

**Analogical Concept versus Analogical Judgment:
Whose Aquinas, Which Rationality?
A Discussion of *Speaking the Incomprehensible God*:
*Thomas Aquinas on the Interplay of
Positive and Negative Theology***

by Gregory P. Rocca
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BERNARD Montagnes, OP, opens *The Doctrine of the Analogy of Being According to Thomas Aquinas*—originally published in 1963, but only very recently available in English translation—with a pertinent observation leading up to two questions:

Several recent worthwhile works have come to revive interest in the Thomist doctrine of analogy—which unfortunately has become a subject of somewhat hackneyed scholarly interest and upon which, it seems, too much has already been written. Is it still necessary, after these recent works, to run the risk of adding a new title to a bibliography whose discouraging mass would rather suggest to us abandoning such an enterprise? Does the contribution made by these recent studies leave any room for a new study?¹

¹ Bernard Montagnes, *The Doctrine of the Analogy of Being According to Thomas Aquinas*, trans. E. M. Macierowski, ed. Andrew Tallon (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2004), 7. Originally published as *La doctrine de l'analogie de l'être d'après Saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Louvain: Publications Universitaires/Paris: Béatrice-Nauwelaerts, 1963).

Unsurprisingly, these questions did not keep Montagnes in 1963 from adding an important study to an already sizable library of Thomists treating “analogy in Aquinas.” Nor did it keep Gregory Rocca in 2004 from seeking to integrate this increasingly complex discussion into the even wider horizon of cataphatic and apophatic God-talk by reconstructing how for Aquinas precisely the exigencies of such God-talk call for the practice of theological analogy.

Even the slightest familiarity with the delicate question of the proper interplay between cataphatic and apophatic theology in general, and in the thought of Thomas Aquinas in particular, commands an immediate sense of respect for Rocca’s achievement. His book offers a highly nuanced and impressively comprehensive treatment of the topic: of St. Thomas in the context of his Platonic, neo-Platonic, and Aristotelian sources; of the tradition of Thomist commentators; and of the contemporary Thomist discussion. In short, the work under discussion represents an impressive exemplar of Dominican scholarly dedication to St. Thomas’s profoundly complex as well as profoundly rewarding thought. An exhaustive bibliography together with very useful indices of names, subjects, and especially works of Thomas Aquinas round off a substantial study, making it a premier guide for in-depth research on the given topic.

Offering a sustained investigation into and presentation of St. Thomas’s theological epistemology, the book is in no way just another treatment of the arguably overworked topic of “analogy in Aquinas.” Rather, Rocca’s project, quite ambitiously and in a much broader scope, aims at demonstrating that “Aquinas’ theological epistemology is a combination of negative and positive theology and that his positive theology is rooted in an analogy subsisting in judgments, including the judgments of faith” (xvi). Conceived in this way, the project entails a distinct polemical edge in that it aims at substantiating a claim, as crucial as it is controversial, that for St. Thomas the unity of theological analogy rests not in the unity of an alleged analogical concept but in the act of judgment. An all-too-clear signal for those sufficiently initiated into the intricacies of intra-Thomistic disputes, this claim amounts to a crisp line drawn between, on the one side, the venerable tradition of Cajetan’s interpretation of St. Thomas’s account of analogy upheld in the twentieth century by Thomistic luminaries Antonin Sertillanges, Gerald B. Phelan, Charles Journet, Eric Mascall, James F. Anderson, and Jacques Maritain and, on the other side, a respectable, recent line of fundamental critique of Cajetan’s “conceptualist” approach advanced by Hampus Lyttkens, Santiago Ramírez, George P. Klubertanz, Ralph McInerny, and Bernard Montagnes, recently reaffirmed by John F. Wippel, and now also embraced by Gregory Rocca.

Precisely because Rocca argues that the unity of theological analogy does not rest in an analogical concept but in the act of judgment, he is anxious to relate the question of analogy to the truths of faith instead of focusing exclusively on what neo-scholasticism considered St. Thomas's philosophical doctrine of God. In other words, he is eager to present the *theological* epistemology of the *doctor communis* as a second-order reflection that arises organically from the first-order theological judgments that are constitutive of his doctrines about God and creation.

Rocca approaches what he calls the "fragile though fruitful unity of Aquinas' positive and negative theology" (xvi) in four consecutive steps constituting the four parts of the book: "God the Incomprehensible and Negative Theology," "Analogy and the Web of Judgment," "Crucial Truths about God," and "The Divine Names." In all four parts, Rocca displays a magisterial command of the topical threads running through the vast net of St. Thomas's oeuvre. In addition to drawing consistently on the *Summa theologiae* as well as the *Summa contra Gentiles*, he pays commendably close attention to the early *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum* as well as the important disputed questions *De veritate* and *De potentia*, the biblical commentaries (especially the one on the Gospel of John), the relevant commentaries of Aristotle's work (*Physics*, *Metaphysics*, *Peri Hermeneias*, *Posterior Analytics*) and of his commentator Averroes, and the neo-Platonic tradition as addressed in St. Thomas's commentaries on Denys's *De divinis nominibus* and the *Liber de causis*.

