

WILLIAM P. ALSTON



*Aquinas on Theological Predication:
A Look Backward and a Look Forward*

i

The question of how to understand predicates in their application to God has preoccupied religious thinkers for as long as they have been reflectively aware of the following two facts. (1) The terms we use in speaking of God are taken from our talk of creatures, particularly human beings. That is, we first understand what it is for a human being to make something, to communicate a message, to condemn and to forgive, what it is for a human being to have powers, virtues, and attitudes. Then, on the basis of that understanding, we use such terms to say something of God. (2) God is so fundamentally and so enormously different from human beings and other creatures that it seems impossible for terms to be true of God and of creatures in just the same sense. Hence it would seem that if we are to have any chance of speaking truly about God, the terms we use will have to undergo some change of meaning from their original use in talk about creatures. And just what change is that, and what does it leave us with?

A great variety of positions has been taken on this matter over the course of some two thousand years, and the issues are very much with us today. In this chaotic scene one treatment stands out: that of St. Thomas Aquinas. Because of the exceptional power of his intellect and his sensitivity to many aspects of the problem, Thomas produced an account of unmatched subtlety, complexity, and depth. As I shall be arguing, he attempted to hold together more themes than can comfortably coexist in a single coherent account, and, even inso-

far as it is coherent, his view and the arguments for it are subject to criticism. Still, in our philosophical endeavors we stand on the shoulders of giants, and preeminent among those giants on this topic is St. Thomas. There can be no better way to advance our understanding of this issue than to work through his treatment and use what we learn therefrom in our attempts to move forward.

A word about sources. My discussion focuses on the explicit discussion of this problem in the two *Summas*, the *Summa contra gentiles* (SCG) and the *Summa theologiae* (ST). These sections represent Thomas's most extensive mature discussion of the topic. We must remember, however, that much of Thomas's treatment of fundamental philosophical issues comes up incidentally in the discussion of one or another theological issue, and a number of these discussions are relevant to the understanding of my central texts. These treatments have to do with the semantics of terms, the nature and origin of concepts, the general metaphysical background, and, most centrally relevant, the nature of analogically related meanings. Hence I draw on various bits of the Thomistic corpus in my interpretation of the discussion of theological predicates in the two *Summas*. But since this essay makes no pretensions to be a work of Aquinas scholarship, I will not be exploring those sources in the way I would if that were my aspiration. Instead, much of that work is behind the scene, and I rarely cite chapter and verse.

I am all too well aware of the enormous quantity of literature to which this tiny stretch of the Thomistic corpus has given rise. One who offers to add to this already swollen stream must justify such apparently gratuitous behavior. My apologia is in two parts. (1) No one, in the literature with which I am acquainted, has noted the particular stresses and strains in the Thomistic view with which I shall be dealing. (2) As for criticism of the view, after the internal tensions have been resolved, most of the literature is too respectful of the master to dare to criticize, or if this inhibition is lacking, the criticism is generally marred by (usually gross) misunderstandings of the target. There is still work to be done.

ii

In both *Summas*, before Thomas develops his view of the analogical meaning of predicates in application to God, he establishes certain basic points concerning theological predicates. Following the order in *ST* I, 13, Thomas first, in article 1, answers various objections

to the possibility of using any term to say anything that is true of God.¹ Then in article 2 he contends that terms can be said of God *substantialiter*, to say something of *what God is*, rather than what He is not or how He is related to other things. In article 3 he argues that some terms can be used literally (*proprie*) of God², namely, those that do not include in their meaning the imperfect mode in which a perfection is realized in creatures, for example, such terms as 'being', 'good', and 'living'. Let's call these "pure perfection terms". By contrast, those terms that do include a creaturely mode in their meaning, for example, 'rock' and 'lion', can be said of God only metaphorically. Finally, in article 4 Aquinas rebuts the suggestion that because of the simplicity of God, the fact that there is no real distinction between different aspects of God, all words said of God are synonyms. The crucial move in response to that claim is to invoke the principle that words signify things through the concepts we form of those things. Since we cannot think of the divine nature in one fell conceptual swoop but only as divided up conceptually into different aspects, our talk about God will inevitably inherit that limitation. Thomas clearly recognizes that this implies a fundamental inadequacy in our talk of God. The upshot of these articles is that we can make significant and true predications of God, in which the terms are used literally and nonsynonymously, and which succeed, though inadequately, in specifying something of what God is. These results set up the problems of how "pure perfection" terms are to be understood when applied to God, just what they are telling us of what God is, and how this is related to what they tell us about creatures when applied to them.³

Aquinas's positive doctrine concerning the semantics of predicates in application to God is put in terms of the trichotomy: univocal, equivocal, analogical. The first thing to note about those terms is

¹ Aquinas, along with many other writers on this subject, does not make explicit the 'truly' qualification. He puts the objection just as "nullum nomen potest dici de Deo" (no word can be said of God). But the truth constraint is obviously in the background. If it doesn't matter whether what we say is true or not, and if we avoid category mistakes (if that qualification is needed), obviously any term can be predicated of God. The only chance for a serious problem, with respect to terms that are commonly predicated of God, such as 'forgives', 'preserves', 'is omniscient', is as to whether they can be *truly* predicated of God, whether we can use them to make explicit something that is true of Him.

² One reason for translating *proprie* as 'literally' is that the main contrast to *proprie* is 'metaphorically'.

³ In the subsequent discussion I refer to various points Thomas makes in these articles.

that they have to do with the semantic relation of two or more uses of a term. It makes no sense to ask of a word apart from any contexts of its use, "Is it univocal?" or "Does it have a univocal meaning?" That would be like asking of a thing whether it is similar or whether it is twice. Similar to what? Twice what? And so with univocity, and so on.⁴ A term is *univocal* in two or more uses when it bears the same sense (meaning) in those uses. A term is *equivocal* in two or more uses when it bears different senses in those uses. Analogy, in the semantic sense that is in question here, is a species of equivocity. A term is used analogically in two or more employments when it is used in different senses but those senses are related to each other in appropriate ways. Just what those appropriate ways are remains to be considered.

When working with this trichotomy, Aquinas always takes the first order of business to be to show that terms are not, and cannot be, used univocally of God and creature. All Aquinas's reasons for this, at least all those that make explicit the differences between God and creatures that prevent univocity⁵, stem from one basic divine attribute—simplicity. Twentieth-century philosophers, in arguing against univocity, are more likely to cite divine immateriality or atemporality, and theologians are more likely to make unspecific appeals to "otherness" or to God's not counting as "a being". But we hear none of that from Aquinas. He certainly didn't take the immateriality of God to be a bar to univocity, though he clearly recognizes that certain terms need to be refined before they can be literally predicated of God, to remove elements of their meaning that render them predicable only of material substances.⁶ For him it is simplicity that makes all the difference.

⁴ It is a currently fashionable view that no word has a meaning, or indeed any semantic properties at all, apart from contexts of use. I certainly don't wish to subscribe to any such doctrine as that. We can specify the meaning(s) a word has in the language without "putting" it in a context of use in order to do so. (Of course, we can illustrate these points by citing contexts of use; and it is also true that for a word to have a meaning is for it to have a certain potentiality, which is realized by using it in various contexts.) Univocity, equivocity, and analogicality are distinguished from other semantic terms in having to do with the ways different uses of a term are semantically related.

⁵ For an argument that is not explicit in this way, see ST I, 13, 5, *sed contra*. The second argument there is based on the thesis that "God is more distant from any creature than any two creatures are from each other". No attempt is made to specify what differences are in question.

⁶ See, e.g., his suggestion that we remove the reference to bodily goings-on in emotion terms to render them applicable to God (ST I, 20, 1, *ad 1*).

Since it is so important for the argument against univocity, I had better say a word about simplicity. It is a matter of there being no distinction at all between any divine parts or aspects of any sort whatever. This means not only that God has no spatial or material parts but also that there is no distinction between different properties, states, or activities of God, no distinction between God, the individual, and His nature or essence, and no distinction between essence and existence. Whatever you say truly of God, it is the same "thing" that makes it true. There are many different things to truly say of God, but that diversity is not reflected in any diversity in what makes all these sayings true.⁷

This very fundamental difference between God and any creature is reflected in each of the specific reasons Aquinas gives for the impossibility of God-creature univocity. In *ST* I, 13, 5, the argument that occupies center stage in the *Responsio* runs as follows.

