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## The Force of Analogy

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## Review Article

### The Force of Analogy

ROBERT MASSON\*

*The article outlines twenty theses for rethinking the doctrine of analogy in a postmodern context. The pivotal claim is that the paradigmatic and decisive force of analogy is to extend and create new meanings by "forcing" an affirmation of identity that fundamentally alters our fields of meanings. Thus analogy in the case of terms properly predicated of God has to do more with the conceptual moves that create changes in our fields of meanings than with recognizing a "similarity in difference" or a proportion of some sort. The argument draws on Mary Gerhart and Allan Russell's theory of metaphoric process, on David Burrell's and Gregory Rocca's studies of Aquinas, and Robert Sokolowski's phenomenology of the "Christian distinction."*

The concept of analogy was a pivotal theme in the theology of the previous generation and its centrality persists in contemporary appeals to the singular role of analogical imagination in religious and theological reflection. The received notion, however, is closely associated with the metaphysical conception of the "analogy of being" and with related theories of language. Can a concept of analogy responsive to the challenges of postmodern linguistic theories and critiques of onto-theology play the pivotal role in theology that the "doctrine of analogy" had exercised in the fundamental and systematic theology of the previous generation? If so, what would be some key features of a revised conception? How would it differ from the received doctrine? And what sort of role would it play?

Of course, it is painting with very broad strokes to speak of "a" received doctrine on analogy, "the" theology of the previous genera-

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tion, and postmodern critiques. Analogy has long been a contested notion. Contemporary currents in theology have origins in a plurality of crisscrossing generations. And postmodernity axiomatically recoils against grand narratives purporting to lay out such "total" pictures. That is precisely what is problematic for postmodernity in any metaphysical conception of a hierarchy of beings with God as its highest instance. Such onto-theologies know too much about God and too little of the ambiguity and hubris in such grand schemes. Nevertheless, attention to such a broad canvas is warranted: first, because there is a crucial and common assumption that is shared in explanations of analogy and that is common in their popularizations and receptions among ordinary believers; and second, because the theological issues and implications entailed in the discussion of analogy are pivotal for theology as such and for the faith understanding of all believers.

Thomas Aquinas is usually credited as the first to appeal systematically to analogical predication as a means for explaining how concepts can properly and meaningfully signify God. He was responding to the problem that arises from the religious conviction that God as "creator" radically transcends the realm of created beings. As one who "creates from nothing" God is not simply the "first" in the long series of "creating" that ultimately gives us our world. Creation from nothing, and so "creator" as applied to God, signify something qualitatively and radically different from what we mean by "creator" and "creating" in every other instance. But if God's essence as "creator" is *sui generis* and so God's reality is beyond the grasp of concepts that refer to created realities, then how can any concept properly refer to God? If we predicate "creator" of God univocally, that would mean that God creates the way others create. We would thus implicitly deny God's transcendence. If we predicate "creator" of God in an entirely equivocal way, then we would have no way of grasping the meaning of the predicated term, and so the affirmation would not have any genuine signification for us. At best it would be a metaphorical and improper stretching of language, and at worst, empty talk.

Aquinas appealed to analogous predication as a third distinct manner of signifying that makes possible proper and meaningful affirmations about God. But while Aquinas consistently appealed to paradigmatic analogies to explain and justify his position, he never advanced an explicit doctrine as such. The variety of examples to which he appealed, and apparent shifts—over time and in different contexts—in his preference for one or another paradigm, set the stage for

disputes later among Scholastic interpreters who were intent upon finding a systematic doctrine implicit in his thought. This led to the much disputed question about whether analogy of proportionality or analogy of attribution provides his fundamental paradigm.