Rocca treats his subject matter—Aquinas's theorizing about the very logic of the discourse about God in light of Aquinas's own practice of such discourse—in a genetic-historical way. Such an approach yields a richly nuanced picture of St. Thomas's thought, which in its very development over the years, remains profoundly faithful to the central axioms operative across a vast spectrum of material and topics. However, the distinct disadvantage of a genetic-historical reconstruction of Aquinas's thought is that this approach intrinsically inhibits the transition to a speculative mode of discourse in which the subject matter itself—in the way, after all, it concerned St. Thomas himself—could be investigated in the proper speculative mode of metaphysical as well as theological discourse. While the genetic-historical approach allows one to advance considerations *about* theological and metaphysical matters—due to its specific formal object, the genealogy of Aquinas's *own* thought in the context of the relevant historical and textual sources—any consistent instantiation of this method must, however, refrain from theological and metaphysical discourse proper lest it lose the unity and specificity of its particular formal object by way of which the theological and metaphysical matters

are addressed. Nevertheless, it becomes quite obvious to any appropriately attentive reader that beneath its genetic-historical surface there is a commendable speculative energy at work in Rocca's discourse, an energy barely tamed by the strictly historical-reconstructive conventions as they still, quite arguably, dominate much of the recent renaissance of Thomistic scholarship.

I

In the first part, "God the Incomprehensible and Negative Theology," Rocca offers a concise account of the tradition of negative theology up to Pseudo-Dionysius and John Damascene, as well as a substantive chapter on God's dual incomprehensibility, a discussion that arises from a sophisticated interpretation of question 12 in the *prima pars* of the *Summa theologiae*. By analyzing in detail how St. Thomas subtly qualifies the unmitigated apophaticism operative in the negative theology of the Areopagite and his followers, Rocca clears the path for an appreciation of Aquinas's own, markedly different *via negativa*, which includes the way of causality, the way of negation, and the way of preeminence. Rocca argues convincingly that St. Thomas employs the *via negativa* in a three-fold way, applying it differently in various contexts, but most importantly using it "as an integral whole in those situations where a positive predicate is first affirmed of God, then denied, and finally affirmed once again in a supereminent fashion" (72–73). Most helpful is Rocca's astute identification of three types of theological negation operative in a rather implicit way in St. Thomas's *via negativa*: qualitative, objective modal, and subjective modal. Rocca summarizes the matter in a succinct way:

Qualitative negations are absolute denials, while modal negations are relative denials; objective modal negations remove the finite mode of the creature from God, while subjective modal negations refuse to assert of God those imperfections arising from our human manner of understanding and signifying. (62)

Already in this first part, Rocca drives home again and again a central point too-often neglected in the context of contemporary postmodern flirtations with a consummate apophaticism that happily assimilates Dionysius and Meister Eckhart with Heidegger and Derrida, and that suggests a serendipitous proximity of Thomas Aquinas: Negative theology in St. Thomas functions as an integral, corrective, and subsequent moment to an antecedent affirmative theology. As Rocca rightly emphasizes, "For the sake of his theological project, Thomas requires a specific

knowledge of God as close to essential knowledge as possible, and the strategy of successive qualitative negations serves that end" (64). These negations cannot arise from any intuitional insight into God. Rather,

Thomas does base the negations upon some primary affirmations which assert that God is pure act and infinite subsistent being; in various ways he claims that God is the infinite positivity of being without knowing *what* that pure positivity is or how it is God. Yet, it is from these affirmations that his negative theology lives and moves and has its being. (64)

With this programmatic statement Rocca anticipates the central claim of part three, "Crucial Truths about God." However, it is precisely in light of the nature and weight of such a far-reaching anticipation that the following question imposes itself: What difference would it have made had he opened up the book with the "Crucial Truths about God," that is—dare I say it—with the *praeambula fidei*? Such an order would have followed more closely the *ordo disciplinae* of the *Summa theologiae*, where these affirmations arise from the recently rather unjustly disparaged and sidetracked "five ways" of rationally demonstrating the existence of God, as Rocca expressly states later in part three:

Aquinas fashions the proofs for God's existence into formidable theological tools: they are indisputably foundational for his systematic theology because he seeds within their premises and harvests in their conclusions the monotheistically revolutionary truth that God is the pure, infinite, subsistent act of being. (224)

However, instead of following St. Thomas's *ordo disciplinae* by privileging the ontological premise of God as *ipsum esse subsistens*, Rocca frontloads the problematic of theological epistemology, being faithful thereby again to a genetic-historical entry into his particular topic instead of privileging the substantive as well as conceptual exigencies of the subject matter per se. Nevertheless, Rocca is perfectly clear that an ineluctable affirmation, being at the very root of *sacra doctrina* as well as the metaphysics of *esse*, remains primordially antecedent to all subsequent epistemic and linguistic entailments:

Aquinas' *via negativa* is . . . a moment within [rational theology] serving to correct the oversights and deficiencies of affirmative theology and doing the best it can to construct a negative theology of the One who cannot be known essentially. . . . Affirmation and infinite positivity are the fecund roots of all subsequent negations. (72)

This, in other words, means that apophatic discourse is not superadded upon but is all the way down integral to a robustly cataphatic Christian theology.

