AQUINAS ON GOD-TALK: HOVERING OVER THE ABYSS

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Picture a deep, narrow abyss cleaving the face of the earth down to its core, where super-hot magma bubbles and percolates, gushing and spurting through the labyrinthine tunnels which are our planet's fiery arteries. Smoke gyres upward in widening spirals. Towering cliffs angle upwards and backwards from the chasm to left and right, so that one standing atop either cliff would be too high up and too far back to view the chasm's nucleus. To behold the depths, one would somehow have to hover below the canyon rim along the rocky wall on either side, without a secure hold and in constant danger of being buffeted by upwelling air currents. Even then, all an observer could see would be a mass of hazy, congealing clouds backlit and limned by a reddish glow—a dark blaze and a blazing darkness.

This image is an apt metaphor, I think, for the ways in which Christians have understood what goes on when they talk about God, that dark blaze and blazing darkness on top of Mount Sinai or at the bottom of the abyss. On the one hand, some Christians have taken the extreme agnostic position, that we cannot know or say anything positive about the mysterious Lord of heaven and earth. Many of these agnostics are mystics who have been plunged by God's grace into the very abyss itself and who, on being brought back to the land of clear air and bright sunshine, can only stammer and babble about what they have experienced of God's tenebrous fire. Human words and concepts can no longer express what they have learned of God by having "suffered" God experientially, and the apophatic discourse of negative theology is their natural home—if they want to talk at all. Negative theology is the only recourse for those who have been chosen by God for a descent into the abyss. There are other agnostics, however, often of a more academic bent, who may not be mystics but who hold, for various philosophical or theological reasons, that our knowledge and talk about God is only equivocal at best, that what we know and say about our world has no intrinsic relation to what we can know or say about the God who is "wholly Other." Of course, such academic agnostics show a surprising ability to be quite garrulous about God while still clinging to their perch on what we might call the left-hand Cliff of Equivocity.

On the other hand, there are Christians who have taken their stand

on the right-hand Cliff of Univocity. For them, our worldly knowledge and speech apply to God in the same way as they apply to the realities of our world. There is nothing surprising or different about our knowledge and talk of God, for God is simply the most excellent reality among all the other realities of our world, different in degree but not in kind from all the other objects of our knowledge. They may acknowledge that God is mysterious, but all the while they press for clear conceptual distinctions and demand that God be conceived in human terms. For them, our knowledge and talk of God are as clear and bright as the air and sunshine which surround them on the Cliff of Univocity.

Still other Christians, however, would hold that talking about God is more like hovering dangerously between the Cliffs of Equivocity and Univocity while peering and pointing below toward the Dark Luminosity at the heart of the world. I hope to show in this article that Aquinas's understanding of God-talk—which involves a unique, complicated, and subtle weaving of negative and positive theology, of analogy and incomprehensibility—amounts to such a hovering over the abyss.

AQUINAS THE NEGATIVE THEOLOGIAN

Aquinas the negative theologian stands in a long tradition reaching back to Hellenistic Judaism,[1] Middle Platonism, gnosticism,[2] and many patristic writers. I will focus on the one we call Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite as the carrier of this tradition; for he not only is the major source for Aquinas's negative theology but also stands in contrast to Thomas as an apophatic theologian. Most likely a Syrian writer who flourished around 500 and who attempted to syn-

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[1] Echoes of Hellenistic Judaism's negative theology are found in the New Testament's assertions that God and God's ways are invisible, immortal, ineffable, indescribable, unsearchable, and untraceable (Rom 1:20; 11:33; 2 Cor 9:15, 12:4, 1 Tim 6:16).

[2] Jean Daniélou distinguishes the three sources: "For a Jew, to say that God is transcendent is to say that he cannot be measured by any created thing, and is therefore incomprehensible to the creaturely mind; but at the same time it is to assert that his existence can be known. For the Plantonist, to say that God is ineffable is to say that he surpasses any conception of him that the mind can form in terms of the sensible world; but it is also to affirm that, if only the mind can shake itself free from all conceptions of that kind, it will be able to grasp his essence. For the Gnostic, however, the matter goes far deeper. God is unknown absolutely, both in his essence and in his existence; he is the one of whom, in the strictest sense, nothing is known, and this situation can be overcome only through the Gnosis" (*A History of Early Christian Doctrine before the Council of Nicea* 2: *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture,* trans. and ed. J. Baker [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973] 335–36).

thesize Neoplatonism with Christianity, he took the pseudonym of Paul's famous convert at Athens mentioned in Acts 17:34 and thereby gained an almost apostolic authority for his writings throughout the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance.[3]

For Dionysius, God is not one of the beings;[4] the essence-surpassing God is the God removed from our knowledge, inaccessible to mind and speech and sight;[5] God is the unnameable one.[6] But Dionysius faces a problem: How can the unnameable God be praised by Scripture with all sorts of names?[7] He tries to overcome the dilemma by balancing positives and negatives, theses and denials, so that he may be true both to the scriptural praises and to the ultimate unknowability of the Nameless One. In a passage remarkable for the beautiful exactitude of its Greek rhetoric and the mystic fervor which inspires it, he writes:

God is known in all and separate from all; God is known through knowledge and through unknowing, and of him there is understanding, reason, knowledge, apprehension, perception, opinion, imagination, and name and all other things—and yet he is neither understood nor spoken nor named; he is not any of the beings nor in any of the beings is he known; he is all in all and nothing in anything; he is known to all from all, and to no one from anything.[8]

The specific nature of Dionysius's negative theology is a much-debated question in contemporary Dionysian scholarship. Does he have two negative theologies, one rational and the other mystical, or

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[3] For two English translations of the Dionysian corpus, see *The Divine Names and Mystical Theology,* trans. with Introduction by John Jones (Milwaukee: Marquette, 1980); *The Complete Works,* trans. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist, 1987). Other literature on Pseudo-Dionysius: Vladimir Lossky, "La théologie négative dans la doctrine de Denys l'Aréopagite," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 28 (1939) 204–21; Jean Vanneste, *Le mystère de Dieu* (Brussels: Desclée, 1959); Walter M. Neidl, *Thearchia: Die Frage nach dem Sinn von Gott bei Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita und Thomas von Aquin* (Regensburg: Habbel, 1976); John Jones, "The Character of the Negative (Mystical) Theology for Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 51 (1977) 66–74; Salvatore Lilla, "The Notion of Infinitude in Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita," *Journal of Theological Studies* 31 (1980) 93–103; Michel Corbin, "Négation et transcendance dans l'oeuvre de Denys," *RSPT* 69 (1985) 41–76; Paul Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols within the Pseudo-Dionysian Synthesis* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984). See also R. G. Williams, "The *Via Negativa* and the Foundations of Theology: An Introduction to the Thought of V. N. Lossky," in *New Studies in Theology,* no. 1, ed. S. Sykes and D. Holmes (London: Duckworth, 1980) 95–117.