Since the 1930s, appropriations of Aquinas's appeal to analogy in theology have more and more taken into account the divergence between his use and the doctrines later imputed to him by Cajetan (1469-1534) and other Scholastics. In addition to retrievals of the historical context that informed Aquinas's very subtle way of dealing with the issue, other theological appeals to analogy in recent decades reframe the notion in light of conversations with contemporary philosophical movements, particularly with transcendental and analytic philosophies. But common to these approaches, as well as to their rejection and counterpoint, in for example Barth's "analogy of faith" or Pannenberg's doxology, is that all focus attention on the issue as a question about how certain terms (meanings) can properly signify God.<sup>1</sup> This is still true, though in a more qualified way, of interpreters such as Henri Bouillard who, noting that Aquinas never employs Cajetan's phrase "analogous concept," emphasize that the force of the term's analogous signification is at the level of judgment.<sup>2</sup> Despite this significant clarification, the mechanisms themselves that give judgment such force remain very elusive in these accounts. In abbreviated elaborations and in popular expositions, particularly, it is hard to avoid the specter of cryptic univocity, even when interpreters insist that for Aquinas what is signified (*res significata*) by a term when predicated of God has to be distinguished from the term's manner of signification (*modus significandi*) in the act of judgment. A similarly ambiguous effect can result from reminders of the Fourth Lateran Council's affirmation that any similarity between creator and creatures is characterized by an even greater dissimilarity, since this too

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of Barth's and Pannenberg's critiques see Gregory P. Rocca, *Speaking the Incomprehensible God: Thomas Aquinas on the Interplay of Positive and Negative Theology* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 93-103.

<sup>2</sup> This observation is not intended as a rejection of their positions, which I see as precedent and support for reframing the issue in the ways I will suggest here. See Henri Bouillard, *The Knowledge of God*, trans. S. D. Femiano (New York: Herder and Herder, 1968), 105-107. See also William Hill, *Knowing the Unknown God* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1971) and W. Norris Clarke, "Analogy and the Meaningfulness of Language about God: A Reply to Kai Nielsen," *The Thomist* 40 (1976): 64-72.

can easily be misunderstood to require a hidden univocal core of meaning: some minimal similarity even if greater dissimilarity.

Recent philosophical and theological investigations make possible a different way to frame the question. Some of that literature is explicitly focused on Thomas Aquinas. Noteworthy are David Burrell's studies on Aquinas and on analogy.<sup>3</sup> More recent works by Gregory Rocca and Olivier-Thomas Venard can be taken as further contributions to a revised construal of analogy's play in religious imagination and theological argumentation.<sup>4</sup> Some of the most illuminating insights about analogy have emerged from the collaborative reflections of the theologian Mary Gerhart and the physicist Allen Russell on metaphoric process and on the relation of science and religion.<sup>5</sup> Another significant resource is Robert Sokolowski's use of phenomenology to develop a "theology of disclosure" focused on the logical implications of what he calls "the Christian distinction."<sup>6</sup> The conceptual tools implicit in this literature suggest an outline for rethinking the notion of analogy that has significant implications for fundamental and systematic theology. While this new direction is faithful to Aquinas's practice, it can help distinguish more clearly the logical "mechanics" in his appeal to analogy, from the appeal's metaphysical presuppositions and warrants, and from the appeal's theological grounding in revelation. This new line of thinking can be outlined in twenty theses, as long as it is kept in mind that the aim is only to describe the broad contours for this revised understanding of the force of analogy.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> David B. Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979) and also *Analogy and the Philosophy of Language* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1973); *Freedom and Creation in Three Traditions* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993); *Knowing the Unknowable God: Ibn-Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986).

<sup>4</sup> See Rocca, *Speaking the Incomprehensible God*, and Olivier-Thomas Venard, O.P., *Littérature et Théologie: Une Saison en Enfer* (Genève: Ad Solem, 2002).

<sup>5</sup> Mary Gerhart and Allan Melvin Russell, *New Maps for Old: Explorations in Science and Religion* (New York: Continuum, 2001) and *Metaphoric Process: The Creation of Scientific and Religious Understanding* (Fort Worth, Tex.: Texas Christian University Press, 1984).

<sup>6</sup> Robert Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason: Foundations of Christian Theology* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982) and *Eucharist Presence: A Study in the Theology of Disclosure* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1994).

