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ANALOGY IN AQUINAS: THE ALSTON-WOLTERSTORFF DEBATE REVISITED

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In the last decade there arose a debate between William P. Alston and Nicholas Wolterstorff on the subject of Thomas Aquinas's doctrine of *analogia*—that is, the position that perfection terms, when properly predicated of God and of creatures, are distinct, yet related in meaning. Whereas Alston interprets Aquinas to hold this well-known position before criticizing it, Wolterstorff argues that Aquinas actually did not hold the position as it is usually presented. In this paper, I show why Alston's "orthodox" interpretation is more faithful to the letter of Aquinas's text than is Wolterstorff's "heterodoxy" and attempt to defuse Alston's criticisms.

Scholars of Thomas Aquinas often bemoan what they perceive to be anachronistic tendencies of contemporary analytic interpreters of the Latin Doctor's work.[1] This is especially true with respect to semantic and metaphysical issues, since the answers affirmed by Aquinas, the mode of questioning, and indeed even the subject matter under which such questions and answers are said to belong often differ significantly from their correlates in contemporary analytic philosophy. This is to be expected, of course, since precious few contemporary philosophers have both the interest and opportunity to obtain fluency in the "conceptual grammars" of both Scholastic and analytic metaphysics.

In the last decade, however, there arose a debate amongst two prominent analytic philosophers of religion that bucked this anachronistic trend, and exemplified this "bilingual" fluency to an impressive extent. These two philosophers are William P. Alston and Nicholas Wolterstorff, and their debate concerned the interpretation of one of the most controversial and difficult areas of Aquinas's philosophical theology: namely, the doctrine of *analogia* as espoused in *Summa theologiae* 1.13.5 and *Summa contra Gentiles* I.32, among other texts.[2] As is almost universally accepted

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[1] For some particularly notable examples of this phenomenon, see Klima, "On Kenny on Aquinas on Being," 567–580; Long, "*Aquinas on Being* and Logicism," 323–347; Dewan, "Saint Thomas, Alvin Plantinga, and the Divine Simplicity," 141–151.

[2] See also Aquinas, *I Sent.* 19.5.2, *ad* 1; *I Sent* 35.1.4; *De Veritate* 2.11; *De potentia Dei* 7.7; *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.34.

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by readers of Aquinas, the central contention of the doctrine of *analogia* is that the meanings of perfection terms as applied to God and to creatures are neither purely "univocal" (i.e., identical in meaning), nor purely "equivocal" (completely distinct in meaning), but "analogical" (distinct, but related in meaning).[3]

The Alston-Wolterstorff debate consists of three separate essays: (1) Alston's "Aquinas on Theological Predication: A Look Backward and a Look Forward"; (2) Wolterstorff's reply, "Alston on Aquinas on Theological Predication"; and finally (3) Alston's "Response to Wolterstorff."[4] Although both philosophers reject Aquinas's closely related doctrine of divine simplicity, their most fundamental disagreement is about whether these texts from Aquinas allow for at least *some* sort of univocity when it comes to predicating perfections of God and creatures. Representing the "orthodox" position is Alston, who finds Aquinas's doctrine of *analogia* wanting precisely because it does *not* allow for any such univocal predication. Wolterstorff, however, affirms a "heterodox" position, holding that Aquinas's doctrine of *analogia* does, in fact, allow for a sort of *metaphysical* or "real" univocity in the *res significata* (i.e., a real identity of the referents of perfection terms) between God and creatures. Consequently, according to Wolterstorff, even if Alston is right to have reservations about any position that would deny univocity outright, his rejection of Aquinas's doctrine of *analogia* is premature.

In what follows, I revisit this debate and aim to further it in two ways—one interpretive, and the other systematic. First, I show why Alston's orthodox interpretation of *analogia* is more faithful to the letter of Aquinas's text than is Wolterstorff's heterodoxy. Second, I attempt to defuse Alston's criticisms of this orthodox position. My argument proceeds in four major sections: a brief account of the main distinctions operative in Aquinas's doctrine of *analogia* (§1); a summary of the most important differences between Alston's orthodoxy and Wolterstorff's heterodoxy (§2); a refutation of Wolterstorff's heterodoxy (§3); and finally a response to Alston's concerns regarding the viability of Aquinas's rejection of any and all univocity between perfections as exemplified by God and creatures (§4).

1. Aquinas and Analogy

First, a rundown of the basics of analogy in Aquinas. As both Alston and Wolterstorff acknowledge, this doctrine in Aquinas is the source of a mind-boggling amount of controversy in secondary literature.[5] This controversy

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[3]As we will have the occasion to revisit later in this essay, this is more or less a standard interpretation of the mentioned. See Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* (McCabe translation), 1.13.5.

[4]Alston, "Aquinas on Theological Predication," 145–178; Wolterstorff, "Alston on Aquinas on Theological Predication," 209–228; Alston, "Response to Wolterstorff," 229–236.

[5]For a good summary and analysis of this debate in the secondary literature on analogy, see Hochschild, "Proportionality and Divine Naming," 531–558.

is often about what *sort* of analogy best captures the way in which the meanings of terms predicated of God and creatures are distinct, yet related, but the disputes extend much further than that—even into some of its most basic claims. So, although the purposes of the present argument are not well served by delving deeply into this secondary literature, it is necessary to establish some of the most fundamental distinctions at play if only to set the context for the Alston-Wolterstorff debate.

The first relevant distinction—or *set* of distinctions, rather—which is immediately necessary to posit is the so-called "semantic triangle" of Aristotle's *Peri Hermeneias*. This semantic triangle, which "set[s] the stage for all semantic considerations in the Middle Ages,"[6] is made up of three fundamental constituents: name (*nomen*), concept (*ratio*) and thing (*res*). For Aquinas, names signify things, but, crucially, this signification is only possible through the mediation of concepts. As Aquinas remarks in his Commentary on the *Peri Hermeneias*,

> [Names] cannot immediately signify things, as is clear from the mode of signifying, for the name "man" signifies human nature in abstraction from singulars; hence it is impossible that it immediately signify a singular man. The Platonists for this reason held that it signified the separated idea of man. But because in Aristotle's teaching man in the abstract does not really sub-sist, but is only in the mind, it was necessary for Aristotle to say that vocal sounds signify the conceptions of the intellect immediately and things by means of them.[7]

To be clear, Aquinas's position is that names (or predicates) signify *concepts* immediately, and *things* by mediation, i.e., through concepts. Note the anti-Platonism in this passage. If language simply "mirrored" reality in a sort of straightforward, isomorphic relation (i.e., predicate *F* : property *F* :: predicate *G* : property *G*),[8] then there would be no need for concepts; for one could simply assume that all names employed in true propositions would have to simply "map on" to reality in a "one-to-one" way.