[4] *The Divine Names* 7.3 (872A). Citations within parentheses or brackets refer to the third volume of Migne's *Patrologia Graeca.*

[5] Ibid. 1.4 (593A).   [6] Ibid. 1.6 (596A).

[7] Ibid. 1.6 (596ABC).   [8] Ibid. 7.3 (872A).

only one? The problem is compounded by the fact that, although in the third chapter of his *Mystical Theology* and elsewhere he clearly distinguishes rational affirmative theology from mystical negations and unknowing, in his *Divine Names* we often discover a mixture of positive and negative theology within rational theological discourse. However, even at the conclusion of the *Divine Names,* which is a work of conceptual, affirmative theology, Dionysius mentions his preference for "the way up through negations" which "guides the soul through all the divine notions, notions which are themselves transcended by that which is far beyond every name, all reason and all knowledge."[9] Although he does not treat his preferred way, that of mystical negation, until the *Mystical Theology,* it has nevertheless already been functioning in the *Divine Names* as a corrective guide for affirmative notional theology.[10] Another passage clearly distinguishes the mystical from the notional and philosophical way to God:

Theological tradition has a dual aspect, the ineffable and mysterious on the one hand, the open and more evident on the other. The one resorts to symbolism and involves initiation. The other is philosophic and employs the method of demonstration. . . . The one uses persuasion and imposes the truthfulness of what is asserted. The other acts and, by means of a mystery which cannot be taught, puts souls firmly in the presence of God.[11]

I would argue that Dionysius has only one negative theology, a *via negativa* which is based on a mystical, nonconceptual grasp of God's transcendent supereminence and is opposed to all conceptual, affirmative, positive theology.[12] For Dionysius, God is absolutely unknowable

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[9] Ibid. 13.3 (981AB; Luibheid trans. 130). This passage and many others (ibid. 1.1 [588AB]; 7.3 [872AB]; *Celestial Hierarchy,* 2.3 [141A]; *Letter* 9.1 [1105CD]; *Mystical Theology* 3 [1032D–1033D]) display the superiority, in Dionysius's eyes, of the mystical way of negation. Lossky has some fine words on the Dionysian mystical way of unknowing, which requires spiritual detachment, purgation, and the continual denial of predicates in order to prepare for ecstasy, union, and finally divinization ("Théologie négative" 211–18).

[10] *Divine Names* 13.3 (980B–981B).

[11] *Letter* 9.1 (1105D; Luibheid trans. 283). Dionysius remarks that Blessed Hierotheus, his esteemed teacher, was instructed (the word *muein* originally meant to be initiated into the mysteries) by divine inspiration, "not only learning but also experiencing the divine things" (*Divine Names* 2.9 [648B]; Luibheid trans. 65). The reference to initiation reflects the liturgical underpinnings of Dionysius's mystical theology; his *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* also develops an epistemology of sacramental symbols as ways to God. Rorem's study (above, n. 3) points out the many biblical allusions and liturgical symbols which undergird the positive theology of the *Divine Names.*

[12] A more extended argument for this position may be found in Gregory Rocca, "Analogy as Judgment and Faith in God's Incomprehensibility: A study in the Theological

in conceptual, notional, or rational terms. Although the negative theology which appears in the *Divine Names* takes the form of conceptual denials, in itself it is actually the polar opposite of all conceptual activity and is written as a corrective by one who has already been mystically plunged into the blazing, murky abyss of God. Ultimately, for Dionysius, the highest form of theology is that beatific ignorance which transpires in mystical union with God and which even transcends the very opposition between affirmation and negation.

Aquinas is indebted to Dionysius for the thesis of God's incomprehensibility; but at the same time he mitigates the starkness of the axiom about God's absolute unknowability and propounds a sanitized, domesticated version of the Dionysian *via negativa* so that it becomes a "way" fully at home within the confines of a positive, affirmative theology. For Aquinas, God is indeed that supereminent darkness which transcends our knowledge and leaves us in ignorance; he approves of those who say that on Mount Sinai Moses "approached the darkness in which God is";[13] in another passage he claims, following Dionysius, that we are best joined to God in this life according to a type of ignorance which is "a kind of darkness, in which God is said to dwell."[14] We are ignorant of God because God's infinite reality and perfection surpass and exceed every conception of our intellect.[15] The ultimate human knowledge of God occurs when someone "knows that he does not know God, inasmuch as he realizes that what God is exceeds everything we understand about him."[16] Our learned ignorance is the result of our awareness that God transcends our knowledge, and thus we know that God exceeds our knowledge without knowing the divine transcendence itself. God dwells in a supereminent darkness, for the darkness of our ignorance is the direct consequence of God's infinitely dazzling light, and the very admission of our ignorance mysteriously evokes in some way a sense of God's infinite beyondness.

However, Aquinas also softens the extreme negative theology of Dionysius and his adherents, for his own negative theology is not a total

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Epistemology of Thomas Aquinas" (Ph.D. diss., Catholic University of America [Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms International, 1989] 73–86).

[13] *Summa contra gentiles (SCG)*, ed. C. Pera (Rome: Marietti, 1961) 3.49.2270.

[14] *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum (SS)* 1.8.1.1.ad 4. Joseph Owens comments on this "darkness of ignorance" in "Aquinas—'Darkness of Ignorance' in the Most Refined Notion of God," in *Bonaventure and Aquinas: Enduring Philosophers*, ed. R. W. Shahan and F. J. Kovach (Norman, Okla.: Univ. of Oklahoma, 1976) 69–86. He sees the darkness as signifying for Aquinas our nonconceptual and nonquidditative knowledge of God, where there is "privation of both intuitional and conceptual light" (86).

[15] *SS* 1.2.1.3; *De Veritate (DV)* 2.1; *SCG* 1.14; cf. *SS* 1.34.3.1.; 4.49.2.6–7; *DV* 10.11.

[16] *De potentia (DP)* 7.5.ad 14; also *Expositio super librum De causis* 6.160; *Expositio super librum Dionysii De divinis nominibus (DDN)* 7.4.731.

and supreme unknowing which leaves us in pure ignorance of God but teaches instead that God always exceeds every kind of human knowledge.[17] He synthesizes his view of God's incomprehensibility in two theses: that no creature by its own natural powers can possess a quidditative grasp of God's essence, which "remains totally unknown,"[18] but at best can know only *that* God is and what God is *not;*[19] and that no creature can ever possess a comprehensive, infinite grasp of the divine essence, even in the beatific vision.

For Aquinas, to have a quidditative knowledge of some object is to know it essentially, i.e. to have a definition of its essence which represents the object in a comprehensive way. This is precisely the kind of knowledge we cannot possess of God in this life, though it is possible through God's grace in the beatific vision of heaven.[20] Until heaven, then, when the divine mystery will be directly present to our consciousness, God cannot be known essentially by any creaturely kind of knowledge, since no creature whose being and essence are distinct can represent the God whose being and essence are identical, for every creaturely bit of knowledge is limited to some finite aspect of reality and thus cannot represent God's infinite supereminence. Moreover, no created intellect, whose existence is a finite participation in God's existence, can by its own natural powers see the essence of God, who is the infinite and subsisting act of existence itself.[21]

Even more radically for Thomas, however, God's incomprehensibility means that no created intellect will ever grasp God as much as God is able to be grasped, even in heaven's eternal beatific vision.[22] The

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[17] *Summa theologiae (ST)* 1.12.1.ad 1,3; 1.12.7.ad 2.