<sup>7</sup> For further explorations of this new line of thinking see: Robert Masson, "Saving God," *Horizons* 31/2 (2004): 239-271; "Reframing the Fields," *Zygon* 39/1

1. *The force of some analogies is metaphoric.* In proposing their theory of metaphoric process to explain how new knowledge develops in science and religion, Mary Gerhart and Allen Russell have provided seminal insights for rethinking how analogous language works. In fact, their theory is as much an explanation of the processes at the root of analogy as it is of the processes at the root of metaphor.

Fundamental to their theory is the contention that metaphoric acts have a disruptive effect on a tradition's fields of meanings and that this creates the possibility for fundamentally new ways of thinking and understanding. They propose that many of the most significant advances in both theology and science have been the result of forcing analogies that, given current understandings, were uncalled for and unwarranted. When forcing such an identity is successful (for example, in Newton's equation of earthly and heavenly mechanics), a fundamentally new field of meanings is created. It is not just that new notions are added to the current world of meanings. When the metaphoric process is successful, it becomes possible to conceive notions, understand relations, and envision as logical what could not have been so grasped before the metaphoric act.

For example, we can learn of new cities or new planets and so gain additional information for ourselves or for the field of astronomy. In doing this, however, we do not change the notions of "city," "planet," or "solar system." Nor do we change our notion of astronomy. Something different happened with Copernicus's insistence that the sun is the center of the universe or Newton's insistence that the mechanical laws of the heavens are identical with those of the earth. Their insistence on the identity between notions that were understood formerly to be contraries, created new understandings—a new world of meanings—that changed fundamental notions within physics, and indeed changed how ordinary people understand the world, its laws, and our place in the cosmos.

This effect—the creation of significant changes in fields of meanings—is the fundamental characteristic of the metaphoric anal-

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(March 2004): 49-62; "Metaphor as Apt for Conversation: The Inherently Conversational Character of Theological Discourse," in *Theology and Conversation: Developing a Relational Theology*, ed. Jacques Haers and Peter De Mey (Leuven: Peeters Press, 2003), 145-161; "The Clash of Christological Symbols: A Case for Metaphoric Realism," in *Christology: Memory, Inquiry, Practice*, ed. Anne M. Clifford and Anthony J. Godzieba (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2003), 62-86; and "Analogy and Metaphoric Process," *Theological Studies* 62 (2001): 571-596.

ogy. That is what distinguishes it from rhetorical moves we more commonly label "metaphor" or "metaphorical" in which creating a new and unexpected analogy extends the meaning of terms within a field of meanings but does not reshape the field of meanings itself. This leads to a second thesis.

2. *The force of metaphoric analogy is in the field of meanings.* A simple example from Christian tradition illustrates this sort of logical change in fields of meanings: the affirmation that "Jesus is the Messiah." Given the images current in the eschatology of Jesus' day, affirming that God was victorious in the crucified son of a carpenter from Nazareth was uncalled for. In fact, most of the key eschatological images by which Jesus is identified in the gospels have something of this metaphoric dimension. By ordinary logic he was not a victorious King of Israel, a Son of Man who descended gloriously from the heavens, or acknowledged by his people for vanquishing their enemies. To affirm that Jesus is the Messiah is to force an analogy between him and Israel's expressions of hope and trust in God. This in turn requires a different understanding of God, Israel's hope, and Jesus. Affirming that Jesus is the Messiah forces a thoroughgoing revision of the field of meanings operative in the narrative worlds of the Bible.

David Burrell has analyzed how this process operates in Thomas Aquinas's theology more subtly and at a second-order level, or as Burrell says, at the level of grammar. Burrell speaks in his writings of "analogical use," but what he has in mind are forced or metaphoric analogies.<sup>8</sup> Paradigmatic instances are Aquinas's affirmations that God is simple and that God's essence is *esse*. In the first case Aquinas is employing the kind of proportions we find in all beings (form/matter, substance/accidents, and so on) to identify God, but to identify God as transcending such composition. Even though the term "simplicity" is a substantive and thus sounds like a quality or description of God, Aquinas uses the term as shorthand for denying that any substantives, at least as we know them, can apply to God. In this case, forcing the analogy between God and simplicity effects and presup-

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<sup>8</sup> For a more detailed examination of his position see my "Analogy and Metaphoric Process," 575-581; the primary source is David Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame, 1979).

poses a change in the underlying logic or grammar of ordinary discourse.