This is simply not the case for Aquinas. In a decidedly anti-Platonist vein that is typical of his corpus as a whole, Aquinas rejects any semblance of a doctrine of subsisting universals. The *ratio* through which we know *res* plays an extremely important role in meaningful language, since it is the peculiar capacity of the intellect to abstract *universal* concepts from *particular* things.[9] Following Avicenna, Aquinas remarks in his early work *De ente et essentia* that "common natures" are "neither one nor many"—meaning that whatever is expressed by predicates such as "human" is, in itself, neither universal nor particular. Rather, universality and par-

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[6]Klima, "The Semantic Principles Underlying Saint Thomas Aquinas's Metaphysics of Being," 90.

[7]Aquinas, *Expositio libri Peryermeneias*, I.2.5.

[8]There is reason to believe that this "mirroring" relationship informs (mistakenly, in my view) Alston's reading of Aquinas. See Alston, "Aquinas on Theological Predication," 163n.

[9]See Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*, 47.

ticularity are *added* to the nature. A common nature is *universal* insofar as it is abstracted by the agent intellect as a concept; a common nature is *particular* insofar as it is exemplified as a really (i.e., extra-mentally) existing substance.[10]

Thus, returning to the *Summa theologiae*, we learn that "words are referred to things signified (*res significata*) *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."[11] In short, meaningful language is language we can understand, and we understand by way of concepts. This will prove to be an important point for the debate between Alston and Wolterstorff.

For now, it is enough to see that the "triangular" Aristotelian semantic framework (*nomen-ratio-res*) offers us insight into a distinction which is important for the debate: namely, the distinction between the *modus significandi* and the *res significata*. The *res significata* is the "thing signified," i.e., the reality to which certain predicates in a proposition are ultimately referred.[12] The *modus significandi*, on the other hand, is the "mode of signifying," which accounts for the intellectual act of "dividing and composing" subjects and predicates into propositions. As Aquinas remarks in *Summa contra Gentiles* I.32, "by means of a name we express things in the way in which the intellect conceives them. For our intellect . . . 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."[13] At least two points are important here: (1) the *modus significandi* is tied inextricably to our way of understanding; and (2) this way of understanding is marked by our capacity for the *composition* of subject and predicate. The non-identity of subject and predicate is a necessary condition for our *modus significandi*, since it is the *composition* of subject and predicate that yields meaningful propositions.[14] If subject and predicate were not distinct, then they would be identical and, of course, then they would not be composite at all.

In short, we signify in accordance with how we understand, and we understand by way of composition. Yet for Aquinas it is a non-negotiable fact that God is *simple* and therefore not composite in any way.[15] In forming propositions about God, we understand him *as composite*—not because

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[10]See Owens, "Common Nature," 1–14.

[11]Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.13.1 (my emphasis).

[12]It should be remembered, however, that not *all* concepts point beyond themselves to an existing *res*. So-called "second intentions" such as "genus" and "species," for example, merely denote "beings of reason" (*entia rationis*). See Klima, "The Semantic Principles Underlying Saint Thomas Aquinas's Metaphysics of Being," 102.

[13]Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, I.32.

[14]This is not strictly speaking correct, since identity itself is an analogical term, but the identity that I am excluding from the nature of propositions is *absolute* identity (i.e., the exclusion of any and all distinction).

[15]See Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.3.7.

we mistakenly "choose" to do so, but because we cannot understand in any other way. After all, propositions *just are* compositions of subject and predicate. For this reason, regardless of which predicates we use to describe God, it is already the case that our *modus significandi* will always fail to represent *what* and/or *how* God is in himself.

But this raises a question that leads us to the next important distinction: namely, the distinction between literal (*proprie*) and metaphorical (*metaphorice*) speech about God. If it is true that our *modus significandi* cannot represent the way in which God is in himself, must it follow that our speech about God must always be metaphorical? As Alston and Wolterstorff both recognize, Aquinas's answer is in the negative: "not all names are applied to God in a metaphorical sense, but there are some which are said of Him in their literal sense."[16]

For Aquinas, the *proprie-metaphorice* distinction is founded in the thing signified, not in the mode of signifying. If the thing signified includes imperfection by virtue of what it is, then that thing when predicated of God is metaphorical. One of Aquinas's favorite examples of a metaphorical statement about God is the proposition, "God is a lion." Because the essence of lion includes corporeality—an imperfection[17]—the proposition ascribes an imperfection to God. Therefore the proposition is metaphorical.

Yet, Aquinas argues, some names express perfections themselves without any reference to imperfection at all: "Other names, however, express these perfections absolutely, without any such mode of participation being part of their signification as the words 'being,' 'good,' 'living,' and the like, and such names can be literally (*proprie*) applied to God."[18] Because perfections such as goodness, life, etc. do not include any imperfection *per se*, there is nothing to prevent us from ascribing them to God non-metaphorically. That is to say, these predicates express something *true* about God in a straightforward and non-metaphorical manner. Still, Aquinas qualifies this position by resorting to the distinction between *modus significandi* and *res significata*:

> [O]ur intellect apprehends [these perfections] as they are in creatures, and it signifies them by names as it apprehends them. Therefore as to the names applied to God—viz. the perfections which they signify, such as goodness, life and the like, and their mode of signification. As regards what is signified by these names, they belong properly to God, and more properly than they belong to creatures, and are applied primarily to Him. But as regards their mode of signification, they do not properly and strictly apply to God; for their mode of signification applies to creatures.[19]

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[16]Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.13.3.

[17]In Aquinas's Aristotelian metaphysics, matter is defined as potency (and therefore imperfection) with respect to form. See Aquinas, *De principiis naturae*, 2.

[18]Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.13.3, *ad* 1.

[19]Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.13.3.

This is an important passage because it reveals how Aquinas is thinking about properly literal, analogical language about God. Perfections such as goodness and life are predicated literally of God, but it is important to note that these perfections are only *understood* to a limited degree. That is, because our *modus significandi* is irreducibly *composite* and therefore inadequate to the task of representing God as he is in himself, it is also the case that it is inadequate to the task of grasping divine perfections as they are in themselves. After all, on Aquinas's doctrine of divine simplicity, we know that whatever is predicated literally of God is simply *identical* with God. Goodness, life and the like are ultimately expressions of the divine essence itself. To the extent that we fail to comprehend the divine essence, then, we also fail to comprehend these divine perfections.

But this conclusion raises a further question, which leads us to the third and final (for the purposes of this section) distinction that is operative in Aquinas's doctrine of *analogia*: namely, the distinction between a "non-univocal" agent cause and its effect. If it is true that there are certain terms which signify the very perfections that are really in the divine essence, could it not be the case that it is only our *concepts* that are analogical, as opposed to the *things* signified? That is, do God and creatures exemplify the same perfections, but to varying degrees? As we will see, the answers to these questions constitute the most important disagreement between Alston and Wolterstorff. In order to arrive at Aquinas's position on the matter, we must make recourse to the concept of non-univocal causality.