[18] *SCG* 3.49.2270.

[19] Thomas expresses this view many times (*SS* 1.3.1.3; 1.8.1.1; *SCG* 1.11.66,69; 1.12.78; *DP* 7.2.ad 1,11).

[20] *SS* 1.2.1.3; 3.24.1.1.2; 3.24.1.2.1; 3.35.2.2.2; 4.10.1.4.5; 4.49.2.1.ad 3; 4.49.2.7.ad 8; *DV* 2.1.ad 9; 8.1; 10.11; *SCG* 1.3.16–17; 1.25.233–34; 3.49.2268; *DP* 7.5.ad 1, ad 5, ad 6, ad 9; *ST* 1.3.5; 1.12.2; *Compendium theologiae (CT)* 1.26.

[21] *ST* 1.12.2,4. John Wippel asserts that from the very beginning of his career Thomas taught that we have no quidditative knowledge of God, and that when Thomas says that what God is remains totally unknown to us, he is taking quidditative knowledge strictly, in the sense of a comprehensive or defining knowledge (*Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas* [Washington: Catholic University of America, 1984] 238–41).

[22] Karl Rahner sees this as Thomas's more radical view of God's incomprehensibility ("An Investigation of the Incomprehensibility of God in St. Thomas Aquinas," *Theological Investigations* [New York: Seabury, 1979] 16:244–54) and prefers himself to speak of God's "holy inconceivability" ("The Experiences of a Catholic Theologian," *Communio* 11 [1984] 404–14, at 406). See also Paul Wess, *Wie von Gott sprechen? Eine Auseinandersetzung mit Karl Rahner* (Graz: Styria, 1970). Elizabeth Johnson retrieves the tradition of God's incomprehensibility as a critical resource for feminist theological

reason is God's unique status as the infinite act of subsisting being, which no creature can ever comprehend infinitely.[23] He expresses the difference between seeing and comprehending God in heaven by a clever use of different grammatical forms of the same word: "God's very infinity will be seen but it will not be seen infinitely, God's total essence will be seen but not totally."[24] Paradoxically, the blessed will see God's infinity without comprehending it:[25] "Whoever sees God in essence, sees that which in God exists infinitely and is infinitely knowable, but this infinite mode does not belong to the seer so that he himself should know infinitely, just as someone can know with probability that some proposition is demonstrable though he himself does not know it demonstratively."[26]

In addition to these two theses, Thomas puts forward a tamer version of the Dionysian *via negativa* so that it becomes, not a mystical way to God beyond the boundaries of rational, affirmative theology, as in Dionysius, but one of three moments within the overall structure of affirmative theology which serves to correct the deficiencies and univocalist tendencies of that theology. He often affirms that we know God in three connected ways: by causality, negation, and supereminence.[27] For example, we know God is holy because God is the cause of our holiness, but we also know that God is not holy in the same way as we are holy, not because God's holiness is less than ours but because it transcends ours by its own supereminent, infinite excellence. Thus, the second or negative moment, by recourse to the third moment's heightened awareness of God's supreme excellence, corrects any possible univocalist misunderstandings of the first moment's positive affirmation which is based on God's gracious causality.

In practice, Thomas's negative theology can take three different

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discourse ("The Incomprehensibility of God and the Image of God Male and Female," *TS* 45 [1984] 441–65; *She Who Is* [New York: Crossroad, 1992] 104–20).

[23] *SS* 1.2.1.3; 1.3.1.1; 3.14.1.2.1; 4.49.2.3; *SCG* 3.49.2268; 3.55; *ST* 1.12.7; 1.62.9; 1–2.4.3; 2–2.27.5; 3.10.1; *DDN* 1.1.34; *DP* 7.3.ad 5; *DV* 8.1.ad 9; 8.2; 20.4–5; *CT* 1.106; 1.216.

[24] *DV* 8.2.ad 6; cf. 8.4.ad 6; *DP* 7.1.ad 2.

[25] Rahner realizes the mystery of heaven's beatific vision, especially when we remember that the blessed see God as a simple whole and *as* incomprehensible: "The assertion of the direct vision of God and assertion of his incomprehensibility are related for us here and now in a mysterious and paradoxical dialectic" ("An Investigation" 247).

[26] *ST* 1.12.7.ad 3. H.-F. Dondaine, in an article replete with rich historical data, manifests how Thomas displayed his originality in keeping to a middle course between the Augustinians and Albert the Great on the question of whether we know God essentially or comprehensively ("Cognoscere de Deo 'quid est'," *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 22 [1955] 72–78).

[27] *DDN* 1.3.104; 7.1.702; *SCG* 3.49.2270; *DP* 9.7; *ST* 1.11.3.ad 2; 1.13.10.ad 5.

forms.[28] First, he often speaks of what may be called *qualitative negations,* which deny some quality of God on the grounds that it is intrinsically imperfect and thus incompatible with God's perfection: e.g., God is incorporeal, immutable, and without any temporal succession. This is the sort of negation Aquinas has in mind whenever he says that although we cannot know what God is, we can know what God is not. Second, he describes what might be called *objective modal negations:* these are corrective negative judgments applied to positive divine perfections which deny that those perfections are subject to any objective creaturely mode or limitation. For example, when we say in a positive fashion that God is good, we do not mean that God is good in the same way that humans are good, since we, unlike God, follow moral laws and have to struggle with our emotions in order to be good.[29] Finally, Aquinas recognizes what might be termed *subjective modal negations:* these deny that the subjective, human way in which we understand positive divine perfections are to be attributed to those perfections themselves. For example, when we say "God is wise," the proposition signifies semantically that an accidental quality inheres in a subject, but this does not mean that God's wisdom is actually an accidental quality inhering in God, for in reality divine wisdom is identical with the divine nature itself.[30]

For Aquinas, our knowledge of God can grow as we add the negations one to another, and we approach closer to the divine mystery by denying more and more imperfections of God and by realizing ever more deeply that we cannot impute to God our finite and creaturely modes of being and understanding. In a text imbued with mysticism, in which Thomas shows himself a worthy successor of Dionysius, the continuing negations finally burst the confines of all rational pursuits and lead us into the darkness of ignorance:

When we proceed into God through the way of negation, first we deny of him all corporeal things; and next, we even deny intellectual things as they are found in creatures, like goodness and wisdom, and then there remains in our understanding only the fact that God exists, and nothing further, so that it suffers a kind of confusion. Lastly, however, we even remove from him his very

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[28] For more on the three forms of Aquinas's negative theology, see Rocca, "Analogy as Judgment" 151–58.