The subtlety of this metaphoric move becomes most evident in the affirmation that the nature of God is *esse*. The logical act of assertion is different from predication. When we say that something is, that it exists, we are not describing any particular feature of the reality. In affirming that God's essence is "to be," Aquinas is not giving us a description of God in the ordinary sense of things, because "to be" is not a thing or predicate in the ordinary sense. Saying that God's nature is "to be" does not give us a definition or grasp of God's nature. Although what "to be" signifies cannot be grasped directly in a concept, the grammatical analogy between asserting things "to be" and affirming predicates of things, enables Aquinas to stretch predication and to use substantives to talk of a thing's "being" or of God's "to be." In employing this structural analogy, however, Aquinas does not reduce an existential assertion to a predicative one. Rather, he extends language metaphorically—he forces an identity between the logic of asserting and the logic of predicating—to display and speak of what is beyond language's grasp. Recognition of this metaphoric move is essential to the correct interpretation of what Aquinas says here and of much else he says about God.

So a key feature of a revised conception of analogy that would distinguish it from standard accounts is this shifting of our attention to the changes in the fields of meanings from focus on the identity or proportionality of individual terms or propositions.

3. *It is this metaphoric force of analogy that is the most crucial and most paradigmatic for theology.* Robert Sokolowski has made a persuasive case that the Christian affirmation that God creates *ex nihilo* forces a fundamental change in the logic of all other Christian assertions about God. Although he does not refer to Gerhart and Russell's theory, this "Christian distinction," as he calls it, forces an analogy that reconfigures a larger and significant field of meanings. The distinction about which he speaks is between God and everything else. When Christian theology affirms that God is creator, as noted earlier, it is not affirming that God is the highest being of creation (as for example in pagan philosophies such as Aristotle's). God is not part of the world or bound by the necessities of the world. "No distinction made within the horizon of the world is like this, and therefore the act of creation cannot be understood in terms of any ac-



tion or any relationship that exist in the world.”<sup>9</sup> The distinction between God and other beings is thus logically different from any other and thus effects a fundamental change in the ordinary fields of meanings when these become part of the articulation of Christian convictions. Sokolowski’s analysis of key doctrines demonstrates the centrality of such logical shifts in meaning and their implication for correctly interpreting the thrust of Christian affirmations. David Burrell has expanded Sokolowski’s analysis to demonstrate its application to Jewish and Muslim conceptions of God.<sup>10</sup> It would seem that any theology which eschews an onto-theological conception of God as a being, the highest being or being in common, would have to resort to some metaphoric device for speaking of theology’s ultimate referent.

Gregory Rocca’s recent, masterful study of analogy and the interplay of negative and positive theology in Aquinas’s thought also confirms this line of thinking about analogy. Rocca does not refer to the notion of metaphoric process but he does make a very strong case that the many different sorts of appeal to analogous usage in Thomas Aquinas’s corpus involve stretching the language of the tradition he received. Aquinas, in Rocca’s words, “stretches our semantics and exercises our understanding.”<sup>11</sup> Rocca contends that one misunderstands Aquinas’s analogical moves if one misses how his theological assumptions force a reframing of the conception of *ratio*, that is to say, of what is taken as rational. Of course, whether Rocca’s interpretation of Aquinas could be developed to address the charge of onto-theology, or whether he would even sanction such a move, is another question that cannot be pursued here. The point is only to suggest that even in Aquinas, the crucial and paradigmatic force of analogy is concerned with stretching semantics and understanding to open up new conceptual space for theological meanings not expressible in more ordinary ways.