In *Summa theologiae* 1.13.5, Aquinas remarks that "whatever is [literally] said of God and creatures, is said according to the relation of a creature to God as its principle and cause, in whom the perfections of things pre-exist excellently."[20] Here we have a direct connection between the rationale for the doctrine of *analogia* and God's role as the *causal principle* of all created being. That is to say, perfections are predicated of God and creatures analogously *because* God is the first cause and principle of created being. In order to find out why this is the case, we have to make recourse to the notion of non-univocal agency; for it is because God is the non-univocal agent cause of creation that our language about him is also non-univocal.

The concept of a non-univocal agent comes from *Summa theologiae* 1.4.3—the context being Aquinas's affirmative answer to the question of "whether creatures can be like God." Having established that all created perfections are participations of the divine simplicity in the previous article,[21] 1.4.3 is attempt to show *how* this is the case.

Creatures are "like God," for Aquinas, if and only if they bear a formal "similitude" (*similitudo*) to the divine essence: "Since similitude is based upon agreement or communication in form, it varies according to the

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[20]Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.13.5.

[21]See Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.4.2.

many modes of communicating form."[22] Aquinas distinguishes three such "modes of communicating form (*modi communicandi in forma*)":

1. Causes which communicate to their effects "the *same* formality" in equal measure, as in the case of "two things equally white."[23]

2. Causes which communicate to their effects "the same formality, though not according to the same measure, but according to more or less," as in the case of "something *less* white [that] is said to be like another thing *more* white."[24]

3. Causes which communicate to their effects "the same form, but not according to the same formality," as in the case of "non-univocal agents."[25]

Note that (1) and (2) involve a *qualititative* sameness which is also subject to *quantitative* relation. In this case, the quality is "white" and the quantitative relations are "equal" (1), "more" and "less" (2). According to divine simplicity, however, there are no accidents in God, and thus no qualities or quantitative relations of any kind.[26] Therefore (1) and (2) are ruled out immediately as candidates for the way in which God communicates his perfection to creatures as first cause.[27]

This leaves (3), which is precisely how Aquinas conceives of the way in which creatures bear a similitude to God: namely, as effects of a non-univocal agent cause:

> If, however, the agent and its effect are not contained in the same species, there will be a similitude, but not according to the formality of the same species; as things generated by the sun's heat may be in some sort spoken of as like the sun, not as though they received the form of the sun in its specific similitude, but in its generic similitude.[28]

If the earthly effects of the sun's heat (e.g., plants, animals, etc.) bore a *specific* similitude to the sun, then these effects would not be earthly at all; for then they would be "little suns" themselves. This is not the case. Instead, the sun's heat is participated in by earthly creatures in diverse and manifold ways in accordance with the various essences of those creatures. This is a *generic*—not a *specific*—similitude, and therefore the sun is rightly called a non-univocal agent cause of its earthly effects. In short, unlike univocal agents, the sun does not "reproduce itself" in its effects *formally*, i.e., in accordance with its species.

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[22]Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.4.3.

[23]Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*

[24]Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*

[25]Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*

[26]See Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.3.6.

[27]As we will see something like (2) is exactly what Wolterstorff sees (mistakenly, in my view) in Aquinas's doctrine of *analogia*.

[28]Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.4.3.

Like the sun with respect to the earthly creatures it generates, God is the non-univocal cause of creatures. Yet, crucially, there is another "negative step" to take in order to fully appreciate the way in which creatures are like God; for unlike the case of the sun, God has no generic similitude to communicate because he is not contained in any genus at all.[29] So, while the example of the sun is helpful for explaining how a non-univocal agent differs from a univocal agent, it fails in this important, but unavoidable way. This failure is important because it signals the fact that God's communication of similitude has absolutely no adequate parallel in the created order. As Aquinas remarks, the effects of this sort of non-univocal agency "will still more distantly reproduce the form of the agent, not, that is, so as to participate in the similitude of the agent's form according to the same specific or generic formality, but only according to some sort of analogy; as existence is common to all."[30] What this means is that the similitude of creatures with respect to God *is itself* only analogically related to the sort of generic similitude that is on display in the example of earthly creatures and the sun. This recognition pertains to what Joshua Hochschild calls the "formal structure" of the doctrine of *analogia entis* in Aquinas: namely, that creature-Creator similitude is itself different-but-related to all other forms of similitude.[31] As Alston rightly maintains, for Aquinas there is simply no "getting below the proportional similarity so as to specify features that are wholly in common."[32]

To recap, then, we have touched upon three important points of consideration on the subject of *analogia* in Aquinas:

1. On Aquinas's Aristotelian semantics, meaningful language is constituted by the "triangle" of names, concepts and things. We can only understand—and therefore speak meaningfully about—*things* through the human intellective process of *concept* formation. Thus, there is a distinction between the *res significata* and the *modus significandi*.

2. Aquinas admits that some terms are predicated of God and creatures literally (*proprie*) as opposed to metaphorically (*metaphorice*), but this literal-metaphorical distinction is founded in the *res significata*, not the *modus significandi*. Only perfection terms—that is, those terms which designate immaterial perfections such as goodness, life, etc.—are predicated literally of God.

3. God is the cause of all created being, and as such he communicates his perfections to the created order in the mode of a non-univocal

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[29]See Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.3.5.

[30]Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*. 1.4.3.

[31]The (four-term) analogy of *proportionalitas* is used in *De veritate* 2.11 to express this relation of similitudes. On this point, see Hochschild, "Proportionality and Divine Naming," 556–557.

[32]Alston, "Aquinas on Theological Predication," 153.

> agent. Thus, created perfections themselves *bear an irreducibly analogical similitude* to the divine simplicity in which they participate.

Having considered these three points, we are in a position to gain a fuller understanding of Aquinas's famous position:

> [W]hatever is said of God and creatures, is said according to the relation of a creature to God as its principle and cause, wherein all perfections of things pre-exist excellently. Now this mode of community of idea is a mean between pure equivocation and simple univocation. For in analogies the idea is not, as it is in univocals, one and the same, yet it is not totally diverse as in equivocals; but a term which is thus used in a multiple sense signifies various proportions to some one thing.[33]

Since the human *modus significandi* is irreducibly composite in that it generates meaning only by composing subject and predicate into propositions, it is impossible even in principle for human creatures to represent the divine simplicity in the way that he is in himself. We can speak truly about God, however, because the creaturely perfections we *do* understand are effects of his non-univocal agency. Indeed, Aquinas's semantic doctrine of analogous *predication* is founded ultimately in his correlative metaphysical doctrine of analogous *similitude* (i.e., the similitude between a non-univocal agent and its effect).

