

Analogical Synthesis: An Impossible Project?

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IN THE EFFORT of bringing together Athens and Jerusalem, philosophy and theology, the doctrine of analogy has played a decisive role for centuries, at least in the Catholic tradition.¹ If we agree that both—philosophy and theology—have something to say about the ultimate reality of that we call God, it is crucial to formulate some rules for their respective languages. Analogy has been used to convey such rules. Yet, its importance has been much more far-reaching. The search for a *via media* between the univocal and the equivocal in language describing the relationship of man to God helped to avoid bringing Him down to the level of our understanding, on one hand, and placing Him absolutely beyond the reach of our intellect, on the other. Analogy assisted in this way by staying on the narrow path between various sorts of pantheistic deification of the world that deny God of His existence, on the one side, and attempts at an absolutization of God that would deprive the world of its autonomy, on the other. Or to put it in a positive way, analogy was a means of keeping the transcendence of God without divesting creation of its autonomous meaning.²

A philosopher should stop here. But for a theologian, the most important step remains. If the above description of the role of analogy

¹ I want to express my deep gratitude to Gillian Lenoir, Bryan Kromholtz, O.P., Matthew Levering, Anselm Ramelow, O.P., and David Tracy for their valuable comments on this paper and linguistic help.

² See Thomas Joseph White, “Introduction: The *Analogia entis* Controversy and Its Contemporary Significance,” in *The Analogy of Being: Invention of the Antichrist or the Wisdom of God?* ed. Thomas Joseph White (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), 1–31, esp. 6–7.

is correct, the doctrine explaining how human words may help us to discover the created and human similarities to God without compromising His always greater dissimilarity must lead us to His last and definitive Word—Christ. It is in Christ, whose humanity became the tool of divinity, that the logic of analogy reaches its ultimate confirmation and completion.³ It is therefore no wonder that some theologians consider the teaching on analogy as one of the most important consequences of the tenets proclaimed solemnly at the Church Councils⁴ and that, for some of them, this doctrine has become the most pithy synthesis of the Catholic identity: a tenet upon which the Catholic understanding of God and the world stands or falls.⁵

Unfortunately, the last century was not so kind to such projects. Various kinds of scientism promoted univocal discourse as the only possible mode of reliable cognition. If there was some openness to other ways of acquiring knowledge (as in the work of Heidegger or Jaspers), analogy was rejected in favor of equivocation, purportedly to suitably safeguard the apophatic dimension of our approach to the ultimate reality, but in fact accommodating the latent agnosticism of contemporary culture. Finally, the fashion for deconstruction in the second half of the twentieth century did not privilege any synthetic attempts.

Yet, if we agree that the doctrine of analogy has (or even might have) its role to play according to the lines mentioned above in spite of all the difficulties, we should consider it as a theme of philosophical and theological research that cannot be abandoned or marginalized. In this paper, I want to assess the necessary conditions for such a consideration. At the beginning, I will present the classical doctrine on analogy as concisely as I can, taking into account the essential

³ Erich Przywara, *Analogia entis: Metaphysics: Original Structure and Universal Rhythm*, trans. John R. Betz and David Bentley Hart (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 299–302 and 304–5.

⁴ David Bentley Hart connects analogy to the Council of Nicea (325) in his “The Destiny of Christian Metaphysics: Reflections on the *Analogia Entis*,” in White, *The Analogy of Being*, 395–410, esp. 406–410. Przywara (*Analogia entis*, 231–237) connects it to the teaching of the Council of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215).

⁵ See Erich Przywara, “The Scope of Analogy as a Fundamental Catholic Form,” in *Analogia entis*, 348–399. In the context of Thomistic discussion, a similarly ardent conviction about the relevance of the topic can be seen in Steven A. Long, *Analogia Entis: On the Analogy of Being, Metaphysics and the Act of Faith* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011).

differences in its interpretation (first through third sections). I will focus on the classical doctrine, with Aquinas as the key point of reference because Thomas attempted to use analogy as the main tool in the discourse on the divine names.⁶ After this presentation, I will focus on a selection of contemporary criticisms (fourth section) in order to formulate the main desiderata concerning future research on analogy (fifth section).

What is Analogy About?