The perfection words that we use in speaking of creatures all differ in meaning and each one signifies a perfection as something distinct from all others. Thus when we say that a man is wise, we signify his wisdom as something distinct from the other things about him—his essence, for example, his powers or his existence. But when we use this word about God we do not intend to signify something distinct from his essence, power or existence. When 'wise' is used of a man, it so to speak contains and delimits the aspect of man that it signifies, but this is not so when it is used of God; what it signifies in God is not confined by the meaning of our word but goes beyond it. Hence it is clear that the word 'wise' is not used in the same sense of God and man, and the same is true of all other words, so they cannot be used univocally of God and creatures.⁸

Why is it that when we apply a predicate to God "we do not intend to signify something distinct from his essence, power or existence"? Obviously, because we realize that God is simple, and hence we would not intend to say anything that could not be true of a simple

⁷ *ST* I, 3. Thomas's rock-bottom characterization of God would seem to be that He is Being Itself, or Existence Itself, the complete richness of Being, the pure act of existing. This has to be understood in such a way that the pure act of existing can include, without any real internal distinctions, everything that it takes to make a being supremely perfect—including perfect knowledge, power, and so on—and the activity that springs from that supreme perfection.

⁸ Translations from *ST* I, 13 are by Herbert McCabe, O.P., in volume 3 of the Blackfriars edition (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964).

being." And because the wisdom of a simple being is not really distinct from his powers, his activities, or his knowledge, we would be saying something false if we spoke of God with that intention.

Again, the first argument of the *sed contra* is as follows.

'Wisdom', for example, means a quality when it is used of creatures, but not when it is applied to God. So then it must have a different meaning, for we have here a difference in the genus which is part of the definition.

'Wisdom' does not "mean a quality" when applied to God, just because a quality is ipso facto something distinct from the bearer of the quality. And God does not "have" qualities in that way, because no such distinction can be found in Him.

Let's turn to SCG I, 32, "That Nothing Is Predicated Univocally of God and Other Things". In section 2, Aquinas argues that "the forms of the things God has made do not measure up to a specific likeness of the divine power; for the things that God has made receive in a divided and particular way that which in Him is found in a simple and universal way".¹⁰ And he takes this to show that no term can be applied univocally to creatures and God. We shall scrutinize this inference later.

In section 3 he goes on to argue that "even though the rest of things were to receive a form that is absolutely the same as it is in God, yet they do not receive it according to the same mode of being. For . . . there is nothing in God that is not the divine being itself, which is not the case with other things" (p. 144). And the same conclusion is drawn. Again, simplicity is the crucial assumption ("there is nothing in God that is not the divine being itself").¹¹

¹⁰ Thus Aquinas's theory of theological predication would seem to be applicable only to the religious discourse of those who do recognize the simplicity of God. Does this exclude most believers? Presumably Aquinas would appeal to some doctrine of "implicit knowledge" unsophisticated believers have of such matters as divine simplicity. Anachronistically, he could make use of Hilary Putnam's doctrine of the "division of linguistic labor", according to which some of the semantics of a term, even as used by the unsophisticated, is carried by what the experts in the society know about what the term applies to.

¹¹ Translations of SCG are from *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith*, trans. A. C. Pegis (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1955), bk. I: God. This passage is on p. 143 of vol. I.

¹² The other arguments in chap. 32 depend on other features of the Thomistic metaphysics and account of predication, e.g., on the notion of "participation" in a form, which holds of creatures and not of God, and on a certain way in which God is prior

Aquinas then argues that "we are not merely equivocating when we use the same word, as some have said, for if this were so we could never argue from statements about creatures to statements about God" (*ST* 13, 5, R). And, of course, the claim that we can make valid arguments of this sort is crucial for Aquinas, since he holds that all our natural knowledge of God is based on such arguments. Indeed he holds that our natural conception of God is built up in this way, by thinking of God as what is related to creatures in certain ways, for example, as their ultimate cause. In *SCG* I, 33, we find this argument along with others.

For in equivocal by chance [the use of the same word for two quite unrelated meanings] there is no order or reference of one to another. . . . But this is not the situation with names said of God and creatures, since we note in the community of such names the order of cause and effect. . . . (Sec. 2)

Furthermore, where there is pure equivocation, there is no likeness in things themselves; there is only the unity of a name. But . . . there is a certain mode of likeness of things to God. [For God makes creatures as so many modes of likeness of His nature.] (Sec. 3)

All these arguments against pure equivocality stem from the basic idea that God is the cause of the existence of creatures, and in such a way that, as with all causality according to Aquinas, what is produced in the effect preexists, perhaps in a different mode, in the cause.

iii

If these terms are applied neither univocally nor purely equivocally, only one possibility remains. "We must say, therefore, that words are used of God and creatures in an analogical way, that is in accordance with a certain order [*proportionem*] between them" (*ST* I, 13, 5, R). Aquinas is speaking here only of "pure perfection" terms

to creatures—by virtue of the fact that everything is predicated of God "essentially". Most if not all of these arguments themselves rest on the simplicity assumption. For example in the last argument "things being predicated of God essentially" is explained as follows. "God is called being as being entity itself, and He is called good as being goodness itself". God does not just share in goodness; He *is* goodness. If this were a work of Aquinas scholarship I would go through all the arguments. But I take the ones cited in the text to be the most important ones.

(*huiusmodi nomina*); others, if appropriate in any way, are, as we have seen, said of God metaphorically. Let's keep firmly in mind the point that 'analogical' is being used here to designate a certain relation between two different senses of a term, a relation that is such as to make the senses linked to each other or relevant to each other in a way in which "purely equivocal" senses are not, as when 'pen' is used both for a writing implement and an enclosure for keeping pigs. We must be careful not to read Thomas on analogy in terms of the dominant current meaning of the term in which it has to do with some likeness or similarity between things. Analogically related uses of terms, or the things they are applied to in these uses, need not be markedly similar to each other. Similarity is only one of the relations that can tie together analogically related senses. *Analogia* is a Latin term of Greek derivation, and in the Greek it was originally used for mathematical proportions, or equality of ratios. In the course of its career it broadened out to encompass relations of any sort, and that is the dominant meaning in Thomas. Most basically, when two uses are related "analogically," they are related by virtue of some significant relation between what they signify or the things to which they are applied. So the crucial question we need to answer in order to understand Thomas's dictum that pure perfection terms are said analogically of God and creatures is: By virtue of what sort of relation are the two senses significantly connected to each other?

In order to attend properly to what is said about this in the two Summas we have to set aside a great weight of Thomistic tradition. In 1498, Cardinal Cajetan (Thomas de Vio) wrote his *De nominum analogia* (*The Analogy of Names*),¹² and it quickly became established as the definitive systematization of the Thomistic doctrine of analogy. In this treatise Cajetan distinguished three basic types of analogy—inequality, attribution, and proportionality. The first need not concern us here. Analogy of attribution is found where the term is primarily applied to one subject (or applied to one subject in the primary sense), and the understanding of the other application is given by some relation that the subject of that application has to the former subject. This is often a causal relation. Aquinas's favorite example is 'healthy', as applied primarily to an animal, and then applied by analogy to urine as a sign of animal health, to medicine as a cause of animal health, to diet as conducive to animal health (here

¹² *The Analogy of Names and the Concept of Being*, trans. E. A. Bushinski and H. J. Koren (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University Press, 1953). The passage on which Cajetan principally relies for his interpretation is found in the *Commentary on the Sentences*, Bk. I, Dist. 19, Q. 5, a. 2, ad 1.

we would be more likely to say 'healthful'), and so on. Analogy of attribution is omnipresent in language. Thus if we think of 'academic' as applied primarily to a certain range of activities (teaching, learning, etc.), we can say that 'academic salaries' are salaries paid for engaging in such activities, 'academic buildings' are buildings in which such activities go on, and so on.