[29] Objective modal negations are the same as the *via negativa* understood as the second moment of the threefold way to God, which means that Aquinas's negative theology encompasses more than the *via negativa.*

[30] For a full account of Aquinas' treatment of subjective modal negations, see Gregory Rocca, "The Distinction between *Res Significata* and *Modus Significandi* in Aquinas's Theological Epistemology," *Thomist* 55 (1991) 173–97.

existence, as it is in creatures, and then our understanding remains in a certain darkness of ignorance according to which, as Dionysius says, we are best united to God in this present state of life; and this is a sort of thick darkness in which God is said to dwell.[31]

AQUINAS THE POSITIVE THEOLOGIAN

Through his own prayer and his reading of mystics like Dionysius, Aquinas certainly learned the ways of negative theology, but he was also a more insistent positive theologian than the majority of mystics, at least until that December day in 1273 when he underwent the mysterious experience that left him unable to write any more[32] and led him to consider all he had written till then as mere straw. His view of God-talk, at least until that last December of his life, is a subtle and intricate weaving of negative and positive theology, the latter being the more fundamental, even though in order to thrive as *theologia* it must first pass through the corrective lenses of negative theology. The main reason why Thomas's positive theology takes precedence over his negative theology is that the foundational truth of his entire systematic theology is the ringing affirmation of God's pure positivity as *ipsum esse subsistens,* the subsisting act of being itself.[33]

Despite the many accents of his negative theology, therefore, Aquinas continually asserts that we can make true judgments about God's very nature and being, whether by reason or by faith.[34] He opposes those who, like Maimonides, are so tightly constrained by negative theology that they interpret seemingly positive predications like "God is good" to mean only that God is not evil or that God causes our goodness. Thomas argues that the positive nature of predications like "God is good" cannot simply be reduced to such negative or causal interpretations. Rather, he claims that such predications tell us something true about God's very nature.

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[31] *SS* 1.8.1.1.ad 4; cf. *DDN* 13.3.996.

[32] Although it is true that after 6 December 1273 Thomas added nothing in writing to his major academic works then in progress, scholars date his brief letter to the abbot of Monte Cassino (*Epistola ad Bernardum Abbatem Casinensem*) to early 1274 when he was on his way to the second council of Lyons. The letter deals with a recondite issue about predestination found in Gregory the Great's *Moralia.* In this case, as also in the legend about his commentary on the Song of Songs to the Cistercian monks of Fossanova during the last few weeks of his life, Thomas's charity outweighed his disinclination to write or dictate. See Antoine Dondaine, "La lettre de Saint Thomas à l'abbé du Montcassin," in *St. Thomas Aquinas 1274–1974: Commemorative Studies* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1974) 1.87–108.

[33] *ST* 1.3.4; see Rocca, "Analogy as Judgment" 164–73, 462–93.

[34] *SS* 1.2.1.3; 1.22.1.2; 1.35.1.1.ad 2; *DV* 2.1; *DP* 7.5–6; *ST* 1.13.2,6,12.

When it is said that "God is good," the meaning is not "God is the cause of goodness" or "God is not evil," but "that which we call goodness in creatures preexists in God," and preexists according to a higher mode. From all of this, then, it does not follow that to be good belongs to God insofar as he causes goodness, but rather vice versa, that because he is good he diffuses goodness to things.[35]

Aquinas is quite willing to walk a tightrope, for although his negative theology denies that we have any intuitive concept of God's essence or being, his positive theology affirms that we can make true judgments about that same divine reality; and although he supports a robust *via negativa*, he will not permit affirmative propositions about God to be reduced to a merely negative interpretation.

How can Aquinas hold all of this together? How can he swing between the poles of positive and negative theology, partaking of both while being reduced to neither? He accomplishes this balancing act by means of the analogical predication of the divine names.[36]

But which type of analogy does Aquinas have in mind, and what is the nature of that analogy? Up until about forty years ago the reigning interpretation of Aquinas on analogy was that of the Dominican Cardinal Cajetan de Vio, who, in his 1498 *De nominum analogia et de conceptu entis*,[37] proposed a fourfold typology of Thomistic analogy and explained the nature of genuine analogy in highly conceptualistic terms. Basing himself mainly on a combined reading of two early texts,[38] Cajetan holds that Aquinas recognizes only four analogical types: of inequality, of attribution, of improper metaphorical proportionality, and of proper proportionality.[39] According to Cajetan, however, only the last type is genuine analogy, for it alone posits real perfections in both God and creatures, according to a fourfold proportionality (e.g., creatures' being : creatures :: God's being : God). In the analogy of attribution, however, the perfection only really exists in the prime analogate, while it is merely *attributed* to the secondary analo-

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[35] *ST* 1.13.2; cf. 1.13.6.
[36] In many texts (*SS* 1.4.1.1; 1.34.3.2.ad 3; 1.45.1.4; *DV* 4.1.ad 10; *ST* 1.13.3), Aquinas subdivides predications which refer positively to God's being into those which are metaphorically true and those which are true according to the proper and literal meaning of their terms (and by "literal" he does not mean an iconic idea with a physical referent but rather the strict truth of a judgment). His theory of theological analogy is meant to explain how we can speak truthfully about God in a nonmetaphorical fashion. Contrariwise, much of contemporary writing on theological epistemology tends to blur the distinction between metaphor and analogy.
[37] Ed. P. N. Zammit (Rome: Angelicum, 1934); trans. E. A. Bushinski and H. J. Koren, in *The Analogy of Names and the Concept of Being* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne, 1953).
[38] *SS* 1.19.5.2.ad 1, and *DV* 2.11.   [39] *De nominum analogia*, chaps. 1–3.

gates by reason of their extrinsic relation to the prime analogate (e.g., the human body is really healthy while food is only *called* healthy because it helps to keep the human body really healthy). Cajetan thus denied any intrinsic real analogy to direct two-term judgments like "God is good," and equated genuine analogy with four-term proportionalities.[40] But in the decade between the early 1950s and the early 1960s, several Thomists began to criticize Cajetan's reading of Aquinas and concluded that Thomas recognizes the genuine analogical nature of direct two-term judgments.[41] Although a few today still follow the Cajetanian interpretation, Cajetan's critics have largely won the debate over the proper typology of Thomistic analogy.[42]

The conceptualist tradition of analogy actually originates with John Duns Scotus. Combating the extreme equivocity he detects in Henry of Ghent, Scotus holds that the concept of being is one, is formally neutral vis-à-vis God and creatures, and is distinct from its finite and infinite

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[40] Modern proponents of Cajetan's typology include George Phelan (*Saint Thomas and Analogy* [Milwaukee: Marquette, 1941]); Eric Mascall (*Existence and Analogy* [London: Longmans, 1949]); James Anderson (*The Bond of Being* [St. Louis: Herder, 1949]); Jacques Maritain (*The Degrees of Knowledge*, trans. under the supervision of G. B. Phelan from the 4th French ed. [New York: Scribner, 1959] 418–21).