Analogy is a doctrine that emerged to express two separate although sometimes overlapping phenomena: (1) nongeneric likeness of things and (2) the neither univocal nor equivocal association in meaning. The example of the first may be the similarity we find between the feathers of a bird and the scales of a reptile. Without a doubt, there is something similar between them. But we have neither a word nor a concept to express it. To spell out this similarity, we need to describe their functions and internal relationships according to the model “as the feathers are to a bird, the scales are to a reptile.” This phenomenon leads us from reality to language. In the case of the second phenom-

⁶ The bibliography of the topic is vast. The most significant works during the last decades are the following ones (in the case of the authors who wrote several books on the topic I mention only the most recent or the most directly connected to it): Eric Lionel Mascall, *Existence and Analogy: A Sequel to “He Who Is”* (London: Longmans, Green, 1949), 92–121; Hampus Lyttkens, *The Analogy between God and the World: An Investigation of Its Background and Interpretation of Its Use by Thomas of Aquino*, trans. A. Poignant (Uppsala, SE: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1952); Mieczysław Albert Krąpiec, *Teoria analogii bytu* (Lublin, PL: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 1959); George P. Klubertanz, *St. Thomas Aquinas on Analogy: A Textual Analysis and Systematic Synthesis* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1960); Bernard Montagnes, *The Doctrine of the Analogy of Being according to Thomas Aquinas*, trans. E. M. Macierowski (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2004); James F. Anderson, *Reflections on the Analogy of Being* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967); David B. Burrell, *Analogy and Philosophical Language* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), 1973; Ralph McInerny, *Aquinas and Analogy* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996); Gregory P. Rocca, *Speaking the Incomprehensible God: Thomas Aquinas on the Interplay of Positive and Negative Theology* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 77–195; Long, *Analogia Entis*; Reinhard Hütter, “Attending to the Wisdom of God—from Effect to Cause, from Creation to God: A *Relecture* of the Analogy of Being according to Thomas Aquinas,” in White, *The Analogy of Being*, 209–245; Bruce D. Marshall, “Christ and the End of Analogy,” in White, *The Analogy of Being*, 280–313.

enon we move in the opposite direction. Let us consider the two following sentences:

1. Mark is healthy.
2. Mark's food is healthy.

The word "healthy" used in either context cannot be qualified as a univocal term. In the case of a univocal term, the definition should be absolutely the same in the both cases. For example, we could use the term "filthy" in both sentences in such a univocal way. Neither is it a case of equivocation. In equivocation, there is a radical divergence of definitions: the term "healthy" is not used as the word "sap" can be used to describe a liquid in a plant or for someone who is naïve. With these two uses of "healthy," there is a clear connection between two meanings founded in a real relationship: healthy food is one of the reasons for Mark's good health. So, the meaning in the second sentence is derived from the meaning in the first sentence, or putting it in a more formal way, the description of the meaning of "healthy" in the second sentence should contain a reference to the meaning of the word in the first sentence according to the following model: "healthy said of food means that it is one of the reasons for the healthy being of Mark/man/animal."⁷

These two phenomena were noticed already by Aristotle.⁸ The reflection on them was undertaken over the next centuries by the Neoplatonic and Arabic commentators.⁹ But it was Aquinas whose work created the main basis for the interpretations and quarrels about analogy over the last centuries.

Aquinas did not try to formulate a developed doctrine on analogy.¹⁰ Rather, he treated analogy as a quite necessary presupposition,

⁷ In this introductory part, I am indebted to Joshua P. Hochschild, *The Semantics of Analogy: Rereading Cajetan's De Nominum Analogia* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 1–4.

⁸ See, for example, *Posterior Analytics* 2.14.98a20 ff., *Metaphysics* 5.6.1016b30 ff., and *Nichomachean Ethics* 1.4.1096b27–29. See also Joseph Owens, *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian "Metaphysics": A Study in the Greek Background of Medieval Thought* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1978), 116–125; Marie-Dominique Philippe, "Analogon and Analogia in the Philosophy of Aristotle," *The Thomist* 33 (1969): 1–74.

⁹ See Alain de Libera, "Les sources gréco-arabes de la théorie médiévale de l'analogie de l'être," *Les Études Philosophiques* 3.4 (1989): 319–345, and Joël Lonfat, "Archéologie de la notion d'analogie d'Aristote à saint Thomas d'Aquin," *Archives Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Age* 71 (2004): 35–107.

¹⁰ The most important texts on analogy written by Aquinas are the following

although he did not interpret it always in the same way. What is, however, the most important is that his interest in analogy was very precisely focused: he needed it to provide a background for the usage of our terms for God. It is therefore relevant to understand the conclusion of Aquinas's interpretation to be able to grasp the pattern and internal dynamic of his doctrine.

In the *Prima Pars* of the *Summa theologiae*, one can see the conclusion of Thomas's doctrine very clearly. In the discussion with Moses Maimonides and Pseudo-Dionysius, Thomas says that the names expressing the perfections, like wisdom, are predicated on God not only in a causal way (*causaliter*), but in a substantial (*substantialiter*) or essential (*essentialiter*) way.¹¹ In other words, Aquinas does not agree that when we use the names of perfections to refer to God this usage means only that God is the primary cause of the perfection that we find in the created world. His position is much stronger: we mean not only that God is the first cause of the perfection, but also that there is a similarity between the "content" (*substantia*, *essentia*) of the perfection that we know in the created world and the perfection existing in God. Yet this inexorably positive claim is at once balanced with a counterweight: although our perfections applied to God really point to the "content" of the perfection in God, we must not forget that the way of signifying (*modus significandi*) of our words remains, and will remain forever, created, and thus limited. Because of that, we will never be able to grasp a perfection as divine, that is, as realized in the uncreated way. In short: our words, like "wisdom," point to the divine essence, and we know that there is some similarity between created and uncreated wisdom on the essential level; nevertheless, because of the abyss between the created and the uncreated, we will never be able to comprehend the nature of this similarity or, consequently, the nature of the perfection in God.¹²