Analogy of proportionality is found where there is a likeness of two relationships. (A proportion is a relation; proportionality is a similarity between two proportions.) Thus we may say that the way a computer is related to some material that appears on a monitor is similar to the way a human being is related to some recalled information, a similarity that undergirds analogically related senses of 'remember'. Again the relation of a human being to what she does is similar to the relation of an inanimate body to its reaction to the forces acting on it, in such a way as to give rise to analogically related senses of 'behave' or 'act'. It may be objected that in these cases, and other putative cases of analogy of proportionality, one could find or construct a term that could be used univocally to say what is in common in the two cases by virtue of which the relations are similar. Even if this were so, it would not show that the terms in question—'act', 'behave', 'remember'—are not used in accordance with an analogy of proportionality. But it would encourage us to suppose that this kind of analogical talk could be replaced by more fine-grained talk in which all the terms are used univocally. That is, we could replace unspecific references to similarity with a precise specification of the respects of similarity and dissimilarity. However, the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition has been committed to the thesis that certain predications are essentially or irretrievably analogical, in that we are incapable of getting below the proportional similarity so as to specify features that are wholly in common. The favorite examples for this are the "transcendentals", terms that apply across the Aristotelian categories. Thus it is frequently said that 'being' is said analogically of substance, quality, quantity, relation, and so on. A substance and a quality each *is* in a way appropriate to its category, but there is no way of specifying a neutral sense of being, such that a term for that sense is univocally predicable of things in any category. Needless to say, this is all highly controversial. I find it illuminating to think of the "essential analogy" thesis as amounting to the claim that at certain points we can manage at best an "imperfect abstraction"; we cannot go all the way in forming a concept that applies equally to each item in the extension of the term; instead the best we can do is to form a cluster or family of related concepts. We can "see" or "show" their mutual "belongingness", but we can't

spell it out in terms of strictly common properties. A currently prominent species of this genus of "imperfectly abstracted concepts" is the Wittgensteinian concept of family resemblance terms.¹³

Cajetan held that the analogy of proportionality is the only "true" analogy of names and gave it pride of place in his treatment. And until quite recently the Thomistic tradition has followed him in this. Thus it has been widely supposed that in holding that terms are said analogically of God and creatures, Aquinas was attributing an analogy of proportionality to these uses.¹⁴ If one approaches the discussion in the two *Summas* against the background of this tradition, one will be quite surprised to learn that Thomas gives us no hint of a similarity of relations or any of the other distinguishing features of the analogy of proportionality. On the contrary, he seems for all the world to be saying that predications of a term to God and creatures are related according to an analogy of attribution.

We can distinguish two kinds of analogical or 'proportional' uses of language. First there is the case of one word being used of two things because each of them has some order or relation to a third thing. Thus we use the word 'healthy' of both a diet and a complexion because each of these has some relation to health in a man, the former as a cause, the latter as a symptom of it. Secondly, there is the case of the same word used of two things because of some relation that one has to the other—as 'healthy' is used of the diet and the man because the diet is the cause of the health in the man.

In this way some words are used neither univocally nor purely equivocally of God and creatures, but analogically, for we cannot speak of God at all except in the language we use of creatures, and so whatever is said both of God and creatures is said in virtue of the order that creatures have to God as to their source and cause in which all the perfections of things pre-exist transcendently. (*ST* I, 13, 5, R)

The exposition is quite parallel in *SCG* I, 34, 1–4. The only significant difference is that it is made more explicit that the analogy in theological predication is according to the second of the two types. "Now, the names said of God and things are not said analogically according to the first mode of analogy, since we should then have to

¹³ See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan Co., 1953), pt. I, secs. 66–67.

¹⁴ See, e.g., Jacques Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, trans. G. B. Phelan (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), Appendix II; R. Garrigou-Lagrange, *God: His Existence and His Nature*, trans. Dom Bede Rose (St. Louis & London: B. Herder Book Co., 1946), vol. I, pp. 213–23; G. B. Phelan, *St. Thomas and Analogy* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1948), p. 35.

posit something prior to God, but according to the second mode" (SCG I, 34, 4).¹⁵ Thus in both *Summas* Thomas clearly puts forward the analogy of attribution as the one by which divine-human predication is to be construed.

But how can this be? This would seem to come into stark conflict with a thesis at the heart of the Thomistic philosophical theology, namely, that there is a divine-human commonality with respect to "perfections". This is usually put by saying that the perfections of all things are in God.

All the perfections of all things are in God. . . . This may be seen from two considerations. First, because whatever perfection exists in an effect must be found in the producing cause: either in the same formality . . . or in a more eminent degree. . . . Since therefore God is the first producing cause of things, the perfections of all things must pre-exist in God in a more eminent way. . . . Second . . . God is being itself, of itself subsistent. Consequently, He must contain within Himself the whole perfection of being. . . . Now all the perfections of all things pertain to the perfection of being; for things are perfect precisely so far as they have being after some fashion. It follows therefore that the perfection of no thing is wanting to God." (ST I, 4, 2, R; see also SCG I, 29, "On the Likeness of Creatures to God")

And so it would seem to follow that any pure perfection, like goodness or knowledge, will be found both in God and creatures, though, as we shall note in more detail, in a different mode.

¹⁵ It is not entirely clear that Aquinas's reason for rejecting the first mode is cogent. Presumably his thought is as follows. Where the analogy between asserting P of x and y is of the first sort, it holds because each of them is to be explained in terms of a relation in which they stand to a third item, z. But that would require that a predication of P to that third item is prior to the predication of P to God. And nothing is prior to God. But as we shall note later, Aquinas does acknowledge that "from the point of view of our use of the word we apply it first to creatures because we know them first", even though "from the point of view of what the word means it is used primarily of God and derivatively of creatures, for what the word means—the perfection it signifies—flows from God to the creature" (ST 13, 6, R. See also SCG I, 34, 5-6). But in order to have an analogical use according to the first mode, the "analogy of many to one", it need only be true that the one is prior to the many "from the point of view of our use of the word". It need not also be prior in causality. Indeed, in Aquinas's favorite example of this mode of analogy, what is prior to the two analogical uses, viz., health of the animal, is not prior in the order of causality but only in the order of the use of the word. However, whatever is to be said about this argument, it seems clear that, as Thomas is thinking of it, the sense of 'God is wise' is to be understood by the relation of God to human wisdom, rather than both of them being understood by their relation to some third subject to which 'wise' is applied.

¹⁶ Translations from ST other than I, 13, are taken from *Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, ed. A. C. Pegis (New York: Random House, 1944). The translation is a revision by Pegis of the translation by Laurence Shapcote.

The reason this seems to conflict with the central passages on analogical meaning is that in Aquinas's paradigm case of the analogy of attribution the analogy does not involve any commonality, or even similarity, of property predicated by the term in each attribution. What makes urine, medicine, or diet *healthy* (or 'healthful') is certainly not the same as, or even similar to, what makes an animal body healthy. What it is for a body to be healthy is, let's say, that its vital functions are being carried out properly. But what makes the medicine healthful is that it tends to correct certain deviations from the former: what makes the urine healthy is that it is an indication of the former; and so on. It is by virtue of these relations to animal health, not by virtue of any similarity between what we are saying of the secondary analogates¹⁷ and animal health, that the term is analogically applied to them all. But if this is our model for the analogical predication of goodness to God and creatures—an analogy based on the causal relation between the analogates—then in saying that God is good, we would simply be saying that God is the cause of goodness in creatures, just as in saying that this medicine is healthful we are saying that it is the cause of health in an animal body. We would be doing this rather than attributing an intrinsic property to God, one that is shared to some extent by, or imitated, or participated in by, the creature. And just this interpretation is roundly rejected in *ST* I, 13, 2.

Firstly . . . God is just as much the cause of bodies as he is of goodness in things; so if 'God is good' means no more than that God is the cause of goodness in things, why not say 'God is a body' on the grounds that he is the cause of bodies? . . . Secondly, it would follow that everything we said of God would be true only in a secondary sense, as when we say a diet is 'healthy', meaning merely that it causes health in the one who takes it. . . . Thirdly, this is not what people want to say when they talk about God. When a man speaks of the 'living God' he does not simply want to say that God is the cause of our life. (*ST* I, 13, 2, R)

Thus Aquinas not only rejects the interpretation of 'God is good' that his explicit discussion of analogical meaning would seem to suggest. He seems in the passage just quoted to distance himself from the very example he used to explain the relevant mode of analogy.¹⁸

¹⁷ An "analogate" is the subject of an analogical predication.

¹⁸ All this provides aid and comfort to the Cajetan party. For according to Cajetan's general account of analogy, the analogy of proportionality is the only one that involves "intrinsic attribution" in all the analogates, that is, the only one that involves an important commonality in the properties attributed.