2. The Alston-Wolterstorff Debate

Alston correctly recognizes that Aquinas holds that words only signify through concepts with which human intellects compose propositions, and that "the differences between God and creatures that prevent univocity, stem from one basic divine attribute—simplicity."[34] He also correctly recognizes that the doctrine of *analogia* as developed in *Summa theologiae* 1.13.5 and *Summa contra Gentiles* I.32 has "*causal* or *ontological*" and "*semantic*" aspects. He remarks that this doctrine "holds that such terms are predicated of God in a sense not exactly the same as that in which they are predicated of creatures but in a sense that is related to the latter by virtue of the dependence of creatures on God for their existence and what they are."[35]

Created perfections are always accidents added to finite essences. More precisely, they are *qualitative* accidents, meaning that they are modifications of composite substances in motion.[36] Thus, perfections such as goodness are, in a sense, *imperfect* insofar as they are qualities inhering in *complex* substances such as Socrates. In the creaturely case, the *modus significandi* is adequate to the task of representing the perfection without ambiguity, since the perfection involved can be mapped onto the subject-

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[33]Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.13.5.

[34]Alston, "Aquinas on Theological Predication," 148.

[35]Alston, "Aquinas on Theological Predication," 160.

[36]See Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, 5.16.998.

predicate structure of that *modus significandi*. Citing *Summa contra Gentiles* I.32.3, again, Alston rightly claims that for Aquinas there can be no such univocity when predicating the same perfection terms of God, since in this case "[t]here can be no exact reproduction of form just because creatures have in a divided way what is found in God in an absolutely simple way, without any real distinction."[37]

Alston concludes his summary of the Thomistic position with the following account of what we *are* doing when we speak literally about God: "We can adumbrate the analogous divine perfection only by relating it, by supereminence, to the creaturely version of which we do have a satisfactory grasp."[38] In other words, the lack of univocity is not limited to the *modus significandi*; rather, it extends into the *res significata* itself, thus disallowing any conceptual refinement that might "correct" the "merely analogical" application of perfection terms to God.[39] All this to say, Alston seems to sign off on all three aforementioned points about *analogia* as part of the proper reading of Aquinas: (1) we can speak meaningfully about God only in and through our concepts; (2) we can predicate perfection terms of God literally; and finally (3) those perfections as applied to God and creatures bear only an analogical similitude to one another. In short, analogy is not a "merely semantic" doctrine which only tells us something about our *modus significandi*; rather, this *modus significandi* is proportionate to creaturely perfection, and thus *analogia* is founded in the metaphysical principle of non-univocal causation.

This interpretation—one that affirms all three aforementioned points about *analogia*—amounts to the position that I call the "orthodox" interpretation of analogy in Aquinas. It is this position that Alston interprets Aquinas as adopting, but it is also the position that he rejects in the latter part of his essay. This rejection is based on two lines of criticism—one focused on the *modus significandi* and the other on the *res significata*.

With respect to the first line of criticism, Alston says the following:

> Our grammatical forms make a contribution to the truth conditions of our statements. Thus when I say that Jim forgave Sally, part of what it takes to make my statement true depends on the fact that "forgave" picks out one attribute rather than another, and "Jim" and "Sally" are being used to refer to certain persons rather than others. . . . [But this means] that a condition of truth is that there is a distinction between Jim and this action.[40]

Of course, this purported truth-condition—that there is a distinction between substance and accident—cannot apply to the divine simplicity for reasons that we have already touched upon.[41] But if this is the case, Alston

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[37]Alston, "Aquinas on Theological Predication," 167.

[38]Alston, "Aquinas on Theological Predication," 167.

[39]See Alston, "Aquinas on Theological Predication," 165.

[40]Alston, "Aquinas on Theological Predication," 168.

[41]See n33 above.

argues, then theologians literally do not have access to the truth condi-
tions of their statements about God. Of course, "if truth goes, the game is
up with theology."[42]

Anticipating a potential response on behalf of Aquinas, Alston admits
that it would be saying too much to suggest that a "perfectly" precise gram-
matical form is a necessary condition for knowing the truth-conditions
of any given proposition expressed in ordinary language. Noting that
the logic of existential quantification had not yet been developed in the
thirteenth century, Alston suggests that such an extreme position would
commit its adherent to the view that the truth-conditions of propositions
such as "Margaret Thatcher exists" would be out of reach for anyone who
did not know that the "precise" grammatical form of such a statement is
something like "There is at least one x such that x is a person and Mar-
garet Thatcher."[43] Still, Alston argues, "surely it is better to have an apt,
perspicuous form of statement for what we want to say. This can hardly
be denied."[44]

This leads Alston to his second, "stickier" problem with Aquinas's
doctrine of *analogia* on the side of the *res significata*: "By [Aquinas's] own
admission he is in no position to spell out the respects of similiarity and
dissimilarity between divine and human causal agency, willing, and so
on."[45] Again, this criticism mirrors the earlier "grammatical" problem
on the side of the *modus significandi*—the common issue being the lack of
perspicuous truth conditions. The more fundamental step in Alston's criti-
cism, however, is not so much that the Thomistic position is incoherent;
rather, it fails to recognize the possibility of a certain kind of univocity on
the side of the *res significata*. Indeed, such a possibility lies in waiting in
another key text, *I Sent.* 19.5.2, in which Aquinas includes among "three
modes of analogy" a "mode of analogical predication . . . when several
things are put on an equal footing under *one and the same common concept*,
although the nature that they share in common exists diversely in them."[46]

It is Alston's contention that Aquinas fails to exploit his own recogni-
tion in the context of his doctrine of *analogia*: "Why," he asks, "should
it impossible to form a concept of willing, knowing, forgiving, or loving
that abstracts from the differences in the ways in which these forms are
realized in God and creatures, and hence can be predicated univocally

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[42]Alston, "Aquinas on Theological Predication," 169.

[43]See Alston, "Aquinas on Theological Predication," 170. This is an unfortunate example
because there are actually very good reasons to think that "Margaret Thatcher exists" is *not*
rendered faithfully by the tools of existential quantification, e.g., "$(\exists x)[Px \bullet (x = m)]$." In fact,
I suggest that such a position is inconsistent with a Thomistic position on the semantics of
existence. On this point, see Harris, "The Thin Theory of Existence and Conceptual Idolatry,"
73–86.

[44]Alston, "Aquinas on Theological Predication," 170.

[45]Alston, "Aquinas on Theological Predication," 173.