[41] Santiago Ramirez found that, contrary to Cajetan's view, the two texts from the early Thomas are not parallel and thus not able to be combined into a total theory (*De analogia*, in *Edicion de las obras completas de Santiago Ramirez, O.P.*, ed. V. Rodriguez [Madrid: Instituto de Filosofia "Luis Vives," 1970–72] 2/4.1811–50; the original article appeared in *Sapientia* 8 [1953] 166–92). George Klubertanz and Bernard Montagnes discovered that, although in the early text of *De veritate* 2.11 Thomas had focused on the four-term analogy of proportionality in order to protect God's infinite otherness, he later abandoned proportionality as the only possible analogy between God and creatures once he realized that the direct two-term judgment about God did not derogate from divine transcendence (G. Klubertanz, *St. Thomas Aquinas on Analogy: A Textual Analysis and Systematic Synthesis* [Chicago: Loyola Univ., 1960] 27, 86–100, 109–10; and B. Montagnes, *La doctrine de l'analogie de l'être d'après saint Thomas d'Aquin* [Louvain/Paris: Publications Universitaires/Béatrice-Nauwelaerts, 1963] 7–10, 65–66, 75–93). Hampus Lyttkens demonstrated that the analogy of proper proportionality is neither primary nor free of serious internal problems (*The Analogy between God and the World*, trans. A. Poignant [Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksells, 1952] 49–54, 63–74). Ralph McInerny marshaled trenchant reasons against Cajetan's insistence that all analogy of attribution is extrinsic, proving that analogy for Thomas, formally as such, is quite neutral with regard to whether the perfections in question are extrinsic (as in the traditional example of the predicate "healthy," where only the primary analogate, the living body, is really healthy) or intrinsic (as in the traditional example of the predicate "being," where both the primary and secondary analogates, substance and accidents, are really instances of being) (*The Logic of Analogy: An Interpretation of St. Thomas* [The Hague: Nijhoff, 1961] chap. 1).

[42] For more on the Cajetanian tradition and its critics, see Rocca, "Analogy as Judgment" 25–37.

modes in God and creatures.[43] Since being is the simplest concept of all, and since every analogical predication involves at least some concept of being, all analogy is reducible to a common univocal core of being, with its various modes arranged like layers around it.[44] Attempting to hew a middle course between Henry's equivocity and Scotus's univocity, Cajetan describes the "confused" unity of the analogous concept which lies at the heart of the genuine analogy of proper proportionality. The unity is confused because the concept is only imperfectly abstracted from its real modes in God and creatures (rather than being perfectly abstracted, as would occur with a fully univocal concept), but even such a confused analogical unity, according to Cajetan, is able to escape Henry's equivocity without falling prey to Scotus's univocity.[45]

Cajetan's analogous concept, however, with its confused proportional unity, has been criticized on the grounds that it is ultimately reducible to either univocity or equivocity.[46] Realizing that Aquinas never employs the *conceptus analogus* of Cajetan, who succumbed to Scotus's conceptualism even as he tried to avoid his univocalism, some authors[47] focus instead on judgment as a way of understanding Aquinas's

[43] *Opus Oxoniense, Ordinatio* 1.8.1.3, nos. 81–82; 1.3.1.1–2, nos. 26–30 (*Opera Omnia,* ed. C. Balic [Vatican City, 1950] 4:190, 3:18–20); *Quaestiones subtilissimae in Metaphysicam* 4.1.5.

[44] Cyril Shircel, *The Univocity of the Concept of Being in the Philosophy of John Duns Scotus,* (Washington: Catholic Univ. of America, 1942); Étienne Gilson, *Jean Duns Scot* (Paris: Vrin, 1952); Michael Schmaus, *Zur Diskussion über das Problem der Univozität im Umkreis des Johannes Duns Skotus* (Munich: Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1957).

[45] *De nominum analogia,* chaps. 4–10.

[46] Montagnes, *La doctrine de l'analogie* 150–58; Henri Bouillard, *The Knowledge of God,* trans. S. D. Femiano (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968) 105–7.

[47] Etienne Gilson writes that "the Thomist doctrine of analogy is above all a doctrine of the *judgment* of analogy" (*Jean Duns Scot* 101). Claiming in general that analogy is the semantic expression of the judgments philosophers make and the result of how language must work in order to do justice to insight, David Burrell also discerns in Aquinas a view of analogy as usage based on insightful judgments (*Analogy and Philosophical Language* [New Haven: Yale, 1973] chaps. 1–2, 6–7, 9). A few other scholars have also begun to view analogy as judgmental rather than conceptual. W. Norris Clarke sees analogy as based on our ability to make the judgments we do ("Analogy and the Meaningfulness of Language about God: A Reply to Kai Nielsen," *Thomist* 40 [1976] 61–95, at 64–72). For Colman O'Neill, all analogy is judgmental because it occurs when a predicate is transferred from its normal linguistic context to a new one not originally its own; to speak of "analogical *concepts,*" he says, is a "disastrous misunderstanding" ("La prédication analogique: L'élément négatif," in *Analogie et dialectique,* eds. P. Gisel and P. Secretan [Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1982] 81–91, at 82). He writes that "the theological theory of proper analogical predication deals with the very complex phenomenon of complete statements which express judgments inspired by faith about the reality

use of analogy. Theological analogy,[48] in particular, is in Thomas's eyes the only valid way of explaining epistemologically, in a secondary, after-the-fact reflection, what takes place in the primary ontological and theological judgments that bear upon God's very being.[49] Aquinas's theological analogy is actually an epistemological reflection upon the truth status of the theological judgments he has already made, and so one cannot understand his view of analogy without appreciating the truth of his basic theological positions.[50] And only if Thomas's use of theological analogy is understood more as a matter of judgments than of concepts can it thread its way amidst various threatening shoals.[51]

One would look in vain, however, for an explicit statement from Aquinas that theological analogy is a matter of theological judgments. My contention that his theological analogy is a matter of judgment is an interpretation of his thought based on two main reasons: the positioning of analogy's treatment within his theological works; and the

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of God. . . . It is false to place this theory on the same footing as those which deal only with concepts" ("Analogy, Dialectic, and Inter-Confessional Theology," *Thomist* 47 [1983] 43–65, at 57).

[48] What Thomas means by analogy here is not to be confused with the so-called argument from analogy, which comprises four terms and is much used in biology and the other sciences; see Mary Hesse, *Models and Analogies in Science* (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame, 1966).

[49] See Rocca, "Analogy as Judgment" chaps. 6–7, 10, 13.

[50] O'Neill writes that theological analogy "has to do with the linguistic expression of a knowledge about God that is held, whether rightly or wrongly, to be *already acquired* and to be *true*, even though necessarily imperfect. Those who speak in this way of analogical predication take it as given that there are judgments about God, whether of faith or reason, in which, by means of concepts drawn from the created world, the human person attains the reality of God himself. All that the theory of analogy is meant to do is to account for the oddities of linguistic expression which result from this conviction" ("Analogy" 45).