If there is a way out of this impasse, it will be based on the point that the health example is designed to illustrate some features of the theological analogy and not others. In particular, it is designed to illustrate the fact that attributions of, for example, goodness to God and creatures are related via a relation of the analogates, in this case a causal relation of a special sort (creator to creature). That fact is a defining feature of the analogy of attribution. But that there is no important commonality in what is attributed to each of the analogates is not a necessary or invariable feature of this mode of analogy. That is true of the health example, but since it is not essential to analogy of attribution, we are not constrained to extrapolate that as well to the divine-creature case. And in fact Aquinas gives us sufficient warning not to do so, though he could have been more explicit about this. At the end of the canonical statement of theological analogy quoted from *ST* I, 13, 5, he says that "whatever is said both of God and creatures is said in virtue of the order that creatures have to God as to their source and cause in which all the perfections of things pre-exist transcendently" (emphasis added). Consider also what, to my knowledge, is the closest Aquinas comes to telling us in so many words what the analogically related sense is in which a predicate like 'good' is applied to God. In *ST* I, 13, 2, after giving his reasons for rejecting the purely causal and the purely negative interpretations, he says: "'God is good' therefore does not mean the same as 'God is the cause of goodness' or 'God is not evil'; it means that what we call 'goodness' in creatures pre-exists in God in a higher way." To expand on this a bit, the meaning of 'God is good' is not derived from 'Sam is good' in terms of a purely causal relation, as in the health example, for that would not preserve the intention of attributing a commonality of property (form). On the other hand, the causal dependence of creatures on God is fundamental for the analogy; it is because of this that we can significantly speak of God in terms originally applied to creatures. But the causality here is of such a sort as to involve transmission of form (perfection) from cause to effect. Hence in deriving the sense of the predicate in application to God from its sense in application to creatures we are exploiting the causal dependence of the prior analogate on the posterior one (in the order of meaning derivation), but we are doing so in awareness of the fact that by virtue of this causal dependence there is, and must be, a commonality in intrinsic form, though possessed in more and less perfect ways. Hence though the analogy here is an analogy of attribution, like the case of health in animal and medicine, and also like it in being based on a causal relation, it is unlike it in that the crucial relation guarantees a commonality of intrinsic property between the

analogates, and hence that commonality is part of what is being asserted in the derivative attribution.

This approach to the matter is put by Battista Mondin in terms of a distinction between an "extrinsic" and an "intrinsic" analogy of attribution.²⁴ Both the health case and the goodness of creature and God case exemplify the analogy of attribution, because in both cases the analogy is based on a relation between the analogates. But in the one case this relation founds a commonality in intrinsic property, and in the other case it does not. This runs counter to Cajetanist orthodoxy, according to which commonality of intrinsic property is found only in the analogy of proportionality.

Note that in specifying the divine sense of pure perfection terms in this way Aquinas makes no pretense of giving a positive account of what this higher way is in which the perfection exists in God. Thus his account is much less specific or contentful than it might conceivably be. He does lay down a number of negative specifications, all of which are involved in the doctrine of simplicity. The perfection is not possessed by God in any way that requires having a body, that requires His being distinct from the perfection possessed, that requires this perfection being distinct from others, and so on. But Aquinas gives every indication that he does not by any means aspire to give a concrete positive sense of what it is for a simple being to know something or will something or love someone or to be omniscient or omnipotent. He does, indeed, apply various general principles concerning these perfections to God, for example, that one wills only what one cognizes as good and that one knows other things by way of a "species" of the thing in the mind.²⁵ But all this too is stated in terms appropriate to nonsimple beings. There is no attempt to say what it is for a cognitive subject to "have" a species of the object known in such a way that the species and the knowing are not distinct from the knower. Again, Aquinas does say that for God the "species" through which He knows everything He knows is His own nature. But, again, no attempt is made to give us a concrete sense of how that is possible, and, more crucially, how it is possible that that "nature" through which S knows x

²⁴ See Battista Mondin, *The Principle of Analogy in Protestant and Catholic Theology* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968), chap. 2, secs. 8-11, and chap. 4. I have learned much from Mondin's treatment of the whole topic. An alternative non-Cajetanist approach is set forth powerfully and persuasively in Ralph M. McInerny, *The Logic of Analogy: An Interpretation of St. Thomas* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961).

²⁵ I will return to this point in another connection.

is not distinct from *S* itself, from *S*'s existence, and *S*'s other activities.¹³

Thus someone who is looking for as full-blooded a conception of God's knowledge, volition, love, or power as we have of human knowledge, and so on, will be disappointed with what he gets from Aquinas. But then that would have been a thoroughly misguided expectation. As we shall see in more detail in the next section, given the fact that all our forms of thought and speech are fitted to deal with complex beings, it should come as no surprise that we are unable to develop a robust conception of the nature, properties, and activities of an absolutely simple being in which no real distinctions are to be found.

One more gap needs to be filled before we have a fully rounded picture. In *SCG* I, 34, 1, Thomas explains analogical predication as being "according to an order or reference to something one". In *ST* I, 13, 6, R, he makes it explicit that in analogically related predications there is a primary analogate by reference to which (by virtue of relations of other analogates to which) the other analogically related predications have to be explained.

Whenever a word is used analogically of many things, it is used of them because of some order or relation they have to some central thing. In order to explain an extended or analogical use of a word it is necessary to mention this central thing. Thus you cannot explain what you mean by a 'healthy' diet without mentioning the health of the man of which it is the cause; similarly you must understand 'healthy' as applied to a man before you can understand what is meant by a 'healthy complexion' which is the symptom of that health. The primary application of the word is to the central thing that has to be understood first.

Thomas goes on to say that "all words used metaphorically of God apply primarily to creatures. When used of God they signify merely a certain parallelism between God and the creature." But as for pure perfection terms, "from the point of view of what the word means it is used primarily of God and derivatively of creatures, for what the word means—the perfection it signifies—flows from God to the creature. But from the point of view of our use of the word we apply

¹³ Perhaps Aquinas's realization of the lack of any positive account of what these perfections are like in God is reflected in his statement in the introduction to Q. 3 of *ST* I, the question on simplicity, that "because we cannot know what God is, but rather what He is not, we have no means for considering how God is, but rather how He is not."

it first to creatures because we know them first. That . . . is why it has a way of signifying that is appropriate to creatures."¹²

Thus Aquinas holds that there are two contrasting orders of priority for pure perfection terms, one appropriately called *causal* or *ontological* and the other appropriately called *semantic*. He says that the term is applied primarily to God in the first order and applied primarily to creatures in the second. I must confess that I can't see why Aquinas thinks that the first order is an order that has to do with words. There is no doubt but that, in his system, God's goodness, knowledge, or power is prior causally and ontologically to creaturely goodness, and so on, because the realization of the second is completely dependent on the first. But this would not seem to be a point about the predication of terms but about causal relations that hold independent of the structure of language. Be that as it may, I am concerned here, as Aquinas is primarily concerned in these discussions, with semantic order, with what meanings are derivative from what others, with what meanings have to be explained in terms of what others. And on that point he is quite clear that the application to creatures is semantically prior: "we apply it first to creatures because we know them first". And he carries that principle out in practice. In a passage quoted above we saw him explaining what is meant by 'God is good' in terms of the goodness of creatures ("what we call 'goodness' in creatures pre-exists in God in a higher way", ST I, 13, 2, R). But we never find him explaining what it is for a creature to have knowledge or the like in terms of what it is for God to have knowledge.

iv

So far, perhaps, so good. We have developed a coherent, interesting interpretation of the Thomistic position that pure perfection terms are predicated of God and creatures analogically, and we have brought out Thomas's reasons for this position. It holds that such terms are predicated of God in a sense not exactly the same as that in which they are predicated of creatures but in a sense that is related to the latter by virtue of the dependence of creatures on God for their existence and for what they are. By virtue of this relation

¹² Cf. SCG I, 34, 5-6, where it is pointed out that a parallel opposition in priorities holds for health. Health of the medicine or diet is causally prior to health in the animal, but as for the use of the word, we explain the former in terms of the latter.

the divine sense of the predicate 'wills that *P*', for example, is something like "does something of the same sort as what we call willing by creatures, except that it is in a higher mode". Understanding the divine sense in this way does not give us as much as we might like to have by way of a detailed conception of what it is for God to will that *P*, for example, but (a) it is more than nothing (it does give an intelligible sense to the term), and (b) it is the most we can expect to have, given the constraints, especially simplicity, within which we are working.

But before I close the book on all this, I must attend to another prominent feature of these stretches of the *Summas* that may seem to sort ill with the doctrine of analogy I have been expounding. This is the distinction between the "perfection" or property signified by a predicate term (*perfectio significata*, *res significata*) and the mode of signification (*modus significandi*).

We have to consider two things . . . in the words we use to attribute perfections to God, first the perfections themselves that are signified—goodness, life and the like—and secondly the way in which they are signified. So far as the perfections signified are concerned the words are used literally of God, and in fact more appropriately than they are used of creatures, for these perfections belong primarily to God and only secondarily to others. But so far as the way of signifying these perfections is concerned the words are used inappropriately, for they have a way of signifying that is appropriate to creatures. (*ST* 1, 13, 3, R. See also *SCG* 1, 30, 3.)

This distinction renders the problem more complicated than it appears from the passages concerning univocal, equivocal, and analogical meaning. For in terms of this distinction we have to give semantic treatment to each of the two aspects that have been distinguished.

Aquinas gives us a hint as to what sort of thing is involved in the "mode of signification" by contrasting abstract and concrete terms.