II

Part two, “Analogy and the Web of Judgment,” constitutes the heart of the book. After an informative chapter on analogy in Aristotle and in neo-Platonism, Rocca ably sketches the scathing critique of analogy advanced in twentieth-century Protestant theology, most prominently by Karl Barth, Wolfhart Pannenberg, and Eberhard Jüngel. To state their respective concerns briefly: Barth is haunted by an allegedly overarching conceptual univocity of being, with the term applicable to both Creator and creature such that human beings by way of natural theology secure a comprehensive conceptual handle on the Creator and, hence, conceive an idol of their own making. Barth decries the “analogy of being” as the epitome of “natural theology,” the latter being a synonym for the kind of metaphysical presumption typical of unredeemed theological inquiry under the condition of sin. In short, for Barth, between the analogy of being and the analogy of faith there obtains an irreconcilable and, hence, interminable “hamartiological” conflict. Quite likely, however, Barth attacked in Aquinas a concept of analogy he saw advanced by his contemporary Erich Przywara, S.J., who on this matter was arguably closer to Scotus and Suarez than to Aquinas. The early Pannenberg, a more subtle medievalist and a Scotus scholar, brings greater precision to the Barthian concern. He contends that constitutive of any form of analogy is an indispensable conceptual core of univocity, a “common *logos*” that ultimately compromises God’s transcendence. Jüngel, quite contrary to Pannenberg, conceives the fundamental problem of analogy along the lines of Kant’s reduction of all analogy to the analogy of improper (exterior or metaphorical) proportionality and consequently of such profound apophatic entailments that in the end the God of the Gospel is utterly obscured—a concern more recently forcefully expressed by the late Colin Gunton. The strategy of these critiques is only all too obvious: to reduce analogy to and consequently to dismiss it either as the ultimately unmitigated univocity of predication and being between God and creation—and thus to impale it on the horn of idolatry—or as the consummate equivocity of predication and a consequent positioning of God beyond being and nonbeing—and thus to impale it on the horn of agnosticism. Rocca astutely uses this set of criticisms as a foil to present St. Thomas’s genuine account of analogy, an account that in its substance constitutes a devastating witness either to the lack of hermeneutical goodwill from the side of the Protestant critics or to a disconcerting lack

of familiarity with St. Thomas's oeuvre.

Building on the work of Lyttkens, Montagnes, Klubertanz, and McInerney, Rocca makes what strikes me as a conclusive case against Cajetan's theory of analogy as four-term proportionality being the proper *interpretation* of St. Thomas's *own* account of analogy. The analogy of proper proportionality according to Cajetan predicates inherent perfections of each analogate and is held together by one analogous concept "that transcends all the analogates, possesses a unified meaning proportionally the same, and abstracts from the proper concepts of the analogates" (114). One problem with Cajetan's theory is that the analogous concept oscillates between a clear concept (actually many concepts and only proportionally one concept) and a common but confused concept achieved by a special abstraction.

At least the historical and hermeneutical side of the question can now be regarded as settled: Cajetan seems to rest the case of his interpretation of St. Thomas exclusively on a particular stage in the latter's development reflected in a position advanced in *De veritate*, question 2, article 3, ad 4; question 2, article 11; and question 3, article 1, ad 7, to which he never returned. Moreover, Rocca rightly points out that, quite conceivably, an argument can be advanced "that analogy as proportionality is ultimately grounded in the properties of analogy as referential multivocity, also known as analogy of attribution" (124). Still, it should not be forgotten that a convincing historical and hermeneutical case does not per se constitute a demonstrative argument. On the metaphysical level, however, the defenders of Cajetan's theory deserve such an argument. While, for reasons already mentioned, Rocca does not offer such an argument, one can find a rather sustained *metaphysical engagement* of Cajetan's account in Montagnes's earlier study.

The strength of Rocca's genetic-historical approach is this: He can convincingly demonstrate that St. Thomas's advance beyond his transitory position in *De veritate*, and, hence, his final mature solution, hinges on an expanded meaning of the term *proportio*: "This broad sense of *proportio* as 'direct relation' is the bridge that allows theological attributes to cross from us to God and, more generally, is the philosopher's stone Aquinas utilizes to transmute *analogia* as four-term proportionality into *analogia* as referential multivocity" (123). Rocca employs the term "analogy of referential multivocity" in order to designate the linguistic practice of *analogia* in which multiple predications of one name to many things occur. Such multiple predications can be based on reference, attribution, or proportion to some one reality. In the latter case, *proportio* tends to carry the broad meaning of any relation at all: It is "'proportion with a reference to one'

(*proportio ad unum*)” (107). Rocca makes a persuasive genetic-historical case for this thesis by way of a close textual reading of a wide range of St. Thomas’s writings, an analysis that builds carefully on the prior work of Klubertanz and especially Montagnes.

While Rocca’s relationship to Montagnes is explicit and far-reaching, it is instructive to observe the difference between the two. Montagnes, whose primarily philosophical study was guided by an intrinsic metaphysical concern and discourse, offers a clearer conceptual account of the reasons why St. Thomas was able (after the short experimental stage in which he considered proportionality) to return in his mature work to the analogy of relation: It is the metaphysics of participation that enables Aquinas to shift from the problematic formal causality centrally employed in the *Scriptum* to the efficient causality of his later work that enables him to conceive the analogy of attribution as an intrinsic analogy.² In short, St. Thomas was for a relatively brief time conceptually stuck with the problems that arose from the way he employed formal causality as the premier conceptual tool to understand the analogical causality between God and beings, the fundamental problematic being the serious risk of comprising both in one and the same form. Consequently, for a while he entertained the analogy of proportionality precisely to overcome the conceptual dangers of univocal, formal similarity inherent in formal causality. However, as soon as St. Thomas saw his way through to conceive the causal dependence of creatures upon God as one not of *formal* but rather of *efficient* causality by way of participation, he was able to return to the analogy of intrinsic attribution.

