

## TALK OF GOD AND THE DOCTRINE OF ANALOGY

response?  
 W. Morris Clarke  
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If then we take the divine attributes one by one and ask whether each of them is to be found in God, we must reply that it is not there, at least as such and as a distinct reality, and since we can in no way conceive an essence which is nothing but an act of existing, we cannot in any way conceive what God is, even with the help of such attributes.

E. Gilson

The world requires as its cause a being totally transcending it in every respect; but how can we even affirm the existence of such a being, if our experience of the world gives us no words by which to define him?

E. L. Mascall

## I

THE CLASSICAL DOCTRINE of analogy has been used to try to show how terms involved in God-talk have an appropriate meaning even if the key statements involving God-talk are not verifiable even in principle. Someone who 1) accepted the verifiability principle as a criterion for what is to count as *factually* meaningful and 2) who took the intent of the normal use of most indicative God-talk sentences to be to make factual statements, would assert that for 'God loves His creatures' to be properly meaningful, we must show what implications for our experience would or at least in principle could count for or against its truth. Some defenders of the doctrine of analogy present an alternative account of the meaning of such utterances, an account, which, if correct, would, for much of God-talk at least, supply an answer to the challenge that non-anthropomorphic God-talk is devoid of factual significance. I shall consider the merits of such views.

Father F. Copleston and Professor James F. Ross provide us with distinguished contemporary statements of such a position.<sup>1</sup> They both claim that where we are speaking of a transcendent and infinite being—the object of a religiously adequate God-talk—the terms predicated of this being must be used analogically if they are to have any meaning at all. We need such an analogical account to escape the following dilemma. If, on the one hand, the terms are used with the same meaning, say in respect to God and to man, then God becomes an anthropomorphic being. That is to say, if God's intelligence or love is like man's intelligence or love, then God becomes simply a kind of superman, a being that is a part of nature, and not an infinite, non-spatio-temporal being, transcendent to the world. Yet, on the other hand, if 'intelligence' and 'love' are said to have a completely different sense when applied to God, they lose all meaning for us. The meaning-content of terms such as 'intelligence' and 'loving' is determined by our experience of human beings, by our experience of human intelligence and love, "and if they are used in an entirely and completely different sense when predicated of God, they can have no meaning for us when they are used in this way."<sup>2</sup>

'Intelligence' as applied to dogs and men could have (I don't say it does have) a completely different sense and still 'intelligence' could be intelligibly predicated of a dog's behaviour as well as a man's because we could ostensibly teach how we

<sup>1</sup> F. C. Copleston, *Contemporary Philosophy* (London: Burns and Oates, 1956) and James F. Ross, "Analogy as a Rule of Meaning for Religious Language," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 1 (1961), pp. 468-502. In his later "A New Theory of Analogy," in *Logical Analysis and Contemporary Theism*, ed. by John Donnelly (New York: Fordham University Press, 1972), Ross uses work in structural linguistics to give the outline of a new theory of analogy which he believes to be compatible with the classical theory. His account there (where it applies to analogy of proper proportionality) is vulnerable to most of the criticisms I level at his earlier and more detailed account. I shall concentrate my discussion most extensively on his earlier and more detailed account, but I shall in the final section say something which applies particularly to the later account.

<sup>2</sup> Copleston, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

used the term. But the case is different with God for we have not observed and cannot observe God—anything that could be observed, *ipso facto*, would not be God.<sup>3</sup> Since this is so we cannot discover by ostensive definition or ostensive teaching what it means to say God has intelligence or is loving. Thus if 'intelligence' and 'love' have a completely different meaning when applied to God, we can have no understanding at all of these predicates. If such key utterances as 'God loves human beings' or 'God's intelligence is manifest in his creation' are to have meaning, then 'love' and 'intelligence' must be used analogically: "that is to say, a term which is predicated of God and finite things must, when it is predicated of God, be used in a sense which is neither precisely the same as nor completely different from the sense in which it is predicated of finite things."<sup>4</sup> Terms like 'love' and 'intelligence' must be used in a "sense which is similar and dissimilar at the same time to the sense in which it is used when predicated of finite things."<sup>5</sup>

To put the matter in a slightly different way. For Aquinas and for other late medieval writers, who, as thoroughly as most contemporary writers, rejected any claim that there could be a *logically* necessary being or a purely conceptual identification of God, the problem of *meaning* was an acute one.<sup>6</sup> Our ordinary language with its pervasive empirical anchorage was accepted by these thinkers as being applicable to God. We must start from the language of common experience if we are to have any understanding of anything at all. But, as Ross puts it, Aquinas' problem then was this:

How could he show that this language (all of the terms, expressions and employments of which are learned from human experience) can be applied, without such equivocation as would render invalid all argument, to God, an entity which is so different from the

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> See here Terence Penelhum, *Religion and Rationality* (New York: Random House, 1971), pp. 77-87, 121-62, and 365-79.

objects of experience as to be 'inexperience-able' in any of the ways common to ordinary human experience.<sup>7</sup>

It is claimed that it is just here—if our God-talk is to be shown to have an intelligible factual content—that we must develop a viable theory of analogical predication. Again, as Ross puts it, in a more technical rendering of Copleston's point:

If the predicate terms in G-statements (statements with 'God' or a synonym as the subject) are *totally* equivocal with respect to the occurrences of the same predicate terms in E-statements (with any object of ordinary, direct or indirect experience as subject), then all arguments with an E-statement in the premises and a G-statement as the conclusion will be invalid, committing the fallacy of equivocation; and all G-statements will be meaningless because none of the human experience will count either as evidence for or as explications of those statements.<sup>8</sup>

But if our common terms here have a univocal meaning, we (Ross agrees with Copleston) fall into a gross anthropomorphism in which our statements about such an anthropomorphic deity are certainly literal enough but false or, as Copleston puts it, at least they commit their user to a concept of God that no one (presumably no 'contemporary man') "would be seriously concerned to argue" for.<sup>9</sup> As Ross puts it "if the G-statement predicates are univocal with a representative set of instances of those predicates in E-statements, then our statements about God will be, in most cases, obviously false and, in the remainder, misleading."<sup>10</sup> We are back with the old problem: God-talk seems to be either without a proper meaning or, where it has an evident factual content, our first-order God-statements are simply false and embody religious concepts which are plainly religiously inadequate.<sup>11</sup> The analogy theory on such con-

<sup>7</sup> Ross, *op. cit.*, p. 470.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 487-88.