It is with this doctrine as the setting that Thomas develops his

ones: *In I sent.* d. 35, q. 1, a. 4; *De veritate*, q. 2, a. 11; *Summa contra gentiles* (hereafter, *SCG*) I, ch. 34; *Compendium theologiae* I, ch. 27; *De potentia* q. 7, a. 7; *Summa theologiae* (hereafter, *ST*) I, q. 13, a. 5. The quasi-complete set of texts is presented in Klubertanz, *St. Thomas Aquinas on Analogy*, 163–293.

¹¹ See *ST* I, q. 13, a. 2.

¹² See *ST* I, q. 13, a. 3 and 6. For the commentary, see Rocca, *Speaking the Incomprehensible God*, 304–305; Thierry-Dominique Humbrecht, *Théologie négative et noms divins chez saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: J. Vrin, 2005), 279–281 and 290–293; Rudi te Velde, *Aquinas on God: The "Divine Science" of the Summa Theologiae* (Aldershot, UK, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 106–107.

understanding of analogy. This context having been clarified, we may turn to the different types of analogy used by Aquinas. There are different classifications. I will present only the three types that are necessary to construe the framework of his interpretation:¹³

1. Analogy of proportionality (*analogia plurium ad plura, analogia proportionalitatis*).
2. Analogy of attribution of two to one (*analogia duarum ad tertium*).
3. Analogy of attribution of one to another (*analogia unum ad alterum*).

The analogy of proportionality is well illustrated in the aforementioned example: “as the feathers are to a bird, the scales are to a reptile,” although its classical example has been for centuries: “as understanding exhibits a thing to the soul, so seeing exhibits a thing to an animated body.”¹⁴ This kind of analogy has four elements and the structure of the mathematical proportion $A:B::C:D$. It is worth mentioning that this structure underlies many metaphors. Saying that the lion is a king of animals, we spell out the figure of thinking “as a king is to a human community, so is a lion to a community of animals.”

The analogy of two to one has its most traditional example in the use of the term “healthy”: we can predicate this word of a medicine, urine, and an animal.¹⁵ But we understand that predicating “healthy” of a medicine or of urine depends on the predicating “healthy” of an animal. It is only an animal that may be named “healthy” in a way that is proper or intrinsic, that is, concerning its internal characteristics. A medicine or food may be called “healthy” only because of different extrinsic relationships to the health of an animal—a medicine is a *cause* of it and urine is a *sign*.

The analogy of one to another is a subtype of the previous analogy, but in its case, we limit the scope of our attention to only two elements. Although one may use the previous example of health limiting it to two elements so as to illustrate this kind of analogy (a healthy animal and healthy urine or a healthy animal and a healthy medicament), the classic example of this analogy became the relationship between the being of substance and the being of accident.

¹³ And I will use the terminology most commonly used in the Thomistic tradition.

¹⁴ See, for example, Thomas de Vio Cardinal Cajetan, *De nominum analogia*, c. 3 and 23, and Cajetan, *Scripta philosophica*, ed. Paul N. Zammit (Rome: Angelicum, 1934), 24.

¹⁵ See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 2.2.1003a33–b4.

One may wonder whether it was necessary to introduce the last subtype as a separate category. However, in fact, it is very instructive to grasp the reason for doing so. In the analogy *duarum ad tertium*, there are two elements referred to the third. Because of this, a precipitous analysis may conclude that there is some common third term (*tertium quid*) applied to the other two terms: we forge a common content of meaning on the basis of the health of an animal and we apply it later to urine and medicines. Yet, such an interpretation would dangerously approach the reduction of analogy to univocation. Limiting the analysis to two elements helps bring to light that requiring a third term as a common base for analogy must be actually excluded.¹⁶

There is yet still more to it. I mentioned that the classic example of this type of analogy is the relationship between the being of the substance and the being of the accident. This example was not chosen by chance. Let us notice the obvious dependence of the latter on the former: it is only thanks to the substance that the accidents have their being. This causal dependence is crucial. It makes it unnecessary to look for some other element “responsible” for some similarity between them. What is equally important to note—although this aspect might also be illustrated by the example of health—is that the relationship between the substance and the accidents helps us to understand that the analogy *unum ad alterum* is not symmetrical. It is the substance that has the fullness of being, while an accident only takes part in the being of the substance. In the words of the scholastics, being should be predicated of the substance and accidents *per prius et posterius*—*primarily* of the substance, *secondarily* of the accidents.