[51] The conceptualistic understanding of analogy is rightfully subject to the critique of those who claim that since it is tantamount to univocity it derogates from God's glory and transcendence. Consider Barth's famous pronouncement against such a view of analogy: "I regard the *analogia entis* as the invention of Antichrist, and think that because of it one cannot become Catholic. Whereupon I at the same time allow myself to regard all other possible reasons for not becoming Catholic as shortsighted and lacking in seriousness" (*Church Dogmatics* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936–77] 1/1.x). Elizabeth Johnson summarizes Pannenberg's critique of analogy so understood: "Analogy is a relation requiring a logos common to both analogates. The structure of analogy understood in this way held good from primitive human thought to the Neoplatonic causal schema, and no subsequent concept of analogy, whether early Christian, medieval, or modern, has ever broken through the confines of that Neoplatonic schema and its presuppositions. . . . If one is opposed to univocity, however slight, existing in the essential characteristics of Creator and creature, one must oppose analogy" ("The Right Way to Speak about God? Pannenberg on Analogy," *TS* 43 [1982] 673–92, at 687).

process of elimination by which he chooses analogy as the *only possible way* to understand epistemologically what takes place in our talk about God. First, then, the very placement of Thomas's treatment of theological analogy within the larger context of his treatise on the one God shows that for him such analogy subsists in a secondary consideration reflecting back upon primary theological judgments. In three of his major works—the *Summa theologiae,* the *Compendium theologiae,* and the *Summa contra gentiles*—he treats of analogy only *after* having proved to his own satisfaction that God exists, that God is one, simple and perfect, the pure and infinite act of being, and that in creation God bestows the Divine Mystery upon creatures by creating in them a likeness to the divine nature and persons. His discussion of analogy is situated after the treatment of his core theological truths, not before, as would be our modern propensity.

The second reason for viewing Thomistic analogy as a matter of judgment is the manner in which Thomas portrays analogy as a mean between univocity and equivocity. For him, there are only three possibilities for understanding what goes on epistemologically when we talk about God's very being in a nonmetaphorical manner—univocity, equivocity, and analogy—and once he has rejected the first two alternatives on the grounds of his previous theological judgments, analogy is the only option left. In the *Summa theologiae,* e.g., he refuses univocity since it detracts from God's unity, simplicity, and incomprehensibility:

Nothing can be predicated univocally about God and creatures, since no effect whose production does not require the total power of its agent cause can receive a full likeness of the agent, but only a partial one; so that what occurs among effects separately and plurally, exists in the cause simply and unitedly, as the sun by its single force produces many different forms in all things beneath it. Likewise, all perfections existing in creatures separately and plurally, preexist in God unitedly. Thus, whenever any perfection term is predicated of a creature, it signifies that perfection as distinct in idea from all others: e.g., when we call a human *wise* we signify a perfection that is distinct from the essence, power or existence of humans; but when we call God *wise* we do not intend to signify anything distinct from the divine essence, power or existence. And so, when *wise* is predicated of a human, the name somehow circumscribes and comprehends the reality meant; but this is not the case with God, where *wise* does not comprehend the divine reality but lets it remain as surpassing the name's meaning. It is clear, then, that the name *wise* is not predicated with an identical meaning of God and humans, and the same can be said for all other names.[52]

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[52] *ST* 1.13.5.

Since Thomas already knows through his first-order theological judgments that God is one, simple and incomprehensible, univocity cannot be a valid option for his second-order theological epistemology. The same article goes on also to reject pure equivocity as a valid option since, if the divine names were equivocal, "then nothing at all could be known or demonstrated about God on the basis of creatures, for one's reasoning would always be exposed to the fallacy of equivocation"; but Thomas affirms that philosophers and Paul the Apostle (and presumably theologians like himself) have claimed to know some truths about God based on the nature of creation.

Finally, after this process of elimination, the same article maintains that names such as "wise" must be predicated of God and creatures according to analogy, i.e. proportion (which is the original etymological meaning of the Greek *analogia*).

Names are predicated according to proportion in two ways: either because many things bear a proportion to one reality, as medicine and urine are called healthy insofar as both possess an order and proportion to the animal's health, since medicine is a cause of health and urine is one of its signs; or because one thing bears a direct proportion to the other, as medicine and the animal are called healthy insofar as medicine is the cause of the health which exists in the animal. And in this second way some things are predicated of God and creatures analogically, neither purely equivocally nor univocally. For we are not able to name God except from creatures, and thus whatever is said about God and creatures is predicated inasmuch as the creature is ordered to God as to its causal principle in whom all the perfections of things preexist surpassingly. Now the analogical type of commonality is a mean between pure equivocity and simple univocity. For in analogical predications there is neither one meaning, as occurs in univocal predications, nor totally diverse meanings, as occurs in equivocal predications, but the name which is predicated analogically in multiple ways signifies different proportions to one single reality: as when *healthy,* said of urine, refers to the sign of an animal's health, but when said of medicine signifies the cause of that same health.[53]

Thomas does not clarify why he favors the one-to-one over the many-to-one proportion, but it is clear from elsewhere that it has to do with his desire to underscore divine freedom and transcendence, for if God and creatures were given a common name by reference to some third reality, then in his view that third reality would somehow be prior to God and determine God's being.[54]

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[53] Ibid.
[54] *SCG* 1.34.297. This move is simply the epistemological correlative of Aquinas's ontological rejection of any reality beyond or above God, whether it be Greek Necessity/ Fate, Platonic Forms, or Whiteheadian Creativity.

As in Aquinas's view analogy is closer to equivocity than to univocity,[55] so is its unity to be found not in the single concept but in the single *reality* to which all the analogates bear some proportion, order, or relation.[56] Urine, medicine, and food can all be called healthy, by extension, because we judge them to have an intelligible relation to the single reality of animal health, which is the most natural subject for the predicate "healthy." A meaning gets extended analogically when a word is used to name a secondary analogate precisely because it is judged to have an intelligible relation to the primary analogate. Thomas also notes that in the case of God and creatures, being and naming are not on the same plane:

> Since we arrive at the knowledge of God through things other than God, the reality referred to by the names predicated of God and other things exists by priority in God according to his own mode, but the meaning of the name belongs to God by posteriority, and thus God is said to be named from his effects.[57]

While God, ontologically speaking, is the primary locus for every analogical name shared with creatures, at the epistemic level of knowing and naming, most names (except for a few like "God" and "YHWH") find their primary home in creatures and are then extended to refer to God.