4. *The force of a metaphoric analogy is epistemic.* As we have seen already, such analogies are not simply rhetorical tropes but

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<sup>9</sup> Sokolowski, *God of Faith and Reason*, 33.

<sup>10</sup> David B. Burrell, “The Christian Distinction Celebrated and Expanded,” in *The Truthful and the Good: Essays in Honor of Robert Sokolowski*, ed. John R. Drummond and James G. Hart (Boston, Mass.: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996), 191-206.

<sup>11</sup> Rocca, *Speaking the Incomprehensible God*, 151.

rather are reconfigurations of the fields of meanings by which reality is apprehended.

5. *Moreover, metaphoric analogies make real, though logically and semantically altered, assertions.* Despite their apparent unreasonableness, forcing such analogies does not result in nonsense. Quite to the contrary, twisting accustomed meanings in these situations opens up possibilities for understanding that otherwise would not be available. On this reading, for example, Christians do intend to force the identity between "Jesus" and "Messiah." The logic of this move loses its force if Jesus is not in some sense properly and literally the one expected.

6. *Metaphoric analogies make literal affirmations.* The use of "literal" here is deliberate. The conception of metaphoric process destabilizes the meaning of "literal" itself and warrants this qualified use. Although reference to the literal meaning often assumes that exact and primary meanings are univocal and constant, and that fields of meanings are stable, the metaphoric process presupposes that meanings are dynamic and relative. In a metaphoric affirmation words come to have new exact and primary meanings. Moreover, in the re-framed context, these meanings are semantically proper, logically warranted, and factually the case—three further important denotations of "literal." After Thompson and Joule, *heat is motion*. After Einstein, it is literally true that the speed of light *is* the same for all observers. For those whose world of meanings has been transformed by the gospel, *Jesus is the Messiah*. For those who accept Aquinas's grammatical moves "*God's being is 'to be.'*"

7. *Analogies have metaphoric thrust only to the extent that they continue to force disruptions in our fields of meanings.* In the three examples mentioned, the meaning will be lost if the metaphoric change in fields of meanings is missed. If one thinks it necessary to prove that Jesus literally fulfilled every prophesy or if one believes that Aquinas offers substantives which enable a grasp of God's simplicity or being, then the point has been missed. In some fields—for example, the natural sciences—the death of a metaphor because it has been so effective that it produced a permanent change in meanings does not constitute a comparable loss. In the religious and theological realm, therefore, some device is required to keep the

metaphoric disruption alive, or at least retrievable. In the case of "Jesus is Messiah," it is the gospel narratives that hold open this possibility. In Aquinas's affirmations, it is their grammatical and semantic oddity, as Burrell and Rocca demonstrate.

8. *The metaphoric analogy's alteration in fields of meanings is often at a meta-level or in the way of asserting rather than in what is asserted.* Or, to put it another way, the changes in fields of meanings are often as much implications of the performance of asserting as they are of the assertion. In the cases cited above, for example, changes in the fields of meanings of the gospels' conceptual worlds are rather direct implications of asserting the identity between Jesus and Messiah. But changes in fields of meanings is more subtle in the second example of Aquinas's affirmation that God is simple. In that instance the shifts in fields of meanings are an implication of a grammatical move. "Simplicity," although grammatically a substantive, is used by Aquinas as shorthand for denying that any substantives, at least as we know them, can apply to God. Aquinas's affirmation that the nature of God is *esse* operates at an even deeper level, since to display and speak of what is beyond language's grasp he forces an identity between the grammatical logic of asserting and the grammatical logic of predicating.

9. *Reception is a crucial element in metaphoric analogies.* The new meanings and logical entailments are available only to those who are "alive to them"—who are able and willing to accept the reframed field of meanings. It is always possible that one might not "get the point." This would be the case, for example, if one misses the metaphoric thrust and concludes that Aquinas had defined or grasped God in affirming that God's essence is *esse* or that God is simple.