Since we come to know God from creatures and since this is how we come to refer to him, the expressions we use to name him signify in a way appropriate to the material creatures we ordinarily know. Amongst such creatures the complete subsistent thing is always a concrete union of form and matter; for the form itself is not a subsistent thing, but that by which something subsists. Because of this the words we use to signify complete subsistent things are concrete nouns which are appropriate to composite subjects. When, on the other hand, we want to speak of the form itself we use abstract nouns which do not signify something

as subsistent, but as that by which something is: 'whiteness', for example, signifies the form as that by which something is white. (ST I, 13, 1 ad 2. Cf. SCG I, 30, 3.)

Although Thomas was writing before the full flowering of the movement known as "speculative grammar", it is tempting to interpret the above distinction in terms of that theory. The speculative grammarians²³ distinguished two levels of the semantics of words, one the more specific or lexical, by virtue of which the meaning of, for example, 'cat' differs from that of 'dog', and a more general meaning that is shared by all members of a given grammatical category. This latter is the *modus significandi*. Thus 'dog', 'cat', and all other concrete nouns have the same *modus significandi*. The *modus significandi* has both semantical and syntactical significance; it fits a word for certain positions rather than others in sentences, and at the same time it constitutes one aspect or level of the word's meaning. The fact that 'dog' signifies a kind of substance is an integral part of its meaning. Furthermore, the "modistae" took there to be ontological correlates of the various *modi significandi*, more specifically different aspects of a thing referred to (*modi essendi*).²⁴ Thus Aquinas:

A noun signifies a thing as coming under some description, verbs and participles signify it as enduring in time, pronouns signify it as being pointed out or as in some relationship. (ST I, 13, 1, ad 3)

Let's return to the third quotation back, from Q. 13, 3, R. That ended with the statement "But so far as the way of signifying these perfections is concerned the words are used, inappropriately, for they have a way of signifying that is appropriate to creatures". What way is that? A part of the answer is given in the second quotation back, from Q. 13, 1, ad 2. Our language, and thought, is designed for application to material substances; that is the subject matter for which we are cognitively fitted. "Amongst such creatures the complete subsistent thing is always a concrete union of form and matter. . . . Because of this the words we use to signify complete subsistent things are concrete nouns which are appropriate to composite subjects. When, on the other hand, we want to speak of

²³ Because of their emphasis on modes of signification they were known as "modistae".

²⁴ For more on the modistae see Jan Pinborg, "Speculative Grammar", in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Norman Kretzmann, A. Kenny, Jan Pinborg, and Eleonore Stamp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

the form itself we use abstract nouns which do not signify something as subsistent." Thus we are in a bind. God is both subsistent and simple. The conceptual and linguistic resources at our disposal enable us to speak either of something subsistent and complex or of something simple and non-subsistent, but they give us no way to speak of something as both simple and subsistent. Hence when we speak of God, we are forced to misrepresent Him so far as the *modus significandi* aspect of our terms is concerned.

Whatever our intellect signifies as subsisting, therefore, it signifies in concretion; but what it signifies as simple, it signifies, not as *that which is*, but as *that by which something is*. As a result, with reference to the mode of signification there is in every name that we use an imperfection, which does not befit God, even though the thing signified in some eminent way does befit God. (SCG I, 30, 3)

But is our situation really that desperate? Why can't we just construct terms to fit the bill? Why can't we just stipulate that we are going to use a certain term, 'gwise', to signify a being that is both subsistent and simple? Why is that beyond our powers?

To respond to this query we will have to go more deeply into this problem than Aquinas explicitly does in the passages we have been considering. Suppose we do say 'God is gwise', having tailor-made the term 'gwise' for application to a being that fits Thomas's specifications for God. There are still two aspects of our modes of signification that render what we say unsuitable for talk about God. First, our forms of speech and thought²⁵ require us to distinguish between subject and predicate in order to make any assertion whatever about anything.²⁶ But because God is absolutely simple, there is no distinction between God Himself and one of his properties or activities. Hence, by virtue of a deeply rooted feature of human thought and language we cannot think or speak of God without misrepresenting Him in this respect. Second, we are forced to distinguish between various properties, features, or aspects of God. We can't sum it all

²⁵ Let's not forget that language mirrors thought for Aquinas and inherits its fundamental features from the thought it expresses.

²⁶ Strictly speaking, this claim holds only of subject-predicate statements. In the twentieth century we see more clearly than our predecessors that not all statements are cast in this mould. However, the basic point I am concerned to make here is that our forms of statements impute complexity to what we are speaking of; and that point can be made for all statement forms.

up in one simple concept.²⁷ We have to first say that God is wise, then that He is *omnipotent*, then that He *exercises providence over His creatures*, and so on. For both these reasons it is endemic to the constitution of human thought that we cannot speak of God, whatever terms we use, without thereby violating our solemn assurance that God is absolutely simple: "as to the mode of signification, every name is defective" (SCG I, 30, 3). This idea that the aspect of the meaning of terms known as *modus significandi* is derivative from the way terms function in our forms of thought and speech is itself deeply rooted in the thought of the *modistae*. *Modi significandi*, though they have semantic and ontological significance, are in the first instance a matter of syntactical function; it is from the latter that they are discerned and distinguished. Hence any ineluctable features of the forms of our thought and talk will be reflected in what is possible for us with respect to the *modi significandi* of our terms.

Now let's look at the relation of this discussion to Thomas's doctrine of univocal and analogical meaning. What would the latter look like if formulated in terms of the *res significata*-*modus significandi* distinction? At least this much is clear: pure perfection terms as applied to creatures are unsuitable for application to God, so far as their *modi significandi* is concerned. But what about the more specific aspect of the meaning—the perfection signified? Although Aquinas isn't using the language of univocity-equivocity-analogicality when he deploys this distinction, he certainly gives the impression that all is clear sailing, univocity-wise, with the perfection signified. "So far as the perfections signified are concerned the words are used literally of God" (ST I, 13, 3, R). "And so with reference to the mode of signification no name is fittingly applied to God; this is done only with reference to that which the name has been imposed to signify. Such names, therefore, as Dionysius teaches, can be both affirmed and denied of God. They can be affirmed because of the meaning of the name; they can be denied because of the mode of signification" (SCG I, 30, 3). There is no hint in these passages that the *res significata* side of the matter forces a change in the meaning of pure perfection terms when applied to God. And, indeed, at least most of the

²⁷ "Since we know God from creatures we understand him through concepts appropriate to the perfections creatures receive from him. What pre-exists in God in a simple and unified way is divided amongst creatures as many and varied perfections. . . . Thus the words we use for the perfections we attribute to God, although they signify what is one, are not synonymous, for they signify it from many different points of view." (ST I, 13, 4, R)

ways in which we found Aquinas arguing earlier from simplicity to a denial of univocity would seem to yield a lack of univocity only with respect to the *modus significandi* side of the matter. Thus, for example, he pointed out that wisdom is not a quality of God (since not really distinct from God Himself) though it is a quality of creatures, and that each of the words signifies something distinct from each of the others when applied to creatures, but that they cannot appropriately do so when applied to God. These are two ways of pointing out the unsuitability for divine predication of the modes of signification words display when predicated of creatures.

But if the lack of univocity attaches only to the *modus significandi* side of the matter, there is no room for analogically related senses. For, as we have seen and as Aquinas insists, we can't change the creaturely mode of signification into one that is suitable for a divine application. We are stuck with the former, and the best we can do is to lament the fact that "as to the mode of signification, every name is defective". And as for the *res significata* side of the matter, on the present interpretation, that is just fine as it stands; there is no need to look for an analogically related divine sense of the term, so far as that aspect of the meaning is concerned. Hence it appears that the doctrine of an analogical meaning of theological terms has been frozen out; there is no place for it. Instead of analogically related creaturely and divine senses, what we have are creaturely senses all up and down the line, together with the recognition that one aspect of each such sense is ineluctably inappropriate for application to the divine.²⁸

This would be a striking result indeed. On Aquinas's own showing there is no room for an analogy of meaning for creaturely and divine applications of terms. At one point in my decades-long reflection on this topic, I thought that this was the last word. But fortunately for Thomas and for Thomism, there is a hitherto (almost) suppressed side of the matter. On a number of occasions Aquinas testifies that there can be no strict sharing of form between God and creature.

²⁸ Note that I have not arrived at this conclusion by supposing that a term could have just lexical meaning (just signify a perfection) without also displaying a mode of signification and for that reason be perfectly univocal as between creaturely and divine attribution. Such univocity is clearly impossible, as Aquinas would no doubt agree, just because of the fact that the semantics of terms is intimately connected with their uses in larger syntactical complexes; a term would have no meaning at all if its meaning did not fit it for playing a distinctive role in assertions and the like.