Whereas Montagnes insists by way of metaphysical argumentation that for St. Thomas the analogy of relation arises from the metaphysics of participation—and, hence, the practice of epistemic judgment arises from the order of being³—Rocca, characteristically using the term “analogy of

² Ibid., 75–79.

³ Ibid., 77: “According to [the] analogy *unius ad alterum*, must beings be defined starting from God or God starting from beings? This question calls for two complementary replies. Our knowledge follows an order *per prius et posterius* which goes from beings to God. It never coincides with the ontological order of creative causality: what is first for us is never first in itself. Whatever we know of God we know by means of beings, by ascending from the effects to their cause. In short, for us, the primary analogate is the creature. But since beings receive by participation what God is by essence, they depend upon Him as the primary instance from which they have what they are. Of itself, being does not include dependence upon a cause in its definition, otherwise one would have to say that God is not a being, since He is not caused. Still, if being pertains to God *per prius* and to creatures *per posterius*, one must conclude that beings cannot be defined

referential multivocity," clearly privileges the *linguistic practice* of epistemic judgment ("speaking the incomprehensible God"!) in a way that keeps the precise relationship between the orders of being and knowledge in Aquinas somewhat in suspense. On the one hand he emphasizes the primarily *logical* nature of the practice of analogical judgments:

For Aquinas the analogy of referential multivocity is primarily a logical mean between univocity and pure equivocity and as such is neutral as regards the ontological question of whether a subject possesses an analogous predicate intrinsically or not. (127)

On the other hand, he wishes to affirm a certain notion of this logical order arising from the order of being:

That being said, however, it is also true, as a kind of corollary to our main thesis, that Aquinas grounds the analogous predication of the divine attributes in the real similarity between creatures and the Creator-God, and also uses the notion of analogy to refer not merely to logical realities but also to metaphysical structures of causality within the real world. (127)

Rocca leaves the matter with the broad affirmation of such a relation, which clearly privileges the logical nature of the practice of analogical judgments. Montagnes, in contrast, leaves no doubt about the precise metaphysical relationship obtaining between the order of being and the order of knowing:

In the last analysis, the unity of being rests upon the unity of the first cause of being. The unity that one discovers is not only that of the concept of being, but also the real unity of the Principle of being. Hence, the structure of analogy and that of participation are rigorously parallel: they correspond to each other as the conceptual aspect and the real aspect of the unity of being. As long as one has not returned to the real unity of the Principle, the multiplicity of beings has not yet truly been reduced to One. In short, the analogy of being . . . suppose[s] to reproduce the unity of order which ties beings up with their Principle. Thus and thus only does the realistic and critical character of the theory of the analogy of being show up within Thomas's philosophy.⁴

independently of their dependence upon God, as the effects of creative causality: *esse quod rebus creatis inest non potest intelligi nisi ut deductum ab esse divino*. The causal dependence on God creates the relation necessary for analogy by reference to a primary instance without risk of confounding beings and God in one and the same form or notion."

⁴ Ibid., 91.

Montagnes's way of putting the matter presses the question how the metaphysical and the properly theological aspects of analogy are precisely related. If one follows Rocca, St. Thomas seems to have moved back and forth between, on the one hand, the unfolding of *sacra doctrina* informed by a deep theological intuition—giving rise to the interplay between cataphatic and apophatic God-talk—and, on the other hand, the best of logical tools available to conceptually support and unfold this theological intuition. If one follows Montagnes, however, St. Thomas treats analogy first and foremost in an ontological way in the sense that whenever analogy is applied, the content of what is said must be taken into account first and foremost. Unlike Montagnes, Rocca conceives analogy pertaining primarily to the domain of logic: That is, he understands it as a formal structure of predication. And indeed, such a primarily logically conceived notion of analogy is more conducive to an immediate application to the theological interplay between cataphatic and apophatic God-talk. However, at the same time it remains rather unclear in Rocca's reconstruction whether, and if so how, for St. Thomas proper metaphysical discourse—as the intellectual reception and speculative penetration of reality and the analogy of participation in being—is at least integral to, if not constitutive of, the scientific execution of *sacra doctrina*. Rather, Rocca's impressively learned and comprehensive genetic-historical reconstruction suggests in so many ways—perhaps against his own best intentions—that St. Thomas practiced a highly personal form of bricolage, albeit an overwhelmingly successful one due to his conceptual “wizardry” (124, note 75), fusing from highly disparate and historically contingent conceptual material a personal metaphysical synthesis of doubtless ingenuity, but which was in no way integral to (while formally independent of) his theological project. It is in conveying the impression of “Aquinas the metaphysician” that Rocca fails to convince. Precisely in this regard, on the contrary, Montagnes does convince by reconstructing St. Thomas's metaphysics in the speculative act itself, that is, in the procedure proper to the formal object of metaphysics.