<sup>9</sup> Copleston, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

<sup>10</sup> Ross, *op. cit.*, p. 498.

<sup>11</sup> See here my "On Fixing the Reference Range of 'God,'" *Religious Studies*, Vol. II (October, 1966), *Contemporary Critiques of Religion* (London: Mac-

temporary readings as Copleston's and Ross's is designed to bail us out here.

## II

I shall begin by examining Copleston's account, for it is relatively straightforward and yet it attempts, taking into account the analytical or linguistic turn in philosophy, to break new ground. I shall then in section III examine Ross's "Analogy as a Rule of Meaning for Religious Language." Ross's essay is a complicated piece, full of stipulative definitions and a formidable jargon, but it does, though in an unnecessarily cumbersome way, attempt to come to grips with these crucial problems of meaning. I shall not examine E. L. Mascall's *Existence and Analogy* for two reasons: (1) it has already been extensively criticized and (2), as Ross points out, it does not really come to grips with the problems of *meaning*, for it treats analogy as a theory of inference rather than as a theory purporting to show how God-talk can have factual intelligibility.<sup>12</sup>

To say (1) 'God is intelligent,' (2) 'God made men out of nothing,' and (3) 'God loves all human beings' is, according to Copleston, to use—when (1), (2) and or (3) are vehicles for religiously adequate assertions—'intelligent,' 'made,' and 'loves' analogically. As we have noted, where our God-talk is not grossly anthropomorphic, all predications of God must be analogical. Where we have analogical predication as in (4) 'James is intelligent,' and (5) 'Fido is intelligent,' we must say that the terms predicated of the different subjects, e.g. James and Fido, are used in a sense which is neither precisely the same nor completely different. Yet this general remark,

millan Ltd., 1971) and *Scepticism* (London: Macmillan Ltd., 1972). For F. C. Copleston's account of this situation see his "Man, Transcendence and the Absence of God," *Thought*, Vol. XLIII (1968), pp. 24-38, "The Special Features of Contemporary Atheism," *Twentieth Century: An Australian Quarterly Review*, Vol. 25 (Spring, 1970), pp. 5-15 and his reviews of Axel Hägerström's *Philosophy and Religion* and Richard Robinson's *An Atheist's Values* in the *Heythrop Journal*, Vol. 7 (1966) and Vol. 5 (1964), respectively.

<sup>12</sup> Ross, *op. cit.*, p. 469.

Copleston stresses, tells us very little. Moreover, to be told that 'intelligent' is used analogically when applied to God is not yet to be told what *meaning* it does have or even how to determine what meaning it has.<sup>13</sup> To say that 'intelligent' in (5) is used analogously to the way it is used in (4) is most certainly not to tell us how it is used. We still do not know what it means to say that Fido is intelligent. What behaviour traits are we referring to? What would Fido have to do not to be regarded as intelligent? As we have indicated with Fido and his canine brethren, we can resort to ostensive definition but with God no such thing is possible.

How then do we know how 'intelligence' is used when applied to God? The negative way, though it is a natural way to proceed, will not do with (6), 'God is intelligent,' for we cannot intelligibly go on saying that God's intelligence is not like this or like that, if we cannot say *what* God's intelligence is. Every time I say that God's intelligence is unlike a characteristic of human intelligence, I whittle away more of its meaning. To intelligibly apply 'intelligence' to God I must make, or be able to make, some *positive* affirmation such as 'God is intelligent in an infinitely higher sense than human beings are.' But this, Copleston is well aware, is still to say very little. Moreover, when asked to give "a positive account of this higher sense," I find myself, full circle, back to the way of negation. Furthermore, if I continue in the affirmative way I end in anthropomorphism.<sup>14</sup> A successful theory of analogical predication must combine those methods without falling into the pitfalls of either. As Copleston puts it, "to avoid anthropomorphism of a gross sort the mind takes the way of negation, departing from its starting point, namely human intelligence, while to avoid agnosticism it returns to its starting-point."<sup>15</sup> We try here, in oscillating back and forth between anthropomorphism

<sup>13</sup> Copleston, *Contemporary Philosophy*, p. 94.

<sup>14</sup> Copleston, *Contemporary Philosophy*, pp. 94-95. See also his "Man, Transcendence and the Absence of God," *Thought*, Vol. XLIII (1968), pp. 24-38.

<sup>15</sup> Copleston, *Contemporary Philosophy*, pp. 96-97.

and agnosticism, in our predications concerning God, to hold together similarity and dissimilarity at the same time.<sup>16</sup>

This is indeed perplexing, but we must not forget that we are speaking, or trying to speak, of a mysterious being transcendent to the universe. We have, Copleston tells us, no direct apprehension of God.<sup>17</sup> God transcends our experience and thus He "cannot be positively and adequately described." This, he believes, should not lead to a rejection of God-talk as incoherent but simply to a recognition that our understanding of God—who after all is mysterious—is of necessity inadequate. Without the possibility of an adequate understanding of God, we must use analogy to have any understanding of God at all. This is simply one of the features "of our understanding of descriptive statements about God."<sup>18</sup> But, Copleston continues, that our concept of God is imperfect and can never be thoroughly purified of anthropomorphism does not mean that the very idea or concept of God is anthropomorphic; it only means that what Copleston calls the "*subjective meaning*" of 'God is intelligent' or 'God loves his creation' is inadequate and in part anthropomorphic. It does not mean that the *objective meaning* of these statements is inadequate.