[46]Alston, "Aquinas on Theological Predication," 175.

of both?"[47] Such a rendering of the analogy between divine and crea-turely predication would allow for some univocity, since the relevant dissimilarities would be subtracted from the concept in question, while yet preserving the obvious and considerable dissimilarities between God and creatures with respect to their exemplification of the perfection desig-nated by this predicate-concept. In other words, such a perfection would retain a "generic," but not a "specific," similitude when exemplified by God and creatures.[48]

It is this univocal, generic similitude that Alston does not want to give up when it comes to divine naming. Therefore his most fundamental criticism is expressed concisely in the conclusion of his impressive essay: "when it comes to what Aquinas calls 'pure perfection terms' he lacks any sound reason for denying that they can be univocally applied [in the way described] across the divine-creature gap."[49] At day's end, for Alston, Aquinas is mistaken in leaving the aforementioned special "mode" of analogy explained in *I Sent.* 19.5.2 "untapped," as it were, for the project of divine naming. Aquinas's doctrine of *analogia* suffers accordingly. This is Alston's critique, in a nutshell.

One of the two objectives of the present essay is to provide answers to these criticisms offered by Alston. For the purposes of this section, however, we pivot to Wolterstorff, for my other objective is to show why Wolterstorff's "heterodox" departure from Alston's "orthodox" interpre-tation of Aquinas is problematic.

In response to Alston, Wolterstorff describes his thesis in the form of three objectives: "[Alston's] argument is that Aquinas sees himself as having to pay the price, for that position, of denying 'straight univocity.' My argument will be that Aquinas affirms both straight univocity and the possibility of saying of God what is literally true of him—while also af-firming analogy."[50] The latter two of these three objectives about Aquinas are consistent with the abovementioned orthodox interpretation, so it is the first objective—that Aquinas allows for "straight univocity" between predicates applied to God and creatures—which serves as the *differentia* for Wolterstorff's heterodoxy. It is this position that is most interesting for our current purposes.

Wolterstorff recognizes the importance of the distinction between *modus significandi* and *res significata* and divine simplicity with respect to the question of analogy. Citing *Summa theologiae* 1.13.5, he "tips his hand," as it were, with respect to his heterodox reading: "The issue [in article 5] is whether the term, in these two or more uses, is being used to designate the same *property* or different *properties*. If the same, then it is being used

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[47]Alston, "Aquinas on Theological Predication," 175.

[48]In other words, Aquinas could retain precisely the sort of similitude he rejects in *Summa theologiae* 1.4.3. See n28 above.

[49]Alston, "Aquinas on Theological Predication," 178.

[50]Wolterstorff, "Alston on Aquinas on Theological Predication," 116.

univocally; if not, then it is being used equivocally."[51] Note the emphasis on the term "property"—one with no correlate in the Latin texts at issue.[52] If it is true that the *res significata* of perfection terms are properties, then it makes sense to make a clear distinction between (1) these properties themselves and (2) the way in which a subject bears those properties. Indeed, this seems to be precisely Wolterstorff's understanding: "The *res significata* of those pure perfection terms is just those perfections themselves, not any particular mode of participation in the perfection. Hence such terms can be applied literally to God, even though our creaturely mode of participation in those perfections is different from God's mode of participation."[53] Therefore, Aquinas's "serious problem" is that he fails to recognize that the very fact that both God and creatures share any single property at all (regardless of the divergent ways in which the property is exemplified) implies some sort of univocity.

Note the similarity to Alston's objection to Aquinas's refusal to grant a generic univocity to perfections as predicated of God and creatures.[54] The difference is that Wolterstorff goes further, saying that Aquinas *did* in fact hold precisely this sort of position:

> In assertively uttering "God is alive" and assertively uttering "Joe is alive," we are predicating the same "form" of two different things. But given our other conviction, that God "participates" in perfections as a simple being whereas Joe participates in them as a complex being, we would say that we are claiming a different relationship to hold in the two cases—though not entirely different, since in both cases we can describe the subject as "participating in" what is designated by the predicate term. It's our predicating of the predicate term to God that is analogous to our predicating it of Joe; the analogy is to be located, not in the sense (meaning) of the predicate term itself but in the copula. This, I submit, is what we would say if we held Aquinas' ontology.[55]

For Wolterstorff, the dissimilarity expressed by the doctrine of *analogia* between God and creatures is a dissimilarity "in the copula," *not* "of the predicate term itself." That is to say, we can clearly identify the similarity and dissimilarity in the propositions "God is alive" and "Joe is alive"; for in both cases the *same* property of "life" is exemplified, but *in different ways* signaled by the copula of the sentence. In "God is alive," the copula is identitative; in "Joe is alive," the copula is predicative. This dissimilarity, of course, is due to God's simplicity and Joe's complexity, respectively. The similarity—and thus the *univocity*—in the two predications is supplied by

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[51]Wolterstorff, "Alston on Aquinas on Theological Predication," 119–120 (my emphases).

[52]For a detailed discussion of a "property-based metaphysics" and its relationship to classical theism, see Nash-Marshall, "Properties, Conflation, and Attribution," 1–18.

[53]Wolterstorff, "Alston on Aquinas on Theological Predication," 121.

[54]See n28 above.

[55]Wolterstorff, "Alston on Aquinas on Theological Predication," 126.

the fact that the same perfection is being exemplified in different ways; hence Wolterstorff's heterodox reading of Aquinas.

Wolterstorff argues that his heterodox reading of *Summa theologiae* 1.13.5 is "concealed from us by our English translations."[56] In particular, Wolterstorff takes issue with Herbert McCabe's translation of the following from Aquinas's response in Article 5: "Sed nullum nomen convenit Deo secundum illam rationem, secundum quam dicitur de creatura."[57] McCabe renders this sentence as follows: "But no word when used of God means the same as when it is used of a creature." Wolterstorff suggests that "this is interpretation, not translation."[58] If it were true that no word—not even perfection terms—*means* the same when predicated of God and creatures, then indeed Wolterstorff's heterodoxy would be compromised. Indeed, his heterodox reading relies upon the position that perfection terms identify *identical* perfections as exemplified by God and creatures.

As an alternative translation, Wolterstorff offers the following "literal translation": "But no name applies to God according to the same *ratio* according to which it is said of a creature."[59] Wolterstorff's point is that the Latin word *ratio* is ambiguous, and that it is not at all clear that it should be rendered as "meaning." Indeed, citing passages from *Summa contra Gentiles* I.32, Wolterstorff prefers to render *ratio* as "the force of the copula"; for then Aquinas's (supposed) position that perfection terms designate the same *properties* exemplified differently by God and creatures is vindicated:

> The "is" in "God is wise" necessarily has a different force, a different *ratio*, from the "is" in "Socrates is wise"—assuming that we are using our words in such a way that in each case what we say is true. But the force (*ratio*) of the copula in the two cases is not completely different and unconnected; the copula is not being used *purely* equivocally. Its force (*ratio*) when used to speak of creatures is *analogical* to its force (*ratio*) when used to speak of God; in both cases one is claiming some mode of participation in the perfection by the entity referred to.[60]

By translating *ratio* as "the force of the copula," Wolterstorff reads Aquinas as keeping univocity on the side of the *res significata*, while acknowledging equivocity on the side of "the act of predicating."[61] This univocity and equivocity when considered together makes for the doctrine of *analogia* in Aquinas, as Wolterstorff's heterodox reading has it.