This description of the three kinds of analogy, as presented above, provokes three observations. Firstly, it must be stressed that the reflection on analogy is not a purely linguistic doctrine. In the light of what has been said, it is obvious that the metaphysical background is at least equally important, if not more important, in providing its decisive elements. Secondly, a careful examination of the different types of analogy will quickly make us construe that the distinction between them is not disjunctive. If we focus on the first and third types, we can see that they do not exclude each other. The relationship “being of the substance—being of an accident” may be translated into a relationship of two proportions according to the A:B::C:D model: “as being is to the substance, being is to an accident.” One can perhaps object that, in the example given above, A and C became equal (we speak

¹⁶ See SCG I, ch. 34, and Montagnes, *Doctrine of the Analogy of Being*, 71.

about “being” twice). But the truth is that we are speaking here about two profoundly different natures: the being of a substance cannot be equaled with the being of an accident. So, even though we shifted from $A:B::C:D$ to $A:B::A':D$, it is still the proportional pattern we use. Obviously, the recognition that neither pattern excludes the other does not mean that they stress the same aspects or that one of them may be easily reduced to the other.¹⁷ Thirdly, we should understand that a reflection on the relationship between substance and accidents was vital to medieval thinkers, since it allowed them to prepare the necessary tools to approach the relationship between the Creator and His creatures. These two kinds of relationship are, without a doubt, not the same. The first (substance—accidents) is horizontal, allowing us to remain in the categorical order. Hence it is called *predicamental*. The second is vertical, obliging us to leave the predicamental order. Hence it is called *transcendental*. Yet they have a similar structure.¹⁸

The Background of the Differences

This quite neutral, if not serene, doctrine has provoked many (sometimes very emotional) disagreements through the centuries. What is the reason for this?

As we can see, there are two different kinds of analogy that are used to describe the God—creation relationship: the analogy of proportionality and the analogy of attribution in its version *unum ad alterum* (from now I shall refer to the second one just as “analogy of attribution”). The obvious question that may be raised in such a situation concerns the choice between them: which of them is the right one to describe the relationship between the Creator and His creatures?

Unfortunately, the reference to the work of Aquinas does not bring an unambiguous answer. Thomas seems to have changed his mind on this issue. In the text of the *De veritate*, written between 1256 and 1259, he consistently supports the use of the analogy of proportionality in this context.¹⁹ But in the posterior works, with the famous

¹⁷ See Hochschild, *The Semantics of Analogy*, 112–113.

¹⁸ Albert the Great spelled out these differences as the differences between the analogy of the philosopher (substance and accidents) and the analogy of the theologian (Creature and creatures). See, for example, St. Albert, *In I Sent.* d. 8, a. 7; see *Super I Sententiarum*, in *Opera omnia*, vol. 25 (Paris: Borgnet, 1893), 228–229. See also *ibid.*, d. 46, a. 17 (Borgnet ed., 26:456–259). More details and references on the position of Albert may be found in Montagnes, *Doctrine of the Analogy of Being*, 94–95n20.

¹⁹ *De veritate*, q. 2, a. 11. Montagnes saw only one later text, in which Thomas

texts from the *Summa theologiae* (1267–1273) at the summit, he will be equally firmly inclined to use the analogy of attribution as his main tool.²⁰ He does not explain his motives.

Fortunately, thanks to the historical studies undertaken at the turn of the 1950s and 1960s, we have now a very probable reconstruction of Aquinas's thought process. The change was due to his increasing understanding of causality and being. At the beginning, Thomas put the accent in his description of causality on formal/exemplar causality. Because of that, the idea of likeness expressed by the adage *omne agens agit sibi simile* ("every agent makes something similar to itself") becomes crucial. The effect must first of all be in some way *similar* to its cause. But with time, writing his *Summa contra gentiles* (1259–64), Aquinas became more and more convinced that causality—that is, the communication of being—should be understood much more as the communication of actuality than the communication of likeness. A cause should be seen much more as bringing about being real (*in actu*) than as imprinting similarity. Because of that new insight Thomas shifted his position to prioritizing efficient causality in his metaphysical description of causes. This change of emphasis from formal/exemplar causality to efficient causality was decisive for the understanding of analogy. In the *De veritate*, Thomas looks for a type of analogy that may defend the divine transcendence and that will not suggest that creatures share in the same form, or even in a similar form, with God: between God's essence and created essences there is an abyss, a difference of kind and not merely a difference of degree of perfection, as if God were merely the first (although most perfect) being in a hierarchy of forms that is common to God and His creatures. The analogy of proportionality according to which one establishes only a similarity of proportions seemed to Aquinas much more appropriate to rule out a possible misunderstanding of this kind. Nevertheless, when his metaphysical description of causality changed and the danger of an overestimation of likeness in the analysis of causality diminished significantly, Thomas moved to the analogy of attribution. He preferred the analogy

seems to prefer the analogy of proportionality, and which is his commentary on *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1096b26–30 (I, 7; Leonine edition, 47:26–27), but he interprets it as a presentation of Aristotle's opinion (*Doctrine of the Analogy of Being*, 52–54n36). The turning point in the interpretation of analogy was probably *De veritate*, q. 23, a. 7, ad 9. See also Rocca, *Speaking the Incomprehensible God*, 121–123.