Copleston's use of that tricky word 'meaning' is rather unusual. By 'subjective meaning' he means "the meaning-content which the term has or can have for the human mind."<sup>19</sup> By 'objective meaning' he means "that which is actually referred to by the term in question (that is, the objective reality referred to) . . ."<sup>20</sup> In the case of such key God-statements what is objectively referred to isn't at all anthropomorphic, but what our subjective meaning signifies is. It is this meaning that is inadequate, but not 'necessarily false.'

The distinction Copleston draws between 'subjective mean-

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 96-97.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

ing' and 'objective meaning' most certainly seems to be crucial in his attempt to rehabilitate the appeal to analogy, but it unfortunately is not a coherent claim. We might intelligibly speak of the distinction between 'subjective meaning' and 'objective meaning,' where the former referred to the meaning-content of a term as used on a given occasion or set of occasions by an individual or some group of people. This would make a non-vacuous contrast with 'objective meaning,' since the latter could be taken to refer to the meaning-content the terms would have if people were fully informed and took to heart the implications of the terms in question. But for Copleston 'subjective meaning' includes any meaning-content the term or terms "can have for the human mind," the 'objective meaning' of terms predicated of God is said to transcend our experience.<sup>21</sup> "It cannot be positively and adequately described."<sup>22</sup> But if the 'can' and 'cannot' here have a logical force, *viz.* if it is logically impossible to adequately grasp the objective meaning of these terms or even if it is some sort of 'ontological impossibility,' then there is no genuine contrast between 'objective meaning' and 'subjective meaning.' We can have no understanding of this 'objective meaning;' we can have no understanding of whether the 'subjective meaning' adequately or inadequately characterizes that 'objective reality' that the objective meaning adequately signifies. *Any* understanding at all of such matters that we humans can have—no matter how purified of anthropomorphic elements—is still subjective; the meaning we apply to predications of God is still necessarily and irredeemably 'subjective meaning.' Having no grasp of the 'objective meaning,' we can have no idea at all of whether our attempts to purify our 'subjective meaning' succeed or fail. Indeed 'purifying' actually has no use here, for we cannot know what would count as 'purifying' the meaning of a term unless we had some grasp of the standard of perfection aimed at. How, in short, does subjective meaning A fall shorter of

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

perfection than subjective meaning B? To know this we must have some understanding of the meaning-content of that which they fall short of, but if we have such a knowledge, then by definition it will not involve 'objective meaning' but 'subjective meaning.' But again we do not know and cannot know how this stands in relation to A and B.

There is a further quite unrelated difficulty in Copleston's account. In trying to avoid agnosticism about our predications of God we try to "hold together similarity and dissimilarity at the same time."<sup>23</sup> To be an analogical predication of God and man, the terms in question must be used in a sense which is neither precisely the same nor completely different. But this characterization is ambiguous. Taken in one way it makes analogy the same as univocity; taken in another it makes analogy the same as equivocity. If, on the one hand, 'James is intelligent' and 'God is intelligent' have even one similarity, then it is the case (or so at least it would seem) that one property (characteristic) of intelligence when referred to man and God is the same. But this means (or so at least it would seem) that the term by which this property (characteristic) is signified is a univocal predication of man and God and that, after all, not all God-predicates are analogical. If this is true, then analogical predication is neither essential nor complete in our talk about God. Indeed even for analogical predications to be possible, there must be some univocal predications as well. Suppose, on the other hand, the 'not precisely the same' rules out their having any common property or relation, then there can be no similarity since we cannot assert in what respect they are similar. If this is so, analogical predication really becomes the use of equivocal terms. Yet there seems at least to be no other way of intelligibly taking the terms being used so that in the different contexts they are used in a way which is neither precisely the same nor completely different. Thus Copleston has not been able to give us an intelligible account

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

of analogical predication that would distinguish it from a univocal or equivocal use of predicates when applied to God and the world.

There is a further problem that Copleston should face which is directly related to the falsification issue. If his claim that 'intelligent' (for example) is in a definite sense similar, when used of both God and man, then (given the correctness of the above argument) in both employments of 'intelligent' the term must signify at least one common property or, if you will, a relation. But then, aside from being committed to claiming—inconsistently with his general thesis about analogical predication—that at least one predication of God is univocal, he also in effect commits himself to treating 'God is intelligent' as a statement which can, at least in principle, be confirmed or disconfirmed, for if to be intelligent is to have property X and if property X is never manifested by God or if God does something inconsistent with ascribing X to Him, then we have grounds—though surely nothing like conclusive grounds—for denying that God is intelligent and if He does manifest X we have grounds for asserting that 'God is intelligent' is true. We have (if this is so) shown how such God-talk is verifiable by showing how evidence is relevant to the truth or falsity of 'God is intelligent.' The same, of course, applies to 'God loves all human beings.' But now these theological-metaphysical statements become what Copleston elsewhere has denied that they can be if they are to count as metaphysical statements, namely empirical assertions.<sup>24</sup>

This unintended implication of his account of analogical predication is surely unwelcome, for Copleston is committed to the view that such God-talk does not at central points consist

<sup>24</sup> This is very evident in his debate with A. J. Ayer. See A. J. Ayer and F. C. Copleston, "Logical Positivism: A Debate," in *A Modern Introduction to Philosophy*, ed. by A. Pap and P. Edwards (2nd edition, New York: Macmillan, 1967). In a later essay "Man, Transcendence and the Absence of God," *Thought*, Vol. XLIII (1968), Copleston contends that while believers and non-believers have the same expectations in regard to events in the world, their interpretations of the world are different. (See p. 37 of his text.)

in statements of empirical fact open to the usual precedures of confirmation and disconfirmation. Indeed Copleston seems anxious to meet, in some way, Flew's challenge about falsifiability. God-statements are taken by him to be factual statements, but they are alleged to be 'factual metaphysical statements.' Of these Copleston remarks: "I can hardly be said to know what is meant by a factual statement unless I am able to recognize that something at least is not asserted" and "unless I am able to recognize that something is excluded I do not know what is asserted."<sup>25</sup> But in his actual arguments concerning this, Copleston does not give us straightforward factual statements which could be used to confirm or disconfirm our theological statements. Rather, reasoning like what has been called a theological non-naturalist, his statements, used in confirmation and disconfirmation, have the same equivocal and controversial logical status as the statements to be confirmed or disconfirmed. He never breaks out of the religious network of statements; that is to say, in Ross's terminology, he gives us no E-statements to confirm his A-statements and so does not in reality meet Flew's challenge or give our A-statements their needed empirical anchorage.