3. A Critical Problem in Wolterstorff's Heterodoxy

In my view, Wolterstorff's heterodox interpretation of Aquinas on analogy is mistaken. The general problem with this reading is that it imports an

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[56]Wolterstorff, "Alston on Aquinas on Theological Predication," 128.

[57]Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.13.5.

[58]Wolterstorff, "Alston on Aquinas on Theological Predication," 128.

[59]Wolterstorff, "Alston on Aquinas on Theological Predication," 128.

[60]Wolterstorff, "Alston on Aquinas on Theological Predication," 126–27.

[61]Wolterstorff, "Alston on Aquinas on Theological Predication," 130.

alien understanding of "properties" into Aquinas's texts. With Siobhan Nash-Marshall, I take it that such an understanding of properties includes at least the following commitment: namely, that "properties are basic and invariant features of reality."[62] That is to say, separate instances of predicates such as "good" denote a single, identical feature of reality—even when this feature of reality is "instantiated in" or "participated by" in God and creatures, respectively. As Wolterstorff puts the matter, Aquinas "is not saying that the terms predicated have a different sense. . . . [T]he thing designated (signified) is exactly the same."[63] Now it is true that Wolterstorff has been an important advocate for medieval exponents of divine simplicity, for example, in the sense that he has dedicated tremendous scholarly energy to encouraging contemporary analytic philosophers to understand medieval thinkers on their own terms.[64] Despite this, Wolterstorff assumes a property-based metaphysics when interpreting Aquinas—one that is foreign to Aquinas's own thought. In order to see what this means, we can consider two especially notable "symptoms" that are intelligible in light of this commitment.

Now we have seen that Wolterstorff's reading of Aquinas depends heavily upon his commitment to the idea that *perfections themselves* and the *mode of exemplifying* those perfections must be kept distinct. Without a clear distinction here, there can be no distinction between the "force" of the copula (Wolterstorff's translation of *ratio* in *Summa theologiae* 1.13.5) and the perfection terms at issue in divine naming. Yet, while the distinction itself is well-founded, the way in which Wolterstorff makes the distinction is deeply problematic, from a Thomistic point of view. For example, in an abovementioned quotation, Wolterstorff says that "God 'participates' in perfections as a simple being whereas Joe participates in them as a complex being."[65] Indeed, for Wolterstoff, these two modes of "participation" account for the difference in meaning in the copula in the propositions "God is alive" and "Joe is alive."

The confusion here is evident when we consider the meaning of "participation"; for the very notion of participation in Aquinas implies an asymmetrical relation of effect to cause. That is, effects participate in causes; causes *are participated* by effects. Because God is the first cause of all created being, all created being *participates* in him.[66] Crucially, precisely

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[62]Nash-Marshall, "Properties, Conflation, and Attribution," 2.

[63]Wolterstorff, "Alston on Aquinas on Theological Predication," 125. Perhaps not coincidentally, Wolterstorff's "property-based" reading of Aquinas is strikingly similar to a position articulated in the Epilogue of his 1970 book *On Universals*: "Everything whatsoever is either a predicable, a case of a predicable, or an exemplification of a predicable. . . . God too has properties; he too acts. So, he too exemplifies predicables" (Wolterstorff, *On Universals*, 299). I am grateful to Professors Lambert Zuidervaart and Robert Sweetman for their respective observations of this fact.

[64]See, for example, Wolterstorff, "Divine Simplicity," 547.

[65]See n53 above.

[66]"It must be said that every being in any way existing is from God [*a Deo esse*]. For whatever is found in anything by participation, must be caused in it by that to which it belongs

because God is uncaused, *he does not participate in anything*—not even himself.[67] The very notion of participation includes metaphysical posteriority, inferiority and finitude, none of which apply properly to God.

But could not even this disparity of meaning be attributed to "mere semantics," especially given the fact that for Aquinas God surely does "have" perfections (i.e., by being identical with them) in an entirely different manner than creatures have them (i.e., as qualities)? Not quite. The problem remains when we consider Wolterstorff's *rationale* for saying that God participates in properties. Wolterstorff's rationale for saying that God participates in properties, albeit in a different way than creatures, is that he wants to show that the properties *themselves* are the same in God and creatures. But for Aquinas, created perfections exist *as* participations of the divine essence. In other words, for created perfections, "to be" and "to participate" are one and the same.[68] This is just what it means be the effect of a non-univocal agent. There cannot be univocity between divine and creaturely perfections, therefore, because the very notion of participation implies a non-identity with that which is participated.

This non-identity between divine and created perfections is not something that a property-based metaphysics can accommodate, because again the distinctive commitment of property-based metaphysics is that properties are "invariant features of reality." Wolterstorff's mistaken position that Aquinas says that God participates in properties, then, is symptomatic of this commitment to properties as "invariant"—one that is wholly alien to the framework of non-univocal causality in Aquinas. Created perfections are distinct from uncreated perfections just to the extent that creatures are distinct from God. This is the case, of course, because "uncreated perfections" are nothing other than the divine essence itself.

The second "symptom" of Wolterstorff's anachronistic reading of Aquinas is intimately related to the first. As Alston recognizes in his response,[69] this symptom is Wolterstorff's neglect of the *modus significandi* when it comes to understanding (and translating) what Aquinas means by *ratio* in *Summa theologiae* 1.13.5. Whereas the McCabe translation translates *ratio* as "meaning," we have seen that it is crucial to Wolterstorff's interpretation that *ratio* designates only "the force of the copula." However, in the response of Article 4 of Question 13, Aquinas tells a different story: "For the *ratio* signified by the name is the conception in the intellect of the thing signified by the name. But our intellect, since it knows God from

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essentially, as iron becomes ignited by fire." Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.44.1.

[67]"Now the first good and the best—God—is not a participated good, because the essential good is prior to the participated good." Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.3.2.

[68]Indeed, for Aquinas, *esse* is the perfection of perfections: "Now all created perfections are included in the perfection of being; for things are perfect, precisely so far as they have being after some fashion." Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.4.2.