Hence, while Montagnes and Rocca are in fundamental agreement about their shared opposition to the Cajetanian interpretation of analogy as proper proportionality, a difference as instructive as it is significant opens up between the two. Briefly, contrary to Montagnes, Rocca prioritizes—especially in matters theological—the act of judgment over the mind's first act of simple understanding, the act of obtaining concepts. Rocca plays off Aquinas's *ex professo* treatment of this matter against what he reconstrues as St. Thomas's *de facto* practice. According to Rocca, St. Thomas employs a rather broad meaning of the terms *apprehensio* and *conceptio*, such that at least

some concepts turn out to be the result of epistemic judgment and other related rational procedures. Fundamentally, for Rocca, "every predication is a judgment seeking and bespeaking the truth" (154). Consequently, judgment is involved in concept-formation such that at least some concepts follow from judgment and not vice versa. Drawing upon Edward Schillebeeckx, William Hill, Etienne Gilson, Henri Bouillard, David Burrell, and Colman O'Neill, Rocca accounts for the practice of analogical judgments without any need to seek recourse in some "analogous concept"; rather, "analogy is a matter of making true predications about God, of using concepts in judgments" (157). It is quite worthwhile to attend closely to Rocca's central thesis:

Analogy as judgment . . . , which is analogy-in-the-act rather than analogy-after-the-fact, uses and abuses concepts by claiming in their very employment to refer to a Transcendent that is not open to conceptual insight. Theological analogy, paradoxically, in its truth-claim sans intuitive apprehension, asserts what cannot be fully conceived or defined, and yet makes its assertions with concepts inextricably bound to creaturely modes.

Aquinas' theological analogy subsists in the judgments he makes about God, judgments that necessarily transcend the very concepts that comprise them. The basic unit of theological analogy is the complete statement, and the meanings of discrete concepts must be referred back to the truth-claim of the whole proposition. Moreover, while analogy-in-the-act arises in the judgments themselves, his formal doctrine of analogy is only established once he takes a reflexive look at his original theological judgments and analyzes what must be the case epistemologically in order for them to be true. If we tend automatically to think of judgments as built up out of concepts, so that truth is meaning-dependent, in the case of theological analogy we must also reverse the direction and think of the meaning of the divine names as truth-dependent. (194–95)

However, what does it mean exactly to say that "the meaning of the divine names [is] truth-dependent"? *In se*, this surely is true, but *quoad nos* this claim remains problematic. Does the very practice of judgments not presuppose *in all cases* the initial obtaining of concepts: In other words, can there plausibly be any "original theological judgments" without antecedent "concepts inextricably bound to creaturely modes"? Of course, the very point of the supernatural virtue of faith is to actively receive a broad range of concepts and judgments by way of Scripture and tradition that inform faith's discursive activity. However, Scripture and tradition together with the concepts and judgments they convey can only be effectively received

in a context in which the analogicity of creaturely concepts in their regular creaturely modes is already fully at play, inexorably producing meaning, and open to a proper metaphysical analysis. Hence, the question arises—and Montagnes and Rocca seem to come down on different sides—whether in the speculative order there obtains an indissoluble and constitutive relation between predicamental and transcendental analogy, reflecting the analogical unity of being, or whether theological analogy explodes any relation such that the meaning of divine naming has to become inherently truth-dependent? Ultimately, Rocca seems to see unity in theological analogy arise solely from the acts of judgment that use and abuse concepts in their attempted reference to the transcendent. By contrast, Montagnes insists also in matters of theological analogy on the analogical concept and its special unity *per prius et posterius*:

[T]he analogical concept has a totally special unity; it does not stand above its inferiors but it applies to them without any intermediary, and it does not represent them equally but applies to them *per prius et posterius*. . . . Accidents and substance, creatures and God are gathered in the unity of being only in virtue of the relation of causality and participation which binds the second term to the first, the accidents to the substance, the creatures to God. Being stands above neither predicamental nor transcendental diversity; it belongs *per prius* to God and *per posterius* to creatures. The concept of being immediately designates God or creatures, substance or accidents, not separated and disjoint [sic], but considered within the unity of the relation that binds them to the primary instance. For predicamental analogy, there is no primary instance other than substance, and for transcendental analogy no primary instance other than God, the ultimate term of reference of all the meanings of being, the principle of order by relation to which all else is unified. In short, the unity of being hangs upon the real unity of the First Being.⁵

Contrary to Montagnes, Rocca advances a reading of St. Thomas that allows the concept of being as the root of all judgments as well as the fruit of some of them. He rests his case on the fact that Aquinas understands the mind's concept in a broad sense, that is, as "a definition, a judgment, or anything at all in which the intellect speaks its interior word" (173). The key for Rocca is the "final concept" (173) that constitutes the telos of a process of antecedent judgments. And so he concludes that

Aquinas' theological or transcendental analogy may also be seen as broadly conceptual, in the sense that the meanings of that analogy are

⁵ Ibid., 81–82.

themselves the fruit of a web of interwoven theological first-order judgments stretching out toward the truth. (173)

To put the matter differently, Rocca's reading of St. Thomas can arguably be understood as awkwardly poised between, on the one hand, a Thomist account that—along the lines of Montagnes—reciprocally integrates the transcendent analogy and the analogy of being, and, on the other hand, Karl Barth's "analogy of faith" (*analogia fidei*).⁶ Because human language has no inherent capacity to refer properly to God, God in a gracious act of self-revelation contingently confirms human language—and does so again and again in the Spirit's freely faithful and faithfully free activity—such that it can give appropriate witness to God's self-revelation. It is the truth of God's self-revelatory act that produces the meaning of the gratuitously confirmed language such that the meaning of all proper theological concepts in their utter contingency upon God's self-revelation is all the way down truth-dependent. While it might go against his own best intentions, it seems clear that Rocca occupies ground rather proximate to Barth when he claims that "Aquinas' theological or transcendent analogy may also be seen as broadly conceptual, in the sense that the meanings of that analogy are themselves the fruit of a web of interwoven theological first-order judgments stretching out toward the truth" (173). In short, the more Rocca loosens the relationship between predicamental and transcendental analogy, the more his reading of St. Thomas approximates Barth's *analogia fidei*, an analogy cut loose from any substantial moorings in predicamental analogy and allegedly arising solely out of true judgments about God and creatures as normatively witnessed to in Scripture and as expanded under the guidance of the Spirit by the grammar of faith.