That this is so can be seen from Copleston's own analysis of 'God is intelligent' and 'God loves all human beings.' He asks us, in asking for the meaning of these statements, to consider why a person would make such statements. Consider 'God is intelligent.' A man who has the idea of an 'existentially dependent world' naturally ascribes the order or system in the world to a creator. My 'subjective meaning'—the only meaning I can have for 'God is intelligent,' on Copleston's account—is 'There is a creator of the world who orders the world.' But if one is puzzled over what (if anything) it could mean to assert or deny that God is intelligent, one is going to be equally puzzled about the statement, given as the 'subjective meaning' or part of the 'subjective meaning' of that statement. We

<sup>25</sup> Copleston, *Contemporary Philosophy*, p. 99.

do not have a statement that is plainly an empirical statement to give empirical anchorage to our G-Statement. The same applies to 'God loves all human beings.'<sup>26</sup> Copleston remarks that if this statement or rather putative statement "is compatible with all other statements that one can mention and does not exclude even one of them," then it is devoid of factual significance. But it appears at least that it is so compatible, for no matter how many millions are put in the gas chambers, it is still said by the faithful that God loves his children. No matter what wars, plagues, sufferings of little children are brought up *a la* Dostoevski, they are still taken, by the faithful, to be compatible with the truth of the statement 'God loves all human beings.' Given such linguistic behaviour, one is tempted to think that nothing is excluded in the statement and thus it appears to be devoid of factual content. But, Copleston avers, this impression is mistaken. Something is incompatible with it, only we have been looking for that something in the wrong direction, namely in the experiences of men. But the Christian theologian knows a factual statement with which it is incompatible, namely 'God wills the eternal damnation and misery of all human beings.' The truth of 'God loves all men' is confirmed by 'God offers all men through Christ the grace to attain eternal salvation.' Knowing this latter statement to be true, we are justified in asserting 'God loves all men.' But here again Copleston is lifting himself up by his own bootstraps, for he is verifying religious statements by appealing to further religious statements without any of them getting the necessary empirical anchorage. The verifying statements are as problematic as the statements they are supposed to verify. In short, Flew's challenge concerning falsifiability is not met, for we have not been given any *empirically* identifiable state of affairs that is excluded by these statements. We do not have the anchorage in experience that Copleston so stresses as necessary for an understanding of God-talk.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

In short, Copleston has not provided us with an answer to Flew's challenge: he has not shown us how experiential statements either verify or falsify 'God loves all mankind' or 'God is intelligent' or any G-statement at all and he has not given an intelligible account of analogy that would enable us to overcome the anthropomorphism of univocal predication or the impossibility of understanding what is meant by the predicates in God-talk if they are used equivocally when applied to God and the world. He has not shown us how it is that 'we see through a glass darkly,' for given Copleston's approach to the incomprehensible Godhead, we can never know whether, by self-consciously and sensitively using our analogical concepts, we purify or fail to purify our understanding of God, because we can have no idea at all of the 'objective meaning' of such a concept.

### III

Ross tries to state in contemporary terms what he takes to be the vital heart of Aquinas' theory of analogical predication. But while his statement is far more complicated than Copleston's, it is no more successful.

As has frequently been pointed out, 'analogy' is itself an analogical term, that is to say, it has several meanings which are not unrelated: that is, they are partly similar and partly different. Moreover, 'analogy' is a term of art for the scholastics. In speaking of analogy we speak of analogy of attribution, metaphor and analogy of proper proportionality. But, as Ross and others have argued, it is analogy of proper proportionality that is most crucial in considering the analogical relation between terms predicated of God and terms predicated of man and other 'contingent natures.' It is then to analogy of proper proportionality that we shall turn.

Ross escapes some of Copleston's confusions by arguing that "analogy of proper proportionality is the general form of language about God" and that it is improper to call this language inadequate "for no other language is possible given the Christian assumption that God is transcendent and different in kind

from all other things."<sup>27</sup> 'God,' on this account, is "a shorthand for the definite description which would result from a combination of all the properties shown to be attributable to one unique being with some (psychologically prior) property such as 'First Cause' or 'Creator.'"<sup>28</sup> But the terms signifying these properties are all "analogous by proper proportionality with respect to psychologically prior instances of the same terms in ordinary experience describing statements."<sup>29</sup> In order to make sense of religious discourse, in order to explain how we have any understanding of the concept of God at all, we must give an intelligible account of analogy of proper proportionality and then show how it applies to God-talk.

What then are we talking about when we speak of analogy of proper proportionality? A proportion is the equality of two ratios, i. e. a is to b as c is to d. Ross gives several paradigms the least unfortunate of which is (a) Fido caused the barking and (b) Plato caused the murderous act.<sup>30</sup> Here 'caused' is supposed to be such an analogical term. And in (a) and (b) we have an analogy of proper proportionality. Fido's causing the barking is as Plato's causing the murderous act. Where we have analogy of proper proportionality, we have statements of the form:

1. (a) A is (or has) T
- (b) B is (or has) T

or:

2. AT<sub>x</sub>
- BT<sub>y</sub>

Where 'T' is a term, namely a word capable of naming or applying to a thing or things, A and B are things, and x and y are properties, actions or events. No. 1 above, Ross argues, is reducible to no. 2.

We are asked initially to assume that in our paradigm

<sup>27</sup> Ross, *op. cit.*, p. 501-02.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 500.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 501.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 487.