[69]See Alston, "Response to Wolterstorff," 235.

creatures, in order to understand God, forms conceptions proportional to the perfections flowing from God to creatures."[70]

Clearly, the *ratio* that Aquinas has in mind is the aforementioned concept from the Aristotelian semantic triangle. The point is simple: words can only signify things via the mediating presence of concepts, and thus only things proportionate to those concepts can be *signified* adequately. Because God's perfections are identical with his essence, they resist the conceptual representation that is proper to our intellectual capacities. Our language about God is always analogical, therefore, insofar as human intellects come to the *judgment* (not a conceptual refinement) "that claims a truth about the holy darkness of God which transcends anything the concept can quidditatively grasp on its own, bound as it is to creatures. . . . There is no univocal core to the concept that has been abstracted from its finite and infinite modes."[71]

In eliding the importance of the *modus significandi* in Aquinas's Aristotelian semantics, Wolterstorff inadvertently smuggles in a property-based metaphysics that is wholly foreign to Aquinas's own metaphysical project. No wonder Aquinas remarks that according to the *opinio Platonis*, "there is no need for an active intellect in order to make things actually intelligible,"[72] since it is precisely this activity of concept formation (the fruit of the active intellect) that a Platonist account of "properties" does not need. Indeed, by banishing the *modus significandi* from any functional role in his reading of Aquinas on analogy, Wolterstorff seems to banish Aquinas's own Aristotelian semantics.

I have attempted to demonstrate that Alston's orthodox reading of Aquinas is much more faithful to the letter of the Latin Doctor's text than that of Wolterstorff's heterodox interpretation. As we have seen, this discrepancy has to do with a certain property-based metaphysics that Wolterstorff anachronistically reads into the texts of Aquinas—one that fails to account for (1) the non-identity of divine and creaturely perfections as cause and effect, respectively, of non-univocal agency; and (2) the role of the *modus significandi* in the doctrine of divine names. Having vindicated Alston's interpretive project to some extent, then, we now turn to his criticisms, offering some responses on behalf of Aquinas.

4. Reply to Alston's Criticisms

We have seen that Alston raises two main objections to Aquinas's doctrine of analogy: (1) due to the finite nature of our *modus significandi*, we seem not to have access to the truth conditions of propositions about God.[73] (2) Aquinas fails to exploit a distinction made in *I Sent.* 19.5.2—one that could

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[70]Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.13.4.

[71]Rocca, "The Distinction between *Res Significata* and *Modus Significandi* in Aquinas's Theological Epistemology," 194.

[72]Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.79.3.

[73]See n45 above.

yield a generic univocity in divine naming.[74] To be precise, then, I should say that my responses are direct answers to these particular concerns. With respect to (1), I will attempt to show that there is indeed a way to preserve the truth conditions of propositions about God despite the fact that our *modus significandi* cannot represent God as he is in himself (i.e., simple). With respect to (2), I will attempt to show that Aquinas has very good reason even in the text mentioned *not* to ascribe the sort of univocity that Alston claims is freely available on Aquinas's own terms.

In criticism (1), Alston remarks that "none of the statements we make about God can be (wholly) true. For a necessary condition of the truth of [statements] is that what we are asserting of God is related to him in a certain way, and hence is distinguishable from him."[75] In response, I offer two qualifications—one general, and the other specific.

The general point is that Alston seems to take it as a given that truth is a univocal predicate which either applies to statements or fails to apply to them. For Aquinas, however, truth is far from a univocal predicate; for, like unity and goodness, it is a transcendental *perfection* that is realized "wholly" (so to speak) only in God.[76] In order to understand the way in which Aquinas understands our ability to form true propositions about God, then, we have to understand this exercise *performatively*. Crucially, the relation between intellect and thing is a relation of *conformity*, not one-to-one correspondence, as is often the case in modern correspondence theories.[77] If it is Alston's contention that Aquinas's doctrine of analogy does not make sense in light of modern correspondence theories of truth, then he is right. But this is no vice; for there is good reason to view modern correspondence theories of truth as problematic, at least from a Thomistic point of view.

When we think of propositions as signs of an intellect come to fruition in the act of self-reflective judgment rather than as "abstract objects" in their own right, we are closer to Aquinas's understanding of truth-bearers. In short, it is the intellect-in-act, not an abstract object called a "proposition," of which truth is properly predicated in Aquinas.[78] When this general point is understood, it is easier to understand how our *modus significandi* can yet form "true" propositions about God without claiming to have comprehended the divine essence in his simplicity. Because truth is an analogical perfection itself, it should come as no surprise that we should be able to say that our intellects are true *just to the limited extent* that we are able to understand created perfections as pointing to divine

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[74]See n47 above.

[75]Alston, "Aquinas on Theological Predication," 168–169.

[76]See *Summa theologiae* 1.16.5; *Summa contra Gentiles* I.47.6; *De veritate* 1.4.

[77]On this point, see Harris, "Does Aquinas Hold a Correspondence Theory of Truth in *De Veritate*?," 291.

[78]On this point, see O'Callaghan, *Thomist Realism and the Linguistic Turn: Toward a More Perfect Form of Existence*, 168.

perfections by way of their non-univocal similitude. It is Gottlob Frege, not Thomas Aquinas, who holds that truth does not "tolerate more or less."[79]

But this general point can be supplemented by a more specific point about our *modus significandi* and its relation to the *res significata*. Responding to an objector who more or less anticipates Alston's objection about the failure of our *modus significandi* to understand God "otherwise than [he] is," Aquinas says the following:

> This proposition, "The intellect understanding anything otherwise than it is, is false," can be taken in two senses, accordingly as this adverb "otherwise" determines the word "understanding" on the part of the thing understood, or on the part of the one who understands. Taken as referring to the thing understood, the proposition is true, and the meaning is: Any intellect which understands that the thing is otherwise than it is, is false. But this does not hold in the present case; because our intellect, when forming a proposition about God, does not affirm that He is composite, but that He is simple. But taken as referring to the one who understands, the proposition is false. For the mode of the intellect in understanding is different from the mode of the thing in its essence. Since it is clear that our intellect understands material things below itself in an immaterial manner; not that it understands them to be immaterial things; but its manner of understanding is immaterial. Likewise, when it understands simple things above itself, it understands them according to its own mode, which is in a composite manner; yet not so as to understand them to be composite things. And thus our intellect is not false in forming composition in its ideas concerning God.[80]

In other words, if we were to assert of God himself that he is composite, our intellects would be false; for this is to understand the *thing* as otherwise than it is. However, when we truly assert that God is simple—inevitably doing so by way of a *modus significandi* that involves composition—what we are doing is coming to the judgment that our *act of intellection* falls short of representing God as he is in himself. Now, in a sense, Aquinas agrees with Alston that such propositions cannot be wholly adequate; for a proposition to be wholly adequate would mean (*per impossibile* in this life) perfect conformity of the human intellect to the divine essence. Importantly, though, to fail to be wholly adequate, however, is *not* to be false necessarily. We do not think that propositions about stones are false because the propositions themselves do not share a "stony" material constitution; nor should we think that propositions about God are false because God's being is not propositional in structure.