⁶ According to Bruce McCormack, one of the most able contemporary interpreters of Karl Barth's theology, for Barth "the 'analogy of faith' refers most fundamentally to a relation of correspondence between an *act* of God and an *act* of a human subject; the act of Divine self-revelation and the human act of faith in which that revelation is acknowledged. More specifically, the analogy which is established in a revelation event is an analogy between God's knowledge of Himself and human knowledge of Him in and through human concepts and words. . . . There is nothing in the being or knowing of the human subject which helps to bring this event about—no capacity or pre-understanding which might be seen as a necessary precondition to its occurrence. . . . God's self-knowledge does not become analogically related to a prior human knowledge of Him in revelation; rather human knowledge is conformed to His. God's act is the analogue, ours is the analogate." Bruce McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909–1936* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 16–17, original emphasis.

III

The third part of Rocca's work, "Crucial Truths about God," is inherently linked to the first part; and, arguably, according to the *ordo disciplinae*, it should have preceded part one, a point made above. This part ends with a chapter carrying the same heading in which Rocca offers a brilliant and rich account of St. Thomas's profound theological vision. He concludes the chapter with a particularly helpful discussion of the notion of participation and the complex discussion around it, concluding with Cornelio Fabro's claim that "participation is the special ontology of analogy, and analogy the special semantics of participation" (287). And again the question arises: If, instead of functioning solely as an adage, Fabro's claim had functioned as axiomatic and, hence, had governed Rocca's first part all the way down, would it not have required Rocca to acknowledge the essential metaphysical relationship between predicamental and transcendental analogy—very much along the lines of Montagnes?

However, the main point of this third part, an extensive commentary on the relationship between Aristotle and St. Thomas, is not only to display "the primary supportive pillar of his theological epistemology—the existence of God the Creator" (199), but also to show that in ascertaining the philosophical underpinnings of this pillar, St. Thomas operates all the way down as a theologian; that is, while he employs discursive reason to the utmost degree in the form of an ancillary metaphysical speculation, he consistently gives pride of place to faith and theology. In order to demonstrate this thesis—a thesis that, especially in its finer points, remains hotly debated among Thomists—Rocca employs the hermeneutical strategy of reading Aristotle not "through" or "by way of" St. Thomas's own commentatorial interpretation, but rather "over against" it, in order that the theological presuppositions operative in Aquinas's interpretation of Aristotle become traceable. Consequently, he reads Aristotle in light of the best of recent historical scholarship and, unsurprisingly, encounters a deeply aporetic philosopher in general and, in particular, a profound tension between the account of a first mover offered in the *Physics* and the one offered in the *Metaphysics*. According to Rocca, it is not St. Thomas's superior metaphysical insight, the work of a more profound and consequent speculation, that overcomes the aporetic moments in Aristotle. Rather, St. Thomas is able to synthesize Aristotle on the basis of his antecedently and independently held theological beliefs. Aristotle, in other words, only gains overarching consistency under St. Thomas's able commentatorial hands, which are consistently guided by faith: "The deeper truth that Aquinas possesses is the knowledge of God as creative pure act and subsistent being, as the infinitely perfect Creator

and absolute initiator, out of nothing, of all being, motion, and time" (220). Rocca substantiates this claim in a magisterial discussion of the way St. Thomas handled Aristotle's proof for God's existence based on motion, creation *ex nihilo*, and the question of the philosophical (non)-demonstrability of the world's eternity. Tucked away in a long footnote we find Rocca's own position: "In my opinion, Aristotle never taught a philosophy of creation, nor did he even possess the proper principles from which he might have deduced it. Instead, Thomas has completely transformed Aristotle's 'principle of motion' into the 'bestower of being'" (229). Needless to say, with this claim Rocca puts himself into opposition with much of traditional Aristotelian Thomism. And on purely genetic-historical grounds, he might even have a point. But genetic-historical grounds are categorically different from proper metaphysical grounds. The former are extrinsic to the speculative act of metaphysical discourse, the latter are intrinsic. While I agree with Rocca's point that faith in God the Creator was the decisive "context of discovery" in which Aquinas read Aristotle's works, I would also want to maintain that his speculative interpretation and development of Aristotle occurs in a completely consistent way based on the formal object of metaphysics itself in the parameters of its proper "context of justification." Hence, while St. Thomas's "transformation" of Aristotle might possibly be ascertained on genetic-historical grounds, an answer to the question whether this transformation amounts to a consistent and compelling metaphysical advance beyond Aristotle's position requires entering proper metaphysical discourse. In short, the larger question opened up by Rocca's third part is one in large part extrinsic to his claims about the practice of judgment constituting the unity of theological analogy. Rather, this question pertains to the pressing problem after the accomplished reconstruction, as successful as it is comprehensive, of the "genuine, unadulterated, historical Aquinas": whether Thomist theology and its entailed metaphysics can be appropriated only hermeneutically in a fundamentally interminable historical mode of ongoing efforts of reconstructive interpretation or whether it is possible, and by now mandated, to retrieve a substantive continuation of the speculative discourse *ad mentem S. Thomae* informed by the respective dual formal objects of *sacra doctrina* and metaphysics. To be sure, Rocca's historically plausible way of construing the relationship between a historically "original" Aristotle and St. Thomas's creative reception of him undoubtedly contributes to an unbroken contemporary trend of "liberating" St. Thomas's crucial theological insights from their alleged Babylonian captivity in the fetters of an irretrievably outdated Aristotelianism. And, of course, these theological truths are per se in no need of any metaphysical underpinning—Aristotelian,