'caused' is *not* being used univocally. Later Ross will attempt to show that this assumption is justified. Secondly, to have such an analogy there must be at least two instances of the property signified by 'T.' As Ross puts it, "the second condition states, briefly, that the two things denoted by the term 'T' must have the property signified by 'T' and that the first condition must still be preserved: that the term is equivocal."<sup>31</sup>

There is, as Ross recognizes, quite obviously a problem here. If 'T' is equivocal, the properties would not be the same. But if the term 'T' in its instances signified the same property, has the same meaning as or is equivalent in its instances, then, in its instances, it has the same intention (connotation). But if this is so, then either the term is, after all, univocal or the second condition is unsatisfiable.<sup>32</sup> The first and second characteristics of such analogical terms appear at least to clash and this casts doubt on the coherence of analogy by proper proportionality.

To make sense out of this conception of analogy, we must show how both characteristics of this type of analogy are jointly satisfiable. This is exactly what Aquinas, Ross tells us, sets out to do and in Ross's opinion he is successful. To do this Aquinas must show how a term can be "univocal in signification . . . while being equivocal in not conforming to the rule for univocity of intention."<sup>33</sup> That is in (a) 'Fido caused the barking' and (b) 'Plato caused the murderous act' we must show how 'caused' in both cases signifies the same property, yet does not have exactly the same intention: does not in each case have the same conjunction of terms applicable to that to which each instance of 'caused' is applicable. There must be some term which is applicable to that to which 'caused' in (a) is applicable which is *not* applicable to that to which 'caused' in (b) is applicable and yet 'caused' in both occurrences must still signify the same property or set of properties.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 487.

We must examine whether such a notion makes sense. It most certainly appears to be nonsensical. But, as Ross argues, appearances are not to be trusted here.

To understand how this might be done, we must attend to a distinction Aquinas makes and Ross stresses between the *res significata* and the *modus significandi* of a term. A necessary condition for having an analogy of proper proportionality is to have a ratio in which the *modus significandi* differs and the *res significata* is the same. In such a situation we have the requisite similarity in difference. We have a situation in which we have a univocal signification together with an equivocal intention of the terms in question.

To make anything of this we must understand Aquinas' distinctions here. The intention of a term specifies not only the property or properties signified by the term but the way it is signified. The former is the *res significata* of the term and the latter—the way it is signified—is the *modus significandi* of the term.<sup>34</sup> In considering our paradigms (a) and (b), if we take our allegedly analogical term 'caused,' we can speak of two instances of the term 'caused' differing in their *modus significandi* in the sense that 'caused' refers to *different* kinds of causality. (Ross also works out the same point for 'knowledge.') The intention of 'caused' is proportionally the same in (a) and (b) "but the mode in which the property is possessed makes entirely different the kinds of action which can be performed."<sup>35</sup> We have the foundation of analogy of proper proportionality in "the unequal and different in kind participation of different natures in the same property according to differing modes of being determined by their nature."<sup>36</sup>

The terms 'knowing' and 'causality' are indeed univocal or equivocal depending on their use in sentences. In (a) and (b) 'caused' is not univocal even though we may form a metalanguage term 'caused' or 'causality' which is neutral with

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 488.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 489.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 490.



respect to all the object-language senses of 'caused.' The object-language senses of 'caused' are themselves equivocal. Given that the meta-language term 'caused' is about language and is neutral in the respect mentioned, then it need not be univocal with respect to any object-language sense of 'caused.'<sup>87</sup> In the different kinds of causality, distinguishable in the different object-language uses of 'caused,' we have the basis for the difference (the analogues are partly different) and in the meta-language use of the term 'caused' we have the basis for similarity (the analogues are partly similar). The neutral sense of 'caused' is not on the same level as the different kinds of causality exhibited, in the different uses that 'caused' has in different sentences in the object-language. The former is a meta-linguistic notion which includes the other uses and signifies them all equally and alternatively.<sup>88</sup> It, as a meta-linguistic term, is a predicate in sentences about predicates of sentences. This meta-linguistic use of the term is univocal. But this does not make the object-language terms univocal. They are, in contrast, equivocal. It is here that we have an intelligible rationale for analogy of proper proportionality.

There is, however, a fundamental confusion in Ross's argument. Where 'knowing' or 'caused' (the analogous predicate in question) is a predicate about predicates, where it is a meta-linguistic term, it is no longer 'knowing' we are talking about but "'knowing'." Where we are actually talking about knowing or causing something—the object-language terms—we are not talking about linguistic expressions but about their meaning or use in object-language sentences. But where we are talking about the expression 'knowing' or 'causing' we are talking about language. 'She is bald' makes sense; 'She has three letters' does not. "'She' is bald' is nonsense while "'She' has three letters' is not. 'Knowledge is difficult to obtain and Jane caused him to give up the quest' make sense but 'Knowledge has nine letters and caused has six letters' is

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 491.

nonsense. Again "'Knowledge" is difficult to obtain and Jane "caused" him to give up the quest' is nonsense while "'Knowledge" has nine letters and "caused" has six letters' is an intelligible meta-linguistic sentence.

Ross thinks that he has found a univocal sense of 'knowledge' and 'caused' and a equivocal sense of 'knowledge' and 'caused' and that he has thus escaped a crucial difficulty about analogy of proper proportionality. But he has not at all, for he is not really talking about the same verbal symbol, for, even on his own definition, we can only say that two marks or sounds are the same verbal symbol when they have the "same recognizable pattern." But 'knowledge' and "'knowledge'" are clearly distinct. It is apparent we do not have the same verbal symbol or the same expression, so we have no basis for univocity and thus none for analogy of proper proportionality.

Let us assume, however, that somehow this difficulty has been surmounted. Being analogous is a semantical property of a term and—someone might possibly argue—I have mistakenly treated it as if it were a syntactical property. This does not seem at all plausible to me, but let us assume that my criticism can thus be put aside or that it can somehow be gone around. (After all, Ross in his later "A New Theory of Analogy" has formulated a doctrine of analogy which is not vulnerable on *this* score.) Still, even with these assumptions granted, is everything in order with Ross's account?