²⁰ ST I, q. 13, a. 5; SCG I, ch. 34; *De potentia*, q. 7, a. 5 and a. 7, resp.

of attribution in his later works because it articulates more clearly the unity between the two analogical elements and it establishes clearly the hierarchy between them.²¹

Such is the current state of our understanding of the evolution in Aquinas's thought. However, we must not forget that the studies on the evolution of the *divus Thomas* are mainly an invention of the last century. Before that, authors were not unaware of the changes in his positions, but it was not an issue directly and systematically addressed. In such circumstances, the two different kinds of analogy easily gave the background for two competing interpretations. Cajetan became an emblematic figure favoring the analogy of proportionality, whereas the analogy of attribution found its main patron in Suarez.²²

Yet, it was especially the Cajetanian interpretation, expressed in the most systematic and comprehensive way in the *De nominum analogia*, that influenced the history of studies on analogy. Hailed as the best commentator of Aquinas, Cajetan was, in this area, either blindly followed or, more recently, truculently scourged for his unfaithfulness to the Master. To tell the truth, his project was, in its purpose, different from the one undertaken by Aquinas. In the confrontation with the rising cult of univocation provoked by Duns Scotus's interpretation, Cajetan wanted to prove, in possibly the most rigorous manner, that an analogical concept of being may be a reasonable and reliable *via media* between univocation and equivocation.²³

The Reasons for the Disparate Interpretations

It is not my goal to enter into the complex history of the classical doctrine of analogy. I would prefer to focus on the main reasons that kept the different options alive. It is still instructive to understand what was at stake.

Let us begin with the analogy of proportionality. I have already

²¹ This is the interpretation given by Montagnes (*Doctrine of the Analogy of Being*, 37–43 and 75–79). The first precise and extensive historical investigation that noticed such an evolution was Klubertanz, *St. Thomas Aquinas on Analogy*, 94–100. A new perspective was opened by Santiago M. [Jacobus] Ramirez, “En torno a un famoso texto de santo Tomás sobre la analogía,” *Sapientia* 8 (1953): 166–192. The interpretation proposed by Klubertanz and Montagnes (especially) is contested by Steven A. Long, *Analogia Entis*, 2.

²² See the concise introduction to this issue in Klubertanz, *St. Thomas Aquinas on Analogy*, 7–12.

²³ See Hochschild, *The Semantics of Analogy*, 39–44. On the different interpretations of the relationship of Cajetan's work to Aquinas's work, see *ibid.*, 17–32.

mentioned that it was chosen by Thomas in the *De veritate* because of its capacity to defend the divine transcendence. In fact, if we analyze the example “as man’s being is to a man, God’s being is to God” or “as human wisdom is to a man, divine wisdom is to God,” we will immediately notice that, according to this pattern, we avoid putting into a direct relationship the aspects chosen to characterize God and man. What we relate are two different structures: the relationship “being to man,” on the one side, and the relationship “being to God,” on the other. Such a pattern safeguards far better the divine otherness than if we put the mentioned aspects into a direct relationship: “divine being versus human being.” Equally importantly, a relationship between two structures opens the way for attempts at a formal description of analogy as isomorphic relationship.²⁴ And if the chosen aspects belong to the internal characteristics of the related elements, as in the examples given, the fruit of reasoning is the establishing of their *intrinsic* characteristics. In other words, the analogy of proportionality seems to teach us about God in a humble, precise, but intrinsic way.

However, the analogy of proportionality also has important limits. In the first place, just as in the case of mathematical proportion, in the case of analogy of proportionality we need to know three terms to be able to know the fourth. Are we really able to know one of the terms concerning God? There are various strategies for answering this difficulty.²⁵ The most obvious is just to waive the limits of the perfection analogically compared (being or wisdom) and make them infinite in our understanding.²⁶ Because they are not, as such, necessarily limited by a created frame of reference (as for example the perfection of being a skillful driver would be), such a step seems to be possible and coherent. Unfortunately, even if we admit a possibility of a solution for this difficulty—the one that, in my opinion, is conditioned by the endorsement of Aquinas’s metaphysics—we then have to face the other and even more important problem. The analogy of proportionality proposes an interpretative pattern to relate two compared elements, but it does not give us a reason for relating them to each other, and

²⁴ See I. M. Bocheński, “On Analogy,” in *Inquiries into Medieval Philosophy: A Collection in Honor of Francis P. Clarke*, ed. James F. Ross (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1971), 99–122, esp. 116–117. On this approach, see also Burrell, *Analogy and Philosophical Language*, 15–17 (critical), and Hochschild, *The Semantics of Analogy*, 150–151, 176 (positive).