10. *Metaphoric analogies are not necessarily self-conscious and frequently are unnoticed by both the agent and recipients.* It is possible that one can follow Aquinas's move without being conscious that this is a metaphoric analogy. Burrell suggests that Aquinas himself likely was not fully conscious that he was making the grammatical moves Burrell attributes to him.<sup>12</sup> We need not suppose that Coper-

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<sup>12</sup> Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 53.

nicus was aware that he was acting “metaphorically” or that most believers are conscious of the metaphoric thrust of many of their central convictions.

*11. Demonstrating that an affirmation is a metaphoric analogy does not prove it true but puts one in a position where questions of truth can be entertained and evaluated.* There is nothing in principle that precludes a non-Christian or a fundamentalist Christian from understanding what is entailed in the attribution of a metaphoric dimension to the affirmation “Jesus is Messiah.” Understanding the proposed explanation that the fields of meanings have been reframed does not necessarily entail being persuaded either that the identity claim in the New Testament is in fact metaphoric, or if it is, that the proposed alterations in fields of meanings truthfully illuminate the phenomenon in question. But one cannot even entertain these considerations or evaluate their merit without first recognizing them. A person who has not recognized that an analogy has been forced cannot entertain or evaluate whatever truth claims this metaphoric move might entail.

*12. The forces of analogy are many. Analogy itself is analogous.* While it can be asserted that metaphoric analogies are the most crucial and paradigmatic ones theologically, it does not follow that all religious analogies are forced. Often religious discourse and theological argumentation use analogies of the more ordinary sort that do not change the field of meanings in any fundamental way. Nor does this hypothesis entail the claim that there is a universal logical scheme that explains all metaphoric analogies. A common epistemic process yields a multiplicity of convictional logics. By its very nature, forcing an unwarranted analogy results in novel meanings and logical possibilities not anticipated or accounted for in the pre-metaphoric fields of meanings.

*13. Hence, the force of analogy must be determined by use, a posteriori, and contextually.* Attention to analogy is not an argument for detaching meanings from their rich conceptual, social, and historical context. Quite to the contrary: since a metaphoric analogy’s creation of new meaning is a function of the way it effects changes in a received field of meanings, it is hard to imagine how one could get the point of a metaphoric analogy without understanding the pre-metaphoric field

of meanings. Rocca's meticulous historical and conceptual analysis of Aquinas's appeal to analogy provides a very illuminating illustration of this. Rocca is able to clarify the interconnection of Aquinas's logical moves, philosophical presuppositions, and theological grounding by careful attention to: the manner in which Aquinas appeals to his paradigmatic cases; the ways he both assumed and radically stretched the available philosophical and grammatical resources; and the theological motivation and basis for his approach.

*14. The force of analogy is to extend and create new meanings. It is more than a matter of recognizing similarity in difference or a proportionality of some sort.* This thesis is an expansion of the first and second above, but it merits some emphasis since analogy so frequently is thought of as essentially distinguishing and affirming some similarity-in-difference. On that assumption, standard accounts presume that the key question about analogies for God is whether they are by attribution or proportionality. Although the force of analogy does involve an identity of some sort and will often manifest itself in the rhetorical tropes we commonly call "analogies," the crucial conceptual moves are the changes in the underlying fields of meaning. It is these changes, not any analogous attribution or proportionality as such, which warrant and provide the mechanism—that is to say, the new field of meanings and logical space—that make possible new meanings that are not reducible to a univocal or equivocal sense as would be the case in the pre-metaphoric (or received) world of meanings. Without such a mechanism—without such underlying metaphoric force—there is not a convincing response to the charges that analogy finally entails either a hidden univocal core of meaning or a lapse into equivocation.