Any creature, in so far as it possesses any perfection, represents God and is like to him, for he . . . has pre-existing in himself the perfections of all his creatures. . . . But a creature is not like to God as it is like to another member of its species or genus, but resembles him as an effect may in some way resemble a transcendent cause although failing to reproduce perfectly the form of the cause. (ST I, 13, 2, R)²⁸

Since the specific "lexical" meaning of a predicate consists in the fact that it "signifies" the property (form) it does, then since no form can be common to God and creature, we cannot use any predicate with the same lexical meaning of God and creature if we are to have any chance of saying something true in both cases. This is made quite explicit in SCG I, 32, 2-3, a passage that I quoted in part when initially canvassing Aquinas's reasons for non-univocity. First we have the "no form in common" point applied to yield the implication of a lack of univocity.

An effect that does not receive a form specifically the same as that through which the agent acts cannot receive according to a univocal predication the name arising from that form. . . . Now, the forms of the things God has made do not measure up to a specific likeness of the divine power: for the things that God has made receive in a divided and particular way that which in Him is found in a simple and universal way. It is evident, then, that nothing can be said univocally of God and other things. (Sec. 2)

In case one missed the point that this is a difference in lexical meaning due to difference in form signified, that point is underlined in the next section by distinguishing it from the additional point that the mode of being of the form in creatures is different from that in God (and hence, although Aquinas does not make this explicit, terms will always differ in their mode of signification).

If, furthermore, an effect should measure up to the species of its cause, it will not receive the univocal predication of the name unless it receives the same specific form according to the same mode of being. For the house that is in the art of the maker is not univocally the same house that is in matter, for the form of the house does not have the same being in the two locations. Now, even though the rest of things were to receive a form that is absolutely the same as it is in God, yet they do not receive it according to the same mode of being. For as is clear from what we have said, there is nothing in God that is not the divine being

²⁸ See also ST I, 4, 3; SCG I, 29.

itself, which is not the case with other things. Nothing, therefore, can be predicated of God and other things univocally. (Sec. 3)

This is a very revealing passage. Note that both difference of form and difference of mode of being of the form are derived from the same basic divine-creature difference: the simplicity of God. There can be no exact reproduction of form just because creatures have in a divided way what is found in God in an absolutely simple way, without any real distinction between the perfections. And, again, the mode of being is inevitably different because anything God "has" is identical with His being. Thus we have what we might call a certain "leakage" from the ontological correlate of the mode of signification to the ontological correlate of perfection signified. The divine simplicity not only makes the forms of our speech inapt for talk about God (difference in mode of signifying) but also interferes with any identity of form between God and creature.

Thus the full story here is that in neither aspect of their meaning—the "lexical" or the "grammatical"—are creaturely terms fully suitable for application to God. And so there is a place for analogy after all, at least on the lexical side. Though no real improvement can be hoped for on the grammatical side, the lexical meaning can be altered from its creaturely form so as to fit better the divine subject. And yet it is not as if the lexical meaning can be shaped so as to signify the divine perfection in as complete or specific a fashion as that in which it signifies the creaturely approximation. The best we can do is what Aquinas suggests in his earlier explanation of the meaning of 'God is good'. We can attribute to God a more eminent analogue of the creaturely perfection but without saying specifically just what that is. We can adumbrate the analogous divine perfection only by relating it, by supereminence, to the creaturely version of which we do have a satisfactory grasp. Thus "every name is defective" in both aspects of its meaning, even though we can go some distance toward making the lexical meaning more appropriate.

v

Now that we are straight as to just what the Thomistic account is of the meaning of predicates in their theological application, I turn to criticism. Let's consider the common complaint that on the Thomistic interpretation theological statements lack what is required for their intended function. They (1) lack determinate truth condi-

tions and (2) cannot figure in reasoning in the ways they are supposed to in Thomistic, and other, theology. These criticisms are related in a moderately complex fashion. If (1) is valid, that is going to play havoc with any attempt to perform inferences to or from theological statements. If it is indeterminate just what it takes to make a given (putative) statement true, then what follows from the statement, or what it follows from, will certainly be indeterminate, because what the statement "says" is indeterminate. But, of course, (2) can make trouble even if theological statements are as determinate as you please. For the determinate theological meaning might not be such as to underwrite the inferences that Aquinas and other theologians purport to perform. Hence we must consider both criticisms.

The *res significata*-*modus significandi* distinction further complicates matters. For each of the above disabilities might stem from differences between theological and non-theological meanings in one or other of these aspects, or both. I shall proceed by looking at the possible contributions of each aspect of theological meaning to the alleged difficulties, beginning with the mode of signification.

First off, it is clear that the inaptness of our *modi significandi* for theological application is not going to affect inferences insofar as they depend on the specific meanings of the terms employed, for the mode of signification is distinguished from that. Thus, to the extent that implications of divine knowledge or will or goodness depend on the specific content of those concepts, it will not matter that our grammatical forms are ill-suited to talk about God. Any trouble here will come from differences in the *res significata*.

Then why should defects in the mode of signification be thought to adversely affect truth or validity? It would have to be something like this. Our grammatical forms make a contribution to the truth conditions of our statements. Thus when I say that Jim forgave Sally, part of what it takes to make my statement true depends on the fact that 'forgave' picks out one attribute rather than another, and 'Jim' and 'Sally' are being used to refer to certain persons rather than others. But the truth conditions also reflect the grammar of the statement. What is being said is that the action designated by 'forgave Sally' was performed by Jim, and that relationship has to hold in order for the statement to be true. But that means that the statement can be true only if there is such a relation holding between Jim and this action of his, and that means, in turn, that a condition of truth is that there is a distinction between Jim and this action. And so it is for anything else we say or think in the complex discursive forms available to us. But then that means that none of the state-

ments we make about God can be (wholly) true. For a necessary condition of the truth of each is that what we are asserting of God is related to Him in a certain way, and hence is distinguishable from Him.²⁹ And that condition contradicts divine simplicity. Precisely what makes all our terms for God defective in their *modi significandi* prevents anything we say of God from being true. And if truth goes, the game is up with theology, at least on the traditional construal as a discipline that gives us truth about God.

If Aquinas has any defense against this, it will be by supporting the denial that grammatical form contributes to truth conditions in the way just adumbrated. We might defend this denial by adverting to the way in which grammatically inapt or misleading sentences are successfully used to make true statements in any area of discourse. The work in this century by analytic philosophers on "systematically misleading expressions" and the distinction between "grammatical form" and "logical form" provides abundant resources for such an argument.³⁰ Let's assume that existence is not a predicate and that existentially quantified statements, rather than subject-predicate statements, give an adequate representation of what we are asserting when we make positive and negative existential claims. Nevertheless, we surely do often succeed in saying something true when we use 'exists' as a grammatical predicate, as when we say "Margaret Thatcher exists" or "The Great Pumpkin does not exist". If, as certainly seems to be the case, the statement "Margaret Thatcher exists" is completely, unqualifiedly, 100% true (and not just partly true or approximately true or close enough to being true for practical purposes), then it must be that the grammatical form does not enter into the truth conditions in the way suggested above. For otherwise part of what we would be asserting in saying "Margaret Thatcher exists" is that existence is related to her as one of her properties or attributes, and so, on the assumption we are making about existence, what we are saying would not be completely true.

²⁹ Making this point is less straightforward when we are asserting an attribute like goodness or wisdom. For there, on one interpretation, what we are saying to be related to the subject in a certain way is not a "part" or aspect of itself, but a separate, "abstract" entity. However, even here, I believe it can be successfully argued that when we assert that X is good, we are also committed to X's goodness being related to X in a certain way, and hence being distinguishable from X. I won't have time to go into all that in this paper.

³⁰ See, e.g., Bertrand Russell, *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism*, in R. C. Marsh, ed., *Logic and Knowledge* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1956); Gilbert Ryle, "Systematically Misleading Expressions", in A. Flew, ed., *Logic and Language*, 1st series (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1952).

For another familiar example consider the many turns of phrase in which we use an existential form of statement without seriously committing ourselves to the existence of what we would be committing ourselves to if the grammatical form were taken to make a full contribution to the truth conditions. We say things like "There is a possibility that he will come", "There is a chance of rain", and "There is merit in your suggestion" without committing ourselves to the real existence of such entities as possibilities, chances, or merits.² Assuming there are no such things as chances and so on, if the grammatical form did contribute to the truth conditions in the way mentioned, then we would not ever be saying anything true when making statements like this. But obviously we do often make wholly true statements with these forms of speech.