²⁵ On this issue see, e.g., Mascall, *Existence and Analogy*, 109–12, and Hochschild, *The Semantics of Analogy*, 129–31.

²⁶ Long, *Analogia Entis*, 80.

what is more, it is unable to explain the character of this connection.²⁷ In other terms, it gives us the explanation of *how* to use analogy, but it does not answer the question *why* it is possible.

The analogy of attribution provides quite the opposite. Applied to the case of God and His creatures (for example, “divine being–human being” or “divine wisdom–human wisdom”), it is understood as an articulation of the causal relationship between them. In this way, it allows one to offer a very solid and self-evident answer to the question of *why* the analogical connection between the elements referred to each other is possible. Alas, it is a much less perfect tool if we want to use it to convey the explanation *how* to make use of the above-mentioned relationship to understand something about God. Because of the simplicity of the explanatory structure, there are, in its case, several shortages and a constant risk of misunderstanding. Firstly, using this kind of analogy, one may be tempted to reduce God to the same order as creatures. Without a doubt, Aquinas’s metaphysics, because it holds God to be *ipsum esse subsistens* and holds the relationship between God and creatures to be asymmetrical, provides the necessary background for avoiding such an error. But the proper use of the analogy of attribution is directly dependent on the awareness of this metaphysical framework. Secondly, in the case of the cause that does not produce effects generically the same with its nature—as for example the sun giving growth to the plants—it is impossible to predicate on the basis of the effect something that intrinsically belongs to the cause. Were such predication possible, it would mean, according to a famous argument by Aquinas, that God, in his nature, is corporeal because he is the first cause of the body.²⁸ However it has been contested and discussed over the last centuries,²⁹ the analogy of attribution, understood in its proper sense as articulating only the causal relationship, can provide, in my opinion, only an *extrinsic* characteristic of God. Now, if we apply the analogy of attribution to one of the transcendentals (for example: “the divine *being*–the created *being*”), and if we take into account the background of Aquinas’s metaphysics, our understanding of the perfec-

²⁷ This difficulty is presented as a problem of infinite regress in Mascall, *Existence and Analogy*, 104–108, and as a vicious circle in Hochschild, *The Semantics of Analogy*, 131–134.

²⁸ *ST I*, q. 13, a. 2, resp.

²⁹ For the short presentation of this discussion starting with the position of Suarez and for the references to his work, see Hochschild, *The Semantics of Analogy*, 115–117 with the footnotes.

tions will become intrinsic. But in such a case, our understanding is not intrinsic on behalf of the internal logic of the analogy of attribution, but on the basis of the metaphysical context in which we use the analogy of attribution. Thirdly, we should remember that the structure of this analogy is unsymmetrical—that is, one of the elements has the referred perfection in the complete way (*per prius*), and the second one only by derivation (*per posterius*), like in the case of “healthy” referred to an animal and a medicine or urine, or “being” predicated about a substance and its accidents. If we apply such a structure to the relationship between God and the creatures, we must recognize that, according to the logic of the analogy of attribution, the perfections we want to refer both to God and to creatures have their complete meaning only in God. Pushed to its conclusion, it might lead to ontologism: God would become a mediatory *ratio* in our understanding of created perfections; that is, in order to use meaningfully our terms that express created perfections, we would need to have a previous understanding of divine perfections. Obviously, such a conclusion may be avoided if we remember the difference between the ontological and epistemological order: what is the first in the former may be the last in the latter. An ontological priority does not entail necessarily the epistemological one. Nevertheless, it must be noticed that, in this case, we need, once again, the explicit intervention of a broader metaphysical doctrine to avoid some serious—at least in the eyes of a Thomist—consequences of the usage of attribution as the key for understanding analogy.

What has already been said will probably be sufficient to help us understand that each of these doctrines is in some way incomplete and that they need each other. The analogy of attribution allows us to understand *why* we can refer the elements to each other, while the analogy of proportionality conveys the method of *how* to proceed in such a way that we may reach some valuable conclusion. Putting it in a different way, the analogy of attribution expresses the background for some similarity between God and creatures, and the analogy of proportionality gives us a safe method to explore the nature of this similarity.³⁰ If they are combined, they enable us to spell out the created similarity to God (the analogy of attribution) without compromising the even bigger dissimilarity due to the divine transcendence (the analogy of proportionality).³¹

³⁰ See Mascall, *Existence and Analogy*, 113–15.

³¹ See Przywara, *Analogia entis*, 234–237, and J. Betz, “Translator’s Introduction,” in *ibid.*, 1–115, esp. 73–74.