When we apply this analysis to the concept of God, Ross's position gives rise to exactly the same difficulty as Copleston's. In the *res significata*, if analogous terms signify a common property or set of properties, as they do, then the terms specifying that property or set of properties will be univocal and thus some univocal predications of God are possible. As Ross shows, if there is to be an intelligible account of analogical predication, the analogical terms have, through their *res significata*, a property or set of properties in common. Thus there must be some univocal predication possible concerning God if there is to be any analogical predication at all. But the crucial point

of Aquinas and the Neo-Thomists is that *all* predications of God are analogical. The fact that they are used in different modes or in different contexts or with differing intentions will not alter the fact that, since they have a common term signifying (standing for) a common property, it is the case that some univocal predication is possible. The terms signifying those common properties must have been used univocally. In neither of his essays has Ross escaped this difficulty.

That Ross (and, on his interpretation, Aquinas) is committed to such a position can be seen from what he says about (c) 'Fido knows his dog house' and (d) 'Plato knows philosophy.' 'Knows' in (c) and (d) is supposed to be used analogously. But if we accept Aquinas' partial definition of 'knowing,' we have accepted a generic common feature of knowing, a property that is common to and distinctive of all knowing. This feature is, according to Aquinas, "the possession of the form of another as belonging to another."<sup>39</sup> This is indeed but a partial and very obscure definition; to fill out his definition Aquinas adds to the above quotation "according to one's natural mode of possession." This last qualification presumably gives us the difference which keeps the predication from actually being univocal. But it remains the case that, on the assumption (questionable in itself) that Aquinas' account of knowing is intelligible, it is true that on all uses of 'knowing' there is a property that remains common to and distinctive of all these uses. That is to say, we could construct a predicate signifying the *res significata* of 'knowing' that would be predicated of all cases of knowing. This would be a univocal predication.

Exactly the same thing would be true of the *res significata* of 'God', if the predicates of 'God' are to meet Ross's conditions for analogical predication. But to meet these conditions they must violate another supposed characteristic of predications of 'God,' namely that all such predications be analogical.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

*In short, for there to be analogical predication of a subject term some univocal predications must be possible.* Yet Aquinas and the Neo-Thomists will not allow that there can be any univocal predications of 'God'; but then it is impossible for there to be any analogical predications either.

As a kind of postscript to this argument, it should be noted that Ross's account here clashes radically with Yves Simon's account of analogical predication. Ross is committed to the claim that in analogical predication the *res significata* picks out generic features common to all instances of a given analogical term. But Yves Simon's fundamental point is that such abstraction is impossible for analogical predication. Two important Thomistic accounts are in plain conflict with each other.

Even if my above arguments are mistaken and Ross has given an intelligible account of analogical predication, it will not work for what it is really crucial for, namely for 'God.' We, if it were correct, would never be in a position to understand the *modus significandi* of 'God.' As Aquinas, Copleston, Ross, Simon, and Thomists generally all stress, we can have no direct apprehension of God. We are limited to our own human ways of apprehending things. But the *modus significandi* of predicates applied to 'God' is supposed to be distinguished by being according to God's distinctive mode of possession. But we finite creatures can have no understanding of that, so we can have no understanding of the *modus significandi* of the predicates applied to God. When Aquinas tells us that the nature of the thing denoted by the logical subject determines the modal elements of the intention of predicates which are applied to the subject, he cannot apply this to 'God,' for no direct apprehension of God is possible—and if no direct apprehension is possible—if no use has even been given to 'a direct apprehension' of God—then no indirect apprehension is possible either.

If it is replied that 'knows' in 'Fido knows his dog house' has the same logical features as 'love' in 'God loves all man-

kind,' yet it is plainly meaningful, it simply must be pointed out, against Ross, that 'Fido knows his dog house' does not have all these logical features. It is not the case that there is "within the intention of the terms applied to animals . . . no term which specifies how the dog knows."<sup>40</sup> We can speak of conditioning, of memory, of seeing a familiar object, of smelling and a host of other things. If we are prepared to use 'know' with respect to animals, we can bring in these definite characteristics, for this 'mode of possession.'

Let us again assume that all my previous criticisms of Ross's reconstruction of Aquinas have been in some way mistaken. Yet there are still further difficulties in his account. Aquinas is claiming that a *necessary* condition for two terms being analogous by proper proportionality is that they differ in their *modus significandi* but have the same in *res significata*. But this is but a *necessary* condition, for the terms could still be equivocal.<sup>41</sup> So far we have at best explained (1) "why certain terms cannot be used of God and creatures univocally" and (2) "how a term can in two instances signify the same property and yet be equivocal."<sup>42</sup> In short, we have at best shown how the first two conditions for analogy of proper proportionality are compatible. But there is a third condition, namely that there must be a *proportional similarity* between what is denoted by the two putatively analogous terms.

We must scrutinize this notion of 'proportional similarity.' There is a similarity in what the terms in question stand for "if they are in some respect identical but never numerically identical."<sup>43</sup> The respects, of course, must be specifiable. 'Proportion' for Aquinas, is a synonym for 'relation.' 'Relation,' e. g. 'to the left of,' is a two or more place predicate in object-language sentences. By 'proportionality between A and B,' Aquinas means, according to Ross, that "there is a *similarity*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 492.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 494.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 495.

in the proportions (or relations) of A and B." Thus there is a "proportional similarity . . . between any two things, A and B, which have similar relations to some property, event, or thing."<sup>44</sup> Thus for 'caused' in (a) 'Fido caused the barking' and (b) 'Plato caused the murderous act' to be analogous by proper proportionality, they must have some common properties or relations.<sup>45</sup> Ross then significantly mentions that if we are to be able adequately to establish a doctrine of analogy by proper proportionality, we need some criterion to determine when in fact two things are proportionally similar.<sup>46</sup> We need in short "a criterion of similarity of relations" and this in turn means that we must be able to say in what respect they are similar and this, as Ross points out, means that they are in some respects identical, though never numerically identical.<sup>47</sup> Recall that for Ross, as for most followers of Aquinas, 'God' is a short hand substitute "for the definite description which would result from a combination of all the properties shown to be attributable to one unique being with some 'psychologically prior' property such as 'First Cause' or 'Creator'."<sup>48</sup> This means (gives to understand) that there is at least a partial identity between God and the world. But this most certainly seems to be a denial of God's transcendence. It seems, at least, to make it impossible to say what Thomists and all orthodox Christians and Jews want very much to say, namely that God is transcendent to the world. (Note the initial quotations from Gilson and Mascall.)