In general throughout his works,[58] Aquinas rejects univocity as an appropriate epistemology for the divine names because it would require him to contravene certain truths about God he already holds dear: e.g., that God is incomprehensible, simple, superexcellently perfect, that God does not participate in any perfection but is that perfection essentially, and that God's being and essence are identical. In a word, he rejects univocity because it derogates from the theological truth (known in judgment) of God's infinite transcendence, which he

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[55] Analogy for Aquinas is a kind of systematic and intelligible ambiguity or equivocity, as distinct from a haphazard and accidental homonymy. The idea of an intelligible ambiguity goes back to Aristotle's logic and metaphysics, whereas the name *analogia* finds its home in mathematical and biological contexts. See Rocca, "Analogy as Judgment" 179–96; Harry Wolfson, *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion,* ed. Isadore Twersky and George Williams (Cambridge: Harvard Univ., 1977) 1:455–77; 2:514–23.

[56] A detailed investigation of what Thomas understands by analogical discourse may be found in Rocca, "Analogy as Judgment" chaps. 6–7.

[57] *SCG* 1.34.298.

[58] *SS* 1.24.1.1.ad 4; 1.48.1.1.ad 3; 1.35.1.4; *DV* 2.11; 10.13.ad 3; *SCG* 1.32–34; *DP* 7.7; *ST* 1.13.5–6,10. See Montagnes, *La doctrine de l'analogie* 67–70, 181–83; Hampus Lyttkens, "Die Bedeutung der Gottesprädikate bei Thomas von Aquin," *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 6 (1964) 280–83.

has already established to his own satisfaction. He refuses equivocity because, at root, it would mean that we could not know anything at all about God; but he *already knows he knows* certain truths about God. However strange it may seem to modern ears which, accustomed to Kantian sound waves, instinctively place epistemology before ontology, and the discussion of the transcendental conditions for knowledge before the avowed fact of knowledge itself, Aquinas repudiates a univocalist epistemology on the basis of a theological ontology which subsists in judgments, and renounces an equivocalist epistemology on the grounds that it cannot do justice to the very fact that we do make true judgments about God. On the second-order level of epistemology, analogy is the only option which is genuinely responsive to the truths of Thomas's first-order web of theological judgments. Only analogy can justify epistemologically what he already knows through his theological judgments, and thus analogy can only be understood in terms of those same judgments.

But analogy is a highly paradoxical option,[59] for analogical predications say something true about God by using concepts whose meaning at the divine level we cannot really understand.[60] For example, we can

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[59] J. H. Nicolas is uncomfortable with any paradoxical interpretation that underscores the extreme negativity of Aquinas's theology, for Thomas spent his whole life searching for and saying "ce que Dieu est," and it is contradictory to say that one knows the divine attributes without knowing the divine essence, since each attribute is the divine essence partially known ("Affirmation de Dieu et connaissance," *Revue thomiste* 64 [1964] 200–222, at 200–204, 221–22). Nicolas's position, however, is directly rooted in his assessment of what Thomas understands by judgment and truth: since judgment is nothing more than the application of a previously known form or concept to a subject, then any true judgment about God will have to use a concept of God's essence or attributes which in some manner attains "ce que Dieu est"; for him, then, to posit that our affirmations of God imply no knowledge, even imperfect, of what God is, cannot be consistent with Thomas's notion of truth. See Denis Bradley, "Thomistic Theology and the Hegelian Critique of Religious Imagination," *New Scholasticism* 59 (1985) 60–78, at 77–78. Wess also sees an incompatibility between Thomas's notions of the mystery and the natural knowability of God, but it is clear he does not understand the difference between judgment and quidditative insight in Thomas when, in a Kantian fashion, he criticizes the Thomistic proofs for God's existence because they cryptically rely on the Anselmian ontological proof, which requires an adequate concept of God (*Wie von Gott sprechen?* 107, 123–26).

[60] O'Neill notes that since judgments use concepts, there is a paradox inherent in all theological discourse: theological judgments affirm transcendence even though by means of limited concepts ("La prédication" 87–89; "Analogy" 52, 57). Those who speak of theological analogy as a projection, perspective, or tending towards God are also aware of this paradox (Edward Schillebeeckx, *Revelation and Theology* [New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968] 167, 175, 177, 205–6; William Hill, *Knowing the Unknown God* [New York: Philosophical Library, 1971] 88–97, 123, 144). Gilson remarks that true analogical judgments about God orient us toward a goal, "the direction of which is known to us but

know the truth *that* God exists without knowing *what* the divine existence is in itself.

To be can mean two different things, signifying either the act of being, or the propositional composition which the mind devises by joining predicate to subject. Taking *to be* in the first sense, we cannot know God's being, nor God's essence; but only in the second sense. For we know that this proposition which we form about God when we say "God is," is true.[61]

Thomas's positive theology is rather like a blind person pointing to and making true judgments about a reality which he or she cannot actually see. Even analogy itself is thoroughly suffused with a conceptual unknowing as referred to God, and with the various dialectical moments of negative theology outlined above.[62] Moreover, if we tend automatically to think of judgments as built up out of concepts, so that the truth

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which, because it is at infinity, is beyond the reach of our natural forces" (*The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* [New York: Random, 1956] 110). Clarke holds that through the mediation (not representation) of the analogous concept, God is situated at an "invisible apex" in an upward direction, and that a knowledge is gained which is "obscure, vector-like, indirect, non-conceptual," such that God must be affirmed and yet is still beyond representation ("Analogy" 93–95).

[61] *ST* 1.3.4.ad 2. *ST* 1.13.12 and *SCG* 1.36 teach that we can form true affirmative propositions about God. Although the divine nature is one and simple, the mind can only know it through a plurality of judgments; but the mind also realizes that one and the same simple God corresponds to its various judgments.

[62] A few writers have interpreted analogy within a Thomistic perspective as involving the threefold way to God, but without ascribing the notion as such to Aquinas. Bouillard notes that analogy has all three moments since "it is a synthesis of a thesis and an antithesis," where the way of eminence is the synthesis (*Knowledge of God* 109). McInerny asserts that even affirmative divine names have moments of negation and eminence ("Can God Be Named by Us? Prolegomena to Thomistic Philosophy of Religion" *Review of Metaphysics* 32 [1978] 53–73). O'Neill considers the threefold *via* within analogy as a dialectic of mutually correcting judgments, not of contrary concepts which could then result in some "higher" concept of God ("Analogy" 52–53, 59–60); even the judgment "God exists" shows moments of negation and eminence ("La prédication" 85–88). Those who compare analogy with dialectic often make Hegel the dialogue partner of Thomas. For the theological importance of the two traditions of analogy and dialectic, see Pierre Gisel and Philibert Secretan, eds., *Analogie et dialectique* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1982); for the confrontation between analogy and dialectic, see Bernhard Lakebrink, "Analektik und Dialektik: Zur Methode des Thomistischen und Hegelschen Denkens," in *St. Thomas Aquinas, 1274–1974: Commemorative Studies* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1974) 2:459–87. David Tracy shows the complementarity of analogy and dialectic: just as analogy (based on manifestation) without its own negative moment becomes wooden univocity, so dialectic (based on proclamation) left to itself becomes equivocity and destruction (*The Analogical Imagination* [New York: Crossroad, 1981] chaps. 5, 10). O'Neill considers analogy the fundamental matrix within which dialectic can find a home, for dialectic itself cannot be basic ("Analogy" 43–54, 62–65).