I have to confess that such a conciliatory solution satisfies me because I think that the most difficult problems we have to face in the description of the relationship between God and the world in many cases may be solved with a two-sided analysis. Just as we have two eyes to perceive reality, we need sometimes to accept that only two complementary approaches may lead us to solve a difficult philosophical or theological problem.³² But I have to mention that a conciliatory position is impossible for some disciples of Aquinas. Some Thomists consider the two types of analogies as the expressions of two disparate and divergent metaphysical projects, and a choice between them as a radical, far-reaching decision that means either saving or compromising Thomistic thought.

In the eyes of the supporters of the analogy of proportionality as the main tool for discourse about God, the choice of such a tool allows us to establish, in the center of our metaphysical analysis, the Aristotelian distinction between act and potency, prototype of all the proportions we can try to put together in an analogical analysis. Such an option is a confirmation of the solution that allowed the harmonization of the Parmenidean world (finding its expression in the rule of contradiction) with our experience of change: the metaphysical discovery of “potency” showed that there must be another basis for diversity than form and that act does not limit itself. If we adapt such a perspective in our understanding of reality, we keep the existential interpretation of Thomism—namely, that the unlimited *esse* is the absolute perfection—with its various consequences, including, among others, its priority of the analysis of being before the reflection on being created, and consequently its place as a *preambula fidei* that excludes any form of fideism.³³

On the other hand, in the eyes of the supporters of the analogy of attribution, it is only the causal relationship between the Creator and creatures that guarantees the necessary unity for the analogical analysis. Putting it differently and closer to the intentions of the proponents of this position, only the analogy of attribution that is described in terms of causality, or participation understood as communication of act, may be the proper means to articulate the foundational bond between God

³² On the case of the divine will see Michał Paluch, *La profondeur de l'amour. Évolution de la doctrine de la prédestination dans l'oeuvre de saint Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Vrin, 2004), 285–290 and 315.

³³ Long, *Analogia Entis*, 15–17, 26, 102, and 117–119. Long's position is convergent with a position shared by the majority of Thomists before 1960, among them J. F. Anderson, R. Garrigou-Lagrange, M. A. Krąpiec, and J. Maritain.

and creatures. Such a perspective articulates the metaphysics of the degrees of being, which is different from existential Thomism. The difference especially concerns the role of essence. According to the metaphysics of the degrees of being, the role of essence should not be understood as solely negative, as if the essence were only limiting the *esse*. The essence should rather be seen as a formal measure of being that has its perfection and a positive role of specifying *esse*. Such an interpretation attributing more value to the order of essence should help us to refrain from drawing the conclusion that God, described by the famous formula *ipsum esse subsistens*, does not have essence.³⁴ But it seems also to take into account more completely, in its metaphysical description, the variety of the created world.

A Place in the Contemporary Debate?

In spite of the subtleties of this metaphysical discussion, it may be not easy to convince a contemporary philosopher interested in philosophy of religion, or even a contemporary theologian, that the presented solutions remain of relevance today.

As you may have noticed, my presentation of the classical theory of analogy was constructed in the “top-down” order. Presenting Aquinas, I started with the conclusion of his doctrine in order to help us understand what was at stake and to make my explanation clear. I am convinced that such a strategy is not unfair. As I have mentioned before, Aquinas was mainly interested in applying analogy to explain the relationship between God and creatures; he did not focus on a systematic elaboration of the philosophical background. And yet I have to confess that such a choice covers an important lacuna. As far as I know, there is not a comprehensive “bottom-up” presentation of the Thomistic theory of analogy that is related to the contemporary semantic discussion. The scholars interested in Thomism have always been so interested in the complexities of the Thomistic tradition that they have not had time and energy for reformulating the classical theory in the light of contemporary debates. The sole exception—an experimental presentation of the classical teaching in interaction with the Wittgensteinian project—concluded in the refusal to build up a

³⁴ See Montagnes, *La doctrine de l'analogie de l'être d'après Saint Thomas d'Aquin*, 38, 81, 87–88, 109n76, 137–141, and 158–62. The similar accents, although without so radical and far-reaching conclusions, may be found in Hütter, “Attending to the Wisdom of God,” 228–240, and te Velde, *Aquinas on God*, 109–118.

systematic theory.³⁵ In other words, it became more Wittgensteinian than Thomist.

An attempt to propose an explanation of the classical theory that is comprehensive and relevant for the contemporary debate would need to address at least two quite obvious criticisms arising in the contemporary context. Firstly, the classical theory seems to be interested in analyzing separate terms or concepts. Now, even if we put aside the temptation to understand in a quasi-Cartesian way what is inadequate in the case of Aquinas,³⁶ we seem to be very far from the prevailing assumption that it is only a whole sentence that should be the point of departure for a fruitful semantic analysis.³⁷ Secondly, the classical theory seems to vacillate between semantics and metaphysics in such a way that it must be classified by an impartial observer who has no time to become an expert on Thomas as *uncritical*, to say the least, even if not *naïve*. To put it more positively, the relationship between language and reality became more complicated for us than Aquinas's texts on analogy seem to take into account.