Platonic, or otherwise. This is always important to remember, and St. Thomas would be the first to do so (*ST* I, q. 1, a. 6, ad 3; and a. 8, ad 2). However, St. Thomas's unique and lasting contribution to theology (quite different in that regard from the theologians of the earlier patristic period) was to contemplate the theological truths in such a way that their deepest understanding was fostered by and ultimately coincided with a true metaphysical analysis of the world: in short, the formal object of metaphysics being an integral component in the elucidation and defense of the knowledge received by way of the formal object of theology. Rocca's genetic-historical reconstruction, as nuanced, comprehensive, and astute as it is, however, tends to sever the one from the other. So the crucial theological truths come to hang strangely, un-Thomistically mid-air, held aloft by a somewhat Augustinian/Barthian "from aboveness," in their retrieved core ultimately unencumbered and unsupported by a proper metaphysical argumentation operating "from below."

IV

The fourth part, "The Divine Names," is the shortest but brings home the arguments of the preceding parts. First, Rocca offers a lucid account of Aquinas's positive theology of the Divine Names, stretching from the *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum* via the *De potentia* to the famous question 13 in the *prima pars* of the *Summa theologiae*. "The substantial, proper, and analogical divine names are predicated primarily of God as regards the absolute perfection they signify, for God *is* the perfection in an infinite manner and causes the participated perfection in creatures" (329). The concluding chapter on the distinction between the reality signified and the manner of signification brings to closure Rocca's central thesis on analogy—drawing here especially upon the prior work of William Hill and the early Edward Schillebeeckx:

Analogy comes to pass when the mind predicates the name and its meaning of God in an act of judgment claiming a truth about the holy darkness of God, which transcends anything the concept can intuitively grasp on its own. . . . The truth of the judgment is what makes us realize that the concept, *as used but not as conceived*, has been extended beyond the creaturely realm. We never really know in a clear conceptual fashion what a divine name might mean for God, and whatever we do know about such a name is always a consequence of the judgments we have already made about God. (350)

Since in Aquinas the analogical nature of divine predication and the use of the *res/modus* distinction are matters of judgment instead of concept formation, the danger of the "common core of univocity" is

avoided. His theological analogy depends not on a more profound conceptualization but on a recognition of the truth about God. (351)

I regard Rocca's account of the analogical nature of divine predication as a correct and moreover succinct reading of Aquinas. Rocca indeed successfully avoids the danger of the "common core of univocity" by squarely placing the *res/modus* distinction into the realm of logic by making it a matter of predication that is ultimately based on faith, on the recognition of the truth about God that does not directly and integrally depend on the knowledge of God by way of creatures. But here the question arises whether Rocca—in order to avoid the rightly dreaded "common core of univocity"—has poured out the baby with the bathwater. While "the *act of signifying* goes further than the *ratio nominis*," as Schillebeeckx rightly insists, both the act of signifying and the *ratio nominis* ultimately depend on the analogy of participation in being. Whatever is predicated of God according to this analogy must be understood as indeed a knowledge of God, even though it remains a knowledge of God by way of God's creatures. It seems to me that the predication in the act of judgment always presupposes the analogy of being and all the concept formations entailed in it. The conceptualization inherent to the analogy of participation in being constitutes an indispensable vehicle for a recognition of the truth about God. While theological analogy as the practice of judgments is in no way limited to the scope of the analogy of being, the former always comes by way of the latter as grace always comes by way of being.

V

Rocca's book is an impressive achievement of stupendous scholarship and lucid analysis. It proffers an excellent reconstruction of St. Thomas's thought that deepens our understanding of his theology at crucial points of contention and that sets a high mark to be reached by alternative Thomist accounts in the tradition of Cajetan. A magisterial contribution to Thomistic studies, Rocca's work will be the foremost study on St. Thomas's theological epistemology in general and on analogy in particular for years to come. Rocca clearly presupposes and draws upon the strong tradition of historical Aquinas research in the wake of Martin Grabmann and Marie-Dominique Chenu, but under the surface of his genetic-historical method one can clearly sense a renewed interest in the normative "so what" question on the other side of an exhaustive and at points exhausting historical reconstruction of the "authentic" Aquinas. However, the adopted method does not allow Rocca to transition substantively into the normative and

speculative mode of inquiry constitutive of the theological and metaphysical discourse proper and characteristic of St. Thomas.