But this brings us to Alston's second, more serious objection (2)—that Aquinas fails to appropriate the relative univocity to God and creatures that is freely available in *I Sent.* 19.5.2. In order to understand and answer this objection, it behooves us to examine the text in its broader context. Fittingly, the question at issue in this article is "whether all things are true by

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[79]See Frege, "The Thought," 291.

[80]Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.13.12.

the uncreated Truth."[81] Answering an objector who suggests that all truths are indeed true by direct reference to God, who is Truth itself, Aquinas qualifies his negative response by appealing to three ways in which a term can be predicated analogically—two of which (the second and third) are immediately relevant for our purposes of divine naming. These two kinds of analogy are: "[a] According to being and *not* according to intention; . . . and [b] According to intention *and* according to being."[82]

Now Aquinas's example of the "second mode" (a) is the way in which "body" is predicated of heavenly (i.e., incorruptible) and earthly (i.e., corruptible) matter-form composites. "The logician," Aquinas argues, "who considers intentions only, says that the term body is univocally predicated of all bodies."[83] The point here is that it is possible to arrive upon univocal concepts that map onto two very different kinds of thing. This is possible because the relevant concept of body (i.e., a matter-form composite) "abstracts from the difference between corruptible and incorruptible bodies" by way of subtraction.[84] Even fundamental differences can be abstracted in this way, thereby maintaining univocity at the level of the concept. Given that this is the case in Aquinas's own words, Alston asks, "Why . . . should it be impossible to form a concept of willing, knowing, forgiving, or loving that abstracts from the differences in the ways in which these forms are realized in God and creatures, and hence can be predicated univocally of both?"[85]

While Alston appeals to the second mode in order to pose this objection to Aquinas, Aquinas himself describes a third mode, which is the mode that pertains especially to perfections exemplified by God and creatures. Aquinas's examples of the "third mode" of analogy [b] are "'being' [as] predicated of substances and accidents . . . [and] truth and goodness and all like concepts [as] predicated analogously of God and creatures."[86] What is most important for the immediate purposes of answering Alston's question is that Aquinas reserves the third mode of analogy—according to both intention and being—for perfection terms predicated of God and creatures. But why this reservation? At least two reasons are immediately relevant.

The first reason is that perfection terms do *not* designate discrete essences that are composed of genus and difference, as is the case for predicates such as "human," for example, which for Aquinas is a composite of genus ("animal") and specific difference ("rational"). Indeed, in a

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[81] Aquinas, *I Sent*. 19.5.2, *quaestio*.

[82] Aquinas, *I Sent*. 19.5.2, *ad* 1.

[83] Aquinas, *I Sent*. 19.5.2, *ad* 1.

[84] Alston, "Aquinas on Theological Predication," 175.

[85] Alston, "Aquinas on Theological Predication," 175. Alston cites Duns Scotus in support of this position. For a comparison of Scotus and Aquinas on the subject of *analogia,* see Sweetman, "Univocity, Analogy, and the Mystery of Being According to John Duns Scotus," 73–87. It is important to note that even Scotus's position on the "univocity of being" posits an infinite *modal* interval between *ens creatum* and *ens increatum*.

[86] *I Sent*. 19.5.2, *ad* 1.

sense, every perfection is ultimately "convertible with being" in the sense that perfections are ultimately identical with the God who is *ipsum esse subsistens*.[87] As Alston recognizes earlier in his essay, this is one of the implications of Aquinas's doctrine of so-called "transcendental" predicates, which are labelled as such because they "span across" all of the Aristotelian categories of being.[88]

What this means is that "being" (and also whatever is convertible with being) cannot be a generic concept which is amenable to the kind of "addition and subtraction" that is proper to such concepts. This is because generic concepts are *externally* differentiated by specific differences that do not themselves "fall under" such generic concepts. In the case of the generic concept "body," the specific difference separating earthly and heavenly bodies is the attribute "corruptible." But notice that the attribute "corruptible" *is not itself a body*. Indeed, precisely because corruptibility does not itself fall under the genus of body, it can serve as a specific difference rather than just another species. Thus, the generic univocity of bodiliness can be salvaged in the case of earthly and heavenly bodies. This generic univocity is proper to the "second mode" of analogy described in *I Sent.* 19.5.2 *ad* 1.

The reason that this generic univocity cannot be salvaged in transcendental perfections is because transcendental perfections span across the entirety of being, thereby "leaving no room" for external differentiation. That is to say, being cannot be a genus because there are no specific differences that fall outside of being.[89] This is why there can be no univocity—not even the thinnest generic univocity—salvaged in the "third mode" of analogy described in the same passage.

The second reason that there can be no generic univocity between perfection terms as predicated of God and creature is closely related to the first, and it has to do with the sort of non-univocal agency that is applicable to God in *Summa theologiae* 1.4.3. Returning full circle to our initial discussion of Aquinas's doctrine of non-univocal agency,[90] Aquinas's metaphor of the sun is not quite adequate for illuminating the way in which creatures bear a similitude to God. Although the sun metaphor is helpful for showing how an agent cause can communicate itself to its effects in a non-specific manner, it is inadequate insofar as it cannot help but resort to *generic* similitude when accounting for the (positive) sense in which creatures are like God.

Unlike the Creator-creature relationship, the sun-earthly creatures relationship is a relation of distinct bearers of "heat." While of course it is true that the sun is indeed the source of heat and creatures only sharers in heat,

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[87]See Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.4.2.

[88]See *De veritate* 1.1. For a magisterial treatment of Aquinas's doctrine of transcendental notions, see Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals*.

[89]On this point, see Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 998b.

[90]See nn24–26 above.

it is nonetheless true that heat is *generically common* to both the sun and the earthly creatures it generates. This is not the case for God; for because being and all other perfections are not themselves generic attributes, God cannot be the "principle" of the genus of being in the way that the sun is the principle of the generic attribute of heat. Hence, Aquinas's aforementioned qualification: "if there is an agent not contained in any 'genus,' its effect will still more distantly reproduce the form of the agent, not, that is, so as to participate in the likeness of the agent's form according to the same specific or generic formality, but only according to some sort of analogy; as existence is common to all."[91] Alston's suggestion that Aquinas should admit a generic univocity between God and creatures is undermined by the fact that on Aquinas's view perfections cannot be generic attributes at all.

Unlike Wolterstorff, then, Alston appreciates the radicality of Aquinas's position with respect to the *res significata* of perfection terms, but fails to take the "final step" of recognizing the full significance of their resistance to even generic univocity. As another Latin writer pithily put it, "si comprehendis, non est Deus."[92]

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[91]Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1.4.3. See n30 above.

[92]Augustine, *Sermo*, 117.3.5 cited in Fitzgerald et. al, *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, 389. This paper would not have been possible without several illuminating philosophical conversations with Joel Chopp and Robert Sweetman here in Toronto.

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