In my opinion, the Thomistic tradition has the resources to face both criticisms. In the first case, it was noticed a long time ago that the shift toward the interpretation of analogy on a conceptual level was a move made by Cajetan in the confrontation with the thought of Duns Scotus. The perspective adapted by Thomas was broader: he situated analogical thinking on the level of the "second act" of our mind—composition and division (*compositio et divisio*)—and thus on the level of judgment expressed in a sentence. If we see this larger context of his thought, we understand that, although the analysis of singular terms

³⁵ Burrell, *Analogy and Philosophical Language*, 170: "Aquinas offers no theory of analogy. He does not provide a method whereby one can be sure to speak responsibly of God. He offers strategies based on what he knows of the structure inherent in our language and in certain of its expressions. For the rest, he issues invitations to a quality of self-awareness achieved only in the practice of it." See a critical analysis of Burrell's work, taking into account multiple positive aspects of the project, in Philip A. Rolnick, *Analogical Possibilities: How Words Refer to God* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1993), 97–187.

³⁶ See, for example, McInerney, *Aquinas and Analogy*, 66–70, and John O'Callaghan, *Thomistic Realism and the Linguistic Turn: Toward a More Perfect Form of Existence* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 167–171.

³⁷ James F. Ross, *Portaying Analogy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), ix, 19–27 (I am choosing what is, in my opinion, the crucial element, but Ross's criticism is more developed); and E. J. Ashworth, "Signification and Modes of Signifying in Thirteenth-Century Logic: A Preface to Aquinas on Analogy," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 1 (1991): 39–67, esp. 67.

is an aspect of the classical doctrine that is emphasized, it should be inscribed in a much more “organic” approach carried by the principles of Thomas’s semantics.³⁸ In the second case, it is worth remembering that we can find in Aquinas’s heritage semantic resources that provoked some scholars to try to present his doctrine on analogy as a semantic project.³⁹ I do not think that such an interpretation captures properly the hallmark of Aquinas’s thought, but it is significant that it was possible. Metaphysics does not replace semantics in Thomas’s thought. Aquinas was aware of the different levels of analysis. Yet, it is true that Aquinas was a thinker of his time, of a “metaphysical” era. What he takes for granted needs for us today some additional reflection and justification. It does not mean though that it is wrong or naïve. The strong metaphysical framework of the classical doctrine may become, to say the least, a valuable—intriguing and inspiring—challenge in our “post-metaphysical” era for everybody who wants to investigate how far the language on God may lead.

An Impossible Project?

As one can see, analogy is a powerful means of synthesis. It invites us to articulate the connection between creature and God, logic and metaphysics, and philosophy and theology. Discussions on its different aspects have provoked scholars to reflect on the key philosophical problems for centuries. Nevertheless, if analogy is to play its synthetic role in philosophical and theological reflection today, it needs some reformulation. Now, if such a reformulation is to be convincing and successful, it must be undertaken on many different levels. It is not sufficient today just to present thoroughly the historical record of the discussion, although it is absolutely necessary to be well informed on the history of the past debates. It is not enough just to keep repeating Aquinas’s teaching, even though it is most helpful to take advantage of his lucid metaphysical insights. It is not satisfying to embrace the consequences of the linguistic turn by concentrating solely on semiotic problems, although it would be foolish not to take it into account.

³⁸ Étienne Gilson, *Jean Duns Scot: Introduction à ses positions fondamentales* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1952), 101–102; Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. L. K. Shook (New York: Random House, 1956), 106–109; Burrell, *Analogy and Philosophical Language*, 153–154; Rocca, *Speaking the Incomprehensible God*, 154–195; and Hochschild, *The Semantics of Analogy*, 51–56, 63, and 117.

³⁹ See McNerny, *Aquinas and Analogy*, 162–163, and a similar interpretation in Burrell, *Analogy and Philosophical Language*.

Finally, it would not suffice to focus on the use of analogy in sciences, though it is necessary to take heed of it to make analogy relevant.⁴⁰

The list of all the areas that should be consulted may probably be even longer than history of philosophy and theology, metaphysics, semiotics, and philosophy of sciences (also the arts?). Is it realistic to expect such a multidimensional project to happen?

In the previous centuries, at least up to Hegel, we relied on outstanding individuals to wrestle with such challenges. Today we know very well that such tasks may be possible only for groups of scholars, well organized and committed to the research. Yet, if analogy is really as important as it was for many generations of Catholic philosophers and theologians before us, surely it merits such an interdisciplinary research group. Do I need to add that I would be very happy if Dominicans acted at least as a catalyst for that? N.V

⁴⁰ See, for example, David H. Helman, ed., *Analogical Reasoning: Perspectives of Artificial Intelligence, Cognitive Science, and Philosophy* (Dordrecht, NL: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1988); and Cameron Shelley, *Multiple Analogies in Science and Philosophy* (Amsterdam, NL: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2003).