However, following Bochenski here, Ross sets out a criterion for similarity of relations that might, if workable, mitigate somewhat this anthropomorphism by making it innocuous. We can say that 'Relation R is similar to relation R'' if (1) both are relations and (2) if they "have common formal properties with respect to either a formal or merely linguistic set of axioms,

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 496.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 495.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 470.

the latter not being explicitly formulated in ordinary language, or, they have a common property." 49 Yet, as Ross is quick to point out himself, there are plainly difficulties here. If we consider first whether there are common "formal properties, i. e. common syntactical and semantical properties," we face the difficulty that such an ideal language has not yet been worked out and that it "supposes a more extensive formalized language than seems practicable." 50 But, it seems to me, that there is a far more crucial objection to this first alternative in setting out a criterion for similarity of relations, namely that in so talking about purely formal properties we are, in effect, talking about an ideal language or an uninterpreted calculus. To give it an interpretation so it would have some application to reality, including the putative reality of God, we would need to be able to specify some non-formal properties. Thus, the first alternative in effect reduces to the second and to specify non-formal properties would, in the case of talk of God require the unwanted partial identification of God and the world. Indeed, we would have a univocal predication bobbing back up at us again, for we can, as Ross puts it, have a proportional similarity only if the terms are in some respect identical. 51 Ross operates (quite properly I believe) on the assumption that if x is similar to y, then there must be some respect in which x is similar to y. But this, given his reconstructions of Aquinas' account, in effect lays the foundation for the inescapability of some univocal predications of God. But it is exactly this conclusion that he and Thomists generally wish to avoid.

There is a further related difficulty in Ross's account similar to a difficulty we found in Copleston. His account would make a statement such as 'God loves all men' open to Flew's challenge. That is, such statements would be empirically verifiable (confirmable or disconfirmable), for it is a question of

49 *Ibid.*, pp. 496-97.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 497.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 495.

empirical fact whether 'loves' in 'Nixon loves all Americans' and 'loves' in 'God loves all men' have a property in common. (That this is so, is even more evident in Ross's "A New Theory of Analogy.") But, as Thomists argue in other contexts, such God-statements are not so verifiable. 52 But, if they accept this last criterion, of similarity of relations, they must treat such God-talk as open to empirical confirmation and disconfirmation. They want it both ways but they cannot consistently have it both ways.

Finally, even if we accept, as I argued we could not, common purely formal properties as an adequate criterion for similarity, we still in a way are caught by Flew's challenge, for it is a fact whether there are or are not such formal properties. If we have no reason to say that there are, then we should say that it is probably false that 'God loves all men' and the like are intelligible, i. e., do have their intended factual significance. At the very least, we should say that we had evidence that counted against the intelligibility of that claim. But the faithful are not at all willing to put their claims to such a test. In short, even if such a theory of analogy can be worked out for terms like 'caused' and 'knows,' it does not work for God-talk. If no other language is possible, as Ross claims, if we are to talk literally and intelligibly about God, then it must certainly appear that we cannot talk literally and intelligibly about a non-anthropomorphic God, for such an account of analogical predication is thoroughly broken-backed.

#### IV

I have not claimed that generally speaking all theories of analogy have been shown to be unsatisfactory. I do not even

52 See here M. J. Charlesworth, "Linguistic Analysis and Language About God," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 1 (1961), pp. 139-67, Thomas Corbishley S. J., "Theology and Falsification," *The University* No. 1 (1950-51), C. B. Daly, "The Knowableness of God," *Philosophical Studies* (Maynooth, Ireland), Vol. IX (1959), pp. 90-137. I have critically examined their views in my "God, Necessity and Falsifiability," in *Traces of God in a Secular Culture*, ed. by George F. McLean (Alba House: Staten Island, New York, 1973).

claim that for the conception of analogy of proper proportionality. What I have shown, if at least most of my arguments are sound, is that two distinguished and influential accounts of analogical predication have crippling defects. Perhaps some account could, or even does, escape these difficulties; perhaps there is or could be a perspicuous account of analogical predication. I do not know of one, but it is well to remain agnostic on this score.

Finally, I should say something about a later and parallel effort by Ross, namely his "A New Theory of Analogy." There he deploys some of the technique of structural linguistics and appeals to some of their findings. But, I shall argue, not with the result that he has shown how there is a formulation of the doctrine of analogy of proper proportionality that obviates the key difficulties I have found in his earlier and more extended account.

In his "A New Theory of Analogy," Ross shows what I have not been concerned to deny, that analogy is a pervasive feature of natural languages, that any predicative term can be used analogously and that analogy is a crucial "part of the expansion structure of . . . language."<sup>53</sup> Indeed it is the case that "many terms have varying meanings in different contexts and that the meanings of some pairs of the same-terms may be regarded as being derivative either from one another (*unius ad alterum*) or from some 'prior' use (or set of uses) of the same term (*multorum ad unum*) . . ."<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, I agree that competent native speakers can and do recognize, in practice at least, that "there are sets of same-term-occurrences which are, taken pair by pair, equivocal but which can be ordered as meaning derivatives . . ."<sup>55</sup> There are sets of same-term-occurrences which are in pairs equivocal which are regularity con-

<sup>53</sup> Ross, "A New Theory of Analogy," in *Logical Analysis and Contemporary Theism*, ed. by John Donnelly (New York: Fordham University Press, 1972), p. 126.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

trolled and there are pairs which are not. Ross's example of the last for 'fast' seems well taken. (Compare 'He ran fast,' 'He observed the fast,' 'He stood fast' and 'He considered her fast.') The various uses of 'fast' here *vis-a-vis* each other seem at least to be regularity controlled, though it is difficult to be confident about this. (Is not 'fast' in 'He considered her fast' derivative from 'fast' in 'He ran fast')? Now compare these uses of 'fast' with the uses of 'count' and 'calculated' in the following: 'Children count when taught to' and 'Computers count when programmed to' and 'In oppressing the dissidents the use of physical force was calculated' and in 'In building the bridge the physical force of the spring floods was calculated.' 'Count' and 'calculated' here are equivocal when just the same term pairs are considered, but it is also the case that they differ from 'fast' in being regularity controlled *vis-a-vis* each other. 'Count' in 'Computers count when programmed to' is derivative from 'count' in 'Children count when taught to' in a way that the different instances of 'fast' cited above seem at least not to be derived. Similarly the first instance of 'calculated' above is derivable from the second instance.

What Ross rightly stresses is that there are such analogy regularities built into the structure of our language. People with a grasp of the language readily understand derivative uses of terms; there are, legitimatizing them, meaning regularities within the corpus of our actual discourse and in mastering our language (English, Spanish, Swedish, etc.), we come to have an understanding of them.

However, the acceptance of all this is quite compatible with making the criticisms I have made of Copleston's and Ross's accounts of analogy, for they were giving a certain reading or account of 'analogy' which would have a certain import for theology. They were not just establishing that there are analogical uses of language. My criticisms have been directed against their readings and against their attempted theological employment.

In his 'new theory' Ross uses 'count' and 'calculated' to exhibit how analogy of proper proportionality works and is indeed something which can quite naturally be extrapolated from semantic regularities in our natural languages. Consider the following:

- (1) Children count when taught to.
- (2) Computers count when programmed to.
- (3) The use of force by the police was calculated.
- (4) The force of the wind was calculated.

Here, with (1) and (2) and again with (3) and (4), we have relationships which are meant to exhibit analogies of proper proportionality. In (2) 'count' is derivative from 'count' in (1) and it differs in meaning from 'count' in (1) in exactly the ways in which 'computers' in (2) differs in semantic category from 'children' in (1). That is to say, the meaning of 'count' in (2) is derivative from its meaning in (1) and is altered "with respect to 'computers' in just the way the semantic categories of that term differ from those of 'children'." <sup>56</sup> It is "the difference-of-meaning by combinatorial contraction which corresponds to proportionality." <sup>57</sup> This enables us to understand the shift of meaning, while still carrying similarities, which sometimes obtain when there is a shift from one discourse environment to another. <sup>58</sup> The same considerations hold for 'calculated' in (3) and (4).

In (1) and (2) and in (3) and (4) both pairs of terms differ in their respective pairings in their discourse environments and this is what in modern terms could be called their differences in *modus significandi*. But in both cases there is still a sameness in *res significata* for each. In simpler terms (or at least in a more familiar jargon) Ross's point could be put as follows: in both pairs respectively the property (set of properties) which the term signifies is present and indeed is the same property; i. e. both times 'count' signifies the same property (set of

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

properties), and both times 'calculated' signifies the same property (set of properties), but in both cases respectively "the conditions of use of the term in two contexts . . . prohibit us from making all the same inferences of each occasion." <sup>59</sup> 'Calculated' on both occasions of its use signifies the same property and 'count' on both occasions of its use signifies the same property, but the entailments of 'calculated' and 'counts' differ, showing that in each case the property is present in each subject in a different way.

However, as in his first account, there is in this very sameness in the *res significata* an implicit appeal to univocity. In (1) and (2) and (3) and (4) this can be seen. In spite of all the difference in discourse environment 'count' in (1) and 'count' in (2) both signify a reckoning up to find a sum or total. When we assert—talking about either or both what the computers did or the children did—"There was a reckoning up to find a sum," we can in that proposition say something which is significant and indeed sometimes even true. And there is also a predication here, but the predication 'reckoning up to find a sum here' is univocal. <sup>60</sup>

The use of 'calculated' in (3) and (4) might seem more helpful for Ross. In (3) 'calculated' could be replaced by 'deliberate' with little, if any, change in meaning. But no such substitution could be made in (4), yet 'calculated' in (3) is derivative from 'calculated' in (4). We move from 'computed by figures' to 'ascertained beforehand by exact reckoning' to 'planned deliberately'. And here 'calculated' seems to have a family-resemblance rather than its being the case that there is any respect in which what they signify is similar. What, it is well to ask, is the characteristic in common

<sup>59</sup> Terence Penelhum, *op. cit.*, p. 81. Penelhum generally in his discussion of analogy acknowledges his indebtedness to Ross.

<sup>60</sup> I simply use 'predication' here in the standard way, characterized by Michael Durrant as follows: "An expression that gives us a proposition about something if we attach it to another expression that identifiably refers to something which we are making the proposition about." See Michael Durrant, *The Logical Status of 'God'* (London: Macmillan Ltd., 1979), pp. xiii-Xiv.

signified by 'calculated' in (3) and (4)? In both cases we are talking about something reckoned up according to plan. But do 'reckoned up' and 'according to plan' signify common properties or are they themselves family-resemblance terms?

Even allowing that the elusive conception of family-resemblance is well-enough fixed so as to exclude common characteristics between paired terms, both (3) and (4) would be false, if no expected result was ascertained. And it is implausible to claim that 'result was ascertained' is so different in the two environments that there is no respect in which what they signify is similar. Moreover, as Ross acknowledges himself, where there is a similarity between two terms we must, for 'similar' to be intelligible, be able to say in what respect they are similar. But then again we can see how univocal predication underlies analogical predication such that the very possibility of two terms being in an analogical relation of proper proportionality requires that we can make some univocal predications of what is referred to by these terms. And this brings with it the host of problems I discussed in the previous section.

In sum, Ross in two essays, one detailed and utilizing some of the techniques of modern logic and one more sketchy and using some of the techniques of structural linguistics, has sought to articulate a sound theory of analogy which will serve as a crucial philosophical underpinning in making sense of our talk of God. I have argued that he has failed in both attempts, though in the latter he has made it quite evident that there are analogical uses of language and he has shown us something about these uses. But neither he nor Father Copleston have given us an account of analogy which will enable us to make sense of non-anthropomorphic God-talk.

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