These cases are unlike the theological case in that we have the resources for making our truth claims in an apt, rather than in an inapt, grammatical form. Instead of saying, "Margaret Thatcher exists", we can say, "There is such a person as Margaret Thatcher". Instead of saying, "There is a chance of rain", we can say, "There might be rain". On Thomas's view, however, we are unable to replace "God is wise" with a grammatically perspicuous formulation. But this difference leaves unaffected the point that it is possible to make statements that are wholly true even though the grammatical form is unsuitable for what is stated. At least so I claim. I cannot prove that the possibility of making a wholly true statement by saying "Margaret Thatcher exists" is not dependent on the possibility of making the same statement by saying "There is such a person as Margaret Thatcher." Nevertheless, it seems highly plausible to me that there is no such dependence. Suppose we had the subject-predicate form of statement but that existential quantification had not been developed. Would it then be impossible to make true positive or negative existential statements by the use of the subject-predicate form? I cannot see that it would. Indeed, perhaps we all learn the subject-predicate form before learning existential quantification. If so, would that make it impossible for a child at that stage to make true existential statements? I cannot see that it would.

But surely it is better to have an apt, perspicuous form of statement for what we want to say. This can hardly be denied. But if the

² I am not suggesting that it is impossible to commit oneself to the existence of such entities, or even that there may not be good reasons to do so. I am merely pointing out that in making statements of the sort just cited we are not making any such commitments.

inapt form does not interfere with complete truth, then what is inferior about it? Perhaps the most promising answer is that the inapt form is not the better choice just because it is, or can be, misleading. It can give rise to inappropriate, or even false, suggestions, inferences, or interpretations. The subject-predicate form does not adequately represent existential facts just because it is liable to suggest that existence is among the properties of an existing thing. And any form of statement fails to represent God adequately just because it is liable to suggest that there is complexity in the divine being, that God is distinct from His nature, properties, and actions. But being liable to spawn false suggestions is not the same thing as being false. I can have said something wholly true by saying, "There is a long way yet to go", even though I didn't express it in what is ontologically the most perspicuous fashion. In just the same way I can say something wholly true by saying, "God created the heavens and the earth" or "God spoke to Moses", even though my statement carries, by virtue of its form, false suggestions concerning the divine being.

If this is a satisfactory defense of Thomas-style theological statements against the charge of a failure to satisfy truth conditions, by reason of defects in the mode of signification, we can move on to the stickier double problem that arises with respect to the *res significata*: (a) a lack of determinateness in the theological meaning and (b) the mere fact that the theological meaning differs from the creaturely meaning. The problems significantly interact. I begin with the former.

I have already noted the rather low level of determinateness exhibited by theological statements on Thomas's interpretation. To say that God forgives Butler's sins is to say that the act of forgiveness (directed to Butler) "attaches" to God, but in a higher form. Thus apart from the inaptness of the subject-predicate form, about which nothing can be done, there is the fact that even the perfection signified is not fully specified; instead we simply indicate that it is a higher form of a creaturely perfection but without being able to say just what the higher form is. And insofar as it is indeterminate what we are attributing to God in saying this, to that extent it is not clear what the truth conditions of the attribution are. Hence it is not clear exactly what is being asserted of God.

How serious a problem is this? We can live with a certain degree of indeterminacy in our assertions. It conveys real information to tell someone that London is large city, even though there is no precise lower limit for the largeness of a city. But the difficulty here is that

Thomas, by his own showing, is not in a position to map, delimit, or demarcate the area or extent of indeterminacy. In the case of London we can give the population and make the statement much more specific, thereby making it clear that the largeness of London is on the order of magnitude of, say, New York City, rather than San Francisco. But that is just what we cannot do in the theological case. We can't replace the indeterminate assertion with anything more determinate, nor can we separate out a determinate part from a shadowy penumbra. At least, Thomas has given us no hint as to how this could be done, and it would seem to be indicated by his theory that there could be no such way. Thus we would seem to be at a loss in determining just what we are saying of God when we say that He is good or omniscient or that He created and sustains the world. This looks to be a crippling disability indeed.

The seriousness of the disability can be brought out by considering its consequences for inferences to and from statements about God. In this brief discussion, let's concentrate on the implications, both theoretical and practical, that can be drawn from statements about God.²⁰ I will begin with the former. Actually, it will prove most convenient to start the discussion with difficulties that arise from the mere fact that the theological meaning of a term *differs* from the creaturely meaning, whether the former is perfectly determinate or not. Indeterminacy will then be seen to play a crucial role when attempts are made to resolve these difficulties.

The most pressing worry about theoretical implications has to do with the application of general principles, arrived at from the study of creatures, to God. If 'knows' or 'wills' has a somewhat different meaning as applied to God and humans, then we cannot automatically transfer to divine knowing or willing principles we know (have reason to think) to hold for human knowing or willing. For it cannot be accepted without more ado that what is true of human knowing is also true of knowing in a different sense of 'know'. Thus when Aquinas takes it, on the basis of our understanding of human knowing and willing, that divine knowing takes place via a "species" of the object known, and that God necessarily wills what He understands to be the good, we will have to ask for some further reason to think that principles true of knowing or willing in one sense are also true of knowing and willing in another sense. He gives us no such reasons. (In terms of "theoretical implications" the

²⁰ Theoretical implications have been most emphasized in the critical literature, but the practical implications are at least equally important.

question is as to whether "God knows Moses" entails "God is aware of a species of Moses", etc.) Nor is Aquinas in a good position to do so. For, and this is where indeterminacy is crucial, he has disavowed any attempt to be specific about what knowing or willing come to in the divine case, except that they constitute a "higher mode" of the sort of thing we have in human knowing or willing. But if we can't spell out the ways in which this higher version is like and unlike the lower analogue, how can we even address the question of whether principles that hold of the lower form also hold of the higher form? This difficulty strikes at the heart of the Thomistic theology, for at many crucial points it depends on taking principles (assumed to be) true of human so-and-so's to be true of divine so-and-so's. The whole argument for the central thesis that the perfections of all things are in God hangs on the principle that whatever the cause bestows on the effect preexists in the cause,²⁴ a principle that is drawn from reflection on causal relations in the created order. Just to take one other example, the treatment of divine love depends on applying to God the scheme of passions drawn from the human case.²⁵ And so if the interpretation of theological predication renders such extrapolations invalid, Thomistic theology is in big trouble indeed.

Thomas would, presumably, reply that the ways in which divine perfections surpass their created counterparts are not such as to invalidate the applications of these principles to the divine case. But how, on his own principles, can he know this, or even be reasonably assured of it? By his own admission he is in no position to spell out the respects of similarity and dissimilarity between divine and human causal agency, willing, and so on. Therefore, how can he be assured that the dissimilarities are not such as to undermine the application of principles arrived at by a consideration of the creaturely analogues?

The difficulties with practical implications run parallel with the theoretical. Consider the inference from "God wills (commands) us to love one another" to "We ought to love one another". This seems quite in order until we ask whether the higher form of volitions (commands) has the same practical implications as the human form of volitions (commands)? And again, Aquinas is not in a good position to answer.

Because of these difficulties it would behoove us to reexamine

²⁴ ST I, 4, 2; SCG I, 29, 2.

²⁵ ST I, 20, 1.

Thomas's argument for the lack of univocity of even pure perfection terms, with respect to their lexical meaning, in creaturely and divine applications. Let's recall that this argument depends on an inference from the statement "divine wisdom [for example] is not exactly the same as human wisdom" to the statement that "wise" cannot be univocally predicated of God and man.

It must be said that nothing can be predicated univocally of the creature and God, for in all univocals the intelligible nature signified by the name (*ratio nominis*) is common to each of the things of which that name is univocally predicated. . . . Now however much it may imitate God, no creature can ever attain to this, that anything the same in its very intelligible essence should be common to it and to God. . . . [w]hatever is in God is His own proper act of existing. . . . Consequently, since the act of existing proper to one thing cannot be communicated to another, it is impossible that the creature should have anything in common with God quidditatively, even as it cannot possibly acquire the same act of existing as His. (*De veritate*, II, 11)⁸

An effect that does not receive a form specifically the same as that through which the agent acts cannot receive according to a univocal predication the name arising from that form. (*SCG* I, 32, 2)

It is impossible to predicate anything univocally of God and creatures. Every effect that falls short of what is typical of the power of its cause represents it inadequately, for it is not the same kind of thing as the cause. (*ST* I, 13, 5, R)

In all these cases Aquinas is arguing from "God and creature do not share exactly the same forms" to "No terms can be predicated univocally of God and creatures". But this argument clearly assumes that the meanings of the terms in question exactly mirror the objective facts of the matter. And because for Aquinas terms signify immediately our concepts, and through them what these are concepts of, this claim is based on the assumption that our concepts reflect precisely the ontological character of their objects. If divine volition has a quite different ontological status from human volition, then it follows without more ado that our concept of divine volition is correspondingly different from our concept of human volition, and hence that the meaning of 'wills' as applied to God is correspondingly different from the meaning of 'wills' as applied to human beings.