*15. The warrants for analogy are varied, complex, many, and retroductive.* This thesis also follows from previous ones. The same criteria apply to judging the truth of analogical moves as apply to all our other conceptual moves. Rethinking the notion of analogy along these lines emphasizes several key considerations. First, the warrants have to do primarily with the underlying changes in the fields of meanings. Second, by its very nature, forcing an unwarranted analogy results in novel meanings and logical possibilities not anticipated or accounted for in the pre-metaphoric fields of meanings. Sorting out and evaluating the warrants for such moves is complex and resistant

to the generalization of criteria. Third, since metaphoric process entails forcing analogies which are at odds with the received world of meanings and since human creativity and genius play a decisive role in such moves, warranting them necessarily will be largely a retroductive effort. One has to argue backwards to justify continuity with and deepening of enduring truths, since the truth of a metaphoric change in fields of meanings is not logically or organically required by the pre-metaphoric world of meanings.<sup>13</sup>

16. *The logical particularity of metaphoric analogies precludes specific and a priori generic accounts that apply across the board to all theologies and religions. A posteriori analysis of particular cases therefore is required to determine when, which, and how analogies presuppose some metaphoric force.* This means, particularly in ecumenical and interreligious dialogues, that any sort of comparative analysis or judgments about agreement and difference must attend to differences in the traditions' worlds of meanings and logics. Comparison and judgment are thus complex hermeneutical efforts. The advantage of rethinking the metaphoric force of analogy in such pursuits is that it provides a focus for dialogue, namely discerning the underlying logic and world of meanings for reference to the divine (or ultimate reality) in the traditions compared. Conceived in this way, analogy does not stand for a particular metaphysical or doctrinal criterion for settling convictional disputes between churches or between religions.

17. *Distinctions commonly drawn between a non-dialectical, analogical Catholic imagination and a non-analogical, dialectical Protestant imagination—sometimes also portrayed as a contrast between analogical and metaphorical imaginations—are inadequate.* The metaphoric dimension of analogy points to an inherent dialectical moment that is often not clearly articulated in the standard ac-

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<sup>13</sup> I am particularly indebted for this insight to a forthcoming essay by John Thiel, "The Analogy of Tradition." For more on "retroductive warrants," see also Francis Schüssler Fiorenza's *Foundational Theology: Jesus and the Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1984); "Systematic Theology: Task and Methods" in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1991), 1-88; and "Theology As Responsible Valuation or Reflective Equilibrium: The Legacy of H. Richard Niebuhr," in *The Legacy of H. Richard Niebuhr*, ed. Ronald F. Thiemann (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1991), 33-71.

counts of the doctrine of analogy. The Catholic understanding of God does not necessitate the notion that there is some proportionality between Creator and creature. Moreover, this understanding of analogy does not deny the priority of grace, faith, and Scripture in Christian theological understanding. Again, these are not new or original theses, but rethinking analogy along these lines offers further support for them and suggests a way of addressing some of the common objections, especially in Protestant theology, to the standard accounts in Catholic theology. It could also be argued that the notion of metaphoric process, which entails a key role for forced analogy, offers a more satisfactory explanation of the metaphorical imagination than one gets in primarily dialectical accounts, such as Sallie McFague's.<sup>14</sup>

*18. The force of analogy has to do with its role as a mechanism of a particular variety of speech act.* The discussion of analogy in standard accounts tends to focus almost exclusively on doctrinal affirmations and metaphysical assertions. Religious meaning, however, is encoded in a variety of communicative activities, not only assertions, but also speech acts that are directive, commissive, declarative, and expressive. The sort of metaphoric analogy about which we have been speaking is deeply embedded in these other contexts. Such, for example, are the words of consecration or other sacramental gestures that force shifts in our fields of meaning and whose logic makes sense only in light of these shifts. Hence, speech act theory must play a role in explaining analogy.<sup>15</sup>

*19. The force of analogy offers an explanation of a type of religious and theological speech act left unexplained in accounts influenced by Heidegger but is not inconsistent with Heidegger's critique of onto-theology or even fairly strict Heideggerian usage.* A metaphysically conceived doctrine of analogy has little cogency for Heidegger and many postmodern thinkers. But Heidegger himself continued to speak of God. Likewise, Thomas Sheehan—a Heideggerian

<sup>14</sup> Sallie McFague. *Speaking in Parables* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1975); *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1982); and *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1987).

