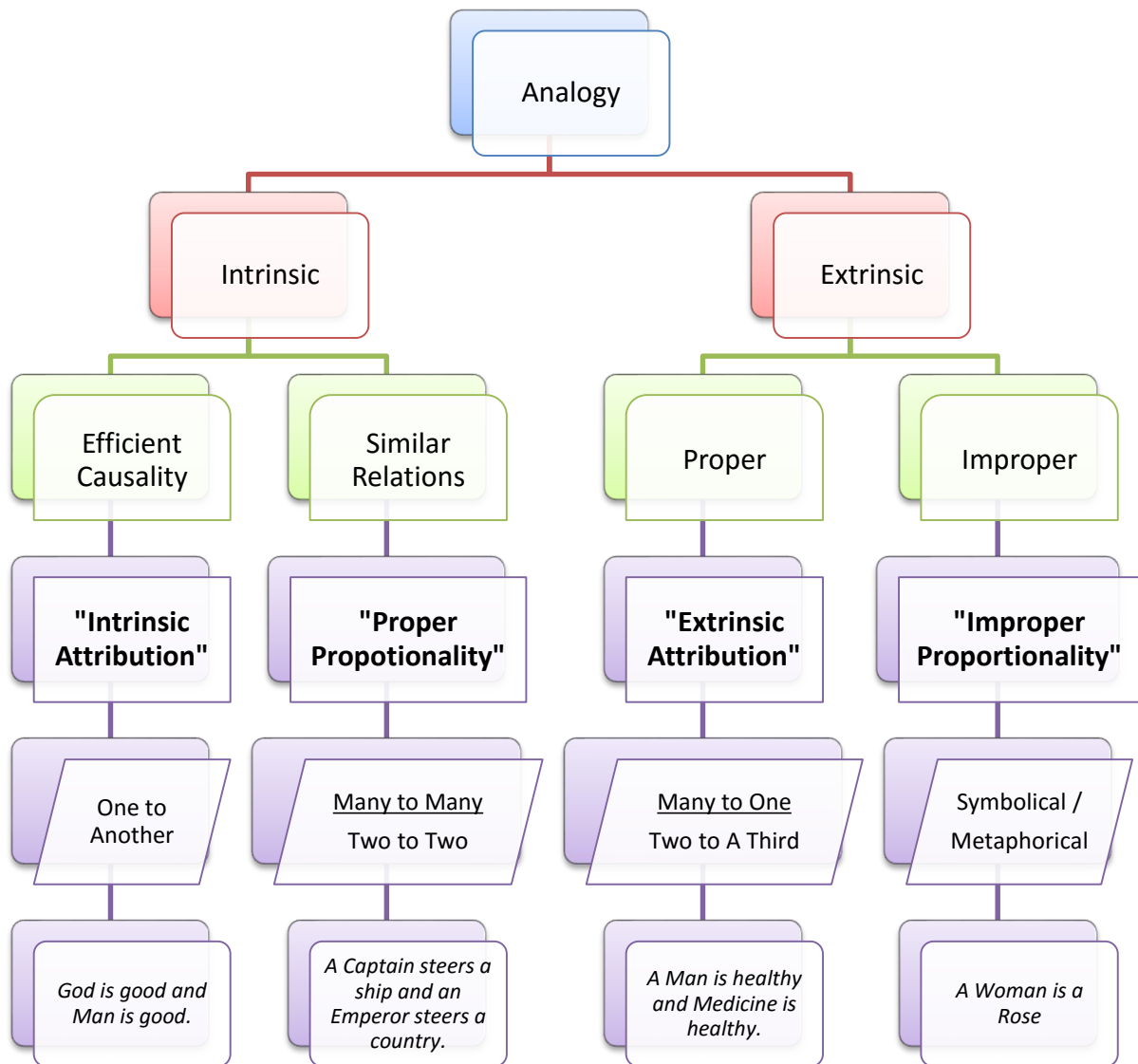


Chart adapted from Battista Mondin, *The Principle of Analogy in Protestant and Catholic Theology* (The Hague: Netherlands, 1963), 52-53.

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