⁸ This translation is from J. F. Anderson, *An Introduction to the Metaphysics of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1953).

But this may well be questioned. Why suppose that our concepts are that closely conformed to the nature of the things conceived? Why suppose that I cannot form a concept of, for example, believing that applies truly both to human and canine believing, even though there are many crucial differences between believings of these two sorts.²⁷ To do so I have to abstract from many of the salient features of each sort of belief, but on what grounds can it be denied that such abstraction is possible? Why suppose that our conceptual operations are so closely tied to the character of what is conceived that we cannot form concepts that prescind from some of those features? Indeed, Thomas himself recognizes that this is possible. In a famous passage on analogy from the *Commentary on the Sentences* XIX, 5, 2, ad 1, he distinguishes three modes of analogical predication: "(1) solely as regards the concept involved; (2) as regards the act of existing, but not the concept; (3) as regards both the concept and the act of existing". He explains the second of these categories as follows.

The second mode of analogical predication is in effect when several things are put on an equal footing under one and the same common concept, although the nature that they share in common exists diversely in them. Thus all bodies [however diverse they may be in their actual existence] are on a par so far as the concept of corporeity is concerned. Thus the logician, who considers intentions only, says that the term body is predicated univocally of all bodies, and yet corporeity does not exist in corruptible and in incorruptible bodies in the same mode.²⁸

Thus we can form a very general concept of corporeity that abstracts from the difference between corruptible and incorruptible bodies,²⁹ and hence can be predicated univocally of both. Why, then, should it be impossible to form a concept of willing, knowing, forgiving, or loving that abstracts from the differences in the ways in which these forms are realized in God and creatures, and hence can be predicated univocally of both?³⁰

²⁷ Human beliefs, but not canine beliefs, are often linguistically encoded. An important part of what it is for a human being to believe that *p* is for that human being to be inclined to draw inferences from *p*. And so on.

²⁸ The translation is taken from Anderson. Note that this is a part of the text that Cajetan principally relies on in developing his interpretation of the Thomistic doctrine of analogy.

²⁹ According to Thomas's Aristotelian astronomy, the heavenly bodies, unlike terrestrial ones, are composed of incorruptible matter.

³⁰ The position adumbrated here is quite similar to the positions of both Scotus and Ockham on this point. See Duns Scotus, *Philosophical Writings*, trans. Allan Wolter

I do not claim to have shown the possibility of forming a concept that is restricted to what is common to divine and human knowing, willing, or whatever; and especially have I not shown the possibility of forming such a concept that has enough content to be interesting and important.⁴⁰ I don't know of any way of demonstrating this possibility short of exhibiting the actuality by actually constructing such a concept. I fancy that I have done this in other publications,⁴¹ and I will not repeat the performance here. Suffice it to say that, so far as I can see, by using a functionalist approach to the construal of psychological concepts we can specify a very abstract structure that can plausibly be claimed to be equally found in God and in creatures with psyches, though the mode of realization of this abstract structure is, no doubt, enormously different. Just to give a hint of the general idea, if what it is for a human being to know something is, in part, for that being to have a tendency to direct its action in a certain way, this fundamental aspect of knowledge could equally apply to God, and a term constructed so as to embody this aspect, and only this aspect, could be univocally predicated of God and man. Of course, to show that a certain term with a certain meaning could be truly predicated both of God and creatures we would have to go into what we are warranted in supposing that God is like, for that obviously puts limits on what can be truly predicated of God.⁴² I cannot go into all this within the limits of this essay. Here I restrict myself to arguing that Thomas has radically undersupported his claim that it follows from the thesis that "no creature can ever attain to this, that anything the same in its very intelligible essence should be common to it and to God" that no term can be predicated uni-

(Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co, 1987), pp. 20-25. (This is from the *Opus Oxoniense*, I, dist. III, q. i.) See also William of Ockham, *Philosophical Writings*, trans. Philotheus Boehner (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1990), pp. 102-13. (This is from the *Ordinatio*, D. II, Q. ix, P sqq., and from the *Reportatio*, III, Q. viii.)

⁴⁰ If the question is merely whether one can form *any* concept that applies equally to God and human beings, that is easily answered. Try *not identical with Richard Nixon or possible object of thought*.

⁴¹ See my "Functionalism and Theological Language" and "Divine and Human Action" in *Divine Nature and Human Language* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

⁴² This is one of the paradoxical aspects of this problem area. We have to employ talk about God in order to determine what terms with what meanings can be truly predicated of God, and we have to do the latter to determine the semantic status of talk about God. Thus we have to have a working grasp of the subject matter in order to arrive at a theoretical grasp of it. But it takes little reflection to realize that this is by no means peculiar to this topic. Any investigation of language, semantic or otherwise, requires us to use language meaningfully.

vocally of God and creature, and hence that if we are to say anything truly of God the term has to be used in a somewhat different, analogically related sense.

One might think that Thomas has resources for answering this criticism in his account of concept formation, according to which intellectual concepts are abstracted from material ("sensible forms" or "sensible species") presented by the senses.⁴⁴ Moreover, this process is such as to make a form of the object, indeed the essence of the object where that is what is conceived, present in the mind in an "intentional mode". Thus Thomas is committed to a very high assessment of human cognition in general and conceptualization in particular. The process is such as to guarantee an exact mental transcription of the form to be conceived. Indeed, "transcription" is too weak a term, for the form conceived is, so to say, "bodily" in the mind. That is, it is in the mind so far as its intrinsic content is concerned, for the mode of realization of, say, the essence of a goat, is far different in the goat and in a human mind! It might be thought that on this view there is no room for a discrepancy in content between a concept (and hence the meaning of a term that expresses that concept) and the real being of the form conceived. And in that case a difference in the forms of knowledge in God and creature would necessarily carry with it a difference in the concepts of divine and human knowledge, and, *pari passu*, a difference in the meaning of 'knows' as truly applied to God and to creature.

However, there must be something wrong with this argument, for we have already seen Thomas acknowledging that generic concepts are sometimes abstracted from differences in the forms they are used to grasp. And apart from that, we can see why the above argument has no tendency to show that our concepts of divine attributes and activities must reproduce with photographic accuracy every detail of those perfections. For the doctrine of the development of concepts by abstraction from sensible forms has no application to the development of our thought about God. God does not present Himself to the senses, and so there is no sensible species from which concepts of divine attributes and properties, much less the divine essence, are abstracted. On the contrary, by Thomas's own showing we form our concepts of the divine by derivation from concepts of sensorily perceivable creatures, concepts that are themselves formed in the way just mentioned. Thus the general account of concept for-

⁴⁴ See, e.g., *ST* I, 85. The account is actually much more complicated than this. But I am not able to go into it properly within the limits of this essay.

mation has no tendency to imply that our concepts of divine attributes and activities will embody the character of those attributes and activities in such a way that differences in attributes will necessarily carry with it a difference in concepts. And so the argument against univocity from a difference in the *res significata* still falls through.

The upshot of these remarks is that even if we go along with Thomas on divine simplicity, the best position to take on theological predication, keeping in mind the distinction between *res significata* and *modus significandi*, is that we may be able in some cases to use terms univocally of God and creature so far as the *res significata* is concerned, even though the mode of signification will misrepresent the divine being. This is not to say, of course, that all, or even most, or even more than a tiny fraction, of creaturely terms can be univocally applied to God. And it may be that no creaturely terms, as they stand, can be so applied. But even so, it may be possible to devise more abstract terms that capture something strictly in common between God and creature, as briefly adumbrated by my reference to a functionalist account of knowledge. That, of course, leaves vast stretches of discourse about the divine that are best construed in other terms—analogy, metaphor, and so on. But it would seem that when it comes to what Aquinas calls "pure perfection terms" he lacks any sound reason for denying that they can be univocally applied across the divine-creature gap.

If we jump ship on the simplicity doctrine, as I believe we should, then much of Thomas's reasons for the denial of any univocity disappears. What is left is only the "difference of specific form" argument I have just been engaged in discrediting. Moreover, we no longer have the worry about the inaptness of the form of our discourse. Since there are real distinctions in God between God and His attributes, properties, and activities, between essence and existence, and between different properties and activities, the fact that our forms of assertion presuppose such differences does not render them inappropriate. We can then attempt to determine what terms can reasonably be thought to be truly applied univocally to God and creatures. As I have already intimated, I think that these will be very abstract ones. For the rest we can explore the varieties of alternatives to univocal literal predication, including special technical terms that can be literally applied only to God, analogically related senses of terms, and various figures of speech. St. Thomas is a landmark figure in opening up this subject and helping us become aware of much of its complexity, but his doctrines need considerable modification if they are to survive critical scrutiny.