<sup>15</sup> Terrence Tilley provides a very accessible overview of speech act theory and illustration of its usefulness for theological analysis in *Evils of Theodicy* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1991).

of strict persuasion—also speaks of God and insists that his analysis does not deny God. At the same time, however, he charges that Christianity's original sin is to think that it is about God. Sheehan advocates a humanistic "atheology" and interprets Jesus as one who sought to bring an end to religious seeking after God.<sup>16</sup> While Laurence Hemming has not distanced himself from the church or Christian tradition in this way, he nevertheless makes a vigorous argument that Heidegger's atheism creates space for the possibility of faith by showing that the death of God proclaimed by Nietzsche is the inevitable consequence of the metaphysical attempt to get a philosophical fix on God apart from faith. For Hemming, following Heidegger, onto-theology, the effort to get to God metaphysically, yields not God but finally only humanity's self-assertion.<sup>17</sup>

It is not clear, however, in Heidegger's analysis, or that of interpreters such as Sheehan or Hemming, what the linguistic mechanism—the vehicle of meaning—is that *enables* their talk of God. The issue here is not about what warrants their use of the term "God." It can be granted that the warrant is a gift or grace and requires faith. But even if that warrant entails God's initiative and so faith and something not attainable by philosophical and metaphysical argumentation, this still requires some human modality—some linguistic medium or speech act—which creates a space and logic for "meaning" God. A case can be made that Heidegger, Sheehan, and Hemming themselves implicitly make metaphoric moves to create the conceptual and logical space for their own talk of God. Moreover, their critiques do not attend to the possibility of a metaphoric force in alternative theologies that would preclude the charges against them as onto-theology.<sup>18</sup>

20. *The "analogy of being" is an instance of metaphoric analogy and so should be interpreted in light of this. The initial key to understanding the "analogy of being" is the metaphoric force of analogous*

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Sheehan, "From Divinity to Infinity," in The Jesus Seminar, *The Once and Future Jesus* (Santa Rosa, Calif.: Polebridge Press, 2000), 27-44, at 28; *The First Coming: How the Kingdom of God Became Christianity* (New York: Random House, 1986) and Karl Rahner: *The Philosophical Foundations* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1987).

<sup>17</sup> Laurence Paul Hemming, *Heidegger's Atheism: The Refusal of a Theological Voice* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002).

<sup>18</sup> For an extended development of this thesis see my "Saving God."



*speech acts, not vice versa.* As noted above, taking into consideration the metaphoric force and distinct logic grounding appeals to analogous language in thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas or Karl Rahner has the advantage of clarifying in a much more perspicuous way what is going on logically and philosophically in their affirmations. If one starts with an understanding of the metaphoric force of analogous speech and the consequent changes in fields of meanings, a case can be made for speaking of God as *esse* that does not necessarily lead to onto-theology. As Rocca puts it,

nowhere does Thomas say or imply that we prove God's existence by means of analogy, as some have claimed. "God exists" does not employ an already existing analogy but actually generates one in order to know and express its own truth—that is, "God exists" is itself an analogical judgment of enormous epistemological complexity that transfers *exists* from its normal worldly uses to God.<sup>19</sup>

Such analogical theologies may sound onto-theological if one is not attuned to their metaphoric modality and warrants. Perhaps it is better put to acknowledge that such analogical theologies are rarely performed perfectly. It is never easy in our efforts to speak of the incomprehensible God to acknowledge simultaneously all that is entailed, positively and negatively, in stretching language to such extraordinary uses.

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<sup>19</sup> See Rocca, *Speaking the Incomprehensible God*, 183-184. He cites the following two authors as making such claims for proof by means of analogy: George Klubertanz, "The Problem of Analogy," *Review of Metaphysics* 10 (1957): 569-573 and Hampus Lyttkens, *The Analogy between God and the World: An Investigation of Its Background and Interpretation of Its Use by Thomas of Aquino* (Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksells, 1952), 395-414.