of judgments is dependent on the meaning of concepts, in the case of theological analogy we must reverse the direction and think of the very meaning of the divine names as dependent upon the truth of theological judgments.[63]

Finally, a concrete example may illumine what I think Thomas has in mind when he places analogy at the nexus of his positive and negative theology. I can point to some papers on a lectern and announce, "Here is my talk"; I can also proclaim, while sweeping my arms in a 180-degree arc so as to designate the whole room containing both audience and lectern, "Here is my God." I have four points about these two sentences. First, they are both instances of analogical discourse since they both signify analogically by means of a complex web of interlocking judgments, though the former is secular, noncontroversial discourse, while the latter is theological, disputed discourse. The first sentence is analogical discourse because we implicitly relate it in our minds to the very same sentence—"Here is my talk"—when it is used to refer to what comes out of my mouth while I am actually speaking. Because we understand the intrinsic relation between intelligible verbal sounds and intelligible written marks on pieces of paper, we spontaneously extend the meaning of the word "talk" by using it to make what we understand to be a true and literal, nonmetaphorical judgment: words on paper are truly my talk though they are not exactly the same reality as my spoken words. The word "talk" receives its extended meaning precisely by being understood and used in two different judgments about the real world which bear an intrinsic relation to one another; it does not possess its extended meaning beforehand all on its own.

However, the second point says these two sentences are also quite different as instances of analogical discourse, since God is much more

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[63] Clarke writes that God cannot be defined or meant before discovering him, at least philosophically: "The *philosophical* meaning of God should be exclusively a function of the *way by which He is discovered*" ("Analogy" 84 n. 9). Without special reference to Aquinas, other authors make similar points: Michael Levine holds that the judgment of God's existence is necessary for any literal or analogical talk about God (" 'Can We Speak Literally of God?' " *Religious Studies* 21 [1985] 53–59, at 53–54); more generally, Richard Swinburne argues that the analogical meaning and coherence of any words or thoughts about God depend on the prior truth of certain statements about God (*The Coherence of Theism* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1977] 1–5, 48–49, 70–71, 278–80, 294–96). With reference to Aquinas, David Burrell states generally that in talk about God, meaning is not so much presupposed as it is constituted by judgment ("Aquinas on Naming God," *TS* 24 [1963] 183–212, at 202). Even more universally, Bernard Lonergan contends that for Thomas knowledge always measures meaning, and that there is a "clear reduction of meaning to knowledge" (*Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas,* ed. David Burrell [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1967] 152–53).

mysterious than any kind of talk whatsoever, is totally hidden from our powers of sensation, and is obscure to our powers of conceptualization. If we return for a moment to the two different significations of the first sentence, "Here is my talk," we note that only the fourth word, "talk," actually changes meaning from one context to the other; in both contexts, the word "here" refers to an area of space that can be pointed to, the word "is" retains its meaning of temporally limited existence, and the word "my" signifies something I possess as having been produced by me. But if we compare the first with the second sentence, we find that not only the word "God," but even the first three words of each sentence, together with the whole context in which they stand, demonstrated different semantic functions. Precisely because someone like Aquinas has already judged, within appropriate doxological and theological contexts, that God is a mysterious and loving being unproduced by me whose illimitable existence cannot be spatially or temporally constrained—because of the supposed truth of such judgments— the meanings of the first three words in each sentence cannot be the same. In the theological sentence, the word "here" cannot refer to a spatial area but rather to a Mystery who transcends space; the word "my" cannot refer to something I possess but rather to a gracious Being who possesses me; and the word "is" must not be limited to temporal existence.

The third point counters those who see a hidden core of univocity lurking in the meanings of the first three words of each sentence. They would be right if those meanings were first abstracted as concepts from our experience of God and creatures and then later predicated as generic meanings of God and creatures. But Thomas permits no latent univocal meanings, for we do not know what a concept really means once it has been extended to God, which is why he constantly applies the correctives of negative theology to the creaturely concepts we use to speak about God. He does not use such concepts because he sees how they apply to God's inner nature but because they are the best tools he can find for trying to speak the Inexpressible. Eschewing any prying into God's inner being, he would refuse the gambit of those who would try to force him to find common abstract meanings and content himself, as a negative theologian, with showing how God's perfections are not like ours.

Finally, however, Aquinas does think theological discourse can extend creaturely concepts so that they point to God and speak truthfully about God, even though they cannot give us insight into God and cannot be distilled down to reveal a common univocal meaning. At this point, those who think they detect a hidden equivocity lurking in the significations of the two sentences are deeply troubled: How can the theological sentence mean anything at all if there are no common

meanings and if we do not know how our concepts apply to God? Aquinas will respond that, at the level of judgment, the theological sentence cannot be equivocal precisely because it is true, although it expresses its truth by projecting creaturely concepts toward an infinite mystery which remains absolutely inconceivable. Whereas he rejects univocity due to God's incomprehensibility, he repudiates equivocity on the grounds of the believer's ability to know some truth about God. In Aquinas's eyes, those who consider all speech about God to be inherently equivocal are reduced in the end to holding that we can never say anything true about God, even that God exists.

CONCLUSION

Aquinas's theory of God-talk, a subtle and nuanced view which hovers over the divine abyss between the crags of purely positive and purely negative theology, evinces Christianity's penchant for invoking and positively identifying a God who is at the same time essentially mysterious and hidden, a God who is neither univocally dissolved into us humans nor equivocally placed beyond every ability of ours to know and name in prayer and worship. Thomas's God-talk blends both the positive and the negative, but the positive is foundational for the negative, for God is the pure positivity of infinite Being who in creation has also acted positively on our behalf. This stance accords well with the views of other theologians who also see God as pure positivity, albeit in terms different from Aquinas's—Kasper, e.g., who sees God as pure and positive Love, or even Barth, who toward the end of his career finally admits that a God-talk based on the world of creation and redemption must have something positive to say if Christ is ultimately the positive "Yes" from God to that world and from that world to God.

Aquinas's analogy-based theological epistemology only escapes idolatrous univocity, however, to the degree that it is based on judgment rather than concept, is continually interpreted by the dialectics of negative theology, and is conscious that the concepts used in its true judgments about God cannot give us any insight into the inner nature of God. His theological epistemology gladly grasps, as the only viable alternative, the inescapable paradox that in all our theologizing we link judgmental truth with conceptual agnosticism.

Finally, Thomas's theological epistemology implies that when we talk about God, the very meanings of the words we use are somehow dependent upon what we hold to be true about God. From his perspective, our theological epistemology is ultimately based on the perceived truth-status of our foundational theological judgments, not the other way around. This suggests that the theory of God-talk to which we subscribe will always be indebted to the truths about God we hold dear.