Nevertheless, Rocca *is* passionately interested in and committed to the theological substance of St. Thomas's thought and the entailed practice of analogical judgment. Such a return to a reconstruction of St. Thomas's theology in light of its proper formal object and with an eye to its ongoing contemporary relevance is warmly welcomed. The return to speculative theology proper, however, also brings back the notorious question of how the formal object of theology and the formal object of metaphysics relate to each other and whether it is advisable in general as well as in the particular case of St. Thomas to reconstruct theological substance and practice in light of the former, unmediated by and only contingently related to the speculative exigencies of the latter. In other words, the specter of the long-standing but lately derided commentatorial tradition of Aristotelian Thomism looms as the unaddressed "other" on the margins of Rocca's genetic-historical discourse. While Rocca displays an impressive command of the best current historical scholarship (internationally) on the Aristotelian and neo-Platonic strands in Aquinas's thought, his reconstructive discourse remains in large part extrinsic to the substantive metaphysical issues preoccupying St. Thomas in his encounter with Aristotelian and neo-Platonic texts. In consequence and in comparison to Montagnes, Rocca's Aquinas displays less than his full speculative, metaphysical force, which consists largely in his compelling integration of neo-Platonic elements into an unmitigated Aristotelian framework and hence thereby properly and successfully expanding Aristotle's metaphysics of substance on its own grounds into a metaphysics of *esse*.

It is never a good practice to enlarge an already-large volume; however, the book ends rather abruptly. While a convincing reconstruction is one thing, reimplementation is another. How can and should St. Thomas's theological epistemology and his practice of analogical judgment inform contemporary theology? A return in a concluding chapter to the discussion with the Protestant theologians Barth, Pannenberg, and Jüngel, as well as the Catholic theologians and philosophers Gustav Söhngen and Erich Przywara, would have helped to more forcefully make Aquinas's ongoing relevance bear upon the dominant discussions of twentieth-century theology. Rocca opens the door wide but remains on the threshold. Hopefully, in his next book he will offer a more expansive engagement of the twentieth-century criticisms of analogy as well as the presently widespread infatuation with an unmitigated apophaticism.

However, even in its present form, Rocca's work offers a salutary antidote to a number of important contemporary readings of St. Thomas's

thought. For one, his reconstruction achieves a most desirable mean between two lines of thought: Thomists in conversation primarily with contemporary analytic philosophy of religion (and its strong Scotist/Suarezian undercurrent of conceptual univocism in God-talk), such as Eleonore Stump,⁷ whose philosophical doctrine of God—despite gestures to analogical predication—makes God all too knowable; and Thomists deeply influenced by the subtle adoption of Wittgenstein's late philosophy (in Cornelius Ernst's, Herbert McCabe's, and Fergus Kerr's versions of Thomism), such as the early David Burrell⁸ and Denys Turner⁹ promoting an apophaticism that makes God all too unknowable. Moreover, and now in agreement with Denys Turner as well as Aristotelian Thomism (to mention just Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, Jacques Maritain, and Ralph McInerny) and in marked contrast to Radical Orthodoxy as well the reading of Aquinas advanced by Henri de Lubac and other representatives of the "nouvelle théologie," Rocca rightly emphasizes the central role the philosophical proofs for God's existence play in Aquinas's way of "doing theology," a role that can be disregarded only at the grave peril of seriously distorting the overall coherence of his project.

Most important, for contemporary Catholic theology Rocca's book constitutes a salient invitation to return to a serious consideration of St. Thomas's unique balance between positive and negative theology; the ongoing mandate for Catholic theological epistemology should be nothing short of this balance. While Cardinal Léger's concern about an *ecclesia unius doctoris*¹⁰ might have been apropos in the heyday of neo-scholasticism, the present state of Catholic theology seems more likely to conjure up the specter of an *ecclesia nullius doctoris* (Nikolaus Lobkowicz). Moreover, while legitimate and substantive objections to his reconstruction of Aquinas's account can be raised from other Thomists or, for that matter, Scotist or Suarezian perspectives, Rocca's study nevertheless serves as a salutary reminder of the level of conceptual sophistication to which the Catholic theological tradition is committed in order to truly and faithfully think

⁷ Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2003).

⁸ David B. Burrell, CSC, *Aquinas: God and Action* (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979).

⁹ Denys Turner, *Faith, Reason, and the Existence of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

¹⁰ At the Second Vatican Council, Cardinal Léger exclaimed, "*Vae Ecclesiae unius doctoris!*" as in the course of the council discussion on section 15 of the decree *Optatam totius* on the theological education of priests several bishops pressed for the explicit mentioning of Thomas Aquinas instead of leaving the matter with the more general rendition of a *patrimonium philosophicum perenniter validum*. See *Acta synodalia*, pt. III, vol. VII, 709.

about, speak of, and most importantly proclaim the Triune God, Creator, and Redeemer. Theology has to a large degree abandoned the commitment to search for and contemplate the truth (singular!); consequently it is progressively eroded by a secular as well as ecclesial culture that feeds on the fast-food of intellectual consumer choice and the pragmatic concerns of pastoral expediency. Only the increasing submission to the rigor and labor of speculative theological contemplation—to which Rocca untiringly gestures beyond the confines of his genetic-historical reading—will help avert the danger of the ever-increasing banalization of Christian God-talk in the very discipline of theology itself. **N·V**