

AQUINAS AND RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE

All *our* language about God is necessarily creaturely and therefore limited. Then how can limited language speak of the Unlimited?

Univocal Predication of God is Impossible

God infinitely exceeds the power of our intellect. Therefore any truth or essence we conceive cannot *completely* represent the divine essence.

Our *concepts* of God can be (must be) univocal, but they can't be *applied* to God univocally, only analogically.

Note that Aquinas speaks here of analogous predication, not analogous concepts. E.g., we have a concept of good or wise. The *concept* is univocal (i.e., "good" and "wise" have the same *meaning* whether we apply them to God or humans), but the *predication* can't be univocal, since God is infinitely wise while we are only finitely wise. In other words, creatures can have the *same characteristics* as God (e.g., patience), but not have them *in the same way* that God has them.

Equivocal Predication Leads to Skepticism

If one and the same concept ("wise") has an *entirely* different meaning when predicated of humans and predicated of God, then we must remain totally skeptical w.r.t. God. If one and the same concept has an entirely different meaning, then we can never reason from the creaturely to God.

Also, if we know nothing about God (i.e., total skepticism), then we can't even claim that we know nothing about him. It is inconsistent to claim that we *know* that we *can't know* anything about God. (To claim to know that God is unknowable is to know something about him; namely, that he's unknowable. Then he can't be utterly unknowable.) More specifically, who or what is the God whom we are claiming to be unknowable? In order to pronounce God unknowable, we have to know what we are pronouncing to be such. Hence the argument is self-defeating.)

Analogical Predication Alone is Adequate

Recall: God can express himself to creatures only in creaturely language, and therefore such language will always be limited while God is unlimited. Nevertheless, expressions *about* God must *express God*, or we're back into total skepticism.

Analogy is based in causality (specifically, in efficient causality, that *by* which something comes to be.) E.g., God as Being is the efficient cause of finite beings. (The cause of being has to be Being, since a cause cannot produce reality that it does not possess.) While the cause is Infinite Being, and the effect is finite being, the being of the effect is *similar* to the Being that caused it.

Kinds of Analogy

Extrinsic Analogy

There is no real similarity between two parties. Only one possesses the characteristic; the second lacks the characteristic but is called that characteristic merely on account of its relation to the first.

Extrinsic Analogy Based on Efficient Causality

E.g., a body is called "healthy" in the sense of fully functional physiologically. Food is called healthy in that it *causes* healthy bodies. (The food, of course, isn't "fully functional physiologically.")

Extrinsic Analogy Based on Similarity of Relation (Analogy of Improper Proportionality)

E.g., a frown is to a face as a thundercloud is to a landscape. The analogy is in the *relationship*, not in the similarity of the *things* being compared. A frown bears no *real* similarity to a thundercloud. In the above example there is a relationship between the two relationships, but no real relationship between the things being compared.

Intrinsic Analogy

Two things possess the *same* characteristic, each *in accordance with* its own being.

Analogy of Proper Proportionality

E.g., Infinite Good is to Infinite Being as finite good is to finite being. While this assertion is true, it tells us nothing about a *real* similarity between Infinite Good (Being) and finite good (being.)

Analogy of Intrinsic Attribution

Both parties possess the same attribute and the similarity is based on the *causal* connection between them; the cause communicates itself to the effect. E.g., Hot water causes the vegetables in it to be hot. Being causes being to be. Since God communicates his likeness to his "effects" (the creation), the creation must be like him; i.e., there must be a *real* similarity. The similarity between Creator and creatures occurs in that God gives characteristics of himself to his creatures.

All proper talk about God is based on the analogy of intrinsic *attribution*. A *real* similarity between Creator and creature exists because God has *caused* the creature.

Note the following features of the analogy of intrinsic attribution:

- 1] The relation is causal. The similarity between Creator and creature is *derived* from the Creator (not merely found in the creature.)
- 2] The relation is intrinsic. Both cause and effect have the *same* characteristic. God isn't called wise merely because he made wise humans; he is called wise in that he is wise in himself, and has made wise humans by communicating his wisdom to them (in accordance with their being.)
When the hot sun melts ice but hardens clay, the hot sun is an extrinsic cause of melted ice and hardened clay. When the hot sun heats water, the hot sun is an intrinsic cause of hot water.
- 3] The relation is essential, not accidental. Poets give birth to non-poets. The causal relation here is accidental, there being no essential relation between the class of poets and the class of non-poets. When humans give birth to humans, however, the causal relation is essential.
- 4] The cause in the causal relation is efficient, not instrumental. Efficient cause is that *by which* something is made; instrumental cause is that *through which* something is made. The boat-builder is the efficient cause of the boat; his tools are the instrumental cause.
- 5] The cause in the causal relation is efficient, not material. The wood out of which the boat is made is the material cause of the boat. Plainly, material causes are affected by efficient causes in different ways. (The boat-builder could have made a patio deck out of the wood.)

All language used of God is used analogically, as per the analogy of intrinsic attribution. Such language permits us to speak *correctly* of God (or else we shouldn't be speaking of God at all), but doesn't permit us to speak *comprehensively* (i.e., exhaustively) of God. When we are glorified we shall "see God" and our language of God will be that much more precise. Still, even in heaven we shall never plumb the depths of God, and there will ever remain oceanic "deeps" in God that are beyond our comprehension. (If we were ever to comprehend God exhaustively we should thereby have mastered him.)

Reverend